



Mandy M. Roth

IMMORTAL
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By

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Dedication

Thank you, Donny, a line muse if I've ever met one, for sharing your time with the Rangers with me. Jean, your red pen, is always appreciated, extra comments in the margin most of all. In addition, I'd like everyone to remember the men and women in the Armed Services who are, at this very moment, putting their lives on the line for our freedom.

Chapter 1

Peren Matthews sat and listened to her friends yak away about their stressful weeks. She turned her green eyes to the window and stared out at the night sky. Her gaze flickered to the crescent shaped moon, and she had to fight the urge to trace the edges of it with her fingers. She'd always

been obsessed with the wonders of night. As a small child she'd sit in her window and long to be among the stars. They seemed so peaceful, so free from care or concern. That had been what she wanted most as a child--peace. Now, on her twenty-fourth birthday, she sat in the back of Melanie's cramped Escort and tried to wish herself somewhere serene. She found little amusement in the fact that she'd come full-circle.

She shifted awkwardly in the seat and pushed the pile of used tissues away from her feet. Melanie was far from a neat freak, and the lipstick stained tissues on the floor told her that Mel had a habit of tossing trash behind her as she drove.

Missy fixed her dark brown eyes on Peren and looked disgusted. "Girl, you need to lighten up--it's your birthday."

Peren let a fake smile creep onto her face. Yeah, it's so easy to lighten up, Kyle's gone and he'll never be back. It's wrong to be celebrating with him not here. She tried to hide the emotions on her face but Missy's expression told her she failed.

She couldn't get angry with Missy or Melanie. They were only trying to help. Since Kyle's disappearance they'd gone out of their way to try and help her deal with her loss and move on. "You need to climb back up on that dick again, darling...that's bound to make you feel better." Mel had told her this on more than one occasion. Sure, she still had the same desires as the next woman, maybe even more, but moving on was the last thing on her mind. She just wanted to go home, curl up, listen to sad music, and wallow. She didn't need or want their planned interventions.

"Let's go to that new country music club...you know..." Melanie said, eyeing Missy, "the one that has the line dancing. Maybe we could find some hot guys there tonight?"

Peren sighed. She was committed for the rest of the night to them--their prisoner until dawn. She'd agreed to be a willing captive and they'd agreed to leave her alone about dating other men. Most of their blind date choices had been disasters. The first two were your typical college guys. They had one thing on their mind and that was to get into her pants. Melanie was upset that Peren didn't give in to their advances. Sure, they were hot, and she could have used a good fuck, but she wanted something more.

The third guy they'd fixed her up with, Ben, had been decent enough. His short black hair and light blue eyes had made for a fantastic combination.

His conversational skills were far better than any of the men she'd been out with before. That wasn't the best thing about him, though. The best thing had been his smell. As silly as it sounded, he smelled like musk and fresh morning air. Kyle had had that very same natural scent. It drove her wild with lust.

Missy had been most surprised to find out that she'd gone on multiple dates with Ben. She'd really enjoyed his company, but felt guilty about betraying Kyle and cut it off. The nameless, faceless other dates meant so little to her that she'd lost count of them.

* * * *

"Do you smell that?" Lukian Vlakhusha asked his long-time friend, Roi.

"Smells like teen spirit alright," Roi said, his tongue running across his lips.

Lukian ignored the comment because he'd known Roi long enough to know what his tastes in women were, and teenage girls weren't one of them. He turned and looked at a gaggle of young women as they walked into the nightclub. Nope, not the ones they were shadowing. These girls didn't look legal. The ones they were after were a bit riper. Not old, no, just a little more mature.

"Tell me again why we're here?"

"Because we have to be," Roi said sardonically.

The answer wasn't the one he wanted to hear, but it was the truth. They did have to be here. Lukian knew what their mission was, probably better than Roi. He was, after all, first in command. Search and destroy, that was the mission. The target was what he had a problem with. It'd been a long time since he'd been forced to take a woman's life. He didn't look forward to it now.

He glanced down at the photo of the auburn-haired girl he'd been carrying in his back pocket. Her large green eyes had haunted him since he'd first been given the assignment. He knew the rules: don't get attached, don't put a face to the name. He'd broken them both. He'd been

fixated on Peren's picture since he'd received it. He silently hoped that he wouldn't have to be the one to deliver the killing blow. He'd been doing this kind of work for too long, and was too good at it, to let this one get to him.

"Showtime," Roi said, watching the tiny turquoise car containing their target pulling in.

* * * *

"We're here," Melanie told Peren, as if she couldn't come up with that one on her own. She looked out the window at the hordes of people in cowboy hats and boots heading into the club. She smiled as she ran various rodeo scenarios through her head. Maybe she'd get lucky and they'd have a mechanical bull.

There's nothing like watching a wanna-be-cowboy get jostled around.

She looked down at herself and felt overdressed. Melanie had hinted that they'd end up somewhere like this, but she'd never come right out and announced it.

She fumbled around with her black skirt and wiped unseen pieces of nothing from it. It was a nervous habit--one of many she'd hoped would pass with time. Kyle's disappearance had only served to enhance her already neurotic behavior. Of course, sleep deprivation had also been playing a role in it.

Having the man you love vanish one day will do that to you.

"Come on, you look great," Missy said, opening the car door and thrusting her hand in at Peren.

* * * *

Lukian watched as the tiny, black-haired girl with the tanned skin opened the car door. She had a bit of Asian blood in her somewhere, that was for

sure. He looked at Roi, to see how he was holding up, because he knew this was his type of woman. If things went badly, they'd be forced to take the friends out as well. Their directive had been only the one target, but they were cleared to do whatever was necessary to eliminate her. If that meant additional casualties, then that was fine too.

Lukian watched his friend lick his lips again. He knew that Roi was picturing his mouth running all along the exotic one's body. He reached his hand out and touched Roi's shoulder. "It is best to not think too hard about that one. Trust me, I know."

He watched as the black-haired girl stepped back from the car, pulling the target with her. He slid his fingers over the photo in his hand. Peren, yes, there she was--average height, around five six or so, with anything but an average build. His gaze fell over her white blouse. Its v-neck was low cut and showed the swelling white mounds of her breasts. Her tiny waist only made her chest look larger from his vantage point. He wanted to suck on her nipples as he rammed his cock deep within.

What's the hell's your problem? You don't think about targets as sexual objects.

Lukian shifted uncomfortably, trying to get rid of the growing problem between his legs. His cock had a hard time understanding why something so perfect had to be destroyed. Come to think about it, so did he. "Let's go."

Missy grabbed Peren's arm and led her into the club. The bouncer at the door spent more time flirting with the girls than he did checking their ID's. Melanie stopped and reciprocated his advances as Peren stood silently on the sidelines. He kept ogling her, but she just stood there pretending to be oblivious to it. She had little interest in hooking up with a man who probably found a new piece of ass to slip it into on a nightly basis. 'Pass-around-penis', (that's the pet name they'd given men who got around), didn't do a thing for her.

Why am I here? God, this night is dragging on. Somebody make it end!

Her own lack of interest in her birthday did startle her a bit. It was especially bittersweet for her because it was to be the day that she and Kyle told her parents that they were engaged. It'd been eight months ago that they'd made that decision. He'd done it in the most romantic way.

He'd set up a blanket under the stars and had a picnic laid out for them. They'd spent the evening making love and discussing their future. Kyle had managed to slip under her radar and finally sweep her off her feet. Eight months hadn't even begun to heal her wounds. No, she still mourned the loss of him daily. Everyone kept telling her that he'd turn up.

"His grant was approved, he's got you..." She could still hear the police and Kyle's parents defiantly listing the reasons why he'd resurface again. She knew better, though. Kyle would never leave to begin with, not of his own free will. He was too jazzed about his research project for one, and he wouldn't quit talking about marrying her.

"I don't understand why we can't tell your parents that we're engaged right now?" The hurt in his voice still echoed in her ear.

"Because, for one, you're my professor. Two, my father runs the science department here, remember? You could lose your job over this, Kyle, and you know it. Just give it a few more months, that's all, okay? I'll graduate, your research will be well underway, and no one will be able to stand in our way."

Maybe he wouldn't have stormed off that night if she'd just agreed to his simple demands. Maybe, if she'd given in and told the world about their affair, maybe he'd be here with her now. She didn't need someone to tell her that he was dead. There was no way that he'd just not come back to her. As much as she hated to admit it, Kyle was dead.

* * * *

"Damn, they are... fine," Roi said, a cross between a whistle and a growl.

Lukian turned to him. His normally even temper was suddenly on the verge of going out of control. He didn't need any one of his men making a stupid mistake because they'd let their dicks interfere with their better judgment. "Control your beast. We don't want to have to blow the place up to cover our asses here."

"The only ass I want to cover is hers," Roi said, still fixated on the black-haired girl.

Lukian wondered if she was the one he'd talked to on the phone. She'd seemed nice enough, and very eager to see Peren happy. A stab of guilt hit him again. Why was this one getting to him so bad?

He watched the girls find a table, then he and Roi went to the bar. The goal was to fit in, slip into the girls' worlds undetected, and eliminate the target. He'd done this so many times before, so what was the problem now? He knew that he'd grown a hard-on, but had he finally grown a conscience as well?

That'd be something to see.

"Alpha, this is Bravo. Do you read?" He touched his earpiece and spoke softly, looking at Roi in the process.

He heard the rest of his team confirm their locations and nodded to Roi. He was his second in command and his right-hand man. They had entered this six-man test team not knowing a soul. Now, they were brothers in every sense of the word. The DNA manipulation had finally been successful. The only regret Lukian had was that now he would forever be a pawn, a killing machine, the government's play toy. Had he really helped mankind by sharing his secret? He wasn't sure yet.

"Move in, Lance, it's a go," he said slowly into his transponder.

"Roger that, Captain."

* * * *

"Where the hell is he?" Melanie asked, tapping her long painted pink nails on the table. Peren's ears perked up. Where was who? That sinking feeling she'd been getting lately was back. The girls were trying to set her up again. Damn, she thought she'd made it clear that they were to leave that area alone.

Missy glanced over Peren's shoulder, and smiled wildly. "I spy something blonde with my little brown eyes."

Both Peren and Melanie turned to see a tall, buzz-cut blonde coming towards their table. Melanie stood and offered him her hand. "Nice of you

to finally show up. I was starting to think you weren't coming." Her lip puckered out in a semi-pout. She did a very on purpose, yet casual, toss of her white-blond locks over her shoulder.

Mel had a way of getting men to eat out of her hand. Peren wasn't sure if it was Mel's demeanor or if it was because she looked like a Swedish supermodel.

Ah, to be five-ten and blonde...

Silently, Peren cursed her mutt blood. Half German, half-Italian, she was left with a slightly olive complexion, auburn hair, and eyes that weren't sure if they wanted to be green or brown. Hazel was too strong a word. Her eyes rarely were both--usually one or the other.

"I thought you said that you were bringing friends?" Melanie's voice managed to be accusatory and sexy all in one fell swoop. It was an art that Peren had started to pick up on.

The tall man with the wide shoulders kissed Melanie's hand gently. "They're at the bar getting drinks. What would everyone like?" His light blue eyes went to Peren. She sat back in her seat from the weight of his stare.

"Nothing...water," she managed to spit out, suddenly uneasy and unsure why.

"I'll have a Long Island Iced Tea and Missy will take a beer. Thanks, Lance."

* * * *

He watched Lance walking towards them. Lance was focused, no surprise there. Lance was the go-to-boy, his field op. Lance nodded at them but Lukian waited for him to get closer before acknowledging him.

"It's a go," Lance said.

Lukian's stomach dropped out. Something suddenly didn't set well with him. They'd spent a fortune beefing up his natural abilities so he'd learned to pay attention to them. When he sensed that something was

wrong, that generally meant they had a problem. He put his hand out and caught his best friend by the arm.

"Roi, abort the operation. Tell the men and meet me at the table in five minutes."

Roi's eyes widened. He felt it too, Lukian was sure of it. "Bravo, this is Alpha dog-two. Abort mission and stand down."

Lance moved along side Lukian as he made his way to the table. The closer Lukian got to the target, the harder it was to breathe. His heart felt as though it would beat out of his chest.

* * * *

"Yummy," Melanie said, as she watched Lance walking back with his tall, dark and handsome friend.

Missy had been watching Lance since he'd left to get their drinks. "Where'd the other one go?" she asked, looking right past the man with Lance.

Peren turned to get out of the chair. Missy grabbed her arm. "What's wrong?"

Peren's blood boiled. "What's wrong? I'll tell you what's wrong. You two can't seem to stop meddling in things you don't understand. I don't want to be here. I don't want to be fixed up with another one of your ideas of the perfect man. Contrary to popular belief, we all don't want to get fucked by the first thing that shows any interest in us. Besides, testosterone-driven sex machines with little to no brains do not appeal to me!"

"Now that's a shame. For a minute there, I thought I actually had a shot. I could do my best to pretend to be stupid, but I can't do much about the testosterone thing. As for showing an interest in you...that shouldn't be too hard."

Peren turned to see who had spoken to her. Her gaze fell on the tall man who stood with Lance. As much as she hated to admit it, he was

breathhtaking, with his wide shoulders and a head of shoulder-length black hair. Its waviness actually rivaled her own, although her hair was at least a foot longer than his. She noticed right off the bat that he had a tiny scar above his right eyebrow, and that his eyelashes were blacker than hers. The thick lashes drew attention to his royal blue eyes. It wasn't a color found in nature. She was sure they were contacts.

The beginning of a five o'clock shadow softened what could easily be taken as too masculine a face. His jaw tightened as she took a step back. He wasn't pleased that she hadn't taken an instant interest in him. Oh well. It wasn't like she hadn't given any thought to having sex with him...I'm grieving, not dead.

Her cheeks flushed and she wondered what was happening to her. She'd only ever thought of one man sexually before, and he was the reason for her depression. She had no business concentrating on the contours of another man's face, or being out on the town celebrating when Kyle was gone.

Peren turned and went quickly towards the club door. She heard her friends calling out to her, but didn't turn to them. They could busy themselves with their new finds all night. She hoped they'd be too sore to walk after spending the night getting ridden hard. It'd serve them right. No fear of that for her. No, she'd be sleeping alone again, because she was going home. Mr. Tall-Dark-and-Sexy would have to be reserved only for her dreams.

Thankfully, I've got fingers. And, if need be, the will to use them.

* * * *

"Shit," Melanie said as she watched Peren leave. She turned to run after her, but found Lance holding her arm. "Peren..."

"I'll go. Maybe I could throw up a white flag or something," Lukian said, smiling widely at the girls. Not wanting to alarm them.

The girls exchanged glances, then nodded. Leave it to women to trust a cold-blooded killing machine with their friend's life. He looked back at

Roi and nodded in the direction of the door before leaving. Roi gave him a thumb's up as he left to retrieve Peren.

Lukian hit the outside and took a deep breath. The scents of the night filled his lungs. He craved the night air, and it him. Tonight he craved something else too, and it was headed down the darkened street in a frenzy. He could almost taste her emotions as he tuned into her distress signal. This was too much, too fast for her. She'd suffered a loss recently and wasn't ready to start trying to find Mr. Right yet. She was riddled with the guilt of lusting after Lukian when she should be at home mourning the loss of her dead lover.

Lukian took off in a slow run in the direction of her scent. Even in the darkness of the night he could see her clearly. His night vision was excellent. It had to be. The blood of the wolf that ran through him would not have it any other way.

* * * *

I'm done with friends. I'm done with dating, I'm done with everyone. Peren thought to herself as she walked down the side of the highway.

What in the hell had possessed her to come out? She'd been doing just fine holed up in her tiny apartment. Now, she was even angrier that she'd let Melanie drive. Peren had a perfectly good Saab waiting for her at home. She wasn't one to flaunt her money. She tried, in fact, to hide it whenever possible, but a ride home would have been worth the hassle of everyone knowing she was loaded.

"Hey...wait up."

She froze and looked down the darkened road. She was miles from town and alone. She wasn't sure how much distance she'd put between her and the bar. She cursed softly and prepared her body to react, if need be, with violence. She'd grown up being trained in martial arts. Being the only child of a wealthy man who had wanted a son equaled having a hell of a good roundhouse kick.

She turned slowly, preparing to strike. The ebony-haired man from the bar chased after her. She looked at him and raised her eyebrow. He was a

persistent bastard, she'd give him that much. His black shirt rose slightly in the wind as he ran to her, exposing his toned abdomen. Damn, the guy must do at least a hundred sit-ups a day. That could only mean one thing...he's an ass.

* * * *

Lukian slowed his pace and read her, mildly amused with her opinion of him in the process. She was definitely attracted to him, but found him to be, like most men in her life, an ass.

Reading her thoughts was easy for him. Most humans weren't too difficult for him to eavesdrop on, but Peren was like an open book to him. That caught him a little off guard.

He stopped and put his hands up in the air slowly. "I come in peace."

Her full lips curved into a smile so white that she lit-up the night, causing his insides to lurch forward. His cock wanted to be in her so badly that he wondered if he could control himself. He was far too old to be behaving like he was still twenty. He was experienced now, and wise enough to be able to control his erections at will, or at least he had thought so prior to meeting Peren.

The wind caught her long black skirt and blew it up. Shiny black leather boots that ran up to her knee showed through. He waited for a better glimpse at what kind of panties she wore under that skirt, but the wind refused to help out any longer.

Just as well. I'd probably jump on her right here and now.

This target of his, Peren, stirred things in him that hadn't existed in over a century. He watched her take a wider stance and realized that she thought his intent was to do her harm. She was ready to try to protect herself. It hit him then, that if all had gone according to plan, she'd be dead already, so her instincts were good; but so were his.

* * * *

"What do you want?" she asked the tall stranger.

He gave her a large smile and shrugged. "I'm not sure, maybe to know that I wasn't what chased you off. That could leave lasting effects on a man's ego."

I'll just bet you've got ego problems.

No, he looked like the type that was incredibly comfortable in his own skin. She thought about how comfortable she'd be in his skin too, and shook her head.

Cut it out. You don't sleep around. You leave that up to Melanie. She's good at it.

"I'm Lukian, and you must be Peren," the man said, extending his large hand out to her. She took a small step forward and grabbed it quickly. A spark of energy flew between them. Something similar had happened to her once when she was a child and the circumstances surrounding that encounter were anything but pleasant. Having little desire to relive that ordeal, and the overwhelming urge to flee, Peren gave into her instincts and screamed.

What the hell? Was all that ran through her mind as she turned fast from the man. The boots she'd worn were thankfully low heeled or she'd have killed herself trying to run on the uneven terrain. She didn't look back to see where Lukian was, yet she knew he was close behind her. Sensing things came naturally to her. It had been a curse she'd hidden all her life. The curse, so to speak, had just allowed her a very bold glimpse into the intentions of the man on her heels, and they weren't honorable. He wanted to fuck her hard em' and now.

She hit the edge of the woods and never skipped a beat. She knew she didn't have that good of a lead on him and that he'd catch up if she dared to stop. A limb scraped her cheek and she screamed out, pushing onward wildly.

It's just a scratch, definitely not worth dying over.

She could see the forest in her mind, even though she could not see her hand before her face in the darkness. She'd learned to trust her mind. The

last time she'd ignored it, Kyle had vanished. She wouldn't make that mistake again.

Chapter 2

What the hell is she? Lukian's mind raced as his feet moved quickly under him. He was faster than any human could hope to be, yet this tiny woman was outrunning him. She couldn't weigh more than a buck o' five, yet she made him work to catch her. Perhaps he'd been wrong to abort the mission. He was obviously dealing with more than just a pretty face.

He stopped and sniffed the air. He could smell her fear of him, which was unfortunate, but expected. He tried to hone in on her and read her location, but somehow she blocked that from him. Had she been trained as well? Had she been recruited to join an elite team too? Perhaps she was from a unit similar to his own? Maybe she didn't work for the same side he did?

He caught her scent, sweet vanilla, and twisted madly. She was headed back to the road. Smart girl. He heard her rustling off to his left. Not smart enough, though. He leapt up and over a rock, waiting for her to pass him.

* * * *

Not again--her mind raced as she ran. She thought back to the night of her tenth birthday. Her father had rented out a circus for her. It was hers and hers alone. She should have been excited to go, but dreams of blood and death had plagued her the week before. Her father was scheduled to give another speech at the university and was unable to make it. Her mother and her nanny had taken her instead. All had seemed well until she'd entered the gypsy tent and sat, waiting for the woman to tell her the future. The woman shrieked and drew away from her, screaming that she was not normal, that she was an abomination.

Peren had run frightened from the woman's tent and straight out into the night she'd loved so much. The images of her dreams had begun to transpire. She found herself surrounded by trees, near a stream. She heard the low growls of the beast that, unbeknownst to her, had been stalking her from the circus. It came at her, its mouth full of blood, smelling of death. It'd caught her by the ankle, and had sunk its teeth into her. She screamed and felt a surge of cold, hard energy lash out of her. It hit the creature with such force that it propelled off her.

Later, after she'd staggered out onto the highway, she'd been taken to the hospital. Her mother and nanny's bodies were found near the fortuneteller's tent. They'd been mauled. The police said it was a pack of wild dogs. She knew better. That was no dog.

* * * *

Lukian felt her heart pounding as if it were his own. Attuned to her, Lukian's breathing sped to match hers. He could sense her pain, her loss, and her fear. She feared another attack. She had survived one as a child...a young girl. She had been bitten by...he closed his eyes and tried to force himself further into the depths of her mind. He saw what he was looking for and pulled back quickly.

Oh, God, she was attacked by one of us, a fellow lycan.

He felt his heart sink with sadness. Here he was chasing this woman, making her relive the same feelings of horror she'd experienced as a child. He wasn't so old that he couldn't remember what it was like to be a child, but he'd been born this way. His father had been a true lycanthrope.

In fact, prior to the introduction of Lukian, the family bloodline had been pure and untainted by human blood.

A shudder ran through his veins. He couldn't imagine running into a werewolf at such a young age and then having it attack you. His heart broke for her, filling him with an overwhelming need to find and protect her. Someone wanted her dead, and he was supposed to be the man to do it. He knew now that would never happen.

He sniffed the air and sensed his own kind near. Tapping his transmitter, he asked for a location on his men. "Bravo is still at station one, in stand-down mode...the rest of Alpha is still together and in the club."

Shit. That was what he was afraid of. Something else was out here in the night with them. Someone wanted her dead pretty badly to bother sending additional hitters. His team wasn't cheap, and sending in back-ups meant that someone with a lot of power and money was backing this. Lukian tried to imagine what the petite Peren could have done that would make someone so adamant about seeing her life come to end, but he came up empty handed. There was no way that he'd let any harm come to her.

He scanned the woods for any sign of her, and then waited. Within seconds she came running towards him.

It's now or never.

* * * *

The trees over her head shuffled and the weight of a man fell onto her. He knocked her to the ground, sending pain shooting up and through her head. She tried to scream out, but his hand clasped over her mouth.

"They will hear you," Lukian said softly in her ear. She tried to scream out again. She wanted him off her and hoped that everyone in the world would hear. She bit down on his hand, and he tightened his grip on her. "Shit, I'm trying to help you. Something...someone is coming for you..." A loud howl interrupted him. Peren's body tightened under his as terror filled her veins. She knew that sound. It wasn't one she'd be likely to ever forget.

Lukian held tight to her and pulled her to her feet, twisting her around to look at him. She met his eyes with tears glistening in her own. She wasn't one to cry in front of others, but the terror that gripped her body was too great for her to deal with alone. The look on Lukian's face told her that he wasn't about to abandon her, regardless of the howls around them.

Another high pitched wolf howl sounded from their left. Her body went rigid with fear. She resisted the urge to scream, and stared at this tall mysterious man who claimed to be on her side. Could she trust him? Did she have a choice?

A growl came from their right this time. Lukian turned first and put his body in front of hers. He whispered something to himself that she couldn't make out, but sounded vaguely like Alpha something or other.

He reached into the back of his tan pants and pull out a silver gun. She scanned the contours of it and recognized it for what it was, a Desert Eagle. Her father had spent the greater part of his scientific career working for the military. He'd been out of the business since she'd been born, but had never stopped his interest in it. He loved to quiz her on interesting bits of trivia and to test her hand-to-hand combat training. She'd always felt like she'd let him down when she'd chosen art school over the armed services.

Lukian pushed her body behind his even more, acting as a barrier between her and the beasts that were surrounding them. He was awfully brave and knowledgeable for a normal everyday guy.

Normal my ass!

Normal, everyday citizens didn't run around carrying military issued handguns with them. Nope, Lukian was definitely hiding something.

He reached back and grabbed her arm. She tensed up, but let him move her backwards slowly. His hand brushed over her right breast and she felt her nipples harden instantaneously. Without thought, she reached up and touched his muscular arm. He flexed under the weight of her fingers.

Typical.

He moved his hand further around her, pressing her to his back while his hand rested firmly on her backside. The tighter the grip on her ass got, the damper her inner thighs became.

Clear your mind girl! Now's not the time to be thinking of banging an incredibly sexy marine, even if he is making you cream your panties!

She did her best to shake the naughty thoughts from her head. They left, just in time to be replaced by thoughts of dying as more howls followed. A flash of fur flew out at them. Peren screamed as Lukian fired a shot dead into the animal's forehead. The dead wolf fell to the ground with a thud. She was normally a huge animal rights advocate, but these weren't normal wolves--they were massive and trying to eat her. The combination of the two wasn't good at all.

Two more leapt out of the darkness at them. Lukian fired at one. Its body hit his arm, sending his gun flying. The second wolf went for the back of his neck.

"Run!" he cried out.

"I'm not leaving you!"

Peren kicked out at the wolf in an attempt to get it off Lukian. Her foot struck it hard in the side. She felt its ribs crack and hoped for dear life that it was a killing blow. It shrank back for a moment before it flew at her again. Lukian's hand shot out and grabbed the wolf by its throat. She jumped as he snapped the animal's neck with one hand and very little effort.

She could hear the rustle in the trees around them. Lukian grabbed her arm, dragging her towards the road. Something large crashed into him, sending him hurtling to the ground. She grabbed at it, trying to pull it off Lukian, but something seized hold of her hair and lifted her off her feet.

* * * *

Lukian rolled onto his stomach and brought the half changed werewolf around with him. He punched out and caught its jaw. His fingers burned for the change. His body wanted to be allowed to go to wolf form for the battle. He knew he could take them, all of them, as a wolf. He also knew that he would send Peren screaming to her death if she saw him become what she feared most.

He brought his knee up hard and caught the half-wolf in the gut. It lurched back off of him. He put his hands over his head, touched the hard earth with his palms, and thrust himself upwards in one fluid motion.

"The cavalry is here, Captain, take cover." He heard the voice of Jon, his sniper, in his earpiece. He kicked out, sent the half-wolf flying high into the air, and spun around looking for Peren. His heart went to his throat and his hand to the tiny transponder near the base of his neck.

"Hold your fire, hold your fire."

The team responded and he dropped down, looking at the dirt beneath him. Tracking came naturally to him. It was in his blood. He'd been born to be a hunter and let his instincts take over. He sniffed the air, running his fingers over the imprints from Peren's boots. A set of barefoot prints were next to hers, matching the dragging pattern she'd left step for step. He growled and the beast within him threatened to surface.

If anyone harms her, they will die. The clarity of this thought surprised him. Why was he being so protective of her? What made this one stand out where so many others had failed?

Peren screamed and he ran towards her. I'm coming baby, hold on. Again, he found himself stunned at his responsiveness to her. But, from the moment that he'd laid eyes on her photo, he'd felt that deep want to provide for her, to make her his, to protect her with his life. He'd been in denial, but seeing her in the flesh helped him overcome that.

I'm coming.

He ran fast and hard. His boots gave him the traction he needed to scale up the side of a rock wall to shave time off of his quest. He hit the side of the road and saw headlights coming at him.

"Captain, is that you?"

He put his hand up and flashed the signal, waiting as the van squealed to a stop in front of him. The side door slid open and two men dressed in black from head to toe stared back at him. He looked at the one with the amber eyes and struggled to get his breathing under control. "Jon, they took her...I lost the trail."

The other man moved forward, pushing Jon out of the way. "But Captain, aren't we supposed to eliminate her? We should be sending whoever did

it a thank-you note for making our life a hell of a lot easier if you ask me."

Lukian grabbed hold of the man's collar and ripped him out of the vehicle. He felt his left hand changing into long claws. He held them under the man's chin. "I didn't ask you, and if they hurt her, I will kill you. Am I clear, Wilson?"

"Sir, I believe that we understand your position on this matter now. If you would please be so kind as to put Wilson down, we can begin combing the area for signs of her," Green said, from the driver's seat.

Lukian looked at the man driving the van. Green, almost as old as he was, was well-known for his level-headedness. He nodded a quick thanks at him and set Wilson back on his feet. He knew that he'd shaken the boy up. He hadn't meant to, but the thought of someone hurting Peren sickened him.

Chapter 3

Whatever was pulling her by the hair let go long enough for her to fall to the ground. She tried to pick herself up again, but knew her limits, and was way past them. Something struck the side of her face and her head snapped backwards. For a moment, she wondered if the man had killed her. When she felt like her head was about to burst, her vision swirling with multi-colored dots, she knew she was still alive.

Hot breath blew down on her cheek. She tried to open her eyes to see what was next to her, but the blow she'd taken kept her relatively

immobile. Something rough like sand paper, and slightly damp, moved over her cheek.

A tongue, it's a tongue.

Her mind tried to process the information as fast as it came in, but it was too much, too soon.

"I'm going to enjoy this," a deep raspy voice said in her ear. Normally, this type of bedroom voice would have been sexy to hear. Now, it was terrifying. She let out a whimper and this seemed to excite the beast near her. "It's time to collect the debt owed to me."

A huge weight dropped on her. She punched out hard trying to get it off. She heard material ripping, and felt the sharp sensation of fingernails being drug down her side.

"PEREN!" Lukian couldn't have sounded more like an angel if he'd tried.

The thing pulled back from her as she cried out for help. Something heavy struck the side of her head. "Luke," she said softly.. It was all she could manage to get out before she gave in to the overpowering darkness that surrounded her.

* * * *

He stopped, motioning for Jon and Wilson to stop, too. He could hear something, someone talking, and smelled desire floating through the air. It was mixed with so much rage that he knew in an instant the man's intent was rape. He grabbed an extra weapon from Wilson and took off running, calling Peren's name.

He felt her fear, then her pain when she received a blow to the head. The muscles in his neck tightened with the anticipation of tearing off the head of the lycan who had hurt her. He heard her whisper his name, or almost his name. She called him Luke. It had been a long time since someone had called him that. The norm now was Captain, and had been for over twenty-five years.

Peren's scent filled the air around him. He was close. He pushed through a large patch of brush and found her lying on her side, clutching herself. A feeling of failure gripped him. He'd let someone harm her when he had vowed he wouldn't. He scanned the area first for the assailant, then dropped to his knees next to her.

He touched her arm, lightly, and she screamed out, jerking away from him. "It's me," he said softly. "It's Lukian."

"Luke?" Her tiny hand came out and slipped into his.

Jon and Wilson broke through the bushes behind them, weapons drawn, protecting his back while he saw to his Peren. My Peren? The words sounded so sweet in his head that for the first time in a long time he had butterflies in his stomach.

He scooped her up in his arms, shocked to discover how little she weighed. She didn't look like there was much to her, but holding her confirmed that. No, he wouldn't let anyone hurt his tiny Peren.

Chapter 4

Roi laughed as Missy, the little black-haired one, tried to stop him from putting her in the van. He picked her up and tossed her over his shoulder. She smelled as sweet upside down as she did right side up. That has its advantages, he thought to himself.

He wondered how Lukian was doing with Peren. Green had radioed over informing him that she'd been injured, but that had been the only information he'd received. He'd been the one to make the choice to bring the other two girls back with them. Part of his decision was based on pure

selfishness. He wanted to fuck Missy. Her tight ass called to him on a primal level. He wanted to have it wrapped around his cock, and soon.

The other reason for his decision to bring the girls was out of fear that whomever Lukian had encountered in the woods would come after the girls if left unattended. No, he didn't want anything happening to the feisty one over his shoulder.

Lance had an easier time coaxing Melanie into the van. She'd believed him when he'd finally confessed that her friend was in terrible danger. The little one over Roi's shoulder hadn't been so trusting. The harder she kicked at him and dug her nails in his back, the more he wanted to take her to his bed and punish her.

He'd never had a woman respond to his advances with hostility before. This was uncharted territory for him, and he liked that.

She'll come around.

He tossed her in the van and climbed in beside her. Her short dress rode up and over her hips, showing off a hot little pair of pink panties. He let a bit of the wolf up and sniffed to see if he made her wet, and was shocked to find that he hadn't. He was a good looking man, and he knew it. Women usually threw themselves at him. This little one didn't seem interested in him in the least.

His lips curved into a smile when she sat up abruptly and smacked his face for sneaking a peek at her undies.

Yes ma'am, make me mind.

* * * *

Peren ran fast and hard, trying to stay two steps ahead of her attacker. He would tear her to pieces when he got his hands on her, she was sure of it. She jumped high, trying to cross the narrow stream. Her foot slipped out from under her and she came crashing down into the icy cold water. Large, strong hands reached out for her and she took them.

She looked up into the face of her savior and found Lukian staring at her. His lips came down on hers so hard and fast that she couldn't breathe. She pushed on his massive chest, in an attempt to alert him to the fact that he was choking her, but he didn't seem to notice. She felt his cock lengthening beneath the thin material of his pants. Breathing seemed secondary to touching him. She moved her hands down and tried to touch him. Howls came from all around her and she jerked away.

"LUKE!"

Her eyes opened and she found herself staring into a pair of royal blue eyes. She blinked twice, thinking it a dream. Then, the events in the woods hit her hard. Her body reacted to the fear, and she tried to get up. Her legs quivered and her stomach twisted into a knot. Suddenly feeling faint, she needed some air.

A warm hand stroked her forehead, softly. "No, baby, don't move. Just rest."

"Luke?"

He smiled down at her. Why was this man, Luke, calling her baby? And, why did it make her insides want to turn to jello? Why was she dreaming about stroking his cock? She didn't know, and she didn't care. She moved her hand up and touched his black curls. A tear rolled down her cheek, but she knew it wasn't her own. It was Lukian's pain that she felt, his sadness had manifested itself in her, causing her to weep for him.

This had happened to her on several occasions in her life. Her father tried to explain that it meant she was capable of being an empath. She didn't care what it meant, it scared her. She pulled her hand away, and felt his overwhelming need to kiss her.

She tipped her head upwards to meet his. Warm lips came down on hers, almost crushing her at first. Her dream flooded back to her and the panic in her rose again. Lukian got control of himself, and pushed his tongue gently into her mouth. Heat washed over her, causing her nipples to harden, and her body to perspire.

What's happening to me?

His tongue dove around in her mouth, exploring her, charting areas she hadn't even known existed. She pushed at his tongue with hers, panting softly, feeling the weight of his body moving over hers, Lukian cupped

her face in his large palm and she planted tiny kisses on it, noticing how rough it was. He fanned his fingers out and caressed her face. Peren drew his middle finger into her mouth and sucked softly on it. He pulled it out slowly, but she hurriedly latched onto it again.

Lukian's eyes closed and his mouth opened. She knew she had him, but she wasn't sure what had made her take him. She should still be grieving over Kyle. She shouldn't be lying under a man she'd just met, thinking about having him drive her body into the bed as he made love to her. No, she certainly shouldn't be thinking about that at all.

* * * *

A low trickle of laughter surfaced when he caught her thinking about him making love to her. She wasn't pleased with herself for that, and that was a problem. However, the real problem was, that's exactly what he wanted to do to her. He wanted to take her luscious body, fuck it, mark it, and claim it as his.

Lukian looked down into her green eyes and wondered how the lover she still longed for could have left her. Her beauty alone was enough to hold any man close to her, and he knew that wasn't all there was to her. No, Peren Matthews was a complicated young woman. That much he was sure of.

He hated to leave her side, but he wanted to triple-check the security around the safe house. He knew he was anal about it, but the woman he wanted to spend the rest of his life with was lying there, needing his protection, and he'd be damned if he wouldn't give it.

Spend the rest of my life with? That phrase struck him with some force. He'd had many women in the one hundred and fifty odd years that he'd been alive. He'd never once wanted to claim one as his own, as a mate. Peren made him crave that. To have her walk with him as his immortal soul mate would be the greatest gift ever. He dared not wish for it, fearing that the gods would punish him for being so selfish as to think a woman as perfect as Peren would accept him. It didn't matter, she made him want to offer her the world regardless of the potential backlash.

He reluctantly pulled away from her and walked towards the bedroom door. Her eyes were closed when he looked back at her. She'd had a long night. What did her friend downstairs say? Now he remembered. It was her twenty-fourth birthday. Over a century separated them age-wise. He wasn't too concerned with that. He didn't look a day over thirty. Most people had a hard time believing he was even that old. No, age wouldn't be the major barrier between them, his condition would.

He'd read her fears as she ran from him in the woods. He knew that werewolves had attacked her more than once now, and that one had been responsible for the death of her mother. Peren wouldn't want to be near him if she knew what he really was. Telling her seemed so unimportant next to touching her.

He walked to the room down the hall from him and tapped on the door lightly. He opened the door slowly, and heard the sounds of sex. He looked in to see his field operator, Lance, pumping himself into the back end of Peren's blonde friend, Melanie. Lance looked over at him and smiled wide as he ran his fingers down the girl's back. She was too busy holding onto the bedrails, screaming out for Lance to fuck her harder, to even notice Lukian standing there.

Lukian looked down and concentrated on Lance's thrusts, not out of the need to watch him have sex with her, but out of the need to make sure that Lance was using protection. He was. Lukian backed out of the room, nodding his head softly.

Can't risk getting a human pregnant, it could kill her.

He'd tried to instill that in his men's heads from day one. He was the only one in the project that had been born a lycan. One had survived an attack. The rest were man-made. Roi was part wolf, like him. In fact, it had been Lukian's own DNA injected into Roi. Green was part panther, as was Lance. Wilson was part rat, and Jon part tiger. They had most of the bases covered. It was an odd grouping. In nature, these animals would never run together, but in their unit, it worked out well. He was Alpha Male, their Captain. No one questioned him. He'd never really given them a reason to, until Peren.

His team had been brought in to eliminate her. They answered to the highest men in the military and no one else, but he wasn't foolish enough to think that the orders came from there. No, someone with a shit load of money had wanted Peren out of the picture and almost had their way tonight, almost.

Lukian walked down the stairs quietly and listened as Roi and the other girl, Missy, argued in the kitchen. She still wanted to go home and Roi was still trying to convince her that it was too dangerous. He stopped and laughed when he heard Missy call Roi a bastard. Yep, Roi had finally met his match.

He continued down the hall to the basement door. He was pleased with himself for setting up nearly twelve of these types of safe houses around the states. He'd managed to set up more than fifty in foreign countries over the past twenty years. It was always easier to do bizarre things in other countries. Americans, post 9-11, had become more vigilant. Everyone was suspicious of everyone now.

He pushed the door open and headed down to Green's lab. He turned the corner and found the redheaded man busy at work. Green had his eyes pressed firmly to his microscope, as he babbled to himself.

"Interesting."

"What's interesting?" Lukian asked.

Green spun around and shook his head. "Try not to do that, you nearly gave me a heart attack."

"Sorry. What's interesting?" He smiled softly. Green had survived an attack by a werepanther almost a hundred years ago, but had never taken to the predator side of the beast. He was easy to sneak up on when he was preoccupied.

Green pulled up a picture on his computer screen, and pointed to the cellblocks. "Look here, the target's...Peren's," he corrected himself quickly. "Her DNA is a melting pot. Look," he said, pulling up another page. "This is normal human DNA...this is normal lycanthrope DNA, and here's hers...notice the extra strings. She's not human Lukian, and she's not a were either, she's..." He seemed to be searching for the best way to tell him this.

"She's what?"

"She seems to be a living and breathing incubator for various strains of supernatural creatures. There are signs of vampire, human, faerie, and wolf blood in her. I'm also picking up bits and pieces of cells that I can't yet identify. I do know that the wolf blood is prominent, I think because of the attack you told me about. She showed me the scars on her ankle.

Pretty nasty, she's lucky she didn't lose her leg. I'm guessing that having vampire and faerie DNA in her sped up the healing process. That would also account for her throwing out that jolt of energy you felt when she first touched you." He took a deep breath. "There's something else."

Lukian looked at his friend. Why did he suddenly feel like he didn't want to hear this? "Go ahead," he said, grudgingly.

"Her father is Dr. Lakeland Matthews, head of Science and Research at..."

Lukian's stomach dropped. "Oh, God...he was a major contributor to the program until he suddenly went cold turkey," he thought back, "almost twenty-one years ago." His mouth was suddenly very dry. "Green, you don't think that he did this to his own daughter, do you?"

"No. Well, I wouldn't think so. It's impossible to do this to someone and not kill them or leave them as a vegetable for the rest of their life. I can't explain what she is or how she came to be it. I think this happened because of his involvement with the creation of the Immortal Ops, but I don't think he did it on purpose. At least, I hope that he didn't do it on purpose."

"No, he'd better hope not," Lukian said through gritted teeth.

Chapter 5

Peren sat on the edge of the large bed and pulled her feet up. She was thankful for the tee shirt and sweatpants that Lukian had given her to

change into after her shower. Being attacked and then subjected to endless tests from his friend, Green, had left her feeling tired and a little on edge. Green had tried to be quick, but he was the stereotypical man of science, wanting to perform every test possible on her.

She'd tried to rest, but every time she put her head against her pillow she slipped into another nightmare. She couldn't deal with that right now. She'd had enough with Kyle's disappearance and the attempt on her life. She had wanted to call and let her father know that she was okay, but Lukian had thought it was best that she and her friends just lay low for a while. After spending some time watching Lukian and the men he called friends, it didn't take her long to figure out that they were some sort of paramilitary group. She'd grown up around enough talk of government covert operations to make her almost immune to it, almost.

A cool brush of energy prickled over her and she knew that Captain Lukian was headed back up the stairs to her room. She turned to the door and watched it open slowly. He poked his head in quietly, obviously expecting to find her asleep. His blue eyes narrowed as he saw her sitting up.

"You should be resting."

"I feel fine. I'm a fast healer...always have been."

"You have no idea," he said so quietly that she almost missed it.

She turned her head away from him. Staring at his muscular arms and wide shoulders made her mind wander to thoughts of sex with him. Right now, though, she needed to be thinking about who would want to put an end to her life, and why.

Lukian stepped closer to her and her eyes traveled the length of his body. The man looked like he could bench press a small country. Thinking of him using those powerful arms to support himself while he pressed his cock deep into her made her blush.

What the hell's wrong with me? I've never felt like this for a man before.

Her eyes met his and, for a second, she thought for sure that she could see his soul, and it was a perfect match for her own.

It had taken her almost a year to find Kyle remotely sexy. His looks weren't the problem. Most girls on campus drooled over him. The science

department had had a boom in class registration since he'd come on to instruct two courses on zoology. No, his looks hadn't been the problem; it had been lack of interest on her part. She'd gone through high school and the greater part of college and remained a virgin. She'd dated lots of men, but never found one sexually appealing. A year after her father first introduced her to his new hire, Kyle, she suddenly found him so irresistible that at times she could scarcely keep her hands off him.

Her father had been against it from the beginning. She had heard Kyle and her father arguing numerous times about his relationship with her. Peren didn't know why her father rejected the idea so much, but he was adamant that she sever ties with him. Kyle did that for her, the day he disappeared.

Now, she sat in the bed forcing her hands under her legs to keep from reaching for Lukian. Something about him called to her and made her want to run her fingers through his dark black curls, and to see what hidden wonders lay under his tan pants and dark tee shirt.

The bed dipped down a little and she looked to find Lukian sitting near her. He didn't try to touch her and she was grateful. If he did, she wasn't sure she could stop herself from tearing his clothes off. He let out a tiny laugh and she looked over at him.

"What, my not being able to sleep funny to you?"

His lips curved upward, but he kept his eyes down. "No, sorry, just...umm...nothing, sorry."

She rolled her eyes and turned to lie back down on the bed. Lukian went to get up to give her room for her legs. Don't go! Please, God, don't let him go. I feel safe with him near me. I can sleep when he's close.

Lukian sat back down at the foot of the bed. Peren didn't care what made him change his mind, she was just happy that he did. Now, maybe if she was lucky, he'd lie next to her and hold her in his arms. She had no clue how to ask him to do that without looking like a sleazebag, so she just lay still and pretended to drift off.

He slid up the bed, like a cat, and moved next to her. He swept her long hair out of the way and put his solid body against hers, spooning her. Thank you, was all she could think when sleep grabbed hold of her.

* * * *

Lukian lay there, listening to Peren breathe as she drifted off to sleep. He could barely contain his excitement enough to lie still and hold her in his arms. She'd wanted him to do this! She'd wanted him to stay with her. He made her feel safe, and that was what he wanted most.

He tried his best to be a gentleman with her, but every now and then he'd let his fingertips brush the underside of her breast while she slept. Her body curled into his each time he did it, so he assumed she enjoyed it. He was positive he did.

Lukian was unable to fight off an erection being this close to her. He couldn't help himself when he rubbed up against her backside--it just happened. He tried to be discreet, but having her in his arms, in his bed, was more than even he could bear.

"Luke," she said softly in her sleep.

The sound of his name falling from her sweet lips made him even harder. He knew he couldn't walk, so running wasn't an option. If this kept up much longer, he'd be screaming in want for her, and possibly changing. He'd never felt this raw need to be with someone before and it actually left him a little scared. That wasn't something he felt often.

Peren shifted in her sleep and called out his name again. She turned slightly, putting her large breast in his hand. He let out a small noise and cupped it gently. His fingers ran over her soft nipple and found it responding to his touch. Everything in his brain said to get up and leave her alone. She was just an innocent, scared young woman, who was reaching out to someone she believed could protect her. Even as he thought it, he knew that it wasn't true. She was his mate, he was sure of it. He just wasn't sure how or why.

Peren moved again, running her hand over his hip. She kneaded at the material and her nails scraped his leg. He pulled on her body and brought them even closer together. He pressed himself firmly against her back, rubbing against her. Dry humping her wasn't nearly as good as getting to be in her, but it was all he had at the moment. Her hands moved upward and pushed between their bodies. He sucked in his breath and was afraid to move when her hand grabbed hold of his cock.

Don't move, don't make a sound, maybe you won't wake her...don't, oh!

She began to stroke him through his pants. He moved his hands down long enough to unzip himself and then moved them back up to touch her stomach and breasts. He wanted to put his hand on her bare skin and run his hand under his tee shirt, the one she now wore on her body. He wanted to feel if her skin was as soft as it looked.

He moaned, softly, as her fingers slid into the front of his open pants and took hold of the length of him. He'd stopped wearing underwear years ago, and was suddenly very thankful for the decision. Peren pushed her butt up and at him. He'd had enough, if this kept up, he'd end up taking her right then and there, and that would make him no better than the man who'd wanted to rape her. He pulled away.

"No...don't go...stay with me, and..." her voice faded off.

Lukian leaned down and looked at her, her hand still held tight to his throbbing cock. "You're awake."

She made a soft almost purr-like noise that sent him over the edge. He brought his lips down on her neck and took in her vanilla scented skin. She wore her attraction to him like a second perfume, but she also smelled of fear. His body reacted and he wrapped her protectively in his arms. "My sweet Peren."

* * * *

His Peren? The sound of that was so amazingly soothing. She held the length of his penis in her hand, stroking his mass gently, wondering, if it came to it, could she take all of him? Kyle had been average size, which had been more than enough for her. Now, holding Luke and having trouble getting her fingers to meet scared her.

How gentle a lover is he?

Her answer came in the form of him sliding his hands down her back and gently massaging her sore muscles. The touch of his rough hands on her skin made her want to pull away; the feel of her inner thighs tightening made her stay still. He moved her hand away from him and turned her

body over more. His weight shifted, and his hands moved to both sides of her spine. He rubbed so gently at first that she wasn't even sure he was there at all, then he increased his pressure. She moved her head forward into the pillow to allow him access to her neck. His fingers found her and worked out the knots that had built up there over the last few months.

No one had ever taken this much time pampering her, not even Kyle. Sure, he'd been gentle with her, but never really focused on her needs. He'd always seemed to be too busy concentrating on not coming too soon to worry about pleasing her.

Peren tightened when she felt Lukian's hands move lower down her back. He answered by forming tiny circles along the base of her spine to relax her. She moved her hands down, pulled her shirt up, and pushed the already loose waistband of the borrowed sweatpants down her hips.

Lukian drew in his breath. She hesitated and waited for the touch of his hands to return. She didn't want to scare him away. His fingers slipped up and under the remainder of her shirt and aided in easing it up and over her head. She wiggled out of it and let it drop to the floor. She turned with her arm cupping her exposed breasts, still on her stomach, needing to see his face.

Intense royal blue eyes, craving her body, stared back at her. She turned towards him, and watched as his amazingly crisp eyes fell lower over her body.

* * * *

She's beautiful, Lukian thought as he stared at Peren's half-dressed body. The fact that she was shy about having her breasts exposed to him only served to turn him on more. He leaned forward and put his hand out. He had to touch her tight stomach. He had to run his fingers over her skin.

Yes, it's as soft as I thought, maybe even softer.

Peren's arm slid down and he was left with his face hovering over her pink nipples. His beast tried to come up while he took in her scent again. He pushed the wolf down and leaned forward, drawing her nipple into his

mouth. Her body reacted as if she was cold, and her nipple hardened. He pulled on it gently with his teeth, rolling it around his mouth.

He felt her desire to hold him, to run her fingers through his hair. He noticed that she was keeping her hands up above her head, and knew that she was afraid of the way she felt for him. He released her nipple and watched it stand at attention in the cool air of the room. The impulse to let his tongue flicker back over it overcame him, and he did.

Lukian sat up and pulled his shirt off slowly. He could hear her thoughts and smiled. He looks like he's been carved from marble. Peren's voice sounded every bit as sweet in his head as it did aloud. He let the sound of it roll around a little before he leaned in closer. He could sense her need to touch him again. He tipped down and took her hand, putting his chest in her face in the process. To his surprise and delight, she bit at his skin, but pulled back quickly.

Oh, shit, I bit him. What the hell...please don't think I'm one of those...please don't think I'm one of those.

It took everything he had not to laugh at her. She was so sweet and innocent, yet none of the above. He slid his hands over hers and cupped them. He could sense her desire for him to make love to her like it was his own. He could easily see himself obliging.

* * * *

What am I doing? This has gone too far. Peren's conscience ate at her. Her body ignored it. The feel of Lukian so close to her, his chest brushing past her face was too much. She knew the moment that her teeth sank down into his warm flesh that she'd crossed that line, that invisible barrier that most women have that keeps them from giving themselves to anything with a pulse.

Lukian held her hands in his and kissed her mouth, her cheeks, neck, breasts. She moaned slightly as his lips touched hers. He pulled back and gazed down at her with a look of adoration. She used this opportunity to free her hands from his grasp, reaching down and removing her sweatpants. Luke's eyes widened and he sat up on his knees to help her.

His thick rough hands brushed past her stomach as he tugged the pants down her legs. She thought she would die from delight when his fingers grazed over her butt. She hadn't put on underwear after her shower. She didn't have any extra, and being drug around on the ground with her skirt riding up high had left hers dirty and unusable. Lukian's face hovered over her neatly trimmed curls. She'd taken to leaving only a strip of hair, a runway, so to speak. She felt him blow a puff of cool air across her now blisteringly hot inner thighs. She let out a whimper and reached down for him.

He tossed her pants aside and slid in between her legs. Kyle had been her only lover and he'd never put his face near her lower regions. She tried to scoot her body up on the bed in an attempt to get away. She wanted him, but was now nervous, having his head so close to her cunt. His fingers spread her velvety folds, opening her, nicking her swollen clit. A wave of pleasure went through her thighs. A shaking, involuntary jerking headed down towards her ankles. She was unable to control herself and continued to move up and away from him. His hands pulled her hips back down towards his face as his tongue flickered over her. Lukian thrust his fingers into her, and she knew that her pussy was involuntarily clenching down around them.

* * * *

Lukian pushed a third finger in to spread her more. He didn't want to cause her pain, but wanted to stretch her body to be sure she'd accept all of him. He bent his face down into her, taking a deep breath, wanting always to remember the smell of her pleasure.

He licked along the inner ridge of her pursed lips, finding her clit, red, swollen, and waiting for him. He slid his mouth over it and drew it in, gently. In a flash, he was running his tongue over it quickly, then stopped to suck on it. He kept his fingers moving in and out of her, leaving the fruits of his labor dripping down his hand and over her sweet ass. He brought his tongue down to lap it up. He didn't want to let a good thing go to waste.

He let one of his fingers slide into her tight ass, pushing past the pink rosette. She cried out and bucked against his hand, riding his fingers harder than he'd have thought she'd have liked. Lukian pushed his face

deep into her hot little cunt, licking her, fucking her with his fingers, taking her virgin ass.

No...more...more...oh, Luke...oh. He laughed softly into her as he heard her thoughts projected onto him. He pulled his face away from her very swollen, very wet pussy, and slid his pants off.

* * * *

"Please," was all she could get out. She wasn't sure if it was please stop, or please go. It didn't matter. They were too far gone now for her to put the brakes on. She leaned up on her elbows and found Lukian standing at the foot of the bed, stroking his hard cock. He leaned forward and stuck his finger deep within her, and pulled it out, taking with it a string of her searing come.

She bit her lip and drew in her breath as she watched him rubbing her come on his shaft until it glistened. She pulled her legs up and out, showing him that she was ready and willing to accept him, if she could. Her eyes widened as he seemed to grow larger by the second. His length was impressive, he had Kyle beat by at least three inches, but that wasn't what made her doubt if she could handle him. It was his girth. She'd never dreamt that they came in that size.

How the hell does he walk and not fall forward from the strain of that?

She watched as a tiny smirk came over Lukian's face. He climbed onto the bed on all fours and crawled over her. The primal look on his face said that he was thinking only of sticking his mass deep within her. She should have been ashamed of herself for falling so fast into Lukian's bed, but instead, she regretted having not met him sooner. She wanted him deep within her, like she'd never wanted anything in her life before. The need for air seemed secondary next to the need to have Lukian's cock between her legs.

She put her hands around his neck, trying to pull his head down to her, but he held his body up still. She clung to his body, like a rag doll, wanting him to slam himself into her, and grind her into a state of numbness.

The mushroom shaped tip of him touched her entrance. His shoulders tightened, he was about to pull away. "No," she pleaded, as she tugged on his neck. She wouldn't let him back out now. Every fiber of her being wanted him and she'd have him.

The look in his unnaturally blue eyes said that he was doing everything in his power to restrain himself. She kissed along his jaw line and tried to coax him into her. He didn't budge.

* * * *

Lukian wanted to thrust into her probably more than she wanted him to, but he had to try and keep a level head about him. It was hard as hell, and so was he. He tried to stand, but Peren was pulling on him, begging him to stay with her.

He could tell from her scent that she was fertile and not taking any precautions of her own to prevent pregnancy. As much as he wanted to take her and make her his mate, he feared that his obsession would drive her away. He cursed silently to himself for not thinking of bringing condoms into his room. Being a lycanthrope prevented him from being able to catch any sort of STD's, and after speaking with Green he knew that the same was true for Peren as well.

He's going to stop this. He doesn't want me.

"I want you more than life itself, Peren," he said softly to her.

* * * *

"Then take me," she panted.

She looked at him and willed him to have her, to use her, to make her his own. Something about this glorious man called to her on a primitive level. She wrapped her legs tightly around his waist and let her upper body drop to the bed. She used her many years of gymnastics and martial arts training for purely selfish gain, and flipped Luke over onto his back.

She pushed herself down onto him in one fluid motion, taking his shaft deep into her. She was so tight, and he so large, that she thought he may rip her in two. She cried out, as did he. He tore into her, filling her with a mix of pleasure and pain. She leaned down onto him and found his mouth. His tongue met hers, and his hands went to her waist. She matched the tiny swirl-like motion that she was making with her tongue with her hips.

"Peren, you feel so damn good," he said, with a low growl.

His scent, a cross between sweat and musk, sent her pheromones into overdrive. She thrust herself onto him, taking him deeper within her. The pressure was so great that she had to pull away from his mouth to let the cries within her out. The cool air from the room made its way between them and she took a deep breath in, trying to avoid hyperventilating. His hands moved to her hips, and yanked her body down onto his, harder and faster. She had to use her arms to steady herself, moving up and down on him.

"Oh, yes, Lukian, yes!"

* * * *

Being sheathed inside Peren's body left him feeling removed from himself. She was so hot and tight that he felt like he was dipping himself into a tight vat of hot oil. She was teasing him, her ample breasts bouncing in his face. He leaned up and grabbed hold of a nipple, sucking hard. Peren's rhythm changed. She slammed down on him so fast and furious that their bodies began to make slapping noises. Sweat-soaked and past the point of being able to stop, he tried to lift her off of him. He gave one final suck of her erect nipple and looked up into her face.

"Off...off...I'm gonna...come," he said, frantically.

Her eyes shifted colors, like his could do if he wasn't careful. The green in them deepened and the tiniest hint of amber wolf pushed through. She leaned down and grabbed his head to her chest. Her warm breasts pushed into his face. He fought the urge to bite down on them and leave his mark. He wanted to claim her as his own, but...

"Off...baby, I can't hold it...I'm going to come in your hot, wet...oh..." His voice sounded weak, even to him.

She yanked the back of his hair and slammed her body onto him. She tightened around him, as her orgasm hit, contracting, milking him. Her eyes rolled back slightly.

Give it to me...I want to feel your hot come in me...I want to feel you exploding deep inside me..."Luke..." she said, softly.

Unable to hold it any longer he released his seed into her. It erupted with such force that it made him shake. He grabbed Peren and pulled her to him, still deep within her.

"You're mine now...forever," he said, very matter-of-factly.

"I know," she said, rolling to the side, falling next to him on the bed.

He pulled her into his arms and kissed her forehead. She moaned slightly, and moved her leg over his. The smell of her sex filled the room. He should have been sated, full, satisfied. Instead, he was left wanting even more of her. "Peren, baby."

"Hmm?" she said, lazily.

Lukian stroked her auburn hair and kissed her again. "Take me in your mouth. I want to feel those soft lips wrapped around me."

She lay still for a moment and he thought she'd say no. When her tiny hand wrapped around his still hard cock, he knew she'd do as he asked. She slid down the bed, and planted tiny kisses on his abs as she went. She reached the base of his penis and giggled slightly.

His brow creased as he leaned up to look at her. "What? Laughing at a guy in that position could cause him lasting damage."

"No, Luke, I didn't mean to laugh. I'm nervous. I've never done this before," she said, slightly embarrassed, her cheeks reddening.

"Oh, baby, talk like that will get you flipped over and that sweet little ass of yours attacked. I can't control myself when I'm near you. I want you, all of you."

He reached into her hair and coaxed her mouth near him. He could read her thoughts and she wanted to take him into her mouth, her ass, wherever he wanted to take her. She was his mate, no doubt about it.

Peren's tongue ran out and over him, sending shivers down his legs. She took him slowly into her hot mouth, and inched her way down his shaft. The head of his cock touched the back of her throat and her eyes widened. It took her a minute to move, but when she did, it was pure ecstasy. Each lick, each suck, sent his body over the edge, and the wolf closer to the surface.

He growled out and tossed his head back, letting his balls tighten, and coming deep into her mouth. She drank him down, sucking softly, not missing a drop. Lukian's legs jerked and Peren continued to move her mouth up and down on him.

He pulled on her head, gently. "Baby, I'm done."

She moved her mouth off him and licked her lips. "No, you're not. You're going to fuck me again," she said, in a sultry voice.

Lukian laughed, deep and long. "Oh, baby, you're killing me."

Chapter 6

Lukian lay, holding her in his arms. She'd been asleep for several hours now. After making love three more times in the bed, and twice in the

shower, Peren was exhausted. He was grateful that she hadn't seemed to regret what they'd just done. In truth, she had no idea what they'd done, he knew that. How could she? He tried to think of the various ways to tell her that he'd just claimed her as his mate, his wife. He'd never had a mate before. He'd had lovers, even a few who meant a great deal to him, but never anyone that made him feel the way he felt with her--complete.

He had wanted to steal away and ask Green how his research was coming. It was careless of him to lose control and come in her. If it turned out that her body wasn't supernatural enough to accept his seed, then she would never end up getting pregnant, or worse yet, would get pregnant and die.

Lukian took a deep breath and buried his face in her silky hair. He silently prayed for her to be physically able to be his mate in every sense of the word. He wasn't sure he could go on if she wouldn't be in his life, or if he'd hurt her in any way. It was bittersweet, thinking of her possibly carrying his child. He would never forgive himself if harm came to her because of it.

His mind raced to his men. He'd spent the last twenty-five years lecturing them on the need for safety, for control. They didn't lead normal lives. Being a member of an elite, supernatural, special operations team didn't leave much room for family. The other men were young yet. They weren't over fifty. Except for Green. He, too, was old. He was from the very first round of experiments that had been conducted on the eve of Hitler.

Green had been in his early thirties and a scientist when he'd volunteered for the experiment. He was one of only a handful of survivors. The only reason he'd made it through was that he'd been attacked by one of the captive weres and not injected with serum. He came by his panther part honestly; there was nothing man-made about him. The dawning of the madman in Germany put an end to America's secret experiments for close to twenty years after that. They in no way wanted to be associated with the likes of that maniac.

None of the other men looked a day over twenty-five, the age they'd been when they joined the program. In the scope of immortals, they were babies. They most likely wouldn't feel the need to reproduce for another twenty years or so. He, on the other hand, was much older than fifty, and had believed that he would never find his mate.

Now, as he lay with Peren in his arms, he suddenly felt unsure. Not of her or what they'd done, but of what to do next. According to the code of the weres, Peren was now considered their leader as well. She was his chosen mate, and most likely the future mother of his children. Her word carried as much weight as his, in theory. He knew that it would be a difficult sell to the were community, especially his pack. They would naturally question his choice in a mate because she was not a full lycan. She was something, that much he was sure of, just not full werewolf. The biggest problem of all was that he knew damn well that Peren had no clue what she was, or what he was for that matter.

He shook his head to clear his thoughts. Right now, his concern had to be on Peren's safety. Someone had paid big money to bring them in to take her down. The very thought of having even considered killing her made him flushed and nauseous. He would die before he saw her hurt, and he was guessing that would be a very real possibility when word got back to the powers that be that his team protected her.

"I'll never let anyone hurt you, my love, my wife," he whispered softly into her hair.

Chapter 7

"You did what?" Missy said, in anything but a low tone. Peren grabbed her arm and pulled her into the tiny side room.

"Hey, announce it to the world, why don't you!"

Missy's dark eyes rolled and her mouth dropped open. "You fucked some ninja-Rambo-stranger? The guy's a nut. All these guys are nuts! Peren, what if you're pregnant?"

A soft knock on the door interrupted them. Peren opened it slowly and, seeing it was only Melanie, let herself relax. Melanie looked tired. Dark circles had formed under her normally vivid blue eyes. She pushed past Peren slowly and moved over to sit in one of the chairs at the long rectangular table.

Missy moved in to grab reinforcements. "Mel, guess what our little buddy did!"

Melanie turned her head slowly and looked up at Peren. "What'd ya' do?" Her tone lacked any real interest. Missy shot a look of concern over at Peren.

"Mel?"

Melanie turned her focus back to Missy. A sinking feeling in the bottom of Peren's gut hit her fast. She knew without asking that something bad had happened, she just wasn't sure what it was. She pulled out one of the chairs and sat next to her friend.

"What's wrong, honey?" she asked.

Melanie turned a set of glassy eyes on Peren and spoke slowly. "I...I had sex with Lance last night." Missy let out a grunt and Peren shot her a nasty look. "He was just...I mean, well, he wasn't...oh, shit, he was hot and I wanted him." She turned and looked at Peren. "I got him. I got more than just him. We fucked three times before it happened."

Peren looked at Missy and they both moved in closer to their friend. Peren's chest ached with the pain her friend was feeling. She'd always been able to pick up and share others emotions. She'd had to learn to tune them out or she found herself weeping for no apparent reason. But she couldn't tune out one of her closest friends in the world.

Melanie looked down at the floor. "You won't believe me if I tell you."

"No, sweetie, it's okay. We'll believe you, go ahead," Peren coaxed her on, stopping only for a minute because she suddenly felt the weight of someone's gaze on her. She glanced around the large meeting room and saw nothing out of the ordinary.

Melanie took Peren's hand and squeezed it tight. "You're going to think I'm crazy, but I swear to you...Lance changed during his orgasm."

"Changed?" Peren asked.

Missy leaned back in her seat. "Yeah, psycho-paramilitary freaks tend to do that."

Peren gave her another nasty look and pulled Melanie closer to her. "He changed how?"

"His mouth widened and then his shoulders moved up...hair, dark black hair just sort of appeared all over him, and the worst part was his teeth...they were huge...he looked like," she gasped, "he looked like he was going to tear me apart after he fucked me."

"Oh, this is ridiculous!" Missy said, standing up so fast that her chair tipped over. "He obviously slipped you something in your drink at the club and you were hallucinating."

Melanie looked up and wiped the tears from her cheeks. "Hallucinating? Yeah, maybe, but it felt...it felt so real."

Missy waved her hand in the air, dismissing the idea. "Well, you don't have a mark on you and since you're sitting here telling us this, he couldn't have eaten you."

Melanie nodded. "Yeah, yeah you're right. When I got up this morning he was lying next to me in the bed, normal. I...yeah, it must have been something in my drink."

Peren felt the penetrating gaze again and then smelled the faint scent of musk. Lukian. She felt like he was standing in her, next to her, all around her. She closed her eyes for a minute and could have sworn that she felt someone moving within her thoughts. As quickly as it came, it left. She turned her attention back on her friend and patted her leg.

"Yes, you were tired, and had too much to drink. Lance didn't slip you a thing. You were half in the bag when we got to the club, and you've been running on empty with finals lately. I'm guessing that the stress of all that, combined with alcohol, left you a little off." She hoped her lie would soothe her friend. She's sensed the terror in Melanie as she talked about the events the night before, and it was real, not imagined.

* * * *

"You changed during sex?" Roi turned on Lance with a look of disgust. Lukian could sense Roi's rage. Hell, Lukian even agreed with it, but he couldn't let him kill Lance.

"Calm down," he said sternly.

The room stopped buzzing and all eyes turned to him. He was their Captain, their leader, and now he'd be expected to fix this. Wilson took a step forward and tipped his head.

"Sir, maybe it would be best if we just eliminate the women. They know too much and..."

Lukian went to strike him, but Roi beat him to it, followed closely by Lance and then Green. He could understand Lance's concern. He'd smelled his desire for the blonde one the minute he'd laid eyes on her. Roi was a different story. The self-proclaimed playboy rarely thought of women as anything more than objects. He'd been surprised to find Roi sleeping on the hallway floor outside Missy's locked room when he woke.

Green pulled Roi off Wilson and turned his attention back to Lukian. "Perhaps full disclosure? It would ease their suspicions, and if they understand the stakes, they may choose the lesser of two evils."

"Sir, if I may, Wilson might have a point. I don't want to hurt'em. They're sweet girls, but to risk the secrecy of the team?" Jon said softly from the other side of the room.

Lukian spun around and glared at him, his nostrils flaring. "No one will be hurting any of the girls. Is that understood?"

"But the brown-haired one...Jen or something? She was our target, we should at least hand her over to the Colonel. Maybe he could figure out what to do with the other two," Wilson said, wiping his bloodied mouth.

"Her name is Peren, and she is my mate!" Lukian said loudly.

Every eye in the room turned to him. The silence was deafening. It was Roi who stepped forward first. "Brother, tell me that you didn't mate with her. Tell me that you didn't offer her your seed."

Lukian stood silently and looked through the two-way mirror at Peren. She was still holding her friend to her, trying to comfort her. He knew that she'd just felt him reading her, scanning her thoughts, and that was another sign that she was his true mate. His mind flashed back to his moment of release in her, when he filled her body with his hot come, sealing the deal that she would be his forever.

"Your silence speaks volumes, Lukian! If she gets pregnant, she will die. What do you have to show for it then? How could you take a human mate?"

Green stepped forward and cleared his throat. "Umm, here's the thing. I did some more tests on Peren this morning and she's less human than we are."

Roi and Lukian turned to Green. He continued, "I told you about the vampire DNA in her, and what I thought might be faerie...and well, you yourself told me about her surviving a werewolf attack. So, it's obvious she carried a bit of that in her as well, but..."

Green looked at Lukian, scared that his commander and friend would kill the messenger. Lukian nodded to him, wanting more than anything to hear what he had to say.

"Peren shows signs of having every known form of were DNA in her blood, along with several mid-level demons. The most shocking of all is that these have all meshed together. I'm not sure, but I think she could shift into upwards of thirty creatures, and most likely has the same powers as most vampires. She, of course, is unaware of any of this. I could sense that during the testing."

Green had the gift for reading truths. It was normally reserved for wolves and vampires, but somehow Green had developed this gift. If he said that Peren was unaware of her condition, then it was true. No one in the team would question that. They'd come to rely too heavily on each other's strong points to start doubting them now. The question that was plaguing Lukian wasn't if Peren knew what she was, but how she came to be in the first place. Someone out there knew full-well what she was and wanted to put an end to her. But why?

Lukian stormed past his friend and went straight for the cell phone they'd been given to keep in contact with the Colonel. He pressed the send button and waited for the Colonel to answer.

"Mission is complete, Sir."

There was a moment of silence on the other end. "Very well, I-Ops can retire. I'll expect a full briefing tomorrow morning."

He hung the phone up and tossed it aside. Not one of his men questioned him. He didn't think they would. He looked back at the mirror to stare at the three beautiful women who had gotten themselves tangled up in a mess they couldn't possibly understand. He thought back to his time at the laboratories with Peren's father. They had worked side by side in creating an elite fighting team. There had been three tries prior to theirs. All were unsuccessful. Synthetic serums had been used to try to recreate the DNA and induce change. Most of the men had died; others had been rendered useless as soldiers.

He turned and looked at the five men standing near him. Each had been carefully screened. It had been determined that all had traces of supernatural abnormalities in their blood. Somewhere in each man's family history, there had been an event that no one talked about. Lukian had spent over a hundred years roaming this earth and had come into contact with more immortals than he cared to count. He was able to round up enough pure blood for Dr. Matthews and it was used on his men. His team. They knew the risks before they went into it, and they knew the consequences.

All but one had survived. Roi had been selected as a back-up. He'd been an alternate candidate. The man prior to him had been given too much of Lukian's straight blood and the effects had been devastating. He'd been unable to control the changes, and the man had lost his mind and escaped. They'd searched for him for the last twenty-five years, but he'd managed to drop off the face of the earth. The chances of him surviving had been so minimal that continuing to spend money and man hours in search of him was ridiculous.

Chapter 8

"We need to get out of here," Missy said softly in Peren's ear as they rinsed the dishes from dinner.

Peren didn't turn to acknowledge her friend's statement, she just nodded. Missy was right, she knew that. They had to get away from these men. The thought of leaving Lukian made her sick to her stomach. The thought of staying scared her just as badly. She'd spent the greater part of the day avoiding him. He'd tried to talk with her once, but she'd turned away and left him standing alone. It was the hardest thing she'd ever done.

A light pain started in her temple. She'd been experiencing them since Melanie had told her about Lance's change. She kept feeling like something was trying to push through her head. The only thing that helped was to envision a wall around her, protecting her, shielding her, for lack of a better word. She'd asked Green for an aspirin, and he had been the one to suggest trying the semi-meditation techniques. They'd been working out well for her. Green seemed like a nice man. He was handsome, and as far as she could tell, unattached. She'd wished that it had been he that Melanie had fallen for, not slicky-boy Lance.

She finished with the dishes and headed upstairs to check on Melanie. Voices floated to her from the other end of the hallway. Peren sunk back into the corner and stood silently.

"I can't believe that little prick even suggested hurting them. I should have ripped his fucking head off." She knew that deep voice. It was Roi, the one who stayed close to Lukian.

"I know, I feel the same way," Lukian answered.

"Of course you feel the same...I still can't believe you took her as your mate. The others will be hesitant to call her their Queen. Does she even know about you?"

"No," Lukian said softly. "No, I'm not sure how to tell her. Any suggestions on how to do it?"

"Oh, I don't know, you could try the truth. Peren, I fucked you, came in you, and cemented a bond that's eternal...try and back out and I'll be left no choice but to carry out my original orders...how's that for a proposal? Maybe telling her she's now royalty would help."

She heard Lukian growl at him. "Stop bringing that up! I've told you already that that part of my life isn't important to me."

Roi shrugged. "If I were King, I know I wouldn't shrug it off. No worries...so...what about this girl?"

Peren fought to control her breathing. What the hell were they talking about? It had to be her and Lukian, but what was all this nonsense about forever and royalty? Yeah, the thought of waking up in his arms everyday made her want to do back flips, but he was involved in some heavy shit, and she didn't want to get in any deeper than she already was.

"Are you going to tell her about yourself?" Roi asked.

There was a pause before she heard Lukian reply. "Again, I'm still trying to figure out how to tell her. She needs to know about her make-up, as well. That should come from her father. He has to have known."

"What kind of sick bastard does that to his own daughter?" Roi asked, wryly.

"Here's the thing. I knew him Roi, and the man was the type that'd lasso the moon for his wife. I can't see where his daughter would be any different. I remember the look on his face when he told me that his wife was expecting. They'd been trying for years and hadn't had any luck. He skipped around the center like a child."

Peren stood quietly absorbing all that she'd just heard. How could Lukian have known her father before she was born? He didn't look much older than she did. She listened closer

"I don't know how much her father had to do with what she is, but for now I've bought us some time with the Colonel. He thinks she's dead. That'll give us some time to try and figure out who hired us to kill her."

Peren fell back against the wall when she heard what Lukian had said. He'd been hired to kill her? She dropped back, missed the top step, slamming hard into the next one.

"What the...?" Roi said from behind her.

She turned and looked up past him at Lukian. Lukian's blue eyes widened. "Peren...shit, no!"

She saw him come towards her and she slid down the stairs hard and fast. The feel of the hard wood smacking against her legs made her want to stop--the thought of Lukian's betrayal kept her going. The bottom step came upon her quickly and she jumped to her feet. She turned and looked at the front door. They kept it bolted down tight. They had claimed it was to keep bad things out. Now she wondered if it was really to keep her in.

She ran past the door and eyed up the front room window. Bars were on the other side. She'd noticed that earlier in the day. Her mind raced as she thought of a way out, then it hit her.

"Peren, baby...wait!" She heard Lukian call out from behind her.

She screamed and ran past him. His arm shot out to grab her and she ducked under him. Roi grabbed hold of her, and she brought her forehead down hard into his face. He yelled out and grabbed at his nose, dropping her in the process.

She ran up the stairs, taking them three at a time. When she threw the bedroom door open she nearly ripped it off the hinges. Footsteps followed close behind her.

* * * *

"Shit! She's a wild one!" Roi yelled as he ran behind Lukian up the stairs.

"You've no idea!" Lukian shouted back.

Lukian ran towards the bedroom. He caught sight of Peren's hair as she ran into the room. His heart was beating so fast that he thought it might leap out of his chest. He couldn't lose her, not now that he had just found

her. No, she was his, and he would try to make her see that he'd never hurt her.

He ran into the room and stopped so fast that Roi ran right into him, sending both of them crashing to the ground. He looked up, alarmed, when he saw Peren diving through the window. The sound of breaking glass and cracking wood filled the air around them. He pushed to his feet, followed closely by Roi, and screamed out for Peren.

They were two-and-a-half stories above ground. Lukian hit the window and stopped, not wanting to see Peren's broken body. Roi moved past him and looked out.

"I'll be a monkey's uncle...or wait, make that a wolf's brother." Roi's hand touched his shoulder. "It's okay, look."

Lukian turned to see Peren using a nearby tree branch to swing her body around, much the same way a gymnast would use the uneven bars. His eyes widened as she gracefully dismounted. She dropped to the ground and crouched for a moment, like a tiger. Her head turned quickly to one side. He knew that her instincts were telling her which way was home, and he knew that whoever else had been in the woods with them the other night would be waiting there for her return.

He went to leap out of the window and onto the tree. Roi grabbed his arm. "Hey, wolf boy...you're not made for swinging from trees. Take the stairs."

Good point. His mind raced as fast as he did.

Peren's bare feet numbed to the pounding of the ground beneath them. She ran with great speed and agility, she always had. She knew that she should be tired. She'd been running for almost an hour at full speed. This isn't normal. Adrenaline was pushing her, driving her onward.

She saw the edge of her property line and felt a wave of relief rush over her. Home. Her pace slowed as she ran to the iron gate. Her key card was still back at Lukian's. She ran over to the electronic pad and pressed the intercom button.

Come on, come on! Nothing.

A rustling in the bushes behind her caught her attention. She spun around to find Lukian standing there. His royal blue eyes blazed with a fire she'd never seen before. She turned to hit the button again, and Lukian grabbed her arm.

"Peren, don't draw any more attention to yourself. You're in danger."

She let out a wild laugh. "Yeah, I heard all about it. What? Do you want a little more action before you bump me off?"

"Bump you off? Who even uses that phrase anymore? I've been alive a long time and I don't remember anyone other than fictitious Hollywood characters using that. I once knew a gangster, but he said...never mind." He smiled wide, and continued on. "I must say that it does have a certain amount of charm when you use it."

She was appalled with the idea that he was trying to make light of this. She'd trusted him, cared for him, and quite possibly allowed herself to fall in love with him. Lukian took another step towards her, and she backed up into the iron gate. She wondered if she'd have time to scale the thing before he got hold of her.

Probably not.

Lukian came at her fast and caught her arm. She brought her hand up and smacked his face, coming away with blood on her fingertips. That should have pleased her greatly. That meant she was winning, right? Then why did she suddenly feel so bad? She stopped fighting him and reached out to touch the cheek she'd just bloodied. His hand caught her wrist, turned her palm to his face, and kissed it gently.

A tidal wave of heat poured through her as she stood before him. This curly mop-topped man, with the body of an athlete, quirky sense of humor, and the ability to make her body ache. How could she deny him?

* * * *

Lukian was still in shock, standing there running his fingers over her face. He'd expected her to be afraid. He'd even expected her to resort to violence. What he hadn't expected was for her to fall back into his arms so quickly.

She's my mate, it's meant to be.

Peren's skin felt a bit feverish. They'd both been running for miles and miles, so sweat was a given, but her body temperature seemed high, even for someone with her mixed DNA.

"You're burning up," he said, his voice packed full of concern.

She didn't respond aloud, but he still heard her. Of course I'm burning up. How could I not be, you're touching me.

He smiled. She wanted him as much as he wanted her. He quickly became very aware of his erection. The thrill of the chase, the blood she'd drawn from him, her touch--all of it made him want to fuck her right where they stood. He could smell her want for him, she was wet with it. He knew that if he stuck his fingers in her, he'd find her damp and ready to accept him. He ran his hands down her arms to her waist. She stepped closer into him and brought her sweet mouth to his. He wanted to close his eyes and get lost in the feel of her tongue on his, but he was afraid she'd disappear.

* * * *

Peren stood there with Lukian's hands on her waist, kissing feverishly at his mouth. She couldn't get enough of him. She felt the curtain in her mind pull back and recognized the strange sensation she'd been having

all day, it was Lukian. He was in her head. He'd been invading her mind since the moment they'd met.

He can read my thoughts. A mild bit of panic swept over her as her mind raced.

"Yes, and you will be able to read mine in time. I'm sure of it," he whispered tenderly in her ear. The tension in her body relaxed. He didn't lie about it. He didn't try to cover it. That counted for something, right? She tried desperately to see inside his mind. Nothing but an overwhelming feeling of security came to her. He would never harm her or allow anyone else to, either.

Reluctantly, she drew back from him. She grabbed his hand, held it tight in hers, and turned to the gate that was now opening.

"Follow me," she whispered softly.

"Anywhere."

Chapter 10

He wasn't sure what he'd expected the Matthews house to be, but it certainly wasn't this. The place was massive, but not well kept. Only the west wing was in order. The other wings had been left to their own devices. Peren had mentioned that it'd been this way ever since she could remember. She rarely wandered into the other sections of the house. The west wing boasted ten bedrooms, twelve baths, and was self-sufficient from the rest of the mansion, so she didn't see a need to bother with the rest.

Lukian himself had grown up in the lap of luxury. His mother had been the only child of a wealthy family, and was orphaned before she was old enough to wed. Her uncle had cared for her, but was anything but civil to her. Once his father, who was rich beyond words, had appeared, the uncle had begun physically abusing his mother. The werewolf in his father was too hard to control, and the man in him would not stand by and watch the woman he loved be abused. Lukian had never been officially told how his uncle had died, but he had his suspicions.

No, money had never been an issue to Lukian. He gave sizeable amounts to charity each year and kept his nose clean. He lived a modest life for a man of his position and wealth, and that was perfectly fine by him. Or, at least, it had been fine with him until he stepped foot inside of Peren's family home.

If this is what she's accustomed to, then this is what I shall provide for her.

He knew that Roi would have a field day when he found out that Lukian was planning on actually spending some of his fortune. He'd been after him for years to spend a little.

Lukian stood there looking at Peren as she paced about the kitchen. She'd been frantically searching the house since they'd arrived. He knew her father wasn't there, and so did she, yet she insisted on checking every room in the west wing. He let her go, and used the phone to contact Roi.

"I don't understand. I would have thought that my father would be here. We meet every Saturday morning for breakfast. He's been insistent on it since I was a child. My stepmother tried to get him to change the day, but he wouldn't hear of it."

"Stepmother?" Lukian had lost touch with Dr. Matthews shortly before Peren's birth. He didn't know he'd remarried.

Peren looked past him. She was remembering something. "Yes, I never actually knew my real mother. She died during childbirth. My father remarried five years later. Susan was a wonderful mother. At least I think she was I really don't have anyone to compare her to." He could sense the dread and feeling of mourning pass over her. "She died when I was ten...she was murdered."

He fought the urge to say that he knew. She didn't need the added stress of knowing that he'd been privy to vital details of her life prior to her

actually sharing them with him. Besides, the news of her biological mother passing away during her birth was news to him, so he wasn't lying. He went to put his arm around her, but she continued talking. He wanted to cover her full lips with kisses, and had to control himself to allow her to express her thoughts.

"Yes, Father is always on time. I generally come out here, my apartment is too small to entertain in, and he loves to put on a show, even if it's just the two of us."

Her apartment?

He looked around the large kitchen. It was almost as big as the entire first floor of the safe house that nine people had been occupying for the past twenty-four hours. Why leave here? He looked around, then he felt it. Dread, death, despair, rage, and most of all, hate.

He looked around the room fast. These feelings had to be emanating from somewhere and from someone. He knew it wasn't Peren--she was too worried about her father's sudden disappearance to be projecting anything but concern. The feelings hit him stronger and he searched for the direction they were coming from, east.

"Peren, honey, what's in the other sections of the house? Are you sure no one lives there?"

Her look of bewilderment told him that no, indeed, she didn't know that someone was there. He turned towards the door and she followed close behind him.

"Lukian?"

* * * *

She felt like her insides would burst into a thousand tiny pieces. She was sick with worry about her father, her situation and, most of all, an overwhelming feeling that she was about to lose the best thing that had ever walked into her life, Lukian.

He seemed preoccupied with the outer hall. She wasn't sure why, but sensed his urgency to go towards it. She followed close behind him. His musky scent blew back at her lightly as he opened the door to the east wing, and she felt her knees weaken.

Why am I so drawn to him...you? She corrected herself remembering that he had a ringside seat to her every thought.

"Because you are my mate, my one true partner. You are mine forever, Peren."

Forever. She let the thought of that float around. She'd thought that what she had with Kyle was special, she'd thought that he'd been the one--her forever. Walking behind Lukian and looking at the way his sweat soaked shirt clung to every ripple, wanting to tear his clothes off and let him use her, she knew that she'd never had this with Kyle. She touched Lukian's back lightly. He turned to her and smiled.

She looked up into his blue eyes and needed to know. She needed to see if he felt only lust for her, or if there was more. Sex with him had been earth shattering, but she couldn't rely on just that the rest of her life. She needed more, and believed that he would too, someday.

Lukian turned and pulled her close to him. "Never doubt how I feel about you again, never. Do you understand that you are my mate, the only one I have ever taken? The only one I've ever given my seed to. It is for life, Peren."

"You talk about us like we're animals," she said, half joking. Thinking of Melanie's story of Lance's change stopped her dead in her tracks. Mate? Lukian had referred to her as this on more than one occasion. That wasn't a normal thing to call your significant other. No, this was anything but normal.

Ideas came together and she formed an image that she wished she wouldn't have. She remembered the wolves in the woods the other night and Lukian's lack of surprise at them. Then she remembered the one moment in her life that she hated reliving the most--the day that she was attacked by the half-wolf, half-man eleven years ago. No, she thought to herself. She didn't want to think the worst of Lukian.

"Lance...can he...do anything special?" She was having a hard time coming out and saying 'change into a beast.'

Lukian tightened his grip on her arm. He bent his head down, trying to kiss her, but she pulled away. He twisted her around and pushed her hard against the wall before she had time to soak in what was going on. His hand went up her shirt. She gasped as he brushed over her hardened nipples. Her eyes went to his, and found royal blue pits of desire looking back at her.

How could this man feel this intensely for her? More to the point, how could she feel the same exact way for him? She pushed the doubt out of her mind and tried to focus on what had made her want to get away from him. It didn't matter. The hard edge of his jaw line held her attention now. She reached out to him and traced the edges of his chiseled frame. His neck muscles tightened as she leaned up to plant tiny kisses on it.

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He pushed her hands back against the wall, effectively rendering them useless. If he allowed her to touch him any further then he'd forget the task-at-hand, and that was finding what was hidden in this house. As much as he wanted to fuck her, it would have to wait.

He moved to take a step back from her, releasing her hands slowly, and felt her teeth sink down into his shoulder blade. The bite was hard enough to get his attention, but not hard enough to draw blood. Not that that would have mattered to him. He was, after all, a predator. He looked down and felt his resistance fade as Peren cupped his cock in her hand.

* * * *

She couldn't believe that she'd just attacked him that way. Lukian looked stunned, but not appalled, at her behavior. The growing bulge under his pants and in her hand told her exactly what he thought of her theatrics. She couldn't help herself. The scent of his sweat, the closeness of his body, was proving to be more than she could handle.

She moved to run her fingers into the top of his pants and he grabbed her wrists gently. She pulled her hands back towards herself, bringing his with her. If he didn't want her touching him that was fine, she'd think of something else.

She drew his hands towards her waistband and eased it down gently. He started to pull away and then gave in to his need to touch her. His thick fingers darted quickly between her thighs and found her moist and ready for him. In a sudden fury he was pushing against her, pinning her body to the wall. He continued his assault on her silken channel, causing tiny moans to escape her throat. Each thrust left her juices soaking the both of them, running down his hand and her inner thighs. Lukian lifted her off the ground, keeping her pinned firmly to the wall, as he continued fingering her.

She had no idea how he'd managed to get his pants down, and didn't care once she felt the head of his cock pushing into her quim. The world around her faded away, leaving only she and Lukian. He rammed himself into her with such force that a picture fell off the wall and onto the floor. A low purring noise erupted from deep within her.

Lukian's thrusts came faster and harder. Her body struggled with something great, wild, overpowering. She tried to keep it deep within her, but her abdomen tightened and her pussy clenched tight around his rigid cock as he brought her to her peak. The orgasm unleashed the beast within her and she felt detached from herself as she bit down hard on Lukian's shoulder. Coppery, sweet tasting fluid ran into her mouth. Lukian let out a growl that matched hers. She was faintly aware of a deep pressure above her right breast and of the added girth between her legs.

* * * *

Lukian let his beast partially out. He felt his teeth and his cock lengthen. Peren's teeth had done the same as she drank him in. He bit down hard above her breast and let the glorious taste of her powerful blood flow through him. All of what Green had said was true. Her blood was a thick, supernatural cocktail that made him unable to control himself any longer. He tasted how fertile she was as he shoved her body against the wall and jabbed his dick into her one final time, releasing himself, and the wolf, in one fluid movement.

We are one...forever.

Chapter 11

When Lukian set her down, she swayed. What the hell's wrong with me?
Why did I bite him?

Peren reached up and touched her mouth. Her fingers ran first across Lukian's blood on her chin, then over lengthened incisors in her mouth. She touched them tentatively at first before letting out a scream. Lukian clasped his hand over her mouth and pushed her gently against the wall.

She looked wildly over the top of his hand into his blue eyes. Why wasn't he freaking out at the fact that she just went all Dracula on him? Lukian's lips curved into a smile. He leaned in and moved his hand off her mouth. In a flash he was lapping the blood from her chin like a dog. She tried to pull back, but found her body responding to his closeness.

Lukian moved his head back and looked down at her chest. Her gaze followed and immediately went to a large bite mark on her breast. She watched in awe as her body began instantly healing the wound before her very eyes. Her skin pulled back together, leaving only the faintest pink mark from the puncture wounds.

"See...I lost control too, my love," Lukian said softly to her. She looked back up at his shoulder and found that, like hers, it had healed already.

"Luke?"

He leaned in towards her and kissed her forehead. "When we find your father you can speak with him about your end. Once you are clear on all of that, then it will make my secret easier to share with you."

She didn't like the sound of worry in his voice. He was nervous about her finding out whatever it was that he harbored from her. She'd already given her body over to him without question, and had taken a large bite out of him. What more could they share?

"I don't understand. Why do I want you so bad? Why is my body burning for your touch and we've only just finished making...having sex." Peren stopped just short of saying making love. Lukian had never come out and said that he loved her, and she didn't want to be one of those needy women she saw on soap operas.

Lukian grabbed her around the waist and turned her body around. He spooned her, still standing, rocking back and forth slightly. He was hard and ready against her back and she drew in a breath when he began to rub himself on her. "Please, no more. I can't do this with you anymore. I need to know..."

He made a small sound that sounded like a growl and pulled her down towards the floor. "I told you to never doubt my feelings for you, didn't I?" His voice was deeper than normal.

"Yes," she said, shaking her head wearily. She was scared and excited by his dominant behavior.

He pushed on her back, easing her onto all fours. She gasped when his fingers rammed into her wet slit. He swirled them around, massaging her body's natural cream around her entrance. She whimpered as he pulled his fingers away, and looked behind her. Her jaw dropped when she saw him licking his fingers, savoring the taste of her sex. His eyes met hers and a dark look passed over his face. The want, the raw need shone through as he moved his fingers back to her body and began working one into her ass.

"Lukian?" she said, slightly uneasy. She'd never done anything like this before and wasn't sure she would like it.

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Lukian slid his finger into her anus, slowly at first, letting her body push back against him. Peren cried out for him to take her and he would, but first he needed to prepare her. He wiped more of the juice that was now oozing from her at a fast rate into her to help ease his entry. He positioned the head of his cock near her rear entrance and moved it around slowly, leaving her bucking against him, trying to take it into her.

"Calm down, baby, I'll take that sweet ass of yours soon, but you need to let me do it. I don't want to hurt you, Peren. I could never hurt you."

"Lukian, please..."

With that he entered her tight rosette, only a tiny bit at first, easing himself slowly. Peren screamed and made an attempt to move away. He held her hips and continued to work himself into her. "It's okay, baby, relax," he said, moving his hands to her breasts, and playing with her nipples.

She pushed back against him hard, causing him to come to full hilt. She cried out again, this time his name. Her hips moved frantically as she pushed herself back against him, taking all that he had to offer, again and again. "Yes, Lukian, yes."

"Peren..." He wanted to tell her that he loved her, but the sensation of being in her, of taking her so completely, overwhelmed him. When her orgasm hit and screamed out for him to come with her, he was left with no alternative but to oblige.

He pushed his hips against her body, fully pressing himself to her, and spit forth his seed. His shaft pulsated in her tight channel as every last bit of him was milked clean away.

"Ohmygawd, Lukian, that was amazing," Peren said lightly, her body limp in his arms.

"Yes, you were amazing, and you belong to me." He smacked her ass cheeks gingerly and laughed when she yelped. "We need to clean up, baby."

Chapter 12

She held Lukian's hand and led him down the darkened hallway. The lights weren't working in this section of the house anymore. She was sure that even though her father kept this section closed up, he did, in fact, keep all the utilities in working order. A knot had begun to form in the pit of her stomach. Something was very wrong and Lukian felt it too.

"Let me go first," he said softly, yet sternly.

She wanted to argue with him, but instead gave up and allowed him to pass her. He planted a tiny kiss on her cheek as he moved his body before hers, and she felt another spark fly between them. She was still damp and a bit sore from their last encounter, but found herself longing to be touched by him again. He turned and winked at her as he headed down the hallway.

* * * *

Lukian sniffed the air and locked onto the scent of another were. The hairs on the back of his neck stood on end. This was not a member of his team. He'd spent the last thirty years with these men, he knew their scents well. Peren stopped moving behind him. He wasn't sure if she realized it

or not, but she was sensing the intruder too. If Green's findings were correct, then Peren would be more adept at tracking things than he was, once she acknowledged her powers.

He felt her reaching out to him with her thoughts. She was concerned for him and wanted him to contact the other men in his unit. He grinned. She'd picked up on the fact that they were a tight military unit right off the bat. Most people thought they were college buddies. She was a smart girl who followed her instincts.

He moved down the darkened hallway, then turned and motioned for Peren to stop. He didn't want her following him into a trap. He couldn't bear the thought of one hair on her head being harmed. He loved her too much to let anything happen to her. Now that he'd marked her, she was his, in every sense of the word. If she hadn't already been carrying the DNA of a wolf in her prior to his bite, she would be now. He didn't want to have to be the one to tell her, but now that he'd added more to her bloodstream, she would most likely change at the next full moon. He knew how wrong it was to do that to her, but the thought of anyone challenging her being their leader, their Queen, was too much for him to think of. A challenge among most political decision makers meant elections or debates; a challenge among weres meant someone died.

He stopped to make sure Peren was where he had told her to be before he continued onward. She was. He gave her another quick wink, and turned back to follow the scent of the other were.

Peren hated the idea of standing around and doing nothing while Lukian went ahead without her. He didn't have to tell her that something was very wrong in the house, she felt it. It'd been ten minutes since he'd vanished down the long corridor, and time felt like it was standing still. She had to take a moment to calm her breathing down and focus on what was going on around her. She'd always had amazingly good hearing. She'd learned to block out most of what she could hear over the years or she'd have gone mad by age eight. The ticking of the clock at the other end of the east wing of the mansion used to keep her up at night as a young child. Her father had gotten rid of it when he figured out that was what she was hearing.

Now, she had to concentrate on hearing everything. She could make out the sound of water dripping. Honing in on it more, she determined that it was coming from the bathroom at the end of the hallway. She listened harder and heard rustling in the bushes near the gate out front. She moved over towards the window and looked out into the dark night. It took only a moment for her eyes to adjust. She made out two shapes near the edge of the property. They were moving with great speed along the inside of the wall. Darkness was their only cover, and Peren had no trouble seeing in the dark.

She glanced back down the hall in the direction that Lukian had disappeared. If these men were trying to flank him, they would succeed if she didn't step in. She knew that she was disobeying Lukian's orders, but she'd never been much for authority. She moved against the wall and walked quietly down the edge to the first room she came to.

She opened the handle and slid quietly into the room. She moved with a stillness that caught her by surprise. The window opened with a bit of effort on her part. She climbed out slowly and lowered it down gently. She covered the distance to the fence in less than a minute. That was unheard of for humans and she knew it. The more she thought back about her life, the less human she began to feel.

Chapter 14

Lukian tried to lift his head. It felt like he was smuggling bricks in it. Someone had caught him off guard and managed to get the drop on him. That had never happened before, and he was curious as to how it happened at all.

He opened his eyes and found himself staring at a cement floor. His wrists were chained behind his back. He tried to move his legs up and found that his ankles were shackled as well. The more he yanked on the chains in an attempt to free himself, the more he knew that they were silver plated. Any other material he could have ripped apart easily; silver was his weakness. It always had been. It was one of the few things that could kill him.

His mind raced, and he tried to get a bearing on where he was. His surroundings still smelled of the Matthews mansion, yet the dark cell he was in looked nothing like the rest of the house. He thought of Peren and sniffed the air, trying to catch her scent but couldn't. That could be good or bad. He hoped it meant that she had listened to him and stayed where he'd told her too. If not, it meant that she was gone. The odds of whoever had done this to him going after her next were great. He tried again in vain to free himself from the chains. Each attempt only made them cut deeper into his skin. If he was not careful, they would cut right through his body.

He stopped moving and tried to reach Peren with his mind. He had told her that she could hear him in time. He prayed that she was ready for that.

* * * *

Peren stifled a giggle as she looked down at Roi lying on the ground. She hadn't meant to be as aggressive as she'd been, but then again, she hadn't realized that it was him when she leapt out of the tree. Jon, who was with him, hadn't stopped laughing yet.

Roi looked up at him and let out a low growl. Jon stopped laughing and put his hand out to Roi. Peren gave him a sheepish smile as he got to his feet.

"That's two times in one night that you got the better of me. Looks like the Captain did right in picking you," he said, smiling back at her. "You're not bad on the eyes either."

She wasn't sure why this meant so much to her, but she was happy that he had accepted her. She knew that he and Lukian were close and wanted to be liked by him.

"Yeah...you're not too bad, for a woman," Jon said softly to her. Roi turned and looked at him and shook his head. Peren went to say something back to him, but stopped in mid-thought. Something was wrong.

She spun around quickly and saw a flash of light from across the grounds. A red dot appeared on Jon's head. Roi noticed it too, and yelled out to Jon. Peren didn't bother yelling at him. She threw her body towards him as she heard the click of the trigger. In an instant she was on Jon, pushing him to the ground. She felt like someone rammed a hot poker through her upper back.

Roi grabbed her body and yanked her off of Jon. He pulled her into the woods and behind a large brick wall that had been erected to add privacy to the property. Jon scurried up next to her. He looked down at her and his eyes widened.

"You saved my life," he said.

"Of course she did," Roi said understatedly. He leaned over her and pulled her shirt open. She felt the cool night air on her breasts. She wasn't concerned about being exposed to them, she was more worried about the burning sensation that was growing in her chest.

She tried to reach up and see if, in fact, she was on fire. Roi's hands caught hers. He looked down at her with the same royal blue eyes as Lukian and pushed her hair out of her face. He turned his head quickly towards the house, and seemed to be listening to something that only he could hear.

"Lukian's in trouble," he said, his voice was low. He looked over at Jon. "Shift and go get the others. You'll make better time that way. Bring

everything we've got in fire power, and make sure Green comes with his supplies. Lukian is hurt, but he's not the one I'm most worried about now."

Peren knew without asking that his concern was for her. "I'll be okay. I'm a fast healer...always have been," she said, and coughed. Pain shot through her chest, and she let out a small cry.

"Whoever did this made sure to use a silver bullet. That's why you feel the burning. Green said you don't just have werewolf blood in you, but all the weres, and vampires...Every were I know of has issues with silver, and I'm positive that vamps do too...now as for the faerie and lower-level demon DNA in you, I'm not sure how that reacts to this kind of wound. This would have killed a normal lycanthrope instantly."

Peren lay there and took in Roi's words. Vampires, fairies, weres, demons? Every fiber of her being wanted to protest, but she knew that what he was saying was the truth. Hearing it said aloud was hard. She closed her eyes and took a minute to try and accept this information.

"You're a werewolf?" she asked sheepishly, unsure if she really wanted to hear him answer that.

Roi nodded and bent his head closer to her. "Rest now, my Queen."

* * * *

Lukian tried harder to reach Peren. He failed. He did manage to reach his men telepathically, but it was a strain to do so. Roi was the only one that he had an open link with. The bond between them had occurred because of the shared blood. The others he had to work at. He'd have a headache for a few days if he survived this, that much was sure--even if it weren't for the bump on his head.

Roi opened his mind to him, but let him in only enough to acknowledge him, then pushed him away. He'd informed Lukian that he and Jon were with Peren, but that was all. His reluctance to notify him of Peren's status told Lukian that something was very wrong. He kept trying to reach Roi, and Roi kept blocking him.

He yanked on the chains again. Someone had once told him of a lycanthrope that could regenerate limbs that were severed. He hoped that this was true. He yanked harder and stopped only when he heard someone's low laugh.

"Yank all damn night, you fool. You can't get through them. And what are you planning on doing if you do? Are you planning on balancing on stumps, only to find your lover dead?"

Dead? Peren was dead? No, he would have felt the loss of her. Their bond was stronger now and would only continue to grow with time. He stopped moving and listened to the voice again. He couldn't get his body turned around to see who was talking, but the voice was familiar to him.

"It was not my intent to shoot her. I wanted only to fuck her and claim her as my mate." A long sigh followed behind his statement. "I've carried the memory of the sweet taste of her blood with me for over ten years. I watched from a distance, waiting for her to be of an age that she could accept me and mate with me."

Lukian's stomach tightened. This lunatic wanted to fuck his Peren, his lover, his wife. He had to fight the urge to vomit.

"I wasn't sure she'd accept me. She'd turned down every man who'd ever asked her out and had never slept with a soul. As much as I wanted to be her first, I wanted more to know that she was my true mate. I bit the young one who caught her eye and watched as she took the man to her bed after that. His beast matured and he'd have been able to share his seed with her if I hadn't stepped in."

Lukian listened in disgust. This man...this thing...had purposely bitten another human to test compatibility? The man he'd done this to must have been Peren's fiancé, Kyle, the one she'd felt so guilty about when she was with him.

"Did you kill him?" Lukian asked.

A sharp laugh answered his question for him. "Of course I killed him. He intended to make her his wife, and impregnate her. I couldn't risk that. Every human I've fucked has left me unsatisfied since the transformation. I long to have my dick in the one meant for me."

It was Lukian's turn to laugh. "She's not meant for you...she's my mate now."

He felt a boot hit him square between the shoulder blades. "YOU FOOL! Of course she's meant for you. I'm the reason it's so. If I wouldn't have bit her, she'd never have enough wolf blood in her to be your mate. I tasted bits of it in her when I attacked her, but the faerie was stronger. That's how she survived, you know...she unleashed her magic on me and sent me scurrying away like a mangy dog. I would have come back and finished her had I not recognized the potential for her to be my mate."

Lukian lifted his head and tried to turn to see the man. "How...why did you attack her to begin with?"

Another sharp laugh filled the room. "Because I wanted to wipe out Lakeland Matthews' loved ones and let him know what it was like to suffer before I killed him. It was his pipe dream that turned me into this...yes...his dream and your blood, brother."

Lukian froze. "Parker?" He let the name fall from his lips. Benjamin Parker had been the man Roi had replaced on the team. He'd been the one they'd assumed was dead all these years. Parker was right--he and Peren could be a match. Parker shared more of Lukians DNA than Roi did, and the fact that he and Peren were a mated pair meant that the potential for Peren and Parker to be a pair was extremely high, almost an absolute.

Parker let out a laugh. "Yes, it's me...Surprise, brother, I'm not dead."

"Dr. Matthews? Is he dead?" Lukian asked, concerned for Peren's father.

"Oh, I'm guessing that he's combing the streets of New York City by now. I put a call in to him telling him that his daughter was being held overnight in a cell for disorderly conduct."

Lukian let out his breath. Dr. Matthews was states away and safe. Peren was not. It didn't matter that Parker claimed she was dead, Lukian knew better. His lover was still alive. He didn't want to tip Parker off about Peren still being alive. The thought of him going after her again was too much for Lukian to bear. He fought to control his breathing and his body language. He didn't need to raise Parker's suspicions. Now, he just needed to buy his men time to get to him.

"So, what? Were you planning on killing Dr. Matthews and then convincing his daughter to fuck you and take you as her mate?" Saying the words was hard for him.

"No, I was planning on fucking his daughter first...making her my mate, then watching the look on her father's face when he saw who she would be forever tied to. I wanted so very much to have him know that she carried my child in her." He took a moment to laugh. "Ah, yes, 'the crazy one who couldn't stop the wolf from coming'... I'm sure the good Doctor would have loved to know that I was fucking his daughter . He would have died wondering if she would turn out like her mother. But now...now...I'm afraid that I'll have to begin my search for a mate all over again. Seems like such a waste. She was quite the looker, too...rare indeed in a mate."

Lukian let out a small laugh. His Peren would never let this man near her. She'd sense the danger he presented and flee. At least that's what he hoped. He strained to draw in a breath. He had no doubt that Parker had broken at least two of his ribs. They'd heal within twenty minutes, but in the meantime, it hurt like hell every time he tried to move or talk.

Parker didn't give him a chance to voice his concerns. He leaned over him and whispered in his ear. "We met, you know...Peren and I. We dated. She liked me and was interested in me. We came close to having sex once, but it was too soon after the disappearance of the other for her to commit, and I didn't want to raise her suspicions by pushing the issue with her. Hiring you to bring the team in was an excellent a plan to blow your cover and for me to get one quick fuck."

His words stung Lukian's ears. It had been a trap from the get-go.

Chapter 15

"How the hell did she survive that?" Jon asked with the slightest hint of a southern drawl. He stood there staring at her in disbelief as Green bandaged her shoulder .

"Is this really necessary?" she asked softly. The men surrounding her stopped suiting up in full combat gear and just looked at her. She watched as they all put matching headsets around the back of their heads and requested confirmation on being heard.

These men were serious, and she knew that they would die to save Lukian. The littlest one, Jon, seemed to be warming up to her. No surprise there. She had taken a bullet that would have been fatal for him.

She looked down at the spot Green was bandaging. He'd managed to extract the bullet with almost no effort. He'd cleansed her wound and then waited. The burning stopped and was replaced by a cool, tingly feeling. Green monitored her body temperature and determined that she was healing her wounds internally first. He'd quickly explained how lycanthropes heal themselves versus how vampires and fairies do it. Then, he'd scolded Roi for having told her of her genetic make-up before going on to confirm that she'd be alright.

The tall buzz-cut blonde, Lance, pulled a black cap over his hair and looked at Peren. She could see what had appealed to Melanie. Lance was a good looking guy, but there was something about him that she couldn't put her finger on. He gave off a vibe that didn't make her feel entirely comfortable around him. She wondered if it was concern for Lukian, or his dislike for her.

The men began to talk amongst themselves. They determined that Roi would lead a team in, consisting of Wilson, Lance, and himself. They would attempt to take out any hostiles, then Green and Jon would follow close behind. Roi bent down and touched the top of her head.

"We'll get him out...I promise."

"I know," she answered softly.

Lance stepped forward. "Sir, with your permission, I'd like to swap out with Jon."

All eyes fell on him. Peren watched as Green and Roi exchanged glances. Green nodded his head. Roi agreed to allow the change, and did something she wasn't expecting. He hugged Lance.

* * * *

Lukian laid in the darkened room and thought only of Peren as he tried to free himself from his chains. He needed to know if she was alright. His eyes drifted shut and he tried again to connect with Roi. This time Roi answered his call.

Brother, tell me of my mate.

Lukian felt that Roi's mood had improved, and Roi pushed tranquility out at him. She is well. She is safe now, I promise you that.

Lukian exhaled and let relief sweep over his body. It did not matter now if he survived, as long as Peren was okay.

Brother of mine, should anything happen to me...

Roi attempted to ease his pain, but he knew the code of the were as well as Lukian. If Lukian were to die, his mate would be left unclaimed. Any surviving brothers that were unwed would need to step in and assume Lukian's role. It would be the only way to ensure Peren's survival in the were community. Roi had been the only choice for this honor prior to Lukian's discovery that Parker was still alive. Now, Parker would be considered the elder brother and he would be given first rights to Peren. It would not matter that he'd been the reason for Lukian's death. Parker would also be entitled to assume the role that Lukian had been hesitant to accept all these years--Wolf King.

Roi...there is another...Lukian was seized with a migraine so severe that he felt the blood beginning to fall from his nose, and the invisible cord that bonded them together crumbled. He would not be able to reach his men telepathically for a few more hours. He'd strained himself trying to find out about Peren and used up too much of his energy.

Chapter 16

It'd been over an hour since the men had taken off in search of Lukian. Peren sat quietly in the van and listened to the talk coming from Lance's head piece. He'd turned it down in hopes that she wouldn't be able to pick up on it, but as nervous as she was she could have heard it a mile away. So far, a thorough search of the grounds had revealed nothing. They had concluded that Lukian must have been moved. Peren wasn't buying it. She still felt him here.

Lance leaned over and started the van. Peren felt her insides twist into a knot. She knew that Lukian was still here. She didn't know how or why, but she knew. She moved towards the door and put her hand on it.

"I know what you're thinking, and I wouldn't suggest doing it," Green said, in his mild mannered voice. "Roi will find the Captain; do not doubt his skills or loyalty to Lukian. They are, after all, brothers, and that is a hard bond to break." He looked at Lance as he said it.

Brothers? Roi's eyes...oh, and Roi's werewolf thing. Thinking of all of this could have easily pushed her over the edge, but she knew that it didn't matter what Lukian was, she loved him.

Peren smiled up at Green and tried to appear weak and meager, but he wasn't buying it. She shrugged her shoulders and went with her gut instincts. She opened the door of the moving van and leapt out. The pavement came upon her fast and she rolled to avoid getting hurt.

* * * *

He watched the young one jump from the moving vehicle and had to hold back a smile. Green had known many women in his life, but none had ever caught his fancy like this Peren. It wasn't so much that he wanted to fuck her, although he wouldn't mind that either, it was more her tenacity. When her mind was set on something she went for it, no questions asked. There was also the fact that her composition was intriguing to him. He'd never encountered someone with DNA quite like hers and wanted to take a closer look at her. He wanted to help her unlock the keys to her strengths and powers. He wanted to monitor her every step of the way and document his findings.

The scientist in him had always repelled women. They thought of him as cute, smart, and witty. Rarely did they think of him as sexy. The only woman who had ever viewed him this way was Peren's young blonde friend, Melanie. He had unintentionally found himself reading her thoughts as they prepared to follow Jon back to aide Roi and Peren. She was still shaken by her experience with Lance. It had been strictly a sexual attraction between the two of them, or at least on her part. He knew Lance well enough to know that Melanie was the type of woman he'd fall for.

Melanie had helped him pack his supplies up and given him a tiny hug before he left. He picked up on how attracted to him she was and how much she regretted not hooking up with him to begin with. She smelled of old faerie blood and he wondered if in fact she possessed any magical skills that she was most likely unaware of. It was obvious that she had received the faerie gift of seduction but, other than that, he wasn't sure what she'd gotten. Most humans had no idea if anything supernatural ran in their family. These were not matters that were discussed at dinner tables.

Green's mind wandered back to Melanie's long blonde locks. He wondered how it would feel to be running his hands through her hair while he fucked her. Fucked wasn't a word he used often, but it was what he wanted to do to her. He'd make love to her after that, but first he'd need to release himself. It had been close to fifty years since he'd had sex. The last woman he'd been with, he'd been in love with. She had died during childbirth--that's how they knew that a human could not carry a were's child to term. It had been a hard life lesson, one which he did not care to repeat.

He looked over at Lance as the van came to a stop. Lance was the closest thing he had to a brother. They shared the same strain of panther DNA,

and he would miss him greatly when he was gone. He hoped that his baby brother was truly up for the task he'd volunteered for. "It is time, my friend. Are you sure you want to do this?" he asked.

Lance looked over at him and nodded. "Yes sir, I'm ready. Are you prepared to step in and care for Melanie when I'm gone?"

"I am, brother."

Chapter 17

Peren was to the house and in the front door before they had time to stop the car. She had listened closely for the sounds of the brakes and of doors slamming before heading in. She made her way quietly through the kitchen and towards the east wing. The doorbell rang and made her jump. She calmed herself down when she thought about how absurd it would be for whoever had taken Lukian and shot her to bother with ringing the doorbell.

Silly girl...she thought to herself as she walked towards the door. She peaked out the side window and was shocked to see Ben, one of the men that Mel and Missy had fixed her up with, standing there. She'd been horrible about returning his calls and she suddenly felt a wave of guilt wash over her. She opened the door and smiled up at him.

"Umm...Hi...I wasn't expecting to see you," she said. She didn't want to come out and say what bad timing he had.

Ben's lips curved into a thin smile and his crisp blue eyes glistened. She'd always loved the blue in his eyes. Lukian's eyes were similar, but a much richer blue. In fact, Ben's hair was similar to Lukian's. Thinking of Lukian made her stomach tight. She needed to find him, but first she needed to get Ben out of harms way.

"Peren, hi...sorry to barge in on you like this, but I felt so bad for missing your birthday that I had to stop by the minute my schedule allowed."

He was a sweet man and she felt bad for having to be so short with him, but fear for Lukian's safety left her no choice. "Now's not really a good time, Ben. Do you think it'd be alright for me to call you later in the week?"

His blue eyes locked on hers and she felt her body growing warmer. He took a step in towards her and forced her to back away from the door. "Peren, I drove over an hour from the airport just to see you. I'm not asking for much of your time. A quick drink and permission to use your restroom would be much appreciated."

"Of course, I'm sorry, I forgot my manners."

She backed up and allowed him to enter. The faintest hint of musk moved past her nose as he walked by, and her legs tightened. Her body reacted to his presence, but her mind and heart were focused solely on Lukian. Ben turned to her and smiled, innocent at first, then sexy.

His black turtleneck and black dress slacks made him look like he was ready to head out on the town. Peren looked down and noticed the mud caked to his boots. Boots? Who wore black boots with their dress pants? Ben noticed her staring down at his boots and coughed.

"Sorry for the mud. I parked my car down at the end of the drive. The gate was open slightly, but not enough for my car to fit through, so I had to walk up. I must have stepped in a few mud puddles on the way."

Peren shrugged her shoulders and headed towards the kitchen. She headed straight for the liquor cabinet to fix him a martini so she could send him on his way as fast as possible without alerting him to what was going on. With all the talk of werewolves and vampires, she knew that if the police were called in it would be bad.

* * * *

Ben watched Peren's tight ass as she walked towards the kitchen. He still couldn't get over the fact that she'd survived the gun shot. He really had never intended on shooting her. He just wanted to eliminate the rest of the I-Ops team. He could hardly contain himself when he saw her running towards the house. She was alive, she would now be his mate.

Going to his contact in the Government had proved to be a good decision. Bringing the Immortal Ops in and having a chance to wipe out the very group responsible for his condition was genius. Letting Lukian have a taste of Peren hadn't been on the agenda, but he could revel in the fact that Lukian would die knowing that it would be Ben's dick buried deep in Peren every night, not his. It was his right, once Lukian was dead. He'd not only get Peren handed to him for the taking, but he'd also get the entire were community to call him King.

His cock was hard and burned to be deep inside her. It always was when he was around her.. He knew that her pussy would be tight, everything on her was. He also knew that he could fuck her extra hard. She would heal whatever damage he inflicted. His mind raced to the possibility of locking her away and using her as his own personal sex slave. If it came down to it, he'd do it.

He moved up closer to Peren and watched her tiny waist as she dropped an olive in his glass. He had to fight the urge to bend her over the edge of the kitchen counter and fuck her right there. She still wanted him. He could smell her desire for him. He wasn't kidding himself though. He knew that her desire was really for Lukian and the fact that he carried so much of Lukian's blood in him now made him just as appealing to her.

She turned to him and smiled. Her wide full lips called to him. He wanted first to feel them pressed against his, and then he wanted them wrapped around the bulge in his pants.

* * * *

Peren turned to hand Ben his drink and found him staring at her in the most peculiar way. She knew that look on a man's face. They got the unrefined look when they wanted sex. She'd gone out with Ben three times and had never noticed him looking at her like that before. They'd come close to having intercourse once, but thoughts of Kyle had made her flee his home crying.

She glanced down, a bit embarrassed by the thought of crying in front of him, and noticed a speck of dried reddish brown on his hand. She didn't need him to confirm what it was, she could smell it--it was blood.

"I'm sorry, Ben, but I didn't remember having ever given you this address. I know I gave you my apartment one, but...oh, well...it must have slipped my mind. It's good that you're here now." she said this deliberately. She didn't need to alert him that she sensed that something was wrong.

Ben smiled at her and took a step towards her. "No, no you didn't give me this address. I called your friend's house and she was kind enough to point me in the right direction."

Red flags shot up in Peren's head. Melanie and Missy were both still at the safe house. There was no way he'd gotten ahold of one of them. He was lying. Her body became rigid, and Ben's facial expression changed. He noticed her alarm. Shit...double shit. She did her best to calm down, but failed miserably at it. She closed her eyes for a moment to collect her thoughts and felt faint.

Peren, Peren is that you? She heard Lukian's voice in her head. She almost answered him aloud, but managed to catch herself before she did.

Yes, I'm here. Are you okay? Where are you? Oh, God, Lukian.

She heard Lukian laugh softly in her mind. You must be fine if you're rambling on like this. Yes, I'm fine. I think that I'm still on the manor grounds. I'm not sure...I'm in a cell of some sort.

"Peren, are you alright? Do you need to lie down?" Ben asked.

Her eyes snapped open. Ben was next to her, holding her elbow. She jerked her arm away and then stopped in mid-motion. She put her hand to her head to indicate that she had a headache and then peeked out at him.

"I think I'm coming down with a migraine. I should probably call it a night."

Ben moved closer to her. His leg brushed against her thigh and she knew that he was hard and ready for her. Suddenly, her nose filled with the scent of want, desire, sex, some her own, but mostly his. He wanted to fuck her right here and now. She felt her channel tighten in anticipation of being taken by him.

Peren, what's going on? Who's there with you? Is that Roi? Lukian's voice was full of concern for her. She tried to block the thoughts of Ben that came to her, but she was too late. Lukian saw him too. Get away from him! Go! He's the one who killed your stepmother...he's the wolf that attacked you!

No, no not Ben. Even as she pushed these thoughts at Lukian she knew that they were lies. Something about Ben was making her want him. She wanted to be fucked by him. She wanted to please him as she did Lukian. What's wrong with me?

Peren, control yourself...fight these feeling of lust. They aren't for him, they are for me...he shares my blood, my DNA, and he is a killer! RUN!

Lukian's voice boomed so loudly in her head that she had to close her eyes to steady herself. She got a clear image of him chained to a concrete floor. She could see the blood on his wrists from the chains cutting deep into him, and then she thought about his warning. Ben was the one who had attacked her when she was girl. He was also the one from the woods the other night.

Ben touched her arm again and she felt her body react with a jolt of power. A tingling sensation began in her mid-section, much like the orgasms Lukian was so good at causing, and radiated up and out her arms. She wasn't sure what to do with all this new energy until Lukian came to her mind. She knew then that she could help him or die trying. She lashed it out at him.

* * * *

A cold wave of static energy hit Lukian's body with the force of a moving train. He screamed out as the chains ripped from his body and fell to the floor. He felt himself being lifted off the ground. Wind snapped around him and power ran through him. This wasn't just any power, it was Peren's power. The faerie side of her had come through. He felt his wrists, ankles, and ribs healing.

He dropped to his feet in a crouched position, and looked around his holding cell. The room had once been done quite nicely. The corner he was in was bare, but the rest was decorated in light pinks and whites. A queen sized four-poster bed sat kitty corner from him, and next to it was a white baby's crib. He walked closer to the bed and a lump formed in his throat. The bed was screwed to the floor and silver chains were mounted in various locations. Something had been tied to this bed, something that involved a baby.

Lukian turned towards a large oak desk in the room. He walked over to it and saw a journal lying atop it. He opened it quickly and skimmed the middle of it.

Karen, my beloved, has confessed to feeding herself the serums in my laboratory over the past year. She was reluctant to confess, but after I found her naked in the moonlight in partial wolf form, she was left no choice. I can understand her desire to produce a child, but to go about it like this was pure madness. I have watched as my love turned into a monster before my eyes and never returned to human form. This child that she carries within her may turn out to be a monster as well. I know that I should have never allowed her to come this far in the pregnancy, but on the off chance that the child is healthy, I could not bring myself to harm it.

Lukian flipped to the last few entries and felt his heart breaking.

I had no choice but to inject this shell of my beloved Susan with liquid silver. Yesterday she gave birth to the most beautiful baby girl; this morning I woke in this very chair to find her levitating the child above her head, fangs drawn, ready to strike. I have destroyed all my research into the creation of a superhuman and will never again allow this type of science to be conducted if I can help it.

My mind tells me to eliminate the men already made at the Center, but if my calculations are correct, then my daughter will be like them. One day they will only have each other, and I will not take that away from them.

Lukian dropped the journal and backed away from the table. Dr. Matthews hadn't been the one to do this to Peren, it had been her own mother. He felt the bile rising up from his stomach.

LUKIAN! Peren's voice screamed in his head.

He ran in the direction of her scent and tried to lock onto her. He let his senses guide him. He saw the image of her being backed into a corner by Parker, who had a half wolf-clawed hand to her throat.

* * * *

Peren screamed out for Lukian as Ben came at her with elongated fingers. His teeth lengthened and his voice seemed raspier. He looked demonic, half-man, half-beast.

"I've waited too long for this. I won't wait anymore." he snarled at her.

Peren ducked down and ran under his arm. She caught him by surprise, and made it through unharmed. She ran full-force towards the front door. The weight of Ben's body slamming into her sent her flying to the ground.

"I'm going to enjoy making you my bitch. You'll be crying my name out before the night is over."

She screamed as she slammed the back of her head into his face. Doing this afforded her much needed time to push him off of her. She rolled to her feet and ran for the door. It opened before she got to it and she found herself face to face with Lance and Green. She'd built up too much momentum and was unable to stop herself from slamming into Green. She sent him hurdling back out the door and his gun flying to the floor, before landing square on her backside.

Something moved behind her and she knew that she had just afforded Ben the opportunity to arm himself. She scrambled to her feet and felt a hand on her shoulder, pushing her back down.

"Stay down, my Queen," Lance said in her ear. She listened to him. He knew what he was doing.

* * * *

Lukian burst into the room to find Parker holding an MP7 on Peren and Lance. The gun would cut through them in an instant if it was set to fire in bursts of ten, which he had no doubt that it was. He stopped moving and stared at Parker. His training kicked in and he attempted first to reason with him.

"If you shoot her, then you're back to square one," he said, hoping this would buy him enough time to get close enough to strike.

Parker froze and turned to look at him. He was unable to hide his surprise. This moment of complete shock allowed Lance to shoot first. Parker turned as the first bullet struck him and fired towards Peren. Lukian caught sight of Lance moving and then time seemed to come to a stop. Lukian screamed out, knowing that Parker's thoughts were that if he couldn't have Peren, no one would.

Lukian let his body do a partial change. He knew that he was now six inches taller and partially fur covered. He was also a hell of a lot more powerful. He leapt towards Parker and let his claws extend from his lengthening fingertips. He came into contact with the side of Parker's head, and as quickly as the commotion had begun, it ended.

Epilogue

Peren touched Lukian's arm and let her head rest on it. The fog covered the cemetery grounds and the cool morning air set a chill in her bones. She turned and looked over the group of men--the I-Ops. Green and

Wilson stood across the casket from them, while Roi stood tall on the other side of Lukian. She knew that this was hard for them. One of their team had fallen in the line of duty. The Priest finished and attendees turned slowly away. All except for the Ops--they stood strong as a unit around the casket. Her father had even made of point of attending the funeral. He'd been close to all the men at one point in time and Peren hoped he would be again, and soon.

Lukian had explained that Lance had foreseen the horrible events from a week earlier, and that he'd gone into the house prepared to die to save Peren's life. Somehow, knowing this didn't help Peren sleep at night.

Melanie and Missy made an appearance to pay their respects. She knew that it was extra hard on Melanie. She never admitted to it, but Peren knew that she had developed feelings for Lance, maybe just lust, but for Melanie that was a big step, and now that he was gone that relationship could go no further. Green moved over and put his arm around Melanie in a protective manner. Peren's heart softened as she saw the look on Green's face. That was a man in love.

She turned and looked towards Roi. It was as she expected. He was focused on Missy. She'd sensed his interest in her friend from day one. Missy was oblivious to it as usual. Roi would do right by Missy if she only gave him a chance. Peren was sure of that.

Lukian's muscles tightened and she knew that he was fighting to remain in control of his emotions. She stood on her tiptoes and kissed his cheek. He bent down and turned his face to meet her lips.

I love you so much. His voice rang out in her head. She felt the warmth of his lips on hers and her legs grew weak.

I love you too, my mate, my husband, my wolf, my King.

THE END

An UNEDITED Excerpt from PEACE OFFERINGS by Mandy M Roth, coming to New Concepts Publishing July 2004!

He stopped staring at my chest and directed his attention towards my face. "I am Rowan. So, you are the lovely Princess Mackenzie. I have heard much about you. I fear that my informants have understated just how magnificent you truly are."

"What, may I ask have you heard of me then?" I wasn't sure I wanted to know, but the thought of not hearing that deep rich voice again made me shudder.

He held out his hand to me, I took it. His fingers were rough. He was most certainly a warrior. Men of wealth and honor rarely had coarse hands. I'd found that most of the men I'd bedded were as silky smooth as myself. Rowan was a refreshing change. "My dear Princess, your beauty is known throughout the lands. Lesser beings talk of your hair as gold as the sun, with streaks as white as snow, of your eyes as green as newly formed leaves, and of your body which is rivaled only by the goddesses themselves."

My pulse quickened. Many men had made futile attempts at flattery with me, but this one was different. This man called Rowan made me want to prove him right. He made me want to show him how much more I could really be.

"I dare say that you flatter me so with your kind remarks." I gave a small curtsy. "Am I to assume that what you've heard about me is true then?"

His dark eyes lit up. "Oh no, I think that words cannot possibly do you justice."

"Then how do plan on telling Prince Elwyn of me? It would have been so much easier for him to come personally to see me. I requested this, but of course, he never responded. Just like an Unblesser, thinking they don't have to answer to anyone but themselves... Are you to house an image of me in an orb?"

My obsession with human culture almost caused me to slip and say photograph, I was pleased that I caught myself. Orb images were livelier than a two dimensional photograph, but dated all the same. I'd not yet received one of the Prince. I was flying blind as to what he looked like. I'd impressed my image into an orb on the off chance he'd request it, but he had not.

Rowan looked amused by my comments. "I take it from your tone that you're not happy about the current arrangement."

I tossed my hand in the air and laughed. "Oh, please. Don't tell me for a minute that if you were me, you'd be happy marrying that barbaric beast!"

Rowan and his two friends burst into laughter. The blonde one actually clutched his gut. I wanted to smack him square in the back of his head, but resisted. "Barbaric beast? What makes you think that the Prince is a barbarian?"

"Oh, that's simple. He is to be King of the Unblessed Court one day, what else could he be? I hardly think they have kind gentleman roaming about to lead an army of demons. No thanks, I'd rather marry a Goblin and that's not saying much is it."

Rowan's grip on my hand tightened. I had offended him. I didn't care. I had spoke the truth, and that's all that mattered. I could respect his loyalty to his Prince, but even he had to admit that someone from the Unblessed Court had to be a scoundrel.. I grew tired of this little game with him. I knew that he wanted me, and I him, so there was really no point in continuing.

"The Prince is not what I want to be focused on at the moment," I said, as I took a step towards him.

He leaned closer. "And, what exactly is it that you are interested in focusing on?"

I stood on my tiptoes to be near his ear and whispered. "Why you of course."

His laughter bellowed out and around me. I felt as though I could wrap his deep voice around me, and it alone would be enough to bring me pleasure. He turned and looked at the men who had accompanied him on his journey. Without question, they walked away, leaving the two of us standing near one another.

"So tell me Mackenzie, now that you have my undivided attention, what do you plan to do with it."

I smiled at him as I put my lips on his. I pushed my tongue into his receptive mouth and inched it around. We explored the deep recesses of the other furiously. A tiny moan escaped him. All would have been perfect if it wasn't for a tiny tingling sensation that started on my arm. Someone's negative energy pressed down on me. I reluctantly pulled away from Rowan, and turned to see Dina glaring at me.

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