

Loose Id

*Fyrriakis  
& Curse*

EVE VAUGHN

# KYRIAKIS 1: KYRIAKIS CURSE

Eve Vaughn

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Eve Vaughn

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## Dedication

*To La Vonne. Thanks so much for putting up with me, helping me out when I needed a hand, and being my friend.*

## Prologue

“Paris,” his mother said gently. Tears of compassion filled her light blue eyes. “I think she’s no longer here. We’ve searched the island thoroughly, and no one has seen her for hours.”

“I suspected as much. Please give me a moment alone, Mama.”

“If you go after her... maybe...”

“No. It’s too late. I think she’s probably been gone for a while now.”

“Perhaps she’s returned to her family’s pack.”

Paris knew that wasn’t a possibility. From his observations of Zahara’s interaction with her family, she had always seemed withdrawn and distant around them -- and it was no wonder, because they, Nana especially, constantly talked down to her.

“No. She wouldn’t go back to them. They would eventually crush her spirit... just as I attempted to.” He bowed his head in contrition, pain, and self-loathing, his dark hair falling into his eyes. Thoughts of the lovely Zahara somewhere in the world, alone, filled him with such despair, he could barely breathe. And it was his fault. All of it.

Had he told her how he truly felt, she’d still be with him. Instead, Paris was left with the task of explaining to his family and to the Nkruma alpha that Zahara was gone. There’d be no joining between two of the most powerful shifter packs, which had been his grandfather Spyros’s vision.

Spyros’s goal was to ultimately breed a super pack; after all, the Kyriakises were already known for their immense strength, superb fighting skills, and cunning. How else could they have survived the virus that had nearly made their kind extinct? The deadly bug had been around for a few decades, and it had proven fatal to shifters almost everywhere; in some cases, entire species had been wiped out.

On the other hand, although the Nkruma pack members had also proven surprisingly resistant to the ravages of the epidemic, they had long been known for their sharp analytical skills and physical beauty, as well as for harboring a touch of magic -- the last was the result of an Nkruma ancestor mating with a wizard. Moreover, the Nkruma had the ability to take the shape of creatures other than those in the lupine family.

Pack Nkruma was revered and respected in the immortal community, but there were fewer members than Pack Kyriakis by nearly half, and most resided just off the Gold Coast of Africa. Key to the Nkruma's history and their small numbers was that they had been the first female-run group of shifters. It was said the women had broken off from a much larger faction that mistreated their females. The women had decreed one of their own as leader of this newly formed pack, and from then on, they were careful with whom they chose to mate.

The melding of the Kyriakis and Nkruma packs might have meant not only that the threat of the deadly virus possibly need never worry either pack again, but it would have created an incredible alliance between strong males and females. In fact, it was because of his grandfather Spyros's plans that Paris had met Zahara. His father, Spyros's son, had been killed by a feral shifter years earlier when Paris was just a baby, leaving Paris as alpha-in-waiting; thus, Paris had been selected to join with the Nkruma alpha's daughter. Naturally, Paris had chafed at the idea of mating with a female from that pack. A matriarchal society just wasn't the way things should be among their kind... and Paris had made sure his opinions were known, loud and clear...

"Grandfather, we're already a supreme pack. We don't need to join with a group of shifters run by women -- what kind of mate would I end up with? You'd be sacrificing me to someone who doesn't understand her place, a woman who doesn't know how to take the lead from her alpha!"

Spyros had shaken his head. "You're my grandson, and I love you very much, but your youth is showing."

"I'm two hundred years old! And I think I know my own mind."

His grandfather had lifted one thick dark brow, his black eyes unwavering. "Is that so? You certainly know your own cock, because that seems to be what's making all your decisions. You've fucked nearly all of the unmated women within our own pack, not to mention a significant amount of non-pack members, yet you've still not chosen anyone for your bond mate. You can't say I haven't been patient with you, Paris. Since you haven't seen fit to choose a mate, I, as alpha, have made the decision for you."

"The choice should belong to me! At least give me the opportunity to find someone to my liking. Besides, how old were you when you mated with Grandmother?"

"You know very well that I was three hundred, but we're not talking about me. As for opportunities, you've had plenty. I won't wait any longer while you sow more oats. If you were truly serious about finding a mate, you would have found one by now. We're talking about the survival of our species. The fact that there's something about both our pack and the

Nkruma pack that's been resistant to the virus thus far means that any cubs from such a union as yours and Zahara's should have a better-than-fighting chance if and when it sweeps through again."

"Others have tried to create superbreds, but it hasn't made much difference."

"The subject is not up for debate, Paris."

"Grandfather--"

"We'll speak no more of this! You will mate with Zahara!"

"I won't do it," Paris muttered with stubborn resistance.

Spyros lifted a brow. "That's where you're wrong. You will obey me, or else you'll be cast out of this pack with not a cent to your name."

"I don't need your goddamn money!"

As quick as lightning, Spyros grabbed Paris by the collar. "You *will* do this. It's time to stop thinking about yourself and put the fate of our pack before your own selfish whims. Is this what your father would have wanted of you? What about your poor mama? What do you think it will do to her when you're shunned and can no longer come back?" His grandfather released him. "The choice is yours, but I warn you now to be wise, because whatever decision you make, there will be no turning back."

Paris had known then that he had had to obey.

He shuddered now to think of how badly he'd behaved after that. He'd heard horror stories about Pack Nkruma and its females and had gone whoring and drinking every night, dreading the moment when his mate would arrive. Sure, the women were touted to be great beauties with rich onyx skin, high cheekbones, and regal features, but who cared about looks when there were plenty of gorgeous women among his own pack? Beauty meant nothing if his potential mate was the harridan so many of the Nkruma women were purported to be. How did their men deal with so many aggressive females?

When Zahara had finally arrived, he'd first been surprised by the fact that she was so young, barely twenty, a cub by shifter standards; she was also smaller than he'd expected, standing no more than five feet tall. Yet she had far surpassed anything he could have imagined.

Zahara was exquisite; the moment his eyes had locked with her large, soulful brown ones, his breath had caught in his lungs. Her skin was like rich mahogany, and she had worn her hair pulled back into a long, thick braid that accentuated her proud cheekbones. Then Paris had focused on her sinful lips, and his cock had immediately jumped to attention -- he'd wanted to sample her lush mouth right away.

After the introductions had been made, Zahara had thrown him a shy smile, baring small white teeth. His throat had gone dry, and he'd known he had to have her. At the large party that had been thrown to celebrate their betrothal, Paris had refused to leave her side. It was only when one of his cousins had teased him about how smitten he was that Paris had



realized the danger he faced of falling for the lovely shifter. He'd thought that if Zahara had any clue about his feelings, she would try to hold it over his head. It was, after all, what he would expect of a woman from Pack Nkruma.

During the festivity, he'd grabbed her hand and led her to a room where they could speak in private. It was then he had told her how things would be between the two of them, that he would do as he pleased and she would always have to do as he commanded. The smile that she'd worn for most of the party had disappeared, but Paris hadn't realized the enormity of his error then. All that had mattered to him was that she didn't argue with him, which she hadn't.

During the four months of their courtship, Paris had continued to carry on as he had before his betrothal, not taking Zahara's feelings into consideration and ignoring his grandfather's reprimands, although he knew Spyros didn't issue idle threats. Zahara never said much to him, and he wondered how someone so quiet could come from the Nkruma pack. Still, he was pleased to see no sign of the headstrong woman he'd initially feared she'd be, and he'd been happy about that -- at first. Unfortunately, it soon became clear to Paris that Zahara was afraid of him.

This had angered him, especially as he'd noticed her smiling at the rest of his pack members -- but never for him since the night they'd met. It had stung Paris that she'd seemed to open up to everyone except him. His ire had steadily grown. If there was anyone she should talk to, it was him, Paris had thought. If she was going to smile at anyone, that particular honor also belonged to him and him alone. Damn her eyes! She was his!

The night before their formal joining, the rest of the Nkruma pack members had descended upon the Kyriakises' private island. When Paris met Nana Nkruma and Nana's sisters, they had displayed all the characteristics he'd originally feared Zahara would exhibit. The women were by turns arrogant, rigid, sharp-tongued, and borderline rude. It had taken every ounce of will power for Paris to remain civil to them.

He'd also noticed how Zahara seemed nervous around her mother and aunts, although she hid it well when she thought no one was looking. It was a wonder how someone like her could come from such people. It was then that he'd realized she truly was nothing like the rest of her pack, or even her siblings. From what he was able to gather, she took after her father, a man of few words. Paris began to think that perhaps things would work out between them. But then he'd really made a mess of things.

At an informal dinner party, Zahara had gone missing. To his annoyance, Paris had found her giggling with a Kyriakis cousin, her lovely face filled with a look of happiness he had never witnessed before. It had driven him mad -- that was the only explanation he could think of for what he had done next. Paris ached at the memory.

Yanking Zahara away from his cousin, Paris had lifted her in his arms and carried her to his room, where he'd proceeded to rip her clothes off. He'd taken her right then and there. "You're mine! You belong to me," he'd said, over and over again.

He had smelled her arousal at his presence, and it had made him crazy. Even though he'd known this would be her first time, Paris hadn't ensured that she was properly pleased. All he'd cared about was claiming what was his; besides, the sounds of her soft moans and pants had told him she wasn't adverse to his touch. It was only after the haze of rage and possession had lifted and he'd rolled off the bed that he realized the extent of his angry actions. Although Zahara hadn't fought him -- had even orgasmed, he realized vaguely -- she'd turned her back to him and wept.

Although alphas were in a position of power, they also carried with them a great deal of responsibility. Paris knew that a real leader would never have abused or caused harm to someone under his protection... no amount of words could take back his rough handling of her, and he was sorry, more than he'd ever been about anything in his life. Ashamed of himself, Paris had left the room.

He'd given instructions that she wasn't to be disturbed; then Paris had taken a long walk to clear his head. He'd vowed to make things right with her, and it was an oath he'd intended to keep. Deciding to give her space, Paris had planned to stay away from her until the ceremony the following day.

By the next morning, no one had seen Zahara. They'd searched everywhere for her, not stopping until the hour of the joining was upon them. When she didn't show up, Paris had known she wasn't coming back...

Shoving his memories aside, Paris lifted his head when he heard a commotion outside his room. A tall, dark, richly garbed female burst through his door. Nana Nkruma, the alpha of Pack Nkruma.

"This is your fault, Kyriakis! She's gone; you drove my cub away! A curse on you and your pack until my daughter is returned to me! No Kyriakis male shall find happiness with their mate until this wrong has been righted... and where you were once strong, now you shall be weak."

But Paris thought no curse could scare him. After all, the worst had already happened. His arrogance and jealousy had caused Zahara to flee -- and he'd never even told her that he loved her.

## Chapter One

Raking fingers through his hair, Constantine felt an impending sense of doom as he walked down the hallway to his father's study. He had a pretty good idea why he'd been summoned and really wasn't in the mood for another lecture. Only Paris could make him feel like a cub all over again, even though Constantine was nearing one hundred and fifty. But this was his father and his alpha as well. To blatantly disobey an order was asking for more trouble than he needed right now -- not that he wasn't close to the man who sired him, but there were times when they didn't see eye to eye.

To hear his relatives tell it, Paris had been an altogether different person, more carefree and wild, back in the old days. Constantine wouldn't have guessed that his Papa was anything but the strict, no-nonsense immortal he knew.

"Enter." Paris's deep booming voice called him from the other side of the door before Constantine could even touch the knob.

Constantine stepped into the study and plopped down on the big leather chair in front of his father's desk. "Good afternoon, Papa."

Paris's light blue eyes darkened. "What took you so long to get here? I caught your scent several minutes ago," his papa asked without preamble. No hello or any other form of greeting; just straight to the point as usual.

Both of them were both well over six feet tall, and Constantine was aware that, in appearance, they were more like brothers than father and son. Many people often commented on the physical similarities between them. The only difference was their eye color; Constantine had inherited his mother's slate-gray eyes.

"And it would be a good afternoon if you would do as I ask for once."

*Here we go again.* It was going to be a long lecture indeed. “Papa, I’m just not interested in the bitches you’ve thrown my way. I’m young; I have time before I settle down to pick a mate. Besides, you don’t harass Persephone.”

“Persephone is not the alpha-in-waiting, and she is betrothed to Marius.”

Constantine rolled his eyes. “Yeah, that’s going to go over well. You know she can’t stand Marius, and you can barely tolerate him yourself. Why would you want to subject your only daughter to that weasel for eternity?”

“Marius is a fine alpha for his den. His pack has not succumbed to the virus in years. Anyway, this discussion isn’t about your sister, it’s about you and your blatant disregard for our laws. You should have mated by now. You’ll be one hundred fifty by the end of this year, yet you have no cubs.”

Constantine was careful to choose his next words because he knew this conversation could get out of hand in no time. “I’m not really sure why there’s such a rush; you’re the alpha. I figured you could mate with Aunt Eleni and add more cubs to your precious dynasty. And, if you haven’t forgotten, we’re immortal. Maybe I’ll never be alpha.”

Paris shook his head, dark waves falling over his face. For the first time, Constantine noticed how disheveled his father looked. He couldn’t remember when he’d ever seen his father appear anything less than immaculate. Paris’s hair was all over the place and his eyes were bloodshot; dark stubble rested on the older man’s face, a testament to the fact that he hadn’t shaved that morning. Paris also looked as if he’d slept in the elegant black Gucci suit he wore.

Concern for his father quickly dissolved any argument he had on the tip of his tongue. “Papa, what’s the matter?” He stood and walked over to his father, meeting those reddened eyes.

It seemed like opening up was the last thing Paris wanted to do but, finally, he sighed, strode to his large leather chair, and took a seat. “Tell me what you think of that portrait.” He pointed to a new painting hanging over the marble fireplace.

Constantine wasn’t into art like his father, but what he saw was compelling, stirring feelings within him that he didn’t think possible of an inanimate object. His breath caught in his throat.

The picture was of a stunning woman, dark as fresh toiled earth, her wild, tousled hair flowing freely around her face and shoulders. Her features were fine and delicate, yet they appeared to belie an inner strength. She covered her naked breasts with one arm, her free hand resting daintily over her pubic region. Above the beauty’s head was the face of a wolf. There was something in its eyes that reminded him of the woman.

He shot a glance toward his father. “She’s one of us, isn’t she?”

“What do you think, Constantine?” Paris asked softly, leaving his son’s question unanswered.

What was his father getting at, and what did this have to do with anything? Could she possibly be a potential mate for him? The woman was gorgeous, there was no denying that, but he'd be damned if he mated with someone he'd never met. "She's very lovely, but I think--"

Paris held his hand up. "Yes, she's beautiful, isn't she? I've been up all night staring at her." He paused for a long moment. "This isn't the real reason I called you in here, though. I think it's time we had a little talk.

Constantine rolled his eyes again. "Oh, brother," he muttered.

"You know I only push you so hard because I care."

Where did that come from? "Papa, I mean you no disrespect... but why are you talking in circles? What does this painting have to do with anything?" He had a feeling his aunt was going to be upset; she had a decidedly possessive attitude toward his father. "I bet Aunt Eleni won't be too pleased to see it."

"This has nothing to do with Eleni."

"I think she'll disagree."

"What your aunt may or may not feel about this painting is irrelevant, and Eleni's already seen it. She has nothing to do with the reason I summoned you."

"Then why did you?"

"That woman should have been your mama."

Constantine could usually think fast on his feet, but that statement completely floored him. He'd always known the union between his parents had not been one of mutual love but of expediency. Still, he'd never have imagined his staid, by-the-book papa pining for someone else. "I... I'm not sure I follow."

"Her name is Zahara. From Pack Nkruma."

"You mean the one where the women rule? I can't imagine you'd mate with a bossy bitch. Did you two quarrel?"

"No. She was the sweetest, most gentle female I've ever met." The wistful note in Paris's voice and the faraway look in his light blue eyes showed Constantine a side of his father he'd never seen.

"But you said 'was.' Am I to assume--"

"That she's dead? I used to think so, but seeing this painting..." his words trailed off.

Now that his curiosity had been piqued, Constantine couldn't let the subject drop. Although his father was a good provider and protector for his family and pack, there had never seemed to be much affection between Constantine's parents -- at least not on Paris's side. His mama, Melanie, had worshiped the ground her mate walked on, but her love had obviously not been returned. Constantine remembered how his mother had laid her heart on the line for his father, only to have her love shrugged off. Not that his Papa had ever been

cruel or inattentive to Mama, but she hadn't been strong enough to handle the one-sided emotion, and it had destroyed her

"Was this woman -- Zahara -- the reason you didn't love Mama?" he asked quietly.

For a moment Constantine didn't think Paris would answer him. Standing abruptly, the older man walked over to the painting, a look of reverence in his eyes.

"She's the reason I can never love any other bitch. As I said before, I know you think I'm hard on you, but I see you heading down the same path that I did, and I don't want you to make the same mistakes. I once put my pleasure above all other things, living a carefree life, whoring and carousing. My grandfather Spyros finally put his foot down, said that I had responsibilities to my pack as alpha-in-waiting. He arranged a betrothal for me with the Nkruma alpha's daughter."

"Zahara? If the union was sanctioned by both alphas and you were in love, then what happened?"

"I loved her, but I didn't say she loved me. The truth is, I didn't truly realize my feelings until it was too late."

This surprised Constantine. He wasn't blind to the fact that women found his father attractive. Wherever Paris Kyriakis went, females vied for his attention.

"She didn't love you? I find that hard to believe."

The corner of Paris's lips tilted slightly. "Thanks for the vote of confidence, son, but it's true. For a time, I thought she might care for me a little but..." That faraway look entered those ice-blue eyes once more.

"But what? What happened?"

"On the evening of our joining, she ran off. It was my fault; in my arrogance, I didn't realize the precious jewel I possessed. Instead of nurturing that gentle spirit, I nearly destroyed it."

"Didn't you try to find her?"

"I searched the world for her... And, until I saw that painting, I truly believed she was lost to me, believed her to be dead."

"How did you come across it? After all these years, your find is quite amazing."

"I'd promised to take Eleni to a showing of an artist she was interested in. While she was mingling, I walked around the gallery to look at its other offerings... and stumbled across the portrait."

"But how do you know it's a recent work?"

"I made inquiries of the proprietor, and he showed me more of the artist's current projects."

"I see." Constantine frowned, trying to understand what lay beneath the words his father was saying. "Did you have a reason to believe she'd died?"

“I thought so, then. She was so young, just stepping over the threshold of womanhood, and without the protection of a pack. She would have been defenseless against any number of dangers. In time, I learned that she’d fallen victim to the Hunters.”

“Do they even exist anymore?” Constantine thought about the coven of renegade wizards who tracked down shifters and killed them. The Hunters used their victims’ remains for powerful potions and black magic. Stalking and pursuing shifters had been outlawed by the Council of Immortals a few centuries back, but the decree hadn’t stopped the rogues from their efforts. Still, he hadn’t heard of any Hunter sightings in decades.

“They’re still lurking somewhere, I’m sure, waiting for vulnerable shifters like Zahara. Her pack was particularly sought after by the Hunters because of their inherent ability to absorb magic.”

“And you think this painting means she’s alive? Couldn’t it just be a coincidence?”

“No. That’s Zahara. She looks almost exactly the same as when I last saw her, except for her eyes. They reflect a maturity and suffering that wasn’t there when I knew her. Whoever painted this picture must have seen her or knows her intimately. That’s where you come in.”

Constantine sighed with resignation, tensing up as he waited for the ball to drop. “What do you want me to do?”

“Find the artist. Bring him or her to me. I questioned the gallery owner, but he refused to give me the artist’s identity, saying he or she wishes to remain anonymous. The signature at the bottom of the painting, ‘S.E.D.,’ doesn’t give much away.”

“Why didn’t you get the answer from the owner’s mind?”

“I didn’t have much of a chance to delve into his head; Eleni was demanding to go home. Still, I managed to ‘persuade’ him to sell it to me over his initial objections, even though the price I named would have convinced most people right away. Apparently the portrait was simply for display. I would do the research myself, but as you know, I’ll be meeting with the alpha from Pack Eriksson to formally arrange Persephone’s betrothal. If you do this for me, I’ll give you one year’s reprieve: I won’t bother you to pay more attention to the business or find a mate until that time has passed.”

Seeing an opportunity from his father’s need to find Zahara, Constantine couldn’t help pushing for more time. “Give me five years.”

His father’s eyes narrowed to ice-blue slits. “Two years, and no more,” Paris countered tightly.

Two years was nothing to an immortal, but Constantine would take what he could get. It’d at least provide him enough time to figure out how to stall again once the reprieve came to an end. “I agree. Tell me exactly what you want me to find out.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“Run, baby, run!” her mother screamed, as the older woman tried valiantly to fight off the two huge snarling gray and white dogs that Sarah had already witnessed gruesomely mauling her daddy.

She couldn’t leave her mommy by herself. Picking up a nearby stick, the little five-year-old girl rushed to aid her mother. “I’ll help you, Mommy!”

“No, Sarah! Run away!”

Ignoring her mother’s pleas, Sarah whacked one of the dogs on the bottom. It instantly turned glowing yellow eyes her way. Fear paralyzed her momentarily, but the thought of losing her mommy gave Sarah the courage to fight. Smacking the dog on the nose with the stick, Sarah yelled, “Bad doggy! Go away, you bad doggy!” Her eyes widened when the dog snarled and stood on its hind legs, poised to attack.

Instinctively, she shielded her face, but something happened. From out of nowhere, a third dog leapt onto the one in front of her. This dog was smaller than the other two and had shiny dark fur.

Sarah looked around the room for her mother. She was gone! Tears sprang to Sarah’s eyes as she backed away. The two larger dogs jumped on the smaller one, biting and clawing at it. The little dog fought back bravely, however.

“Mommy!” she cried out, again, but her mother was still nowhere to be seen. Just then her eyes locked with the smaller dog’s.

*Run! Now!*

The words were screamed in her mind in her mommy’s voice. This time she obeyed and didn’t look back. As Sarah fled through her home into the woods, she heard growling and howling. The sound of padded feet rapidly hitting the earth drew closer. Running as fast as her small legs could carry her, she sped up, but so did those following her.

Focused on the chasing sounds behind her, Sarah didn’t see the rock until she stumbled over it, falling to the ground. On the verge of getting back to her feet, she was knocked down. Turning over, Sarah was confronted by two sets of glowing yellow eyes...

She screamed herself awake. Sweat drenched her body, and her breathing was shallow.

It took several minutes for Sarah to regain her bearings and realize she was in her bedroom. She glanced at the digital clock on her bedside table. Two o’clock.

Damn. She’d had that dream again. This was the second consecutive week she’d had the nightmare, and it was getting worse, becoming longer and more graphic each night. Was she destined to never get a good night’s rest again?

Sliding out of her bed, she slipped on the silk robe lying across a chair in the corner and went to her kitchen, thinking that eating something might help her get to sleep again, but one look at the contents of her refrigerator made her stomach turn. A half carton of sour milk, leftover Chinese take-out, ketchup, and a half-eaten, one-week-old pizza were her



only choices. So absorbed as she always was in her painting, Sarah hardly ever remembered to stock her refrigerator, ordering take-out whenever she bothered to eat.

With a sigh, she strode to her balcony, shivering as the night breeze drifted over her skin and created goose bumps. She looked at the nearly full moon.

“Lord, help me,” she softly pleaded. For some strange reason, whenever the moon was full, she blacked out. And the last time it had happened, she’d woken up the following morning, naked in the woods.

Something was clearly wrong with her. The problem was, she didn’t know what it could be or what she could do about it, other than going to a doctor -- something she avoided like the plague. The last thing she wanted was someone to confirm her suspicions that she truly was a freak of nature.

Growing up, Sarah could run faster, jump higher, see further, and do most things better than the other children in school. She’d been labeled a freak, of course. The social ostracism from an early age had made her a loner, and art had been her only refuge. Even in the homes she’d briefly lived in after her parents’ deaths, she had never felt as though she quite fit in. She hadn’t been treated unkindly, but Sarah could never shake the feeling of being an outsider. And knowing that she was different, Sarah had found it difficult to open up to others. At nearly sixteen, she’d left the home she’d been staying in and had supported herself ever since.

Those early days had been a struggle, and she’d scraped by living in shelters and low-income projects, as well as finding a job as a waitress in a seedy bar. Of course, she’d had to lie about her age at work -- although she suspected the owner had figured it out -- and had been paid under the table. All that time, however, she’d never given up her dream of becoming an artist. She hadn’t wanted or expected to be famous; she’d just wanted to make enough to earn a decent living.

Sarah had sold her work on street corners until, at the age of seventeen, she’d caught the eye of a major art dealer, who’d help her sell her first painting to a local gallery. That had been an incredibly fabulous thrill. Twelve years later, she was now well known among art connoisseurs -- or at least S.E.D was known. Her paintings sold steadily, and she had plenty to live on.

Sarah knew that part of the reason her paintings attracted buyers was the apparent mystique that surrounded them and her. There was much speculation about who she was and even whether she was male or female, because she never appeared at any of her showings, preferring to maintain her anonymity. Sarah had read many articles and usually got a good laugh out of the purported reasons why she chose not to reveal herself. Her favorite explanation was the one which theorized that she was some severely scarred recluse who couldn’t be seen in public.

Sarah supposed the recluse part was correct, but the other bit was only partially right. True, she had plenty of scars, but they were internal. The good thing about living in New

York was that she could just melt into the crowd, especially in the neighborhood where she lived. Sarah blended in with lots of other black faces; on the other hand, she barely ventured out of her Harlem studio apartment except to meet her agent, go to the corner store for necessities and, every now and then, allow her neighbor, a sweet old lady, to convince her to stop over for a visit. Aside from those brief forays, Sarah was more than content to devote herself to painting.

She threaded her fingers through her unruly shoulder-length hair. She'd only had it cut two weeks before to the level above her ears and already it was out of control again. Her quickly growing tresses were yet another thing that made her different from other people. It was on nights like this that Sarah thought it would have been nice to be able to call her parents and ask them why she wasn't like the rest of the population.

She sighed and stared at the bright silver orb in the sky again. Why did the moon make her forget? Why could she do things that took even athletes several years to achieve? And, most of all, why did she get the distinct impression of late that someone was stalking her for these very things?

## Chapter Two

“It’s time to start making arrangements, Paris. I grow tired of waiting for you to make up your mind. Either shit, or get off the pot.” Eleni Kyriakis looked at him through narrowed green eyes, her lips tight with apparent displeasure.

He turned away from her, not wanting to have this conversation now -- or ever, for that matter. He supposed he only had himself to blame for her thinking that the two of them would eventually mate.

It was shortly after Melanie had succumbed to feral wolves that Paris had learned Eleni was interested in him as more than just her brother-in-law and alpha. Paris hadn’t encouraged her affection, but he hadn’t discouraged it, either. Eleni had been a good hostess and perfect escort when he’d needed one, but formally joining with her was an entirely different matter. For one thing, she was his late mate’s sister and, second, he couldn’t see himself in another emotionally mismatched union. He cared for Eleni and appreciated all she’d done for him when Melanie had died, but that was it.

Granted, Eleni was an extremely beautiful woman with her long, wavy auburn hair, intense green eyes, and aristocratic features. Reed slim, she could have been a model if she wanted. Paris had often wondered why she’d never found another husband after her own mate was killed by a feral wolf. After all, Eleni was understandably highly sought after by other shifters from within and without his pack. Even so, his feelings just weren’t strong enough to make him mate with her.

With a deep sigh, he put down his fork and knife, looking mournfully at his rare filet mignons. He had been ravenous earlier, but now he just didn’t have the stomach for this meal any longer. Damn the bitch. He’d told her that he needed to be alone tonight, but she’d insisted that they have dinner together.

“Is it possible to get through one meal without you bringing this up? I thought we’d already discussed this.”

Scarlet-smudged lips twisted derisively. “Not to my satisfaction, and you know it. How can you treat me so shamelessly?”

“You’re saying I used you? In what way?”

Eleni threw her own knife and fork on the table. “I’ve been here for you since Melanie... Well, I supported you through your grieving period, have been the mother that Persephone needed -- and, if I may be so bold to say, that girl is headed for trouble if she isn’t taken in hand soon -- I’ve also been your business liaison when you were off chasing your errant son. I did all this because after twenty-five years, I’d hoped you would realize my feelings and see I’d make the perfect alpha fem for you.”

Paris spoke softly, trying to hold in his temper. “When you gave me all your help, it was very much appreciated. I didn’t realize, however, that there were strings attached.”

Eleni had the good grace to blush, but the damage was already done. “There were no strings attached, Paris, but surely you must know a pack is only as strong as its leader. We have to be even more powerful now that the Council of Immortals is no longer around, thanks to those blasted vampires. I hope you’ll finally admit that the damn Grimaldis are nothing but trouble and sever your association with them.” She snorted. “I hear retaliation is in order for that lot.”

Paris’s lips tightened. This wasn’t the first time she’d brought up his association with the Underground, an organization founded by his close friend Dante Grimaldi to eradicate the rogue threat among all the groups of immortals.

“Even if you were the alpha bitch, you still would have no right to question who I do and don’t choose to associate with.” His patience was hanging by a thread. “Understand?”

Eleni folded slender arms across her chest and pouted mutinously.

Paris brought his fist down on the table, clattering the plates. “Do. You. Understand?” He would not let her have her way in this.

“Yes, I do. I understand that you’re a cruel bastard, Paris Kyriakis.” Tears welled up in her slanted green eyes. “I gave you my heart; for you to just sit there and throw my feelings back in my face like this is unconscionable.” Then, to Paris’s annoyance, Eleni broke out into loud and noisy sobs.

With an exasperated sigh, he stood and walked to where she sat. Kneeling next to her chair, Paris took her hand. “It was not my intention to upset you like this, but you must know that I can never return your feelings. It just wouldn’t be fair to you.”

His words obviously weren’t the right ones, because she cried even harder. Paris gave up and rose; he didn’t have time for this shit. “Eleni, please. This is getting us nowhere. You’re an intelligent, beautiful woman and can have any man you want. You deserve a mate who’ll give you the love and respect you require.”

Lifting her head sharply, moisture still glistening on her eyelashes, Eleni glared at him. "I don't want another man; I want you. How can you be so blind?"

Paris was at a loss at how to deal with her, so when his daughter strolled into the dining room with Isis Vasquez, her best friend, he'd never been happier to see them.

"Papa, Aunt Eleni." Persephone acknowledged them before she sat at the table with her usual dramatic flair. "What's for dinner?"

Eleni's nostril's flared as she scowled at her niece. "Persephone, your father and I were having a private conversation. Please leave."

The younger woman laughed with a toss of her dark head. "Didn't look like much talking was going on when we came in. Are you still trying to get Papa to make the move from a platonic relationship to something a little... I mean *a lot* more romantic?"

Eleni shot from her seat. "This is outside of enough! I will not discuss private matters in front of you, and especially with your low-bred friend sitting there." Dark green eyes turned toward Paris. "This is exactly what I was telling you about. Your daughter has no respect for the hierarchy of our pack. I'm leaving now, but I expect an apology, Paris." Inclining her head curtly in his direction, she ignored Persephone and Isis, then stalked out of the dining room.

Paris knew if he let her leave angry, he'd be paying for a long time to come; Eleni's tantrums were legendary. He gave his daughter a stern look. "We'll talk about your rudeness later, young lady."

Looking unconcerned, Persephone gave him a huge smile, as if she knew he'd let her comment slide the way he had most times before. Eleni was right about one thing, however; his daughter's behavior was indeed getting a little out of hand, and it didn't help that she spent so much time with Isis. He wasn't happy that she hung out with a lone wolf, but short of locking his daughter up, there wasn't much he could do.

Paris caught up with Eleni just as she slid into her fire engine red Porsche. He put his hand on the door before she could shut it. "Don't leave like this, Eleni." Despite the fact that he couldn't return her romantic feelings, he did care about her.

She narrowed her eyes. "Why shouldn't I? You've made it abundantly clear I'm not needed or wanted. As far as I'm concerned, we have nothing to say to each other."

"Can't we at least keep this friendly?"

"I want more than friendship from you, as you're very well aware. Furthermore, I know you would have eventually mated with me if not for that damn picture."

Paris stiffened. "What are you talking about?"

"Don't insult my intelligence. If you hadn't seen that painting in the art gallery, we'd be together now. You've let that woman ruin your life for far too long. She's dead, isn't she? So why do you allow her to haunt you when she obviously wasn't strong enough to be your mate?"

Paris flinched at her brutal analysis. “You know nothing about her.”

“I know she didn’t deserve you, I know she was weak, and I also know that you allowed your feelings for her to drive a wedge between you and my sister. Now you’re letting those same feelings come between us. It’s time to accept the fact that she’s dead and not coming back.”

He knew he’d hurt Eleni, but he wouldn’t let her belittle what he’d felt for Zahara. “You barely knew her. If I recall correctly, you didn’t make her feel very welcome when she came among our pack. I don’t think you took the time to get to know her, so I’ll thank you not to speak of her again. As for your sister, Melanie knew how things were going into our joining, so don’t pretend to be outraged on her behalf when you’re only thinking of yourself.”

Eleni gasped as though she couldn’t believe he’d just talked to her in such a way. “So you choose this dead woman over me?”

“The painting proves she’s alive.”

“She’s dead!” Eleni screamed, her face turning a deep shade of red.

Paris wanted to wring her slender neck. “Let’s get one thing straight. Even if she is dead, as you so adamantly insist, I still wouldn’t choose you as my mate. I don’t want anyone else, and I already have two cubs of whom I’m proud. There is no reason to continue this conversation. I apologize if this sounds callous, but you and I will never have the relationship you want us to have.”

Moisture briefly glistened in her eyes again before they flashed fiercely, possessively. “That’s what you think.” She pulled her door out of his grip and slammed it shut.

Paris watched as her car screeched down his driveway. He shook his head, aware that he hadn’t heard the last of this particular issue. Walking back into his mansion, he heard a burst of uncontrolled giggling. Persephone.

That was another problem. If something wasn’t done about her soon, she’d end up just as wild as that friend of hers. His daughter was nearly a hundred, long past the time she should have been mated, especially considering that the average pack female went into heat around age thirty.

Paris didn’t have to return to the dining room to hear exactly what the two women talked about. Standing as still as he could, he listened.

“That was kind of mean, what you said to your Aunt Eleni.” Isis sounded like she had a mouth full of food. Damn those two! They were probably eating his steaks.

“She had it coming. She’s been chasing Papa for years. Besides, Eleni’s the reason my father has it in his head that I should be betrothed -- to a member of Pack Eriksson, no less. They’re all so boring. I want excitement and someone I can have fun with. Someone--”

“You can love?”

“I know it sounds silly to you, Isis, but my parents were unhappy for as long as I can remember. Mama loved Papa, but he didn’t love her, and it made them both miserable. I don’t want that kind of life. I’d rather be on my own like you than be in a relationship like that.”

Isis snorted. “I sometimes envy you, ’Seph. You may think you’re under your family’s thumb, but being on your own isn’t always fun and games. Without the protection of a pack, a lone wolf is fair game.”

“But you handle yourself just fine. At least you don’t have a father, brother, and cousin who run off any potential mates that you actually like.”

“Well, you do have a tendency to pick mortal men. Even I wouldn’t advise that.”

“Oh? And what about you? You like to consort with vampires.”

Isis laughed. “What can I say? I find them interesting.”

Paris’s lips tightened. He’d be damned before he let his daughter mate with a human. No mortal would be strong enough to take care of his precious daughter the way he would expect him to.

His thoughts drifted to his other cub, and he wondered if Constantine was any closer to finding the answers Paris so desperately sought.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Are you sure this is the place?” Aries asked, as they stepped into the SoHo art gallery. Constantine looked around. He wasn’t an art connoisseur like his father, but he appreciated some of the pieces prominently displayed along the walls.

“This is where my father purchased the painting,” he answered, eyes scanning the gallery for the proprietor.

“What’s so special about this particular painting? Why does Uncle Paris have such a hard-on for finding the artist?”

“Apparently, he hopes the painter can help him to find clues to his lost love.”

“Lost love? Uncle Paris doesn’t strike me as the lovey-dovey type.”

Constantine shrugged. “I never would have thought so myself, but you should have seen him, Aries. He was a mess.”

“Paris Kyriakis, a mess? Say it isn’t so. The world must be coming to an end.”

“It’s the truth. I don’t think I would have believed it had I not seen the way he looked and talked about her with my own eyes.”

“And you’ll get two years’ grace for bringing him this artist?”

“Yes, although I’m hoping to turn those two into a few years more.”

Aries chuckled. “Good luck with that. I seriously doubt Uncle Paris will grant you any more reprieves, but I hope to God he does.”

“Why is that?”

Aries huffed. “Because once he has you and Persephone mated, he’ll turn his attention to me.”

Constantine grinned, knowing his cousin valued his freedom just as much as he himself did. Aries was beta to Constantine’s alpha, which made it important to Paris that the Kyriakis bloodline was secured through Aries as well. If his father had thought there’d been a fight on his hands with Constantine regarding the issue of mating, Aries would not be much easier.

“I think that’s our man right there.” Aries pointed in the direction of a tall, somewhat effeminate-appearing man wearing what looked like a black leisure suit. If Constantine’s usually immaculately dressed father were here, he’d probably shudder.

“Why do you think that?”

“I noticed him adjusting some of the paintings.”

Constantine nodded. “Makes sense.” He approached the smaller man, who must have heard them coming because he raised his head from his task. The smile that had been on his lips fell slightly. Constantine could only imagine what he and his cousin looked like in their jeans and leather jackets.

“How can I help you, gentlemen?” the man asked, a look of faint disapproval in his beady eyes.

“We’re trying to find an artist.”

The man snorted and muttered beneath his breath. “This is an art gallery so you’ve come to the right place at least.” He raised his voice to a normal pitch. “What kind of artwork did you have in mind? Were you interested in something on canvas, or perhaps a sculpture?”

“No.” Constantine ignored the man’s initial words and shook his head. “I’m not looking for a painting; I’m looking for a particular artist, the one who signs his or her paintings with the initials S.E.D.”

The man’s face closed up. “I’m sorry, but I’m not at liberty to divulge that information.”

“You’re the owner of this gallery aren’t you?”

“I manage it.”

Constantine was beginning to find this man extremely annoying. “So why won’t you tell us what we need to know? A painting by this artist was recently purchased from this gallery for a large sum of money. It’s possible that we can bring more business to this establishment if you’re more cooperative.”

“I’m sorry, sir. If I could, I would, but it’s the artist’s wish to remain anonymous. That’s very well known in the art world.”

Constantine normally didn’t often use his powers on humans because he was used to getting what he wanted without having to do so; thus, he found it irritating that he had to



resort to them now. Shrugging, he locked eyes with the slender man and smiled. "I'm sure we can come to some kind of arrangement. You want your gallery to succeed, and I want a name and where this artist can be found."

The man nodded with a dazed expression in his eyes. "Yes, I want the gallery to succeed."

"Give me the name," Constantine said softly.

"I'm sorry, but the artist works through a dealer, Stella Peterson."

"Your cooperation is appreciated." Abruptly turning away from the man, he signaled his cousin and made a move to leave when he caught a faint scent of another shifter's presence. Well, not quite; there was something a little strange about the fragrance. Judging by the puzzled look on Aries's face, his cousin had noticed it, too.

Constantine's gaze darted to the entrance of the gallery. Then his heart began to pound in his chest. A tall, slender woman with skin like rich, dark chocolate had walked in. Her tightly pulled back hair accentuated high cheekbones, and large, dark eyes were exotically tilted upward, surrounded by impossibly long lashes. The woman's mouth below them appeared so welcoming that he had visions of tasting them that instant. She wasn't the most beautiful woman, he'd ever seen, but she was certainly eye-catching.

Constantine inhaled sharply when, on deeper inspection, he noticed her body was just as magnificent as the rest of her. The black turtleneck she wore encased breasts that were small but shapely, and she had a tiny waist that flared out into curvaceous hips. He glimpsed the reflection of her rear in a mirror; her ass would make most grown men weep. His cock stirred as he thought about riding that voluptuous rump of hers.

Licking suddenly dry lips, it occurred to him that the scent he'd caught just moments before belonged to her. She was a shifter, but not a full blood.

"A half-breed," Aries whispered to him. Almost as if she'd heard what his cousin had said, the sexy fem looked in their direction. Her eyes widened briefly before she quickly spun around and raced out the door.

Aries frowned. "What was that about?"

Constantine didn't know the answer, but he intended to find out.

## Chapter Three

They were following her. Whenever she turned a corner, so did they. What did they want? Sarah ducked into a coffee shop and, ignoring curious onlookers, dashed to the bathroom and locked the door behind her. Hopefully, the men would get the hint and leave her alone -- whoever and whatever they were.

The minute she'd stepped into the galley and had seen them, Sarah had known there was something different about the two men -- something not quite human. And the scent they'd given off was like nothing she'd smelled before... raw, wild, musky, and primitive. The only other time she'd caught a whiff like that was connected to a tragic childhood memory.

In the brief glimpse she'd caught of both men, Sarah had noticed they were incredibly attractive, but she hadn't wanted to stick around to get a closer look. Damn. She knew she should have stayed home and painted today; instead, she'd decided to come down to the gallery for inspiration. Now she was in a fix and wasn't sure how to get out of it.

That scent...

They were here.

Looking wildly around the ladies room, she wondered if she should try to escape through the narrow bathroom window or wait out her pursuers. Then the pounding on the door let her know that she had to think fast.

"Um, just a minute," she called out unsteadily. Climbing onto a toilet seat, she pushed against the sill with one hand, while lifting the window at the same time with the other. Shit! It was stuck.

Sarah used the flat of her hand to give the window a hard shove, dislodging the entire thing in the process. The frame dangled and glass shattered, spraying to the ground a few feet

below. She briefly cursed her own strength; if that didn't draw everyone's attention, she didn't know what would.

Again, someone beat on the door, and a deep masculine voice spoke from the other side. "Open up. We just want to have a word with you."

"I'll be a minute. Hold your horses." Slipping through the window face first, Sarah had barely got her hips out when a pair of strong hands grasped her arms and yanked her forward the rest of the way. She gasped, momentarily robbed of her breath.

He was nothing short of perfect. Ink-black hair rested in a dark cloud of waves around his face, giving him a wild look. His features were strong and pronounced, almost arrogant, and his gray eyes seemed to be looking right into her soul. Dear Lord, his mouth was sexy, too; it was deep red, and while his top lip was full, the bottom one was sinfully plump, forming his mouth into a sensual pout. Sarah had never seen anything like those lips before and couldn't tear her eyes away.

With a quick shake of her head, she examined the rest of the man. Since she was an inch shy of six feet herself, she figured he stood at least seven inches taller. The stranger was lean but athletically built and had a broad chest. He was so blatantly masculine that he actually made an Amazon like her feel petite and feminine.

"Why did you run?" he asked smoothly.

Sarah's body heated with awareness. *No. Please don't let me be attracted to this man, who's quite possibly a psychotic killer.* Replying with bravado she didn't quite feel, Sarah snapped, "Why were you and your friend following me?"

An amused smirk tilted his lips. "I asked you first, sweetheart."

"I'm not your sweetheart, and I'll thank you to take your damn hands off me!" When she tried to wrench her arms out of his grip, he held on effortlessly, much to her surprise. Sarah was no weak woman, so why couldn't she break free of his hold? "Besides, I don't owe you any explanation. It's my prerogative where I choose to go. Now, I insist you release me, or I swear I'll scream." As each second passed, she began to lose the little bit of courage stored within her.

"Go ahead and scream. No one will come to your rescue. My cousin can be persuasive when he wants to be, and right about now he's probably convinced everyone in there that they simply imagined everything or that the locked bathroom door and broken window was the result of a prank."

"You don't think I will?"

"Oh, I think you will, but it won't you any good."

Sarah narrowed her eyes. "What do you mean by that?"

"Try it and find out."

Opening her mouth to do just that, she was shocked when his lips covered hers. She began to hammer his arms and any part of his body she could reach with her balled fists. Dear Lord, he was probably a killer *and* a rapist!

Even though she had above-average strength, nothing she did seemed to faze him. Then something incredible happened. As his tongue slid between her slightly parted lips, her body began to respond to him.

A buildup of heated sensuality started at the base of her spine, slowly moving through her body, and made Sarah melt against the insistent pressure of his mouth. Her pussy tingled with sexual awareness, something she'd never allowed any male to get close enough to do before. Sarah couldn't even think of a man who could ever have ignited such a burning need within her so instantly.

His large hands cupped her bottom, pulling her against him. Sarah felt the outline of his hard cock against her thigh. Unable to help herself, she dug her fingers in the thick mane of his dark hair and thrust her tongue out to meet his. He tasted tangy and masculine, and she wanted more.

Suddenly, he shoved her against the building, pressing hard. Sarah's nipples tightened to stiff pebbles, aching to be released. She finally tore her mouth away to take a much-needed breath and saw something that frightened her to the core.

The stranger's eyes were no longer human. His pupils had constricted to tiny pinholes, and the irises were a deep, sinister yellow. What the hell?! This couldn't be happening. He was one of *them*!

Sarah managed to wedge her hand between their bodies and thrust with all her might. This apparently took him by surprise; she doubted he would have budged an inch otherwise. Taking advantage of her freedom, she turned to flee, only to be caught in the arms of the second stranger.

His scent was similar to his companion's and distinctive. He had to be like the other one! She struggled and clawed at him, trying to escape.

"Let me go!" she screamed, bringing a sharp-heeled boot down on his foot.

"Shit!" he exclaimed, but his grip didn't loosen. "Stop it. We mean you no harm, but if you step on me again I just may change my mind."

The one who'd kissed her soundly approached them, his eyes now a dark shade of gray. "Relax; you're more in danger of hurting yourself than you are from us."

"In case you two goons haven't figured it out yet, I'm not interested in talking to you."

Gray Eyes smiled. "That's too bad, sweetheart, because you don't have a choice."

Despite what he said, she didn't believe things would end well for her. How could she have responded to him when she knew he must mean her harm?

Sarah twisted and writhed, but to no avail. She knew she would have been kidding herself if she really thought it was possible to wiggle herself loose, but she still had to try.

Dammit, this second stranger was also much too strong. Sarah faced the fact that her time had come, that *they* had finally caught up to her, but she never could have imagined her life would end like this, in the back of some alley. Did these men intend to rape her before killing her?

Deciding to hang onto her dignity the best she could, she stopped her struggles and raised her chin. "Do what you have to do, but make it quick. I'm not going to beg for my life."

Gray Eyes frowned, then raked a hand through his dark mane. "What are you talking about?"

"You plan on killing me, don't you? Then go ahead; I'm not afraid of you." She was terrified of them, but she would be damned if she admitted it.

"Aries, let her go."

"But she might run."

"I think she knows if she does, we'll only catch her." Gray Eyes glanced at her. "What's your name?"

Sarah's lips tightened mutinously. He had to be crazy if he thought she'd give that information so easily.

Gray Eyes chuckled, walking back to her until he was mere inches away. "I like your spirit, but my will is stronger."

Why was he toying with her? Why didn't he just get it over with?

When the one called Aries loosened his grip, she wrenched her arm away. Her mind said to get the hell out of there, but her feet refused to obey; something held her still. Besides, what was the point? She knew he'd told the truth when he said they'd catch her. Furthermore, even if she got away, did she want all the bother of moving to yet another city? She'd been on the run for as long as she could remember.

Sarah was tired of fleeing and hiding. With a ragged sigh, she strode to the wall, careful not to make eye contact with the men, and leaned against it. "What do you want from me?" she asked with resignation.

"A name would be helpful for starters." Gray Eyes's voice sounded like an intimate caress.

"As if you don't know. Haven't you or your group been tracking me for twenty-some odd years?"

"You must have us mistaken for someone else," Aries said.

Sarah lifted her head then and snorted, glaring at each of them in turn. "I'm not an idiot. I saw your eyes. You're... you're one of *them*. Still, I have a request; before you kill me, could you at least tell me why? I have to know the reason you're doing this to me."

When Gray Eyes stepped forward, she flinched. “I give you my word that I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Did he think she was nuts, that she’d trust him just because he’d given his word? “How do I know you’re not lying?”

“You don’t, so you’ll just have to believe me when I say no harm will come to you. Now, tell me your name.”

“Sarah.” It had occurred to her to give them a fake name, but she’d decided against it. That was all they were getting out of her anyway, at least until she figured out whether she could really trust them or not. As it stood, she was even now filled with an acute awareness of the hunk standing so close to her.

“I’m Constantine Kyriakis, and this is my cousin, Aries.” He said her name as though he were testing it on his tongue. “Sarah. I like it. It suits you.” His gaze delivered a wealth of meaning, making her shiver. She wrapped her arms around her body to keep from shaking. “Why did you run?”

“I thought... I thought you were someone else, but I’m not wrong in assuming you aren’t human, am I?”

He frowned. “Of course not, but neither are you, which is why I’m having trouble trying to understand you.”

The implication of his statement caught Sarah off guard. She’d always known there was something different about her, but she’d never doubted her humanity before. Her throat went dry. This couldn’t be true... Could it?

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“I think you do, Sarah.”

“No. I’m not... like you.”

“You’re only partially right. Tell me, what pack do you hail from?”

“Pack? You’re speaking in code.”

Constantine shot a questioning look to his cousin as if he were trying to determine whether she was telling the truth. Aries shrugged, his green eyes indecipherable.

Constantine turned his intense gaze her way once more. “You do know what we are, don’t you?” His eyes began to glow, and he opened his mouth to reveal very large, very sharp teeth.

A rush of heat swept through her body, leaving Sarah feeling like she couldn’t breathe. Then everything went black.

Constantine hurried forward just in time to catch Sarah. He lifted her into his arms. “What the hell?” he muttered.

Aries peered at the unconscious woman. "I don't think you should have done that. I know this sounds strange, but I get the feeling she has absolutely no clue what she is or what we are."

Constantine furrowed his brows. "But how is that possible? She's a half-breed, and by the looks of her, a young one. She can't be more than thirty. A half-breed without a pack. What do you think she meant by someone's been trying to kill her for years?"

Aries shrugged again. "I don't know, but what should we do with her?"

"I think we should take her to your apartment. It's not too far from here. Maybe then we'll get the answers we're looking for."

"What about Uncle Paris's mission?"

"Damn my father's mission. There's still time to deal with that." Constantine looked into Sarah's face, and his heart sped up as though he'd just gone on a long run. When he'd kissed her, he'd only intended to quiet her, but when their lips had met, the sensations were an altogether new experience in his one hundred and fifty years.

What was it about this half-breed that had awakened feelings of longing within him? Yes, she was lovely, but he'd been with women far more attractive. And yet, it was Sarah who made his cock throb with an aching need. A wave of fierce possessiveness swept through him; he hugged her closer.

Aries chuckled. "God, you're a fast worker. You want to get into her pants, right? Don't you ever think of anything other than pussy?"

"Fuck you." Constantine glared at him. For some reason it bothered him to hear Sarah spoken of so casually, when it would never have fazed him with most other women. "Let's get her back to your place."

"Do you want me to take her? You're driving after all."

Constantine held Sarah tightly. He didn't want his cousin to touch her. "No. I'll carry her. You drive."

"You're going to let me drive the Hummer?" Aries sounded both slightly disbelieving and amused.

"Yeah, but only this once." Constantine managed to extract his keys from his jacket pocket without jostling Sarah, tossing them to Aries. Then the cousins made for the car. When they reached the vehicle, Constantine slipped into the passenger seat with a limp Sarah on his lap.

Aries started the engine. "What are you going to do with her once we get to my place?"

"She intrigues me. Don't you wonder why she thinks someone is trying to kill her? She took one look at us and fled, which makes me believe she knows what we are. I mean, how could she not realize what *she* is? She'd have to shift during the full moon, right?"

“I thought about that, too, but the fear in her eyes was genuine, and she really doesn’t have anything to gain by lying to us. You also need to remember that half-breeds run the risk of losing themselves when they shift.”

Constantine frowned. “Meaning?”

“Meaning she may not remember when it happens.”

Sarah chose that moment to come to. “Where am I?” she asked groggily, apparently trying to take in her surroundings.

“We’re going to Aries’s apartment.” Constantine was once again aware of her delicious scent and thought how melodic the sound of her voice was to his ears.

When she wiggled on his lap, his cock shot up, straining against his jeans. Sarah must have felt it, because she stiffened.

“Was it necessary of you to place me on your lap? I don’t recall saying I’d go anywhere with you.”

“Maybe not, but what were we supposed to do when you passed out? We couldn’t very well leave you in that alley. What was that about, anyway?”

She clutched her head in her hands. “Oh, my God. Now I remember. You implied that I was one of you. Your teeth... Are you... werewolves?” She whispered the last word as if it were dirty.

“You could call us that, I guess, but it’s not what we truly are. I have to ask again. What pack do you or did you belong to?”

“I already told you I have no pack.”

“But you must, unless you’re a lone wolf -- and I just can’t picture you as one.”

“None of this is making sense. Look, why don’t you just drop me off here, and I’ll find my way home.”

“You know we’re not going to do that,” Constantine mock-scolded her.

“Why the hell not? Kidnapping is illegal in all fifty states!”

“Those are human laws. Immortals have their own laws.”

“Immortals?” she asked in clear amazement, twisting around to face him. “None of this makes sense!”

The movement of her ass rubbing against his crotch was nearly more than he could take. If she kept this up, he’d make Aries pull over, but it sure as hell wouldn’t be to drop her off.

Damn. He couldn’t remember when he’d wanted to fuck someone as badly as he did Sarah. It would take very little for him to reach around and cup her small but shapely breasts in his palms. He inhaled her scent again.

She would go into heat soon. He could smell it, and when that happened, Sarah would have every unmated shifter within a three-hundred-mile radius sniffing around her.



“Constantine?” Her voice brought him out of his decadently sinful thoughts.

“Do you think you’ll be able to handle the truth?”

She gulped. “I don’t know, but at least I’ll no longer wonder why I’m so different.”

She was different all right, more than she even realized.

## Chapter Four

Why was she with these two strangers? Men who could probably snap her neck without blinking an eye. She fidgeted in her seat under Constantine's intense gray scrutiny and gripped the cup Aries offered her.

"Thank you." She wasn't much of a coffee drinker, but she needed an excuse to keep her hands busy. Hanging onto the cup and stirring the dark liquid with a spoon did the trick, but Sarah couldn't stand the silence. "Uh, do you fellas plan on telling me what I'm doing here, or are we just going to have a staring contest?"

Aries answered. "You fainted. I thought we'd already established that."

"Yes, but we haven't established why you're keeping me against my will," she countered.

"No one's restraining you," Constantine interjected smoothly. "You're free to leave whenever you'd like... after we have our answers."

She sighed with exasperation, putting her mug down and standing abruptly. "Why won't you two just kill me and put me out of my misery?"

Constantine laughed. "You seem to have quite a fascination with death."

"Not particularly, but there comes a time when a girl has to stop running. I'm tired of living in fear," she said wearily, pacing the floor. The more time she spent in the room with Constantine, the more her body tensed. She felt a tingling between her thighs she desperately tried to ignore. The hairs on the back of her neck rose as he left his seat and strode to her, his intense gray eyes never leaving her face.

When Constantine placed one muscular hand on her shoulder, Sarah forced herself not to flinch away, not because his touch repulsed her, but because it did the exact opposite.

"Look at me, Sarah," Constantine whispered softly.

She shook her head, not wanting to get lost within the depths of his eyes.

“Look at me.” His command was just as soft this time, but it brooked no argument. When their gazes locked, Sarah’s knees grew weak. “Trust us, Sarah. We really mean you no harm. We only want some answers. Are you willing to talk?” He raised one thick brow.

She licked her dry lips. “And if I do, you’ll let me go?”

“If that’s what you want.”

Sarah nodded, looking away. “What do you want to know?” She took a seat again at the table.

“You still haven’t explained your actions at the gallery,” Constantine said.

“It was... I mean, it’s hard to explain. I looked at both of you, and it reminded me of... of some very bad people or creatures. I’m not sure what they were exactly. Werewolves? They’re not supposed to be real, I know, but there you have it.”

“They aren’t real. Not in the true sense of the world. If anything, you’re more a werewolf than we are. My cousin and I are *Canis lupis immortalis*, or just call us shifters, if you like.”

Sarah’s mouth twitched in derision. “Get the hell out of here. I’m not a werewolf... I can’t be.” Or could she? The need to strip and run through the forest when the moon was full had grown much stronger as she’d gotten older. Then she thought about the blackouts, her near-superhuman senses and abilities, and her love for meat so rare that it bled. Well, maybe that last was just as human a trait as any, but still it gave Sarah something to ponder. Then there was her rapid hair growth. She’d read the average rate for human hair to grow was about a half inch to five eighths of an inch per month.

Separately, these things could probably be easily explained, but together... Sarah had no choice but to reevaluate her thinking. “No,” she denied, even though the evidence seemed to be staring her in the face.

“I think you already know we’re not lying, Sarah.” Aries said.

She stood again and paced the floor in nervous circles. “Okay. I’ve known for a while that I’m not like other people, but a werewolf? That’s... this is a lot to take in.”

Aries frowned. “How is that you didn’t know? What happened to your pack?”

“I’ve already told you, I have no clue what you’re talking about.”

“A half-breed lone wolf,” Constantine muttered, as though considering something. “Sarah, when did you realize you were... different?”

“Why?” she asked cautiously, stopping in mid pace.

A slight smile tilted those sensual lips. “Humor us.”

She sighed. “I think I was about thirteen.”

Aries nodded. “That would make sense. That’s around the time when half-breeds usually first shift.”

“Okay, hold on. You two are confusing the hell out of me. How about speaking in laymen’s terms? First, you tell me I’m some kind of werewolf. Now, I’m a half-breed? You know how insulting that term is?”

Constantine gestured to the chair behind her. “Have a seat. It seems you have a lot to learn.”

“I think I’d rather stand,” she said a little more breathlessly than she meant to. Why did he have to look at her with such obvious lust? Remembering the kiss they’d shared sent shivers down her spine.

“Suit yourself.” He gave her a knowing smile before shrugging one broad shoulder. “Where would you like us to begin?”

“I guess you can start off by telling me exactly what I am. Make it clear.”

“Your formal classification is *Canis lupis sapiens*, not an immortal, but much more evolved than humans. You’ll live for a very long time by human standards -- probably a little over two hundred years -- but eventually you will die. On the other hand, my cousin and I will not, at least not by natural causes.” He paused. “One of your parents was a *Canis lupis immortalis*, like Aries and me. Which one was it?”

Sarah frowned, trying hard to come to terms with what they were telling her, but it was all a bit difficult to digest. “My parents were killed when I was young, by...”

“By what?” Aries prompted, when her voice trailed off.

Sarah wrapped her arms around her trembling body as she tried to recall the blurred memories, the ones she’d suppressed for so long. “Wolves,” she whispered.

The men looked at each other, and a brief silence descended over the room.

“Do you remember what happened exactly?” Constantine inquired.

“Everything is sketchy. I remember three people coming to our house when I was about five years old. Two men and a woman. My mother told me to go to my room. I didn’t want to leave her, something told me to stay, but she wouldn’t let me. My father didn’t look too happy, either. I don’t remember much after that, except I snuck back and saw my father’s body ripped to shreds... My parents’ mingled screams still haunt me. The wolves--” Sarah shook her head trying to ward off the painful images.

“Is that it?” Aries asked gently.

Sarah nodded. “It’s all I can remember clearly.”

Constantine’s gray eyes were focused on her. “What happened to you after your parents were killed?”

“I was taken in by some neighbors, a pastor and his wife. They didn’t have children of their own, and they were very good to me. I lived with them until I was about fourteen. Then I came home one day and the house had been ransacked. Papa Bill, as I called him, was badly mauled as if by wild animals. I had no reason to believe it then, but instinct told me that whoever had done that to him had come looking for me. You see, there was something

about the attack he didn't want to tell me, but I overheard him talking to Mama Celine, mention that there had been something supernatural about his assailants. He didn't clarify, but I knew. They'd kept my foster father alive for one reason -- to send a message to me. No actual words were needed. I just knew. Thank God Mama Celine was out running errands when they came or they might have killed her." She hastily wiped away a tear that slid down her cheek.

Constantine's face was full of compassion. "And after that?"

"Papa Bill was rushed to the hospital; he barely made it. When I was assured that he'd survive, my first thought was to leave them. I felt so guilty for being there, knowing they were in harm's way because of me. I did try to run away, but they caught me in the act. After some insistence on my part, they packed me off to a relative in Ohio. Honestly, I think they finally gave in because they weren't sure what they were dealing with. I lived in Ohio for almost two years, but they found me again. I don't know how. And this time they left no survivors." She gulped in a shaky breath. "Since then I've been moving from place to place. Where I live now is probably the longest I've been in one location. I'm just so tired of running, so sick of it. I still don't know why they're after me, or why they killed my parents, but when they're near, I feel them, smell them. I'll never forget their scent."

Constantine looked fierce. "Did they smell like us?"

Sarah nodded. "Yes, but not quite."

"They were probably shifters. As you mature further, you'll realize that everyone and everything has a distinct fragrance."

"I've answered all of your questions. I think it's time you both answer more of mine. What exactly is a shifter? And if you're immortal like you claim to be, wouldn't people notice that you never grow old?"

Constantine chuckled. "First of all, immortals have been here longer than *Homo sapiens*, and humans see only what we want them to see. The very ancient among us could tell you how we came to be, but they mostly keep to themselves. The general consensus is that we're the spawn of fallen angels."

Sarah was incredulous. "The ones who sided with Lucifer?"

Aries took up the explanation. "No. The angels you're referring to became demons. There were those who didn't take any sides in that conflict, and they were cast out of heaven to roam the earth for eternity. Some mated with beasts, some with humans; the results of those unions were shifters, vampires, and wizards."

Were they pulling her leg? Why did she feel like she was in the middle of a bad horror movie? Sarah snorted. "Vampires and wizards? Yeah, right."

Aries smiled at her as though he would at a small child. "Perhaps you'll run across a few of the others one day. Among my best friends is a vampire. Like Constantine said, we've been around a very long time. Though some of us choose to mingle among humans, there are

those who will do so only out of necessity. In fact, our network is quite extensive; we have our own businesses, hospitals, banks. With the advent of technology and Big Brother watchdogs, we even have our own hackers and others who work in the government to keep our existence from public knowledge. If we need to secure new identities, we have people for that as well.”

Sarah digested that information. “And what about my other question? What is this shifter business all about?”

Aries was on the verge of answering her, when Constantine spoke instead. “We informally call ourselves shifters, because we shift at will, unlike you, who can only transform during a full moon. We have two main forms when we are young -- the human one that you see before you and that of a wolf. As we grow older, however, we can change into more. I, for instance, am one hundred and fifty -- and I can shift into five different lupine breeds. On the other hand, my father, who’s significantly older, can transform into every known lupine breed... and some not known to humans. Then there is a pack I know of whose members have the ability shift to other animals, but that is a rare trait. Nevertheless, all of us are strongest in our original two forms, especially the wolf one.”

“Do you eat... people?” Her voice was low.

“Occasionally, we need to hunt -- the hunger for raw, fresh meat drives us -- but as we grow older, not so much.” Constantine shrugged as if that wasn’t a big deal, but the thought of him eating people terrified Sarah.

“So what you’re saying is you shifters go around killing folks.”

He shrugged again. “Some of us aren’t so nice. But there are a number of us who seek out wild animals instead.”

She wasn’t sure if she wanted the answer to her next question, but the need to know drove her to ask anyway. “And which one are you?”

Constantine’s eyes twinkled dangerously. “I’ve been told I can be very bad.”

Sarah looked away nervously, not finding his reply at all reassuring. “Just stick to the story, Romeo,” she snapped.

He chuckled. Why was that sound so sweet to her ears? Hadn’t he just admitted that he ate people? “Spoilsport.”

“Maybe so, but I don’t have time to sit around and play word games with you.”

“I would have thought you’d want to know about me, considering you’re a bitch without a pack. Half-breed or not, once you go into heat, every shifter within a few hundred miles will sniff you out. Without the protection of a pack, you’re fair game. And believe me, what will happen then won’t be fair at all.” He looked grim for a moment. “By the way, exactly how old are you?”

Sarah wasn’t particularly pleased at being called a bitch any more than she had been labeled a half-breed, but then again, she had bigger problems to worry about. “What does

that have to do with anything?" She tried to avoid his gaze, not wanting to be mesmerized by his intense eyes.

"Humor me."

"Twenty-nine. Actually, I'll be thirty next week."

"Figures. You don't look like you've been thoroughly claimed or fucked yet -- but you will be."

She knew her nostrils were flaring and her cheeks were red as she finally looked at him. "By you, I suppose?"

"I didn't say that, but if you're offering..."

"That's it. I'm outta here. I've told you everything, yet you continue to play games. I don't need this crap." Screw them. She rose and stalked to the door; she could find her own way home.

Constantine got to the exit before she did and grabbed the knob, holding it firmly before she could make her escape.

"Move," she demanded.

"Sarah, if you really believe someone is out to get you, we can help. Add to that the fact you'll soon go into heat for the first time... it can be a very frightening experience."

She searched his rugged face. Constantine seemed sincere, but everything she'd learned was too much for her to handle right now. Part of her desperately wanted to give in and let him take care of her, but the other half, the sensible side that had kept her alive all this time, wouldn't allow it. Sarah shook her head. "Just let me go. You said you wouldn't keep me here against my will."

He let go of the doorknob. "Yes, I did, but if you should need help--"

"I won't."

He rattled off a series of numbers. Twice. "It's for my cell phone. Call it."

She committed them to memory, although she doubted she would need them. Sarah had been on her own for a long time; the only person she counted on was herself.

She opened the door and took off for the emergency stairwell, hurrying down several flights, not daring to take the elevator. Once she was outside, she sprinted along the streets, not stopping until she was sure Constantine and Aries weren't following her.

Knowing now that she was some kind of monster only made things worse for her. If it was true that she did shift during the full moon, then she'd have to disappear again -- this time far away from civilization. At least that way she wouldn't hurt anyone.

And she'd be beyond reach of the breathtaking Constantine Kyriakis.

\* \* \* \* \*

“I still can’t believe you let her go,” Aries said as they attempted to drive through downtown traffic.

“We would have been better off walking than trying to wade through this mess.” Constantine grumbled, keeping his eyes on the road and his hand gripped firmly on the wheel. “How much further do we have to go?”

“Just a couple more blocks according to the gallery manager.”

“It’s past five. Aren’t most people off by now?”

“This is Manhattan -- who works regular business hours in this city? We’re going to have to take our chances.”

They inched along. “You never did respond to my question.”

Constantine wasn’t in the mood to play twenty questions with Aries, especially where Sarah was concerned. “I wasn’t aware that you’d asked me one.”

“Fine. Let me rephrase it. How could you just let Sarah go? It’s obvious you’re smitten with her. I haven’t seen you react to a piece of ass like that since... since ever.”

“She’s not a piece of ass, and I’ll thank you not to refer to her as such.”

“Then what exactly is she?” Aries pressed.

“Just a confused half-breed in need of our help.”

His cousin continued to needle him. Apparently Aries didn’t realize how close he was getting to having his teeth knocked down his throat. “Ah, so that’s the only way you see her?”

“Yes,” Constantine bit out through clenched teeth, tightening his fingers on the steering wheel.

He could feel Aries smirking. “So you wouldn’t mind if I had a taste? Her scent is incredible. I bet she’s a virgin, too. There’s nothing sweeter than tight virgin pussy, is there?”

“Enough!” Constantine roared. “Touch her, and I’ll gut you.”

“But I thought she didn’t mean anything to you.”

“Fuck you!” He brought the Hummer to a halt at the stop light and opened the door, leaving the engine running, before sliding out. “I’ll walk the rest of the way.” Constantine slammed the door, the sound of Aries’s laughter raising his ire even more. He knew his cousin had done it on purpose. Had his reaction to Sarah really been that obvious? Dammit, the purpose of this little errand was to get his father off his back, not to fall for the first bitch who came his way, and a half-breed at that.

Paris would definitely have plenty to say, since he was from the old school of thought. His father believed only a pure-breed would be good enough for his son. Maybe it was best that Constantine leave well enough alone. Still, he couldn’t forget the sweet taste of her soft mouth, her tongue shyly stroking his like warm silk.

His cock stirred.



Constantine silently cursed as he lengthened his strides, heels pounding into the asphalt, stopping only when he reached his destination. He strode into the office building and looked at the directory for Stella Peterson. Just then, the elevator doors opened. A woman who looked to be in her mid to late fifties stepped out, followed by a younger man who didn't look very happy.

"Stella, I have other portfolios that you can look at. I'm willing--"

She held up one sun-grizzled hand. "Honey, if you didn't bring your best work in the first place, then I'm not interested. You've wasted your time as well as mine."

"I'm not giving up," the young man persisted. "This isn't the last you've heard of me."

"I'm sure it isn't." Stella sounded bored and looked at her watch.

Constantine made his presence known by directing his comment to the would-be artist. "I believe you're being dismissed."

Stella turned sharp hazel eyes his way. "And you are?" she drawled, her gaze traveling down the length of his body, resting on his cock.

He smirked. "Like what you see?"

"Oh, very much, stud." She looked up at him again, scarlet-painted lips smiling widely. "I suppose you're an artist, too?"

The red-faced man interjected. "I was talking to her!"

Constantine shook his head. "And now you're not. I suggest you leave the lady alone, or perhaps you'd like to be tossed out of here on your ass. I'll give you until the count of three."

"If you touch me, I'll sue your ass."

Constantine moved closer. "One."

The man's eyes widened. "Don't you dare come near me."

"Two," He took another step.

"You're crazy, man. Stay away from me!"

"Thr--"

Before the word was completely out of Constantine's mouth, the artist side-stepped him and ran out of the building, but not before yelling, "I'll be back with the police, you bastard!"

Stella clapped her hands. "Very impressive, stud, but if you're looking for representation, then you're out of luck. God, I need a cigarette. Walk with me."

When they were outside, Constantine patiently waited for her to light up and take the first puff.

"Ah, that's heaven." She exhaled a stream of smoke, blowing it from her nostrils.

He wasn't particularly fond of cigarette fumes, but saw no point in riling the woman by saying so. She looked through squinted eyes as she took another drag.

“So talk. What do you want?”

“I’m looking for one of your clients.”

“In what capacity?”

“I’d rather keep those reasons quiet.”

“Hmph. If you’re looking to swipe some of my clients, you can forget about it, stud. You may be a cutie, but if you try to steal my clientele, you’ll learn why they say I’m hard as nails.”

“I’m not trying to do that at all. I’m simply looking for information. If you can help me, I’ll make it worth your while.”

She looked at him suspiciously. “What kind of information?”

“Whereabouts.”

Stella frowned. “Some artists wish to remain anonymous. Besides, if this has to do with their art, everything is handled through me.” She took another puff. “Which client are you interested in? If you give me your card, I’ll pass it along. It will then be up to them whether they’ll get in contact with you or not.”

“That won’t do at all. I need to find the artist that goes by the initials S.E.D.”

Stella’s eyes widened briefly, a flash of fear entering them before quickly disappearing. What the hell?

“I have no idea who you’re talking about. I don’t represent any artist by that moniker.”

“Of course you do.”

“Look, buddy, I don’t want any trouble, so I suggest you leave me alone. I have a lean cuisine in the fridge with my name on it.”

“I appreciate you wanting to maintain the privacy of your client, but I assure you, I can make it worth your effort.”

“And I said to get lost.” When Stella would have turned, Constantine gripped her shoulder, whirling her to face him. “Take your hand off me!”

He looked into her eyes. “Tell me what I want to know. Where can I find S.E.D? I guarantee there’ll be no repercussions if you give me this information.”

Again that look of fright appeared. “I-I can’t... I don’t know who S.E.D. is.”

What was going on? Something definitely wasn’t right. And why did she sound so scared? Somehow, despite appearances, Constantine knew she was telling him the truth, but so had the gallery manager when the man had told him and Aries that Stella was the dealer for S.E.D’s art. How could both people be stating the truth and yet contradict each other?

He gently placed his hands on either side of her head and closed his eyes. Touching her mind with his, he delved into her psyche, shocked by what he found. No wonder Stella denied knowing S.E.D – there were large chunks of memory missing. A strong force jolted through him, pushing him back from her mind.

Clearly, someone had gotten to the dealer first; Constantine couldn't proceed further into her mind or it would kill her. From what he'd picked up, this could only be the work of a wizard or witch.

Why would they do this to a human, and why erase her memory like this? Judging from Stella's fear, they'd left an indelible impression on the woman, even though she couldn't quite remember why.

"Enjoy your frozen dinner tonight, Stella. When you get home, take a bubble bath and relax."

She nodded. "Yes. That's what I'll do."

"And, Stella, this is your last cigarette."

"My last cigarette. I was just thinking of quitting," she agreed amiably.

Constantine packed her off in a taxi and watched it drive away as he tried to make sense of what had just happened.

Aries approached him on the sidewalk. Incredibly, his cousin must have found some place to park the big car. "So, did you find out anything?"

"Not only did I not find what I wanted, but something strange is going on."

"What do you mean?"

"Parts of Stella's memory have been wiped; I suspect those were the areas that contained what I need to find the person we seek."

"Wizard or vampire?"

"Wizard."

"How can you be sure?"

"Her subconscious remembers something happening but doesn't know what."

"I see what you mean. She wouldn't remember anything at all if it were a vampire, but he or she could have been sloppy about it."

"It's possible, but I didn't get that impression. And it happened recently. I have the feeling there's something very extraordinary about this artist." The shrill ringing of his phone interrupted his thoughts. "Constantine here."

"Constantine! It's Sarah. Please help me!" she whispered desperately on the other end.

A loud crash followed before the line went dead.

## Chapter Five

Paris glanced at his platinum, diamond-encrusted Patek Philippe watch for the third time since he'd sat down. His companion was very late; perhaps he had forgotten their semi-annual lunch meeting. On the verge of pulling out his cell phone, Paris saw his friend enter the restaurant.

An amused smile tugged at the corners of his lips as the other man walked through the restaurant, drawing the stares of every single woman in the room.

"You're late," Paris chided softly as Dante Grimaldi took the seat across from him. They had been friends since Paris was a cub. At one time, Dante and his brothers had stayed with the Kyriakis pack shortly after the death of the vampires' parents.

Paris had not yet been born then, but the friendship Dante had formed with his grandfather Spyros had been extended to Paris's father as well as to him. The vampire was considered family, and over the years, they'd both helped each other out of sticky situations. Paris knew they'd continue to be friends until the end of time.

"Yes. I apologize, but it couldn't be avoided. I had a bit of a family crisis."

Paris frowned. "Is everything all right?" Now that he had a chance to inspect his friend, something seemed a bit off. As usual Dante was impeccably dressed; like Paris, the vampire wouldn't dare appear in public in anything but the best. However, the far-off look in those cobalt eyes told him there was a lot more going on than his friend was revealing.

"Does it have anything to do with Romeo taking out the council? I must say that I wasn't too pleased to learn my nephew was caught up in that mess. Quite a few immortals are starting to wonder if the Underground members have become the very beasts they've sworn to fight."

Dante lifted one dark brow. "Do you feel that way as well?"

“I’ve known you long enough to know that if you gave your brother the order, you must have had good reasons. I’ve also kept my own tabs on things, and it’s my understanding the council members were becoming a bit too power hungry.”

“Yet you object to Aries working with the cause?”

“I can hardly do that when I myself have done numerous missions for the Underground. But I wasn’t head of my pack then. Now, I have others I’m responsible for. Aries is as a son to me, and like any papa, I worry about my cubs.”

Dante picked up his menu and scanned its contents. “Is Constantine still upset with me for not sending him on a mission lately?”

“He was a little ticked at first.”

Dante smirked. “A little ticked?”

“He was furious, but have no worries, his Uncle Dante is still his hero; he knows the fault lies mainly on my shoulders. In any case, as the alpha-in-waiting, it’s time for him to take on more pack duties, and one of those involves the family business. He can hardly focus on that if he’s jaunting all over the world immersed in dangerous situations.” Paris exhaled sharply. “But enough about me and Constantine. Other than this whole council business, what’s this I hear about you tracking down the elusive *il Diavolo*? Aries said something about a pair of mysterious brothers claiming to be Grimaldis.”

Dante gritted his teeth, and Paris knew right away he’d hit on a sore subject. Before his friend could answer, the waiter came by to take their order. When they were alone again, Paris gently prompted Dante once more.

“Something is going on that you’re not telling me. Does it have anything to do with these two new siblings?”

“Somewhat, but not really. Actually I was supposed to meet with one of them, but he never showed up. I don’t really know what to make of it.”

“But that isn’t the issue weighing the heaviest on your heart, is it? Your younger brothers have found mates; I imagine it would make you lonely. Or... is it GianMarco’s mate in particular?”

Dante glared, then growled. “If you fucking read my mind again without my permission I’ll kick your ass!”

Paris sighed. “Your mind was open to me. Very bad form, Dante. I’ve obviously struck a nerve, so I’ll drop it. You have my apologies,” he murmured, taking a sip of his wine.

Dante raked his fingers through his hair. “I don’t mean to sound like a jerk, but it’s been ridiculously stressful recently. All of my emotions are in a jumble. I’ve tried very hard to hide my feelings for GianMarco’s bloodmate, but it’s difficult when she’s nearby. What’s worse is she’ll be giving birth to their child soon, and the entire family is expected to be there. I know it will hurt Marco, but I just can’t do it. Being around her is too painful.”

“She must be extraordinary.”

“Yes,” Dante answered tightly, as though the words were hard for him to get out. “She’s the kindest, sweetest woman you’ll ever meet.”

“Is she a great beauty?”

Dante frowned. “To be honest, no, but she’s attractive, pretty. Once I knew her, though, she easily became one of the most beautiful women I’ve ever met.”

“When did you realize you felt this way about her?” Paris asked delicately.

Dante slowly unfolded a tale of a vulnerable woman who’d somehow managed to steal a little bit of the love Dante thought he’d only had for his brothers. From what the vampire told him, Paris began to form his own opinion, but he waited patiently for his friend to finish.

“That’s about the whole of it. I’m about to cause an even bigger rift between Marco and me, because there’s no way I can be there for the birth of their child when I can’t help but wish it were mine instead.”

“Don’t you think you’re being a little selfish? This isn’t about you. All you have to do is show up for a couple of hours, say the appropriate words, and then leave. It would mean so much to your brother and his mate. Besides, what’s the point of pining for a woman who doesn’t return your feelings?” Paris hadn’t meant to be so harsh, but he hated to see his friend torture himself.

Dante’s eyes glowed briefly. “Kind of like you with your Zahara, says the pot to the kettle?”

This mention of her name was like a shot to Paris’s gut. “Zahara loved me, or at least she could have, had I not been such a fool. And she was mine, if only for a brief time. Can you say the same? I have never lusted after another’s mate.” The second those words left his mouth, Paris knew he’d gone too far. “Dante--”

The vampire rose, extracting his wallet from his pants. “I believe it’s my turn to pay.” He threw a few fifties on the table before turning on his heel.

“*Skata*,” Paris muttered as he got up and chased his friend outside. “Dante, wait.” He grabbed the vampire’s shoulder before he could get any further ahead on the street. “I’m sorry. That was uncalled for. You confided in me, and I repaid your trust with a jackass statement.”

Under his grip, Paris felt the tension slowly ease from Dante until his friend’s body visibly relaxed. He pivoted to face Paris. “Apology accepted. *Dios*, I’ve made quite a few jackass comments myself lately, so I can’t hold that against you. Besides, we’ve been friends for too many years. What’s a couple of insults between friends?”

Paris grinned, smoothing a hand over his tailored Jhane Barnes slacks. “Do you really intend to miss the birth of your brother’s child? I know that kind of thing isn’t as important in the vampire culture as it is with shifters, but I’ve never seen anyone closer to his siblings than you.” He continued more soberly. “Have you thought that perhaps you’re not truly in

love with Maggie? If she were your bloodmate, you would have gone into *la morte dolci* already, am I not correct?" The condition, similar to blue balls in a human male, created pain that was tenfold in vampires; if not relieved by the person they most desired, *la morte dolci* caused the affected vampires to go insane and turn rogue.

Dante inhaled sharply. "Yes, you're right. So what the hell is wrong with me? Do you think I want to feel this way?" Pure frustration radiated from the other man.

"I have a theory."

"By all means, share, because I'd certainly like to understand what's been happening to me."

"I think you're so used to taking care of your brothers that when they stopped needing you so much, Maggie happened to fill the void during the night you helped GianMarco get through *la morte dolci*. It's quite possible your feelings are confused, because you want to have someone to protect and love, too."

Dante's eyes were unfocused, as though he were examining himself internally. "Perhaps, but in the meantime, I'm still stuck with these inconvenient emotions."

Paris shrugged. "I suppose we all have our crosses to bear, but this will pass, I am sure."

"And you? Are you still pining for Zahara?"

Paris's jaw tightened. "Do I make it so obvious?"

"Not really, but I upset you when I mentioned her earlier. You're my friend, and just as you have taken time to try to help me, I need to say this. Isn't it time to lay her ghost to rest? It's been nearly two hundred years without a trace of her."

"Don't you think I know that?" Paris snarled, clenching his fists. "But something has happened in the past few days that gives me hope."

"*Dios*, Paris, not again. You're always turning up something, and each time it leads to a dead end."

"You won't say so when you see what I found. Look, instead of standing here on the sidewalk like a pair of bums, why not come back to my place in the Hamptons? I'll have the valet bring my car around. As a matter of fact, what you need is a break, my friend. Away from everything -- your brothers, the Underground, all of it."

The vampire chuckled. "You make it sound so easy."

"It is. Come to my house for a couple of weeks. You'll have the peace you desperately require. Persephone usually comes and goes, and Constantine prefers to stay in the city with Aries. You won't be disturbed."

"I can't impose."

"Ridiculous. You won't be imposing at all."

Dante rubbed his chin, as though considering the proposition, before a lazy grin touched his mouth. "I appreciate the offer. I think I'll take you up on it."

\* \* \* \* \*

Sarah climbed out of her bedroom window and fell onto the fire escape before bouncing back to her feet. She gasped in horror as the men banged on the door she'd just barricaded behind her. There was no doubt in her mind that had she not pushed her bed against the entrance, the intruders would have burst through already. Unfortunately, she had a sick feeling those barriers weren't going to hold them off for very long.

Sarah stomped her heel against the fire escape stairs. Damn, it was caught!

How had they found her? She should never have gotten so comfortable in her space, should never have believed that maybe she'd finally escaped. Now they were here.

Sarah pushed at the stairs with her free leg, using every ounce of strength in her body. This time the old rusty steps creaked before releasing her heel, but not before her bedroom door splintered apart.

Her heart pounded so hard she was sure it would pop out of her chest. She quickly fled down the fire escape and leaped to the ground. Now that she was outside, perhaps she'd get better reception on her cell phone. At least long enough to complete her call to Constantine. As she raced down the sidewalk, ignoring staring pedestrians, Sarah pulled her phone from her pocket and rapidly punched the "Talk" button to redial the last call.

A frantic voice answered. "Sarah?"

"Yes!"

"Thank goodness! Where the hell are you?"

"I'm moving toward the Apollo Theater."

"Okay. Try to stay in that area. We'll sniff you out."

"But if you're able to sniff me out, then so will they. I can't stick around. I have to get out of here. I--"

An arm wrapped around her waist and a hand clamped over her mouth. Sarah dropped her phone in shock as she struggled against her captor, panicking as she fought against the vise-like grip. Why was everyone walking around like they didn't see what was happening to her? In this neighborhood, someone's business was everyone's business.

She bit down as hard as she could on the callused flesh covering her lips; the acrid taste of blood filled her throat. Her assailant's hand fell away, accompanied by guttural curses, but his other arm remained firm around her body. Sarah brought her heel down in the same move she'd used on Aries. This time, the grip on her loosened enough for her to wiggle away. Her freedom was short-lived, however; she abruptly lost the ability to move.

She felt as if she'd been turned to stone. No matter how Sarah tried to twist or turn, something kept her still. Even attempting to scream did no good, because her lips and vocal cords were as immobile as the rest of her. This was going from bad to worse.



Just as the thought crossed her mind, Sarah found herself lifted in the air, moving toward an alley near the block containing the Apollo. *Dear Lord, please help me.* She kept trying to shout, but couldn't. That strange scent she'd come to fear filled her nostrils, and another odor she couldn't quite put her fingers on. Then her body was suddenly slammed into a brick wall by an invisible force, sending a streak of pain up her spine unlike anything she'd ever experienced.

She fell to the ground moments later, stunned. When Sarah tried to stand up, barely aware that she could move now, a wing-tipped boot connected with her ribs, spinning her onto her back and smashing the wind from her lungs.

"That's for making us chase after you, cunt!" a deep voice said over her. Someone grabbed her ponytail, lifting her head to meet pitch-black eyes. She stared at his harsh and swarthy face; there was a cruel tilt to his mouth. And was that some sort of a tattoo on his neck?

Somehow, she knew this man wasn't a shifter, but he *was* something else -- another nonhuman. The man sneered. "Gage will be pleased that we've finally caught up with you."

It took Sarah a few more seconds to fully realize she was no longer frozen. She swung at him, her fist connecting with his stomach. Gasping out a startled *oomph!*, he released her.

"You'll pay for that, you half-breed whore." The man shot his hand out, and Sarah flew through the air, her body crashing against the wall again. This time she hit head first.

Dazed, aching more than she'd ever felt, she gingerly held her head as stars danced before her eyes, thankful that her neck hadn't snapped. But her enemy wasn't through with her yet, because she found herself hurled again. This time she remembered to put an arm out to cushion herself. The sickening crunch of broken bone assailed her ears before more jagged shards of pain shot from her fingertips to her shoulder. She vaguely heard another voice.

Her attacker's companion spoke gruffly. "Neyo, stop this now. Gage said to keep her alive."

"Shut up, you stupid mutt. You take orders from me when we're on mission and not the other way around. Have you forgotten you live only due to our sufferance? Gage may want this one alive, but he didn't specify what condition she had to be in. He could always heal her once we get her back at the lab."

"I don't think--"

"I didn't bring you here to think, only to track her scent. Now, shut the hell up, or you're next!"

Sarah was in agony, but she managed to lift her head slightly to see who the other man was. She saw a tall blond with a full beard... and what seemed to be a touch of sadness in his hazel eyes. It was almost as if he didn't want to be there. He shot her a sympathetic look.

Gritting her teeth, Sarah struggled to raise herself by using her good arm to steady herself and shoved her legs and back against the alley wall, inching her way up. Her left arm ached like a son of a bitch, as did her head and ribs.

The one called Neyo chuckled. "So, the half-breed has spirit. I'm going to enjoy breaking it, and I won't even use my powers. When he approached her and would have punched her in the face, Sarah managed to dodge the blow and found the strength to swing a foot up to kick Neyo directly in the balls. Hard.

He went to his knees. "You... fucking... c-cunt," he managed to wheeze out. He glared at his partner. "Wh-what are you... standing there... for, you idiot!... Grab her!... The whore... needs to be taught... a lesson."

Sarah looked to her left -- a dead end -- and realized she'd have to run past the large shifter to get out of the alley. If this was the day she was going to die, Sarah figured she wouldn't leave this earth without a fight. For insurance, she dealt Neyo another kick, this time to the face. The stomach-turning sound of bone being crushed accompanied her foot connecting with his nose.

Cradling her injured arm, she attempted to dash past the shifter, but he was much quicker than her and wrapped his powerful arms around her. Sarah screamed from the excruciating pain to her broken limb. It hurt so much that she felt like passing out. Instead, she tried to find a way to make him release her.

"Stop fighting so much, half-breed. You'll only end up hurting yourself more," the shifter whispered in her ear. His heavy accent sounded Eastern European. As his arms tightened, she found it harder and harder to breathe with every passing second.

Neyo got to his feet then, one hand still cradling his crotch, the other his nose, his dark eyes blazing with fury. He ran toward Sarah with a clenched fist, and she braced herself, but she felt nothing. Instead, a loud, menacing growl filled the air. She opened her eyes in time to see Neyo tossed aside.

"Doesn't really seem like a fair fight. A shifter and a wizard picking on a half-breed bitch," Constantine observed.

The shifter let Sarah go, and she dropped to the ground, nausea pounding through her from all of her various aches. Aries appeared abruptly, large teeth bared, and went for her ex-captor's throat, even as Neyo dove for Constantine. Sarah watched hazily as the four men battled -- Aries against the blond shifter, and Constantine against Neyo, who must be the wizard.

Even though pain seared through every part of her body, she had to help somehow. Slowly rising to her feet, each breath a painful effort, she ignored the splintering aches as best she could, then studied the alley for something heavy. Spotting a brick, she picked it up and made her way to the wizard, who shot a bolt of light at Constantine, sending the shifter airborne.

Sarah brought the brick down on the back of Neyo's head with all her available might, making him tumble to the ground. She then kicked him in the ribs a few times, returning the favor plus extra. "Asshole," she muttered.

Constantine was by her side in an instant. "Let me handle this, Sarah." She gladly fell back, her strength depleted, as Constantine picked the woozy wizard up by the collar and shook him. "Who are you?"

Neyo spat blood in his face. "Wouldn't *you* like to know? Kill me now if you want, shifter, but there's more of us. They'll come for her, and you. We won't be stopped."

Sarah's eyes widened as she watched Constantine's fist become covered in dark brown fur. Instead of slamming his fist into the wizard's face as she expected, his clawed hand ripped a chunk of Neyo's throat out. Then she turned away in horror as Constantine's jaw unhinged, and he took a bite from the dead wizard's neck.

She looked toward Aries and saw him, blood covering his mouth, standing over the blond shifter. There was bright-red fluid everywhere. How in the world would they get out of here without anyone noticing? Sarah leaned weakly against the wall, cringing when Constantine held out his hand to her. She shook her head very slowly.

"We have no time to waste. If there are more of these bastards, there's no telling when they'll come sniffing around, looking for their friends."

When Sarah still didn't take his hand, Constantine's gray eyes flashed with obvious annoyance. With a growl, he scooped her into his arms, careful of her injuries. Still, she cried out, hunched over her broken arm, and would have protested strongly, but she was too depleted.

"Come on, Aries. We have to get out of here before the wizard's cloaking spell wears off."

"I can walk." Sarah wanted to insist more vehemently, but she hurt too much.

"You'll come with us to my father's house. It will be safe for you there until we determine what to do with you."

"But I need to go back to my place and get my things."

"Like hell you will."

"I can take care of myself."

"Yes, we saw how you were doing just fine before we came along. No, Sarah. When you called for my help, you entrusted me with your safety. From this point on, I'm the boss of you."

## Chapter Six

Constantine held Sarah cradled against his chest as she'd drifted in and out of consciousness. He was sure she was in a great deal of pain. Her left arm was swollen to twice the size of her right one, her head had a huge knot on it, she moved as though her ribs bothered her, and she had scratches and bruises on every visible inch of skin. But once he bathed her and had her tucked in, he would heal her. If his father was at home, the process would happen much quicker. Constantine was relieved when Aries pulled the Hummer into the driveway, and he saw his papa's silver Bentley parked in front.

The three-hour drive had been an uncomfortable ride for Constantine, not because he was covered in blood or that Sarah was particularly heavy, but every now and then, she'd squirm on his lap, making his cock stir. Carnal images of him sliding his rod between the cheeks of her rounded ass caused his pulse to race. He wanted Sarah, and he would have her.

As he carried her inside the house, she gained consciousness. His father and sister raced to them, followed by Dante Grimaldi.

Paris frowned, eyeing the bundle in Constantine's arms. "We heard you pull up, so I glanced out the window. What happened to you, and who is this?"

"Papa, stop asking so many questions. It's obvious she's hurt. Let's get her upstairs and cleaned off."

When Persephone would have given him a hand, Sarah's eyes widened before she buried her head against Constantine's chest.

"No. Don't touch her. She's not very trusting of our kind."

Persephone scowled. "But I only want to help her."

Sarah turned frightened eyes in Paris's direction, and the alpha paled. "Zahara," he whispered. Then, to his son, "Who is she, Constantine?"

“We’ll talk later, Papa. She’s in a great deal of pain. I had a look at the damage; her left arm is broken, and she’s been injured elsewhere. I haven’t had a chance to give her a proper examination.”

Paris didn’t seem to hear, his gaze never leaving Sarah’s face.

“Papa?”

“She has Zahara’s eyes,” Paris said, as if in a daze.

What the hell? How could Sarah be connected to a woman who was supposed to have been dead for nearly two hundred years, painting or no painting? “Not now, Papa.” Constantine shook his head impatiently. “Persephone, would you prepare the guest room for Sarah?”

His sister nodded. “Of course. I’ll go run her a bath, too.” She turned and headed back up the stairs.

His father’s friend, Dante, had been silent up to this point, but he now stepped forward. “Perhaps I can be of some assistance. There are healing agents in your saliva, but it won’t ease her pain or mend her nearly as fast as my blood.”

Though Dante Grimaldi was like a much beloved uncle to him, Constantine wasn’t so oblivious that he didn’t realize Dante’s effect on women. Even Persephone was a little in love with him. Constantine didn’t want the centuries-old vampire anywhere near his woman.

*His woman.*

Was Sarah really his? He’d just met her today, for chrissake. It would be selfish of him to refuse the vampire’s offer just because of this irrational jealousy that came from nowhere. “Fine. I’ll call you when you’re needed,” Constantine answered less than graciously.

By the time he made it upstairs with Sarah, Persephone had a bubble bath running in the guest bathroom in the room next to his. Constantine laid a trembling Sarah on the bed. Her eyes were glazed.

“Hurts,” she whispered.

“I know, *mana mou*. It will be better soon. I’m going to have to undress you now, okay?”

“Mmm,” was her only response.

He caught the bottom of her shirt and ripped it apart, knowing that if he tried to pull it over her head it would cause her further pain. “I’m sorry about the shirt, Sarah. My sister has tons of clothing; you two are about the same size.”

He discarded her shoes and jeans next, gasping when she lay in only her panties. Under her clothing and beneath the evidence of her recent ordeal, Sarah’s body was even more magnificent: her small breasts were high and firm, capped with dark chocolate nipples. They seemed to be made for his mouth. Her waist was so tiny, he was sure he could span his hands around it without even trying. He could also make out the dark hair between her thighs through her thin, white, cotton panties.

*Down, boy*, he thought as his cock jumped to attention. Constantine licked suddenly parched lips. Unable to help himself, he ran his fingertips along the top of her breasts. Sarah moaned, insensible again, moving her head from side to side. He immediately snatched his hand away. What was he thinking? He felt like such a pervert for lusting after an incapacitated woman.

“Ahem.” Persephone made her presence known, shooting him a knowing look. Her gray eyes, so similar to his, twinkled with amusement. “When you’re finished groping her, how about letting me help her to the tub?”

“Don’t you have someone else to pester?” he snarled.

“Uh, weren’t you the one who asked for my help in the first place? You know, I didn’t think you’d stoop so low as to molest an unconscious woman.”

“Shut up, brat.” He stood up, not trusting himself to be so close to Sarah in her state of undress. “Go ahead and help her out of her panties.”

Persephone removed the last bit of Sarah’s garments. “She’s pretty. Who is she?”

“Her name is Sarah. She’s a half-breed.”

Persephone snorted. “Duh. I figured that much myself. How did you meet her? How did this happen to her?”

“Let’s get her in the tub first; then you can ask questions. Better yet, I’ll put her in the tub, and you can find something for her to wear. I’m sure you have plenty of items in your closet that haven’t seen the light of day since you bought them.”

Just as he was easing Sarah into the bath, Persephone returned. “I laid out a couple pairs of pajamas. I’ll go through my things and find her more outfits later. Now, will you answer my questions?”

“I know as much about her as you do. I only met her today.”

Persephone’s eyes shot up in surprise. “Really? Who would do this to an obviously defenseless woman -- unless she’s not as defenseless as she seems. Maybe you shouldn’t be getting tangled up with this one.”

“And would you have me turn my back on her when it’s clear she needs our help? She was terrified once she realized what Aries and I are. Hell, she didn’t even know she was a half-breed until we told her.”

“How could she not know? Doesn’t she shift during the full moon?”

“That’s what I thought, too, but it’s possible she loses the presence of mind to remember when it happens.”

“But who would be after her?”

“I wish I knew myself. Her attackers today were a wizard and a shifter. Sarah took a pretty good beating but, to her credit, she got in a few good licks of her own.” Constantine couldn’t help the pride in his voice.

He held Sarah upright as Persephone gently bathed the injured woman's cuts and bruises. Sarah whimpered when Persephone ran the sponge along her left arm.

"Easy," Constantine hissed.

"I'm being as gentle as I can. For a woman you've just met today, you sure seem to be awfully protective of her." A slow, sly smile tilted the corners of her lips; Constantine wanted to throttle her. He loved his sister more than life, but at times she could be a major pain in the ass.

"Stop reading more into the situation than there is."

"Who's reading more into the situation? It's staring me in the face. I think you should probably go talk to Papa. He's anxious to speak to you. While I'm getting her dressed, you can send Dante up."

"Why don't you go downstairs and get him, and I'll stay here with Sarah?"

Pursing her lips, Persephone lifted a dark brow. "I'll make it clear to Dante that she belongs to you. Besides, I hardly think he's in the state of mind to molest your Sarah."

"She's not my Sarah."

"Could have fooled me."

"Constantine!" Their father's voice sounded like he called from the bottom of the staircase. Constantine could hear the impatience in it.

Persephone shook her head. "Go. If you keep him waiting much longer, he'll come get you himself."

He shot one last look at Sarah's unconscious form before relinquishing her to his sister's care. "Fine, but hurry up and get her covered. I don't want Uncle Dante seeing her like this."

"And you act like you don't care," she teased.

Constantine glared at his sister, seething as he left the bathroom. Damned pest.

Paris was waiting in the living room for him, pacing back and forth. Dante sat in the far corner of the room, a glass of red wine in his hand.

"Is she ready for me?" the vampire asked.

"Give it five minutes, please. Persephone is getting her out of the bath. She'll call you when she's ready."

"Okay. I think I'll wait for her in the hallway. I'm sure you two have plenty to say to each other." With one smooth movement, the vampire left his seat and the room, leaving father and son alone.

"Papa, I had to bring her here. I couldn't very well leave her to fend for herself."

Paris held up his hand with a strangely urgent expression in his eyes. "You did the right thing. I wouldn't have expected you to leave a vulnerable cub on her own, but I need to know who she is. Where did you meet her?"

Something was definitely off. The other time he'd seen that look in his father's eyes was when Paris had sent Constantine on his task of finding the mysterious S.E.D.

"What's going on, Papa? When you looked at Sarah, you called her by the name of your former betrothed. Sarah looks nothing like the woman in that painting."

"Her eyes, dammit! They're Zahara's eyes!"

Constantine frowned harder. "Even if that is so, isn't Sarah rather young to be Zahara's daughter? Your mate disappeared nearly two hundred years ago. There's too much of a time gap."

"I've thought about that, but those eyes say otherwise. Explain how you met her."

Constantine could see the tension coursing through his father's body, the intensity of those ice-blue eyes burning through him. "Papa, have a seat; I'll fix you a drink."

"You think I'm in need of calming down? Just tell me how you met her!"

Constantine cocked his head. His father rarely raised his voice, which made him realize how important this was to the alpha, and the situation all the more odd. "Relax, Papa."

Paris sighed, raking his fingers through his hair. "I'm sorry for snapping at you, but I really need to know."

"You look stressed. Sit, I'll get you that drink, then tell you everything you want to know."

"I don't need a drink." Paris dropped onto the recliner with apparent resignation.

Constantine dropped onto the coffee table across from his father and relayed the events of the day, leaving nothing out. "...and you know the rest. I brought her here because it's clear that whoever is after her won't rest until she's dead."

Paris remained silent as though trying to absorb all he'd been told.

"You're right. We'll have to keep her here for a while, although I'm not sure that this is the safest place. Maybe we should take her to Circe, where no one gets on or off without my permission." Circe was the family's private island, just off the coast of Greece. Many members of their pack also resided there. Sarah *would* be better off there.

"That might be an idea. You were pretty shaken when you saw Sarah. Could it be possible she hails from the same pack as Zahara? That would explain the slight resemblance."

"No. I don't think so. Pack Nkruma keeps to itself in its part of the world. After Zahara went missing, the alpha decided to isolate them from other packs. They all live in their own contained community, only venturing out periodically to seek mates. Besides, their pack is so small they have to stick together to fend off any Hunters." Paris's brow furrowed. "Wait a minute. You said Sarah was attacked by a wizard and a shifter?"

Constantine nodded.

"Do you remember any visible tattoos or marks on their bodies?"



Constantine tried to think back to the fight. "I think so. The wizard had a half-moon tattooed on his neck, surrounded by some odd symbol."

"Hunters," Paris muttered.

"There's something else I forgot. Before I killed the wizard, I touched his mind to see if I could get some information. I got nothing but vague impressions, except the name Gage. Do you think he could be their leader?"

Paris's eyes widened with apparent alarm. "Gage? Are you sure?"

"Pretty sure, why?"

Paris leapt to his feet and began pacing back and forth across the room again, his movements agitated. "Gage was the leader of a renegade group of Hunters and well known for his methods of torture. He disappeared several hundred years ago and was believed to have been terminated since hunting shifters was outlawed by the council. I'll need to question Sarah when she's healed."

"Can't we just find this Gage guy and take him out? I'll do it myself."

Paris shook his head. "It's not that simple. Gage isn't the typical Hunter. If he wants Sarah, he won't rest until he and his henchmen have her. But I don't think he wants to kill her. Whatever he has in store for her is far worse, I feel."

Constantine's heart dropped.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sarah's eyes popped open as a sweet, metallic-tasting liquid flowed down her throat. She gagged, tried to turn her head to the side, but her chin was caught in a firm grip.

"Lie still and drink."

Reluctantly, she swallowed; she didn't want to, but the cobalt eyes looking down into her own eyes had a hypnotic quality to them. The stranger put his wrist against her lips again. A drop of crimson plopped onto her mouth from the open cut on his flesh.

"No," she groaned.

"Drink, Sarah. You will heal much faster if you do. I'm sure the pain has already lessened."

Sarah moved her injured arm; to her surprise, he was right. She only felt a dull throbbing.

"Go ahead and take more of my essence," he coaxed.

She did as she was told and sucked his flesh. The taste of his blood was surprisingly pleasant. As the fluid filled her mouth, she could feel her strength returning.

He pulled his wrist away after several moments and licked it. "That's enough for you, I think. You should probably rest for a little longer before your bones are fully mended. Are

you feeling better?" He smoothed her hair out of her eyes with a smile. The man wasn't a shifter or a human. What was he? Wizard? Vampire?

He was certainly good looking, but he didn't make her heart leap like Constantine did. As she thought about the shifter, she wondered where he was. "Where's Constantine or Aries?" she asked warily, feeling uneasy with this stranger.

"Downstairs. Relax."

"How can you say that after the day I've had?" She sat up. "I have to get out of here." When Sarah made a move to roll off the bed, the man held her firm.

"We're not your enemy."

A woman Sarah hadn't noticed standing by the bed till then spoke for the first time. "For Pete's sake, Uncle Dante, can't you tell she's scared out of her mind? Considering what she's been through, cut the kid some slack. I'll take it from here."

"My apologies. I sometimes get carried away in my role of nurturer." He chuckled lightly as he stood and faced the woman. "Don't tire her out with all the questions I'm sure you're dying to ask."

"Shoo." She pushed him out of the bedroom and closed the door behind him. It was obvious there was a lot of affection between the two. Instinct told her she would come to no harm from them, but years of fending for herself made it difficult for Sarah to trust anyone.

The woman turned to her with a brilliant smile. She had to be one of the most beautiful people Sarah had ever seen. She was tall and statuesque, with the proverbial hourglass figure. Her hair fell around her shoulders like a cape of ink-black silk. Warm gray eyes sparkled, a contrast to her dark coloring, and reminded her of Constantine. Were they related? "Are you... are you Constantine's sister?"

The woman grimaced, plonking onto the bed beside her as if they were life-long girlfriends. "Unfortunately, yes. I'm Persephone." She rapidly switched topics. "So, I heard you have some pretty powerful enemies."

Although Sarah hadn't had a chance yet to form a complete opinion on this woman, there was no doubt that Persephone wasn't shy. "I'd rather not talk about it." She studiously looked at her fingernails.

"Don't worry. You can tell me. We'll help."

"Look, Persephone, I appreciate all that you and your brother have already done for me, I really do, but I'm feeling much better now. If you return my clothes, I'll be out of your hair in a jiffy."

Persephone crinkled her nose. "Are you serious? If you leave, whoever is hunting you could kill you this time." A smug grin crossed the female shifter's face. "Besides, I don't think Constantine will let you go very far."

Sarah narrowed her eyes. "What do you mean?"

Persephone rolled her eyes with a sigh. "He has a thing for you. You were kind of out of it when he brought you home so you weren't aware, but he would barely allow anyone else to come near you. He'd still be here if Papa hadn't called him." She gazed at Sarah solemnly. "Why would you leave when you're in such great danger? We can protect you. You're a half-breed, and while you're stronger than most mortals, something far worse could happen to you compared with what you experienced earlier."

"You don't understand. I can't impose on your family. Having me here will put you all in danger. I can't have that on my conscience again."

"Again?"

"I'm trouble."

"You don't look like it to me."

"You're being deliberately obtuse. You and your family will be better off without me here. By the way, who was that man -- or should I ask what was he? He's not a shifter."

"No. He's a vampire. That was my Uncle Dante -- well, not my blood uncle but a good family friend."

Sarah's jaw dropped. "Wait a minute. A real-life vampire? I drank vampire blood? Oh, God. Does that mean I'll become one, too? I'm an artist. I need lots of light, and I like to paint the sunrise sometimes. Oh, this really and truly sucks." She grabbed her head as she thought about the ramifications of being nocturnal for the rest of her life. Just dealing with shifters and wizards was hard enough, but now she might be a vampire as well? This was just too much.

Persephone let rip a loud belly laugh. Sarah glared at her. "What's so funny? Why did you let me drink his blood if you know he's a vampire?"

"How in the world have you existed without knowing such basic things? I mean, even a half-breed should know something of her heritage."

"That's beside the point. Am I going to be a vampire or not?"

Persephone explained patiently. "Not. Trust me. Becoming a vampire is far more complex than just drinking a little blood, and I hate to disappoint you, but vampires aren't nocturnal. The real-life versions are nothing like those caricatures in movies and books. The only reason you had to drink Uncle Dante's blood was because it has healing agents in it. That's how your arm was able to mend so quickly,"

"Oh." Sarah felt like an idiot. It was nice of the Kyriakis family to offer her information and shelter, but she couldn't stay. "I have to go. Kindly return my clothes." She slid off the bed, surveying the luxurious guestroom for her things.

"Can't do that, hon. Your clothes are in the trash." The shifter shrugged, an amused smile on her lips.

"Then would you lend me something? I'll mail it back to you when I can."

"Can't do that, either."

“Why the hell not?” Sarah was extremely irritated now.

“Because I’d never hear the end of it from my brother, and I like peace in my life.”

Sarah looked down at the white silk pajamas with red polka dots that she was wearing. They were more than comfortable, but she’d look ridiculous appearing in public like that. Still, her embarrassment wasn’t enough to keep her here. The last thing she wanted was for the Kyriakis family to suffer the same fate as her previous caregivers.

She spotted her ankle boots and picked them up.

Persephone frowned. “What are you doing?”

“I think it should be obvious; I’m leaving.” Once her shoes were on, she moved to the bedroom door and opened it.

Persephone placed a hand on her shoulder, halting her. “Sarah, you’re being silly. You can’t leave.”

Sarah shrugged the hand off. “I can, and I will.”

A tall, dark man with glowing blue eyes approached them. “On the contrary. You’re not going anywhere.”

## Chapter Seven

Sarah backed away from the formidable figure.

“Papa! Shame on you for frightening Sarah like that! What’s wrong with the men of this family that they must resort to threatening defenseless women? Sheesh!”

The newcomer’s icy blue gaze never left Sarah’s face as he addressed his daughter. “Your friend Isis has arrived. I suggest you go downstairs and keep her entertained.” He spoke in lightly accented English. Sarah wasn’t good with accents, but she assumed it was Greek. It sounded rather sexy on him, even if he was a bit scary.

Persephone shook her head. “I don’t think I should go just yet. I--”

“This isn’t up for debate, cub.” The man spoke in a voice of dead calm, but Sarah didn’t miss the undercurrent of steel in it.

Persephone gave Sarah’s arm a light squeeze of reassurance. “Call me if you need me,” she offered, before heading down the stairs.

Sarah held up her hands. “Look, I don’t want any trouble. I’m going right now, and then I won’t be your problem anymore.”

“Your ears must have been damaged in the scuffle. I reiterate: you aren’t going anywhere.” The deep-throated voice oozed authority. If she didn’t find this man so damned intimidating, he’d be very handsome. Even if it hadn’t already been established that he was Constantine and Persephone’s father, no words would have been necessary to explain the connection; the resemblance was obvious. Were there any ugly people in this family?

“Look, pal, this is America. You can’t just hold me here.”

“If I must tie you down, you’ll not exit these premises without my say-so.” He bared shiny white teeth. “As alpha of this pack, I’m not in the habit of repeating myself. Since you are in my home, you fall under my care. Come with me, cub.” When he turned and began to move down the hall, Sarah stayed rooted to the spot, astonished and indignant.

*Who does this guy think he is?*

He swung around with a growl. "I said, come!" His sharp command set her into motion. She followed him downstairs and through a long corridor. Sarah felt as though she were being led to her doom and held herself tightly to keep from shaking apart.

*Calm down, Sarah. I'm sure once this talk is over, he'll let you be on your way.*

*Not on your life,* a voice filtered into her mind.

What the--?

*No more questions until we get to my study.*

This situation was getting weirder by the minute. Soon she'd be too scared to think, because it was obvious this man could read her mind. Figuring there was no use in arguing, she walked inside the room he indicated. It was the size of her entire apartment, and every piece of furniture was clearly expensive, though it wasn't ostentatious. A large bay window looked out on a picturesque lake. Kyriakis senior shut the door quietly.

"Have a seat, Sarah."

"Where?" She was afraid to make a wrong move.

"Anywhere you'd like, cub. There is no need to be frightened of me."

She took the windowsill. There was something peaceful about the outside scene displayed before her. "Why do you keep calling me that?"

"Calling you what?" He took a seat behind a large oak desk nearby.

"Cub. I don't like it."

"I mean no offense. It's a term of affection among our kind. You are of a certain age and I'm significantly older, so to me, you are a baby -- a cub, if you will."

She lifted her chin. "My name is Sarah, not cub."

"As you wish." The alpha inclined his head graciously. "Excuse me, where are my manners? I'm Paris Kyriakis. You've already become acquainted with my cubs, Constantine and Persephone."

"You look more like their brother."

A slow smile tilted his lips. "Do you find it very hard to believe I fathered them?"

"Well, you look young."

"I am immortal. We don't tend to age past thirty-five, although some of us may still acquire distinguishing features throughout the years. My grandfather, for instance, received his first strands of gray hair at the age of four hundred. Now that I've reached that age, I have yet to show any, but perhaps one day I will."

Sarah shrugged. "While this is all very enlightening, would you mind telling me why you've brought me here, and why I can't leave? Where is Constantine?"

Paris gave her a smile as if she were slow-witted. "My son is freshening up from his little adventure today. I have some questions of my own, Sarah, so please bear with me. First,

I must ask your pardon for my reaction to you earlier. I think the stress of my business is getting to me. Perhaps I need to take the vacation my cubs claim I need.”

“What do you do?”

“I own a shipping conglomerate.”

“Constantine explained earlier, but it still amazes me that immortals have their own businesses. I feel like I should have noticed the existence of shifters before now.” There was so much she still had to learn.

“People see what they want to. You’d be surprised what’s out there.” He cleared his throat. “Sarah, who were your parents? Constantine relayed the story you told him, but I need you to fill in the blanks. What were their names? My son tells me you’re unsure of which parent was the shifter.”

“I guess one of them had to have been, right?, but I don’t know which. And I only found out what I am today. All these years, I just thought I was some kind of genetic freak, but this is much worse. To top everything off, some really bad guys are after me. While I appreciate your hospitality, I can’t put your family in danger. I have to leave.”

“Don’t you think that’s our decision?”

“But--”

“No buts, Sarah. Please. Tell me your parents’ names.”

“My father was Roland Devereaux, and my mom, Anna.” Sarah could have sworn she saw disappointment on Paris’s face. “Why do you want to know?”

“Just curious, I suppose. What do you remember about them? I understand you lost them when you were young.”

“Yes. I was five.”

“Is it difficult to talk about them?”

“Not really. It was so long ago, but sometimes I dream of them.”

“Your mother -- do you remember her maiden name?”

“No, although it was probably something foreign. I don’t think she was from this country. She had a bit of an accent, but I really can’t say from where.”

“I see. What else do you remember about her?” he asked quietly, his piercing blue eyes never leaving her face.

“She was very beautiful. I remember her scent especially -- she always smelled of jasmine and fresh rain on a spring day. Whenever she smiled, it made me feel really special. She was very petite, too, because I remember her barely reaching my father’s chest, and he was a large, raw-boned man.” A small smile touched her lips as the memories slowly came back to her.

“She sounds absolutely enchanting.”

“Oh, she was.”

“What did she look like, facially, I mean?”

Sarah frowned. “Why do you want to know all these things?”

“Humor me.”

“Well, she was really dark, but she had the nicest skin I’ve ever touched. My mother liked to wear her hair wild and loose around her shoulders. I used to sit on her lap for hours, just running my fingers through that soft mane.” Tears sprang to her eyes. It shouldn’t have hurt after all this time, but the thought of someone brutally murdering her gentle mother tore at Sarah’s heart.

“My sincere condolences for your loss. I know you may think I’m a little crazy, but you remind me of someone I used to know, and I thought--”

“What?”

“I thought you could possibly be her daughter, but you’re rather young -- twenty-nine I’ve been told.”

“Thirty soon.”

“Yes, well, you’ll thank me for forcing you to stay with us when Constantine takes you to our island. You’ll be safe there, and when you go into heat, which will be soon--”

“Hold on. Do I even want to hear this?”

“You need to know what to expect.”

Though Constantine had brought up the matter at Aries’s apartment, Sarah had had enough. She needed to get away from this place. “Look, I refuse to deal with this right now, because I’m out of here, with or without your permission.” She rose and headed to the door, but Paris was in front of it almost as if he’d teleported there. She kept forgetting these people were not human.

“Please, Mr. Kyriakis.”

“It’s Paris, and for the last time, the answer is no.”

She shook her head, but something caught her eye. A painting in the corner of the room, near the entrance. Why hadn’t she noticed it? Had she not been so tense, Sarah wouldn’t be so oblivious. That had to be the reason, otherwise, she would have recognized the portrait right away. “That painting.”

Paris looked at it, too. “Lovely, isn’t it? Do you like it?”

“I can’t believe Stella did this to me,” she muttered.

“What are you talking about?”

“My art agent. She knew that piece wasn’t for sale, but she sold it anyway.”

A confused expression flitted across Paris’s face. “Your art agent? You’re not saying--”

“Yes, I painted it.” Suddenly, Paris grabbed her arms in a bruising grip, his eyes glowing that icy blue again. She slapped at his hands. “You’re hurting me.”



Instead of apologizing and loosening his fingers, his hands dug harder into her arms. "Who is she?" His teeth grew to sharp fangs.

"My-my mother..."

"You said her name was Anna!"

Sarah didn't care for his accusatory tone, the loud voice in which he spoke, or the way he held her. "It was, I swear. Now, let me go!" She shoved him as hard as she could, breaking free from him before she yanked the door open and tore down the hall.

Come hell or high water, she was getting out of this madhouse.

\* \* \* \* \*

Constantine heard the commotion as he descended the stairs. Sarah!

He headed toward the sound of her voice, which was coming from where his father's study lay. Just as he turned into the corridor, something slammed into him, knocking him back a few steps.

He caught the frantic half-breed in his arms, holding her close. "What happened?"

"I don't want to be here anymore."

Constantine saw his father walk toward them. "I believe the blame rests squarely with me. I frightened her."

Constantine glared at him. "What did you do? Why is she shaking like this?"

"I got a little carried away in questioning her. As it turns out, you completed your task for me and didn't know it."

"What are you talking about?"

"Sarah is S.E.D."

Constantine looked down at the trembling woman in his arms. "You never said you were an artist."

"You never asked. What does it matter?"

"Oh, it matters a great deal, especially when you claim to be the daughter of a woman who disappeared nearly two hundred years ago." Paris's voice were was level.

Sarah sighed. "I don't understand any of this, but I'm sure you'll tell me about it."

"Papa, give her some time to adjust to what she's learned today before you throw any more information her way. Can't you see she's tired and had enough?"

At first, Paris looked as though he'd refuse, his mouth a tight line. "Fine. We'll talk later. Why don't you take her to her room? She'll need her rest if we're to leave for Circe in the morning."

"You're coming? I thought you had important business to handle."

"They can be rearranged."

Sarah tried to squeeze out from under Constantine's grip, but he was too strong. "Are you two deaf or something? I'm not going anywhere. You can't just kidnap a person and get away with it."

Paris shot him a meaningful look. *She's a feisty one. I'll have to reassess my opinion of half-breeds. She'll bear watching; just tread lightly with her, son.*

Constantine lifted a brow. *Are you warning me off?*

*No. I'm advising you to be careful.*

*If you're finished lecturing me, I think I'll get Sarah to bed.*

*As long as you don't take her to bed.* His father shut his mind to him then and looked at Sarah. "I'm sorry for frightening you, twice in one day, no less. We'll talk again." He turned abruptly and headed back to his study.

Sarah began to wiggle again. "Let me go, you big gorilla."

"If I do, will you promise not to run?"

"Even if I tried, you'd catch me."

That was true, but he still didn't want to turn her loose. Her nearness was doing things to his body he had thought he would never experience.

Against his better judgment, Constantine released her. They had only taken two steps toward the staircase when Sarah spun around and kicked him in the knee before taking off in the direction of the front door.

"Dammit!" He grasped his injured limb. That little spitfire was more cunning than a ninja. Ignoring the pain in his knee, Constantine raced after her, something primitive pounding within his blood. The need to claim her was strong. He caught up to her just as she made it to the entrance. Pulling her roughly against him, he brought his mouth down to her ear. "You promised you wouldn't try to escape."

Sarah shrugged. "I-I made no such promise."

"So this is how you want it?" When she remained stubbornly silent, Constantine turned her around and tossed her over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes.

"Let me go you, big bully." She kicked wildly and beat at his back and legs with her hands.

"Be still or else," he warned.

Her fists continued to pound on his back, and her legs continued to flay the air. Losing patience, Constantine brought the flat of his hand sharply on Sarah's curvaceous ass. She howled. "Oww!"

"Then be still!" He strode to the stairs.

"Wow, Con. When I left you, I didn't realize you'd manhandle her," Persephone observed.

"Shut up, and stay out of it."

“How can I, when everyone can hear what’s going on?”

Sarah kicked him again, and he smacked her ass even harder than before.

“Constantine!” His sister’s eyes widened in horror. “You’re hurting her. She’s crying.”

Ignoring Persephone, Constantine took the stairs two at a time. When he reached Sarah’s room, he slammed the door behind him and locked it, then dumped her unceremoniously on the bed. To his shock, tears were indeed rolling down Sarah’s face. Her bottom lip was captured between even white teeth.

“Shit,” he muttered. “Sarah, don’t cry. I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

Her response was to roll over and expose her back to him.

“Would you at least listen to me while I’m trying to apologize?”

“Can’t you just leave me alone? I think I’ve been through enough today, thanks. I’m... oh, what does it matter?”

Taking a seat next to her on the bed, Constantine reached out to stroke her hair. “Sometimes I don’t know my own strength. You’ve been so brave today, and it made me forget that you’re not a full-blood.”

“I’m not crying because you hurt me. It didn’t hurt... that much.” She sniffed.

“Then why the tears, *mana mou*?”

“It’s just the culmination of this entire rotten day. When I woke up this morning, I was still my own woman, but then you walk into my life, and your family tries to take it over. I don’t know what I have to do to make you all understand that if I stick around, your lives are at risk. I just want to go home.”

His heart went out to her. Despite their short acquaintance, he’d discovered Sarah was a woman of courage and compassion. But she was also a lonely female who wasn’t used to letting anyone in. Constantine wanted to smash those barriers of hers. He stretched his body next to her, spooning her delicately curved back.

Sarah’s shoulders shook. He nuzzled the nape of her neck, wrapping an arm around her and pulling her closer. Listening to her soft cries tore at him. How could he feel so much for someone in so short a time?

“Sarah, it’s okay. I’ll keep you safe.”

“You don’t understand. I was doing just fine on my own.”

He turned Sarah over to look into her tear-streaked face. “You don’t have to be alone anymore.” Unable to go another second without feeling her soft brown skin beneath his lips, he pressed kisses along the wet tracks on her cheeks, tasting their saltiness. She looked at him with sad, soulful eyes. His gaze slid to her lips.

Oh, that mouth. That sweet, plump mouth. With a groan, Constantine covered the very flesh he’d been fantasizing over since their first kiss. Sarah whimpered beneath his

urgent lips, neither responding nor protesting. His tongue slid forward, gently pushing against the seam of her mouth.

He was crazed with wanting to savor her over again, pleading with her, "Open for me, *mana mou*. Please, I think you want this as much as I do."

Sarah's lips remained shut for a brief moment before she parted them with a sigh. He explored the sweet recesses of her mouth, leaving no inch unexplored. The tangy, sensual flavor of her sent a wave of passion spiraling up his spine. His cock grew hard as he rubbed it against her.

Sarah moaned and wrapped her arms behind his neck. Constantine felt as if he'd burst into flames with lust for this woman. He'd shared many kisses over his lifetime, but none quite as intense as it always seemed to be with Sarah. With her, he never wanted the embrace to end. His fingers dug through her soft hair as he held her head still, deepening the kiss.

Sarah slowly moved her tongue forward to meet his, tentatively, then retreated. When she slipped it toward his mouth again, Constantine caught it with his lips and sucked deeply. She groaned, her fingers gliding up and down his back. He lifted his head after several moments, his breathing ragged.

"You're so lovely," he whispered. Kissing wasn't enough; Constantine wanted more. Needed more. Pulling back slightly, he undid the top two buttons of her pajamas, but Sarah caught his hands in hers. Her lovely eyes were filled with apprehension.

"I... I can't do this."

"Why not?" he growled, too aroused to stop even if he wanted to. He slipped his hand beneath the elastic of her pajama bottoms, rubbing his fingers against the crotch of her panties. "You're wet. I could smell the fragrant scent of your pussy from the moment our bodies touched. How can you deny us?"

Sarah gasped, wriggling against his intimate caress, trying to twist away, but he wouldn't let her. "Please. I've never... I--"

Constantine frowned. "You've never lain with a man before?"

Her eyes darted away as if she were ashamed. Constantine hadn't known what to expect, but it certainly hadn't been this, despite Aries's earlier words about her probably being untouched. He let the revelation saturate his mind before a new feeling filled him.

He was pleased no one else had had her. The very idea of another man touching Sarah gnawed at his gut. When Constantine took her, she'd be well and truly his. And he *would* have her.

Cupping her face in his hands, he turned her head until their eyes met. "Sarah," he whispered, brushing his lips against her. "It's all right. You have nothing to be ashamed of. Remember when I told you I'd never hurt you?"

She nodded.

“I meant it.”

When she didn't speak, he traced the outline of her lips with his tongue. “Tell me you want this.”

“Yes.”

## Chapter Eight

Sarah was probably making the biggest mistake in her life, but the blood pounding in her ears and tingling in her pussy made it impossible for her to think straight. All that really registered was how wonderfully he kissed and how heady it felt to have his powerful body pressing hers against the mattress.

“Oh, that feels wonderful,” she sighed, as Constantine grazed her neck with his lips, nibbling and licking her flesh.

“And I’ll make you feel even better.” Unbuttoning the remainder of her pajama top, he pushed the cloth aside, revealing her highly sensitized breasts. No other male had ever seen her in this state of undress before, and the intensity of his gaze sent smoldering waves of desire through her.

His eyes were full of lust and possessiveness. “Gorgeous,” he whispered, drinking in the sight of her as if he couldn’t get enough. “Tell me what you want me to do.”

“Whatever you want.”

Constantine chuckled. “That’s what I was hoping you’d say, because I’ve been dying to do *this*.” Lowering his head, he captured one hard nub of her breast into his mouth. Sarah was set ablaze with passion, debilitated by it. She raised her pelvis, grinding against him, sure she was on fire. His mouth toyed with her nipple, tugging, licking, and nuzzling it, making her body throb from his thorough ministrations.

She twined her fingers through the thick locks of his dark mane as he transferred his attention to her other peak. Her head thrashed back and forth on the pillow. There had been so many nights when she’d lain in bed at night with an unfulfilled need that she could barely handle. Touching herself had given her temporary relief, but her own clumsy motions were nothing like what he was doing to her.

Constantine scorched her skin with his questing lips, making it impossible for her to do anything other than to surrender to the burning flames he ignited. He slid lower down her body, using his tongue to blaze a path. Sarah wanted to feel his bare skin against hers.

“Let me touch you,” she pleaded.

“No. I can’t let you do that.”

She frowned. Sarah realized she was inexperienced, but did her touch revolt him? “Why not?”

“Because if you put your hands on me, I’m not going to be able to control myself.”

His response set her mind at ease, but it still left her unsatisfied. “But I want to touch you. I want you to feel like I do.” When she attempted to lift his t-shirt, Constantine grabbed her wrists and kissed each palm. “No, *mana mou*. Tonight, I want this to be just about you. Relax. Let me take care of you.” When she began to squirm, he placed a hand against her belly to hold her still.

Sarah stiffened as he began to slide her pajama bottoms down. “Constantine...” she said tentatively.

He pressed a kiss on her stomach. “It’s okay, *mana mou*. Let me love you.”

She should have told him no, but Sarah was so damn excited, the word would not leave her mouth. Constantine suddenly raised himself to his knees, his gray eyes instantly changing to an eerie shade of yellow; then they began to glow. His canine teeth lengthened before her eyes.

It was like a bucket of ice cold water thrown on her.

Sarah pushed at his shoulders, but he didn’t budge. “Get off!” Trying to squeeze out of his grasp was just as futile. What was happening? Why was he changing into his beast before her?

“I’m sorry; sometimes when one of my kind is in deep lust, the shift can be uncontrollable.”

She shook her head, not caring for his explanation, even if it was legitimate. All she could see was a monster. “I don’t like it. I don’t want to do this anymore.”

“I’m not going anywhere, Sarah. You belong to me now.” With one sinewy hand, he ripped her panties off in one clean swipe. When Sarah would have screamed, he covered her mouth with hers, swallowing the attempt.

She pounded against his hard chest, but he remained unfazed. His tongue plunged into her mouth, claiming and devouring her. She didn’t want to, but Sarah could feel herself responding to his blatant demand.

Something within her almost rejoiced in his forcefulness, that he needed her so much, but she still couldn’t shake the image of those glowing eyes. She tensed when the sharpness of his teeth nipped her tongue. He raised his head.

“I don’t want to hurt you, but I can’t stop, Sarah. Dear God, I can’t.” Then he buried his head against her neck, laving and sucking her flesh. Even though her skin was dark, she knew there’d be marks later.

She should have fought him still, told him this wasn’t right, that she didn’t want him, but her body was no longer her own. Where had this wanton abandon come from?

She cried out when he parted her thighs. “Oh, God!”

His glowing eyes twinkled with triumph. “You thought you could deny me, but you want this just as badly as I do. Your pussy is so wet and ready for me, it’s going to be easy for me to claim you right here and now, isn’t it?”

Sarah gasped. The words wouldn’t come.

“Isn’t it?” he roared.

“Yes!” Her voice cracked with a tinge of fear, but the fear wasn’t as strong as the fiery lust tearing through her.

He smirked. “That’s what I thought.” Constantine lowered himself until she could feel his warm breath against her hot sex.

“Please,” she whispered, unsure of what she was pleading for. No one had ever touched her this way; she’d never allowed anyone to get this close to her.

“Oh, I intend to please you.” A long tongue slid along her damp folds. “Mmm, so flavorful and tangy.”

Sarah placed her hands on his shoulders with the intention of pushing him away, but the second her fingers connected with his heated flesh, she held on tight instead.

Two long fingers separated her labia. “You have a beautiful pussy. Chocolate on the outside, pink on the inside. I’ll enjoy thoroughly tasting it -- as much as you’ll enjoy me doing it.” Constantine pressed a deep and passionate kiss against her clit, making Sarah buck her hips. “So responsive,” he murmured, before circling her blood-engorged bud with his lips. Sensations she’d never thought existed flowed through her.

He took his time licking and kissing the swollen little nubbin until Sarah could do nothing but babble incoherently. Her head continued to move back and forth on her pillow, her nails digging into his shoulders, breaking the skin. The intense need within her grew stronger with each second he stayed between her legs. Constantine’s fingers gripped her thighs before he slipped his velvet tongue into her channel.

Dear Lord, his tongue was heavenly; it glided deeper than she thought was possible. He pulled it out slightly, then pushed back into her.

“Oh, God,” she moaned again. Sarah knew she shouldn’t like this so much, especially with what he’d almost become, but rational thinking had long since fled.

Releasing one of her thighs, Constantine caught her clit between his thumb and index finger. The way he rolled and squeezed the highly sensitized bundle of nerves had Sarah



thrashing wildly on the bed. His tongue slid out of her soaking box and moved to the crevice of her ass.

She shrieked. "What are you doing?"

"Loving you," he growled resolutely. She tried to scoot away from his seeking mouth, but he held her firm, his strength undiminished. The rough side of his tongue circled her tight ring forcefully. Sarah wasn't sure how she felt about this new experience.

"Relax," he whispered, as he caressed the taut hole with his breath, sending electric jolts racing up her spine. This was wrong; she liked this too much. What in the world had this man done to her?

"Please don't do this," she said, but in her head she was screaming, *Please don't make me feel this way*. A burst of heat suddenly exploded within her. Sarah's body began to shake uncontrollably.

"That's it, don't hold back," he whispered.

"I... what...?" Of course she'd pleased herself before, but self-gratification had never resulted in a feeling this tumultuous. Her orgasm was fast and hard. Constantine buried his face between her thighs again and sucked the flowing juices from her moist channel. Sarah bucked her hips against his face until she no longer had the strength to do anything other than lie on the bed, hazily mulling over what she had just experienced.

He slid next to her and placed a kiss on her cheek. "Sarah, you don't have to worry again. You're not alone."

That was exactly what she was afraid of.

\* \* \* \* \*

Gage stroked his pet's head absently. Why the hell hadn't he heard from Neyo yet? Or Craven? Useless bastards.

"Wouldn't you think I'd know better than to send someone else to do the job when I can do it myself, right, my beauty?"

Pet whimpered through her muzzle. He laughed softly, loving the look of fear in her eyes. "Ah, my pretty. I see that makes you unhappy."

She whimpered again.

"Had you not been a bad girl, I wouldn't have to go to such lengths to keep you in line, but I must. You need to be taught a lesson. The time is drawing near when I shall make my move, and then you'll be honored to serve me."

Pet turned away, her dark fur standing on end. With the heel of his boot, Gage kicked her in the side. "Be gone with you, then. Why I put up with you, I don't know."

With a howl of pain, tail between her legs, Pet scurried away and cowered in her "naughty" corner, just the way he liked her. She turned her head only once, her eyes flashing

before she quickly looked away. That brief look of defiance told him he hadn't broken her yet, but when he finally did... ah, it would be sweet.

Gage uncurled himself from the large chair in his sitting room and paced the floor. Where the hell were those two, he wondered yet again. Was Neyo having problems handling the shifter? He was pretty sure Craven's will had completely snapped, but he'd made the mistake of believing such of another once before.

No. That time had been his only slip.

Footsteps pounded in the hallway, creating an echo. Lifting his head with a frown, Gage saw one of his hunters. "Jackal, I believe you were instructed that I was not to be disturbed."

The small man nodded his head reverently. "Yes, Master, but I thought the visitor at the door might be of some interest to you."

"Visitor? I'm expecting no visitors. Did it state its business?"

"No, but--"

"Then why would you think I might wish to see it?!" he roared. He wasn't known for his patience, and he was fast losing what little he had. How dare this minion make decisions about whom he would or would not want to see? He'd deal with Jackal later -- after this unwelcome guest was taken care of.

"It's a shifter."

That got his attention. "A shifter? Here to see me?" Gage and his group were the most feared Hunters in the land. Why would a lone shifter venture here when it'd meet certain doom? "Send the shifter in, and make sure the door is guarded so that escape is not possible."

Jackal bowed slightly before hurrying out of the room.

The only shifters within the walls of his manor were those he'd tamed; Gage considered all others renegades. He waited, electricity flowing through his fingers.

Pet groaned, as if sensing the tension in the room. "Hush, you silly bitch, or the muzzle will remain on for the next meal as well." That shut her up.

Jackal returned, pushing the shifter forward.

"Tell your man to take his damn hand off me before he loses it."

Gage chuckled when he saw who his guest was. "You're welcome to try, but I'd like to point out to you that, small and wiry as he may be, Jackal is much stronger than he looks."

The shifter snarled. "Is this how you treat me, when I can offer you so much?"

Gage narrowed his eyes. No one talked to him this way, especially not a dirty shifter. Pushing his temper back, he pinned a smile on his face. After all, while the creature was still of some use, Gage couldn't kill it -- yet.

"Leave us, Jackal, but remember what I said."

"Of course, Master."

“Have a seat, and tell me what has brought you here.”

“Your two henchmen are dead. It seems your prey has eluded you yet again.”

“*What?*” he yelled in surprise.

A smirk crossed the shifter’s lips. “You heard me just fine, Gage. There’s no need for me to repeat myself. Nor will I.”

Gage sneered. “Your arrogance will be your downfall, shifter.”

“You won’t lay a finger on me.”

Gage clenched and unclenched his fists. “You sound so sure.”

“My pack is strong. If you harm me, they’ll come for you.”

“Or it’s quite possible they’ll rejoice in your death -- when they learn they have a traitor in their midst. You play a dangerous game.”

“I’m doing this for them.”

Gage laughed, feeling amused for the first time since his visitor had arrived. “Don’t insult my intelligence or yours by perpetuating such a lie. You’re doing it for yourself. Now, getting back to the original business... how do you know Neyo and Craven are dead?”

The shifter shrugged. “I have my sources.”

“And the half-breed? What of her?”

A cruel smile twisted the shifter’s lips, but it said nothing.

“If you know something, you had better tell me... unless you have a death wish!”

“Ha! Like I said, you don’t dare touch me. You have neither the balls nor the strength to defeat me. In fact, you Hunters are jokes; you’re not even real wizards, forced to use black magic as you are.”

Enraged, he sent a bolt of lightning from his hand in the shifter’s direction. Easily side-stepping it, the creature laughed. The blast, however, hit the unfortunate Pet in her corner. She howled through her muzzle.

“You still keep her around? I would have thought you’d have gotten rid of her a long time ago. Let me do it for you. It would be my pleasure.”

“You’re really asking for it.” Gage was finding it more and more difficult to hold in his rage. “Where is the half-breed?”

“Right now, she’s headed to a place even you can’t penetrate. It’s heavily guarded.”

“There’s nowhere I can’t go.”

“If you tried to get on the island, you’d have difficulty escaping with your life... but I, on the other hand, would have no problem.”

He eyed the shifter suspiciously. “What do you mean?”

“I could bring her to you... for a price.”

“Get out. I make no deals with shifters. Besides, I have no evidence you’re telling the truth.”

“Fine. When word gets out Neyo and Craven are dead, your men will start to question your competence.”

He took a deep breath to keep himself from making another foolish move. By God, he would enjoy killing this one when the time came. “What pack is protecting the half-breed?”

“Pack Kyriakis.”

“The Kyriakises are again sticking their noses where they don’t belong? They should have learned their lesson when I took care of Spyros. The fool confronted some of my men, trying to get to the bottom of why so many of his pack were falling prey to the feral virus. He even tried to battle me, but he didn’t know about my secret weapon, naturally. But of course his pack members thought the Pack Nkruma curse was the reason he succumbed to the feral virus himself. Perhaps in a way it *was* the curse. Sometimes things can be spoken into existence merely by anyone with a modicum of magic within them, and Nana Nkruma is no lightweight. It’s quite possible Pack Kyriakis wasn’t susceptible to the virus before Nana opened her mouth that day.” Gage laughed, feeling smug. “Very well, if they wish to tangle with me again, they’ll pay dearly.”

“This score you’d like to settle must be strong indeed,” the shifter taunted.

“What is your price to bring me the half-breed?”

“I get the honor of killing her... and your pet.”

Gage pretended to consider this. “You have a deal. But you must bring the half-breed to me unharmed. Once I’ve extracted what I need, you’re welcome to do as you like with her and... Pet. Though I’ll be sad to part with Pet, I suppose what you’ll bring me will indeed be a most fair exchange. However, if you should breach our agreement, it’s your hide we’ll be hunting next. Now, leave.” Gage called to his servant, who appeared within seconds.

“Master?”

“See our guest out, and ignore my earlier instructions.”

“Yes, Master.” Jackal nodded before leading the shifter out of the room.

If what Gage had just been told was true, something had to be done right away. As much as he would have liked to take the Kyriakis alpha for his own reasons, the pack was still far too strong.

He’d bide his time and let his shifter ally lead the half-breed to him. He’d focus on getting her first, and then he’d deal with his other problem later.

Gage went to his pet, kneeling down and stroking her. She again turned her head away from him, pushing her nose against the corner. He ran his hands over her smooth, soft fur. “Did you hear that, Pet? Soon I will have her, and there’s nothing you or the precious Kyriakis pack can do about it. It will all be mine!”

## Chapter Nine

Paris waited for his driver to pick him up and take him to his private jet; he was anxious to talk to Sarah again. Although he'd been reluctant to let Constantine take her to Circe without him, he'd had some sudden urgent matters to attend to. Apparently, Eleni had stayed true to her word and kept away but, in the process, she'd also decided to take a sabbatical from Kyriakis Shipping, leaving a note with Paris's secretary that simply said, "I quit."

Let her go, then. Eleni was always making threats of this nature and, like all of her tantrums, he took none of them seriously. In fact, it would be better if she didn't return to the company. While she was good at what she did, her constant strong-arm tactics and her "sabbaticals" were getting to be too much.

Paris glanced at his watch. Five minutes late. This tardiness was unacceptable.

"I thought I heard you still here. I can imagine the dressing down your driver will receive," Dante observed, as he entered the hallway where Paris stood. Paris glanced at his friend, who was visibly more relaxed than he had been when he'd arrived the week before.

Paris had a sneaking suspicion this had a lot to do with the lone wolf his daughter had befriended, but he decided not to comment. "You know me so well."

"I'm glad you haven't left yet, actually. I wanted to thank you for the refuge you've given me. It means a lot."

Paris shrugged. "What are friends for? I'm sure you'd do the same for me."

"Of course I would. In a heartbeat."

"While I'm gone, please watch Persephone for me. Make sure she doesn't get into too much trouble. I fear that friend of hers..."

"Isis?" The vampire seemed to perk up. "I find her rather charming, although she's hiding something."

Paris snorted. "Lone wolves usually have a lot to hide."

"No. That's not what I mean. Whenever I talk to her... well, it seems as if she's specifically hiding something from *me*."

"You could be imagining things." He glanced at his watch again, trying to keep his temper in check. His driver would get more than a mere dressing down if he didn't arrive soon.

"I thought I might have been at first, but now I'm not so sure,"

"Are you smitten with her? Even I can see she's quite beautiful."

"I don't know what I think about her, to be honest. I enjoy her company, and her bluntness is refreshing," Dante mused. "She's... intriguing."

"More so than your Maggie?" Paris could have kicked himself for bringing up such a sore subject with his friend, but to his surprise, Dante didn't seem to mind.

"I didn't say that, but conversations with her have not been boring -- yet."

"Just be careful with her. Though Isis seems nice enough, I think she could be quite dangerous."

"Yet you allow Persephone to remain friends with her."

Paris chuckled. "You know my daughter. Were I to dig in my heels on this matter, she would rebel. Better to keep them both under my watchful eye than to have Persephone defy me behind my back. Who knows what those two would get up to, then?"

"You should give your cubs more credit. You've raised both of them well, and I'm sure the decisions they make in life are to your credit."

"Don't misunderstand; I'm proud of them both, but I worry. Wait until you have a few of your own."

The vampire smiled, a wistful look entering his cobalt eyes. "Maybe one day."

Paris would have said more on the subject, but his driver chose that moment to pull up. "Finally." He turned to his friend. "Remember, you may stay as long as you like. I don't know how much time I'll be spending on Circe since I need to get to the bottom of a few things where Sarah is concerned. The first and most important is who is after her."

"I would have thought you'd be more interested in her parentage."

"Well, there's that, too, of course, but once I determine the threats to her are no longer there, I'll have time to explore the other things."

They clasped hands.

"Be careful, friend. And should you need my assistance, I'm only a phone call away."

Paris nodded. "Thank you." He was anxious to get to Circe. It had not escaped his attention how his older cub had become possessive of Sarah in such a short time. He wasn't sure he liked the situation.

\* \* \* \* \*

Constantine brooded as he watched Sarah walk along the beach from his window. She paused to pick up what looked like a shell and examined it, gently running her finger around its curved design. More than anything, he wanted to be that shell. He wished her hands were on his body.

Aside from that one time at Hampton Manor, he'd been very careful not to touch her. It had been difficult not to claim her that day, but Constantine had forced himself to be satisfied with only pleasuring her. He had to assess his feelings for her; in addition, he wanted her to get used to the idea of having him around.

There were two problems with his decision, however. Today was Sarah's birthday, and tonight was a full moon. Not only would she go into heat very soon, she'd shift, neither of which she would know how to handle on her own, especially concurrently. Already he'd instructed his unmated male relatives to stay on the other side of the island, although when her scent was at its strongest, his commands wouldn't mean a damn thing. Still, if anyone was going to help her though her time of need, it would be him!

For the past few days he'd been with her, Constantine had learned more about the courageous half-breed. She still hadn't opened up to him completely, but he'd found out enough to know she had had a lonely life. It tore at his heart to realize how many years she'd lived in uncertainty, both from those who pursued her and her own belief that she was some kind of oddity. The shame and the self-disgust Sarah had experienced saddened him.

If he claimed her tonight, and he intended to, there'd be no turning back. She would be his forever -- he would ensure her immortality. On the flipside, he would also belong to her from here until eternity. There'd be no more random blondes in nightclubs. No more carousing in the streets.

He should have known, of course. From the moment he'd set eyes on her, he'd sensed she was his bond mate. Constantine wouldn't make the same mistake his father had made and let his woman get away without letting her know exactly who she belonged to. He didn't know if he was in love or not, but he did know she was his and his alone. He'd have to make certain to establish that fact with her.

Constantine watched her throw the shell into the sea, her wild hair flowing past her shoulders blades and blowing in the wind like a dark cape.

He desperately wanted to dig his fingers through those soft tresses as he plowed between her silky, chocolate thighs. He didn't care what his father said. Sarah would belong to him by the end of the night.

Recalling the last conversation he'd had with his father before bringing Sarah to Circe angered him. He and Sarah had been on their way to the car that was waiting when Paris had stopped them...

“Sarah, go ahead to the car, please. I need to have a few words with my son before the two of you leave. I wish you a safe journey, cub-- little one.”

“Sarah,” she stated firmly.

Paris smiled at her with indulgence. “Yes, of course, my dear. A lovely name for a lovely young lady. Now, if you’ll excuse us.”

She nodded in acquiescence and went outside, both men keeping an eye on her to see she actually got into the car. To Constantine’s relief, she did.

“What is it you wanted to talk to me about? I thought we’d covered everything already. I’m to keep Sarah on Circe and see if I can get anymore information out of her before you arrive. I got it.”

“I trust that you’ve become well versed in what needs to be done, but that isn’t what I wanted to discuss.”

Constantine furrowed his forehead in consternation. “Then what?”

“I’ve seen the way you’ve been looking at her, and I have a pretty good idea of what happened when you took Sarah to her room last night. I asked you to protect her, not fuck her.”

His face grew hot with embarrassment. If anyone else had spoken so casually about Sarah, they would have gotten punched in the face, but this was his sire, and he forced himself to remain respectful. “Papa, really, must we have this discussion now?”

“I can see no better time to talk than now. You’re about to take Sarah to our house on Circe. You’ll be spending a considerable amount of time with her. Although I know she’ll go into heat shortly, I ask, as favor to me, that you do not touch her.”

Constantine frowned. Where the hell had this come from? “Why not? She’ll need me.”

His father ignored his question. “There are ways she can get through this without sex.” Paris handed Constantine a small green vial. “Here. Take this potion. It helps your sister when she goes through her cycles. It should relieve Sarah through the night when her desire grows too strong for her to bear.”

Constantine took the tiny bottle reluctantly, stuffing it in the front pocket of his leather jacket. “And what about me, my aches? How am I going to handle the situation when her scent becomes irresistible? Already she’s beginning to emit pheromones that have me going out of my mind.”

“The potion will tame the scent a bit.”

“Only a bit.”

“You’ll have to be strong, my cub.”

“Why? Especially when there’s no need. I can help her, and she can help me.”

Paris snarled, his irritation clear. Good, now Paris felt as Constantine did.



“Must you challenge my every request? For once, is it not possible for you to do as I ask without giving me grief?”

“That was an unfair statement, and you know it, Papa.”

Paris sighed, raking his fingers through his hair in apparent frustration. “Fine. Just stay away from her in the biblical sense, okay? Sarah is not the one for you.”

“Are you kidding me?”

“You know me well enough to have learned I don’t kid about such matters.”

Constantine raised a brow. “Your snobbery is showing, Papa. I know how you feel about half-breeds, but Sarah is different. I can’t just ignore what’s happened between us, and how she makes me feel.”

“Well, do it. I repeat, she’s not for you. I’ll be joining you in a few days, and I expect my orders to be obeyed.”

Not trusting himself to speak, Constantine had stormed off and joined Sarah in the car to their private airport. The flight had been terse and silent. Once they had reached the mainland on Crete, they’d taken a helicopter and had landed on Circe. Constantine had reiterated his vow that he’d have Sarah -- no matter what his father had said. He’d dug into his pocket and pulled out the green vial, eyeing it with annoyance. Making sure he’d been unobserved, and with a harsh expletive, he’d thrown it on the ground and crushed it beneath his heel.

He now studied Sarah as she bent over to pick up another shell. How could he resist the pretty picture she made? Constantine went outside and gathered a few wild hibiscus that grew alongside the house before heading toward the beach.

As though sensing his presence, Sarah raised her head, a slight smile tilting her full lips.

“Good afternoon, Sarah.” He handed her the flowers. “For a beautiful woman.”

She took them with trembling fingers. There was still a reserve in her eyes where he was concerned, but soon it would be gone when Sarah was officially his. “Thank you. They’re gorgeous.”

“But not more than you. Would you care to walk with me?”

“Sure, I’d like that.”

They strolled in silence as Constantine tried to broach the subject of tonight. “Happy birthday, Sarah. I know you said you didn’t want me to mention it, but I couldn’t go the length of the day without at least acknowledging it,” he finally said as a lead-in to what he really wanted to discuss.

“Thanks. You know, it’s kind of funny, but I nearly forgot about it.”

“You’re rather young for that. When you become my age, then birthdays seem less important, but this birthday--”

Sarah turned to him, holding up her hand. “Look, I appreciate the well wishes, but I’ve never been particularly fond of my birthday and really don’t like celebrating it. My foster family used to make this big to-do, which always embarrassed the hell out of me, but I went along with it. I pretended I enjoyed the parties and festivities because they meant well and I didn’t want to hurt their feelings, but on the inside, I cringed each time. When I was finally on my own, birthdays weren’t on my list of priorities.”

“But we should celebrate your thirtieth. For a half-breed, it’s your official step into womanhood.”

“Oh? And how old is your sister?”

“What does she have to do with anything?”

“I guess in my roundabout way I’m trying to figure out if she’s stepped into womanhood, as you so delicately put it. I guess I wouldn’t be able to tell with my untrained eyes since your kind stops aging after a certain point.”

“She’s nearly a hundred.”

“So she’s already had her jaunt into womanhood.”

“Yes, although it’s quite different for half-breeds and full-bloods. Persephone had her first cycle around the age of twenty. It varies, really. Some bitches can go into heat as early as their teens, but because half-breeds have so many human characteristics, it takes them until around thirty to have their first heat cycle.”

“I see. Sort of.” She shrugged. “Why do I get the feeling there’s a reason you’re telling me this?”

“Because there is. But that aside, perhaps you’d like me to take you to the mainland for some shopping. I was thinking Crete. What do you say, *mana mou*?”

“I really wish you’d stop calling me that, and you’re side-stepping the question.”

He sighed. She was much too sharp for him to argue with. “In addition to your birthday, there’s a full moon tonight. But I think you’re already aware of that.”

She looked away from him, staring into the blue-green sea. “Yes, I know. I’ll change tonight, won’t I?”

“Yes, but I’ll be here with you. The time has come for you to embrace your shifter side.”

For a moment, Constantine didn’t think she would acknowledge his words, but Sarah finally nodded. “I’ve given this some thought over the past couple of days. It’s inevitable, right?”

“You don’t have to make it sound as if you’re going to face uncertain doom.”

“How would you feel knowing that lurking within you is some wild beast you can’t control? I’m sure it’s easy for you because you’ve lived with this all your life.”

He took her hand in his and forced her to face him. "It isn't like that. What you are is not a freak of nature, and you're not a beast."

"I'm not an idiot. As the sun moves further down the horizon, I feel the changes within my body. I know the moon will soon be out, and then what? I'll become the very monster I've been running from all these years."

Constantine gripped her shoulders, his heart going out to her. What he really wanted to do was drag her down into the soft, wet sand and make love to her until nothing existed for Sarah except him, her, and the roar of the crashing waves.

"It doesn't have to be that way. You have me," he whispered, trying to drive his meaning home. She must have sensed the wild and raging lust coursing through his system, because she pulled out of his grip and took a few steps back.

"This is something I'll just have to deal with on my own. I've been doing it all this time before, so why should tonight be any different?"

Constantine's patience finally snapped. This zany woman just didn't get it. "Sarah, would you stop being so goddamn obstinate and accept help when it's being offered? Not only are you going to shift tonight, you're going to experience your first heat cycle when the moon is at its highest. When that happens, you're going to need more than just yourself to get over this. You'll need me and my cock to help you through the night."

Sarah's face went ashen. "No!"

He was by her side within two strides even though she attempted to retreat from him. Constantine hauled her into his arms and covered her mouth in a hungry, burning kiss. His tongue pushed between her firmly shut lips, sampling the delectable flavor he knew belonged to him and him alone. He wouldn't let her deny him of what they both wanted.

He captured her chin to still her head. "Oh, no, you don't. You can try and fool yourself, but you can't fool me."

Sarah groaned. "Why are you doing this to me?"

"Because you feel it, too. From the moment our eyes locked, you knew it would come to this. You knew you were mine."

"No! I don't belong to anyone but myself."

Constantine gritted his teeth at her stubbornness. "Maybe that was so before, but not anymore. I've tried to be patient with you these past few days, to give you a chance to accustom yourself to my presence. From here on out, I'm the only man in your life."

"No," Sarah uttered again, albeit unconvincingly this time. She was irritating him no end with her refusal to surrender to the undeniable passion simmering between them, the passion that threatened to explode. He covered her luscious mouth once more, fiercer and more hungry than his earlier embrace.

His kiss gave her no room to resist; rather, it required her absolute compliance. His cock twitched against her thigh, and he ground and molded his body to her now-submissive form. Constantine didn't believe for a moment that she didn't want this.

He could smell her arousal. He'd even go as far as to bet her panties were damp, but he'd hold off testing that theory -- for now. There'd be plenty of time tonight to reacquaint himself with her pussy.

Constantine's tongue explored the recesses of her mouth, making Sarah moan and writhe against him. Soon, she was gripping his arms tightly, not to shove him away, but to hold him closer. He loved the way she groaned in his mouth. When her tongue snaked out to greet his, he nearly lost it. Even though this was not the first time he'd kissed and touched her, he still couldn't believe how much and how quickly she turned him on.

Constantine forced himself to slow down then, satisfied with her response.

Unable to hide the triumph from his voice, he said, "Do you see? We were meant to be together, no matter what you say. Tonight, when you go into heat, you're going to be burning for something between your legs. I vow that the only man who's going to ease that ache will be me!"

Then he walked off, gratified that he left her with open-mouthed astonishment written all over her face. Maybe it had been harsh to spell things out that way, but it had had to be done. She belonged to him, and no one would stand in his way of claiming her -- not his father, not even Sarah herself.

## Chapter Ten

Sarah kept her door locked. Despite what Constantine had said, she was determined that he wouldn't have his way in this matter. She didn't appreciate him arrogantly telling her she belonged to him and that he would make her his.

Normally, Sarah could have laughed it off and told him he was crazy, but she didn't think she had the strength. After all, whenever he touched her, she lost control. What was it about him that made her react so shamelessly?

Though he was the first man to do such wonderful things to her body, it hadn't been from the lack of opportunities open to her. When Sarah had been in school, she'd had her fair share of offers to initiate her, but being aware of her differences had made her shy away from physical contact. A few shared kisses had been the most she'd ever experienced before Constantine had completely shattered her world.

As much as a part of her wanted to give in to his demands, the realistic side of her screamed "No!" By becoming even more deeply involved with him than she already was, he could very well be the next loved one she lost.

Loved one? *Did* she love him?

She wasn't sure, but over the past few days, Sarah had certainly let her guard down with him more than with anyone from the time her parents were killed. That was what made this entire situation so scary. She didn't want to fall in love, because life had long since taught her the harsh lesson that when she got close to people, they were doomed.

Constantine's sexual prowess wasn't the only thing that made keeping her distance difficult, though. Besides being gorgeous, he made her laugh with his amusing anecdotes and stories of his adventures. And then he sometimes had that way of looking at her that nearly made her feel safe, even though she knew she'd never completely be secure.

She walked to the bay window and sat on the sill, pulling trembling knees against her chest. Resting her head on top of them, she looked out at the sky. The moon was starting to rise. A shiver ran up her spine. Already she could feel her insides moving around. Before she used to think it was some kind of sickness she had to endure, but obviously that was not to be the case. Unlucky her. Sarah didn't want to change; she'd fight it if she could.

The pounding on the door broke her from her silent reverie. "Sarah, open the door. I know you're in there!" Constantine sounded angry.

"Please go away. I can cope on my own." She jumped when a ferocious howl rent the air outside.

"Open this door at once, Sarah! I'll have none of your foolishness."

"Constantine, please! I can't deal with you tonight."

"I'll give you three seconds to open this goddamn door, before I knock it down."

"You wouldn't," she challenged, looking around for a means of escape. If she could just get out the window...

"One!"

Sarah raised the window.

"Two!"

"You're being ridiculous!" she shouted, throwing a leg over the ledge.

"Three!"

Sarah looked down. It was at least a twenty-foot drop, but she had to do this. Being a half-breed had to count for something, didn't it? She swung her other leg over just as Constantine kicked the door in. The sound of splintering wood made a thunderous noise behind her as she leapt to the ground, landing on both feet.

Another howl reached her before she took off like a shot. Sarah sprinted for the woods, knowing Constantine was close on her heels. She might be fast, but he was faster.

"Sarah, you're making this harder than it needs to be," he yelled, sounding like he was only a few feet from her now.

Even though she tried to pick up the pace, it did no good. He was right behind her, yanking her back against him. Though her breathing was ragged, Constantine was not even panting. Knowing there was no point in struggling, she faced him.

Constantine backed her against a tree. His eyes were the eerie yellow color she didn't care for. "Why do you keep running when what's about to happen is natural and inevitable?"

"Because... I..."

He grasped her chin between his fingers. "Didn't I already explain?"

"Yes, but can't you see? I don't want this."

"It would be easier on you if you'd just reconcile yourself. I want to help you."

She shook her head, willing her tears not to fall. "If I allow this to happen, you'll never let me go."

Constantine released a harsh laugh. "I had no intention of doing so anyway, but you accepting it will make things better for you."

How could she express her fears adequately and make him understand? Being on this island wouldn't keep her safe forever. *They* would find her eventually, and when that happened, she wouldn't be able to handle the repercussions. "Constantine--"

He placed a finger over her lips, his eyes now the warm gray that made her body quiver. "Don't you think I know what's bothering you? We can get through this and everything together."

Another argument formed on the tip of her tongue, but her skin suddenly grew incredibly warm. The night air was cool enough, so why did she feel like this? Fanning herself only made her more heated.

"What's wrong, Sarah?"

"I'm so hot."

"Your heat cycle has begun. "God, your scent is delicious. Take off your clothes."

"What?"

"Remove your clothes. No, not for what you're thinking. There's no use ruining that pretty sundress when you shift."

"But this--"

"Is only beginning; your shifting, however, won't be held off much longer." He eyed her body meaningfully.

Sarah looked down at herself to see a thick mat of hair on her arms and legs. "Oh, my God!" she shrieked.

"Don't panic. I'll shift with you. As you're thirty now, there'll be no more blacking out. You'll remember this when the night is over."

"I'm hideous."

"*Calla*. You're beautiful," he countered. Constantine slowly undressed. "Give in, Sarah. Shifting is a part of you. Unleash your inner self."

She couldn't tear her gaze away from his perfect form as he stood completely naked. A dusting of dark hair covered his tight, toned pectorals, trailing in a fine line down the center of a hard stomach. She'd heard of six-packs, but he had an eight-pack. Constantine's slim waist made his already broad shoulders seem bigger than ever, offsetting lean hips.

Sarah tried not to look between his legs, but her curiosity got the better of her.

Dear Lord, that couldn't be normal. His penis was flaccid, but it hung down to the middle of his thigh. If she hadn't had the evidence in front of her to dispute the fact, Sarah would have suspected Constantine would pass out from the blood rush whenever his cock

was hard. Having painted several nude subjects, she wouldn't have thought something as normal as the nude human form would affect her this way. None of those subjects, however, had been as perfect as the specimen before her.

Sarah licked suddenly dry lips.

"Do you like what you see?" His voice brought her out of her trance.

"Yes." Why not be honest? "I'd like to paint you."

"Would you now? Isn't there anything else you'd like to do to me?"

She didn't want to, but Sarah found herself laughing. It was times like these when she could easily fall for him. "You wish."

"And I have a feeling it's going to come true. Your turn now. Undress," he commanded quietly.

Her hands tentatively went to the straps of her outfit. The reassuring look in his eyes made it easy for her to shed her panties and the rest. Then Sarah forced herself not to grab her clothes to cover her nakedness, fists firmly clenched at her sides.

"So lovely," he murmured, admiration glimmering in his gaze as it roamed her body.

Sarah didn't feel particularly beautiful right now, with her skin covered in hair. "I look like a circus freak-show act."

"Well I must be one, too. Follow my lead, Sarah." Constantine dropped to his hands and knees, letting out a howl so primal and animalistic, she took an involuntary step back. Her hand flew to her mouth as she watched chestnut brown fur pop from his pores until it covered his entire body. His face slowly elongated, his nose growing blunt, black, and wet. Constantine's jowls widened and stretched, giving his gums and teeth more room to grow.

He didn't seem to be in pain from this transformation, as so many horror movies portrayed. If anything, he looked as though he were relishing the change. His arms and legs became their lupine counterparts, while a thick bushy tail extended from the small of his back. When the shifting was complete, Constantine turned golden eyes her way. They were the scary yellow she feared they'd be.

But words couldn't describe the majestic beast he was. The wolf was... beautiful. She found his presence comforting, especially when changes slowly took over her own body.

His voice entered her mind *Give in to it, Sarah,*

The urge to howl was too strong to resist. It tore from her throat -- a wild cry to the moon. This metamorphosis almost felt like a joyous release, a cleansing of her soul.

Constantine nuzzled her neck when she had wholly shifted, nipping at her flesh playfully. *Do you see, my darling? That wasn't so bad was it?*

She shook her head.

*You can communicate with me as well. When you're in this form, no words will be necessary. Just think of what you want me to know, and I'll hear you.*



She tested his words. *Constantine.*

*Yes, mana mou?*

*I want to run and keep running.*

*Then, let's do that. Give in to your urges. Howl, roar, run if you must. Just don't fight what is in your nature.*

Sarah considered this for a moment, her eyes locking with his. *There is something I want to do.*

*What is that, calla?*

Walking ahead of him on padded feet, she swatted her tail against his nose, then took off. *Race you!*

His chuckle reverberated in her head. Pelting through the woods, feeling the soft, cool earth beneath her paws filled Sarah with an exhilaration beyond anything she'd known. Constantine caught up with her effortlessly, slowing down slightly to pace her.

*This is how it will be between us, always.*

Sarah ignored the comment, concentrating on the thrill rushing through her. Nothing could dampen this experience.

They ran, sometimes with her ahead, and other times with Constantine taking the lead. Even though her lungs felt as though they'd burst from the exertion, Sarah didn't want to stop.

Suddenly Constantine leapt on her, sending Sarah crashing onto her side. *Gotcha!* He licked her face as he lay his strong body against hers.

In this form, Sarah was stronger than ever. She rolled from under him and pounced on his back. *How does it feel to be in my power?* she teased.

*I think I could get used to this, but I wouldn't be so cocky if I were you.*

*Oh? And why is that?*

*Because of this!* He managed to flip her around, which led, in turn, to a playful tussle and roll on the ground.

Sarah barked with delight. For the first time in her life, she felt truly uninhibited. When she grew tired of playing, she rose and ran again. Having Constantine next to her made the night even more enjoyable. She cried freely to the moon, bounding through the forest with wild abandon until a fierce heat halted her mid stride.

Constantine had also stopped, his eyes no longer a warm golden hue, but the glowing bright yellow again. A series of howls from far off filled the air.

*What's happening, and where are those sounds coming from? I feel like I'm about to burn up.*

*The time has come, Sarah.*

She didn't have to ask him what he referred to. She knew. Sarah shook her head.

*Is there no other way? Must it come to this?*

*Why do you continue to fight it? The heat generating from your body could set this forest on fire.*

Another wave of intense burning made her weak at the knees. What was more, it all seemed to stem from between her legs. Sarah rolled on the ground, trying to relieve the ache. *God, it hurts.*

*You're suffering needlessly.*

The howls seemed to be closer this time.

*Shit!* Constantine cursed harshly in her head. *It's my pack. I told my cousins to stay away, but your scent is growing stronger as you get hotter. I'll need to get you back to the house. Follow me, and run as fast as you can.*

*I wish I could, but it hurts. I can barely stand.*

*I'm here with you. Just run. I won't let them touch you.*

Despite the torturous burning within her, she found the strength to follow Constantine, stumbling only once on the way back to the house. When they reached the front door, Constantine howled, but this time it sounded as though there was some underlying message behind it. There were answering growls.

*What are you doing?* Sarah wanted to know. In the meantime, the pain had become searing. She feared she'd pass out.

*I'm warning them off. Shift, and I'll take you inside. All you have to do is think of your other shape to change back.*

It occurred to her that they'd left their clothes in the woods. *Our things--*

*Do as I say! There's no time to argue!*

She glared at him, but obeyed. She focused on her human form, and her body began to morph. The inferno within was worse than before as she lay boiling and nude on the porch, sweat covering her body. Constantine stood over her, also in his human form and scooped her up.

His skin against her would normally have felt good, but it made her blaze brighter than ever. "I don't think I can take this." Sarah squirmed in his arms as he carried her inside the house and up the stairs.

"It's okay, darling. I'll make it better for you. I'll douse this fire and make you mine."

That was what worried her.

\* \* \* \* \*

Her scent was driving him as insane as it was the rest of the males on this island. Although he'd told warned them to keep away, he was aware of just how hard it was to resist

a bitch in heat, especially when in her first cycle -- even a tiny whiff could send a male out of his mind, sometimes rendering him temporarily feral.

"So hot," Sarah moaned as Constantine carried her to his bathroom and set her on her feet.

"I'll make it better." After turning the shower to its coldest, then adding a little hot water, he tested the stream before he took her hand. "Come. This should cool you down some."

Sarah stepped under the spray and sighed, letting the water cascade over her head. Her hair fell down her back like a curtain of dark, wet silk.

She wasn't the only one burning; Constantine was practically sizzling with need for her. His cock ached, reacting to the knowledge she'd soon truly be his and to the seductive scent pouring from her in almost visible waves. Constantine really wanted to lay her on his bed and fuck her silly, but he'd have to take things easy tonight, be careful with her. Unfortunately, he didn't know how much longer he'd be able to hold off before he took her.

"How does the water feel?"

"Wonderful. I think I could stay under here forever."

Not if he could help it. "This is only a temporary relief. Soon, even the water won't be able to temper the heat inside you."

A stricken look crossed her face. "It gets worse?"

"Infinitely."

"It was unbearable before. How can I possibly handle it?"

He cupped her face and brushed his lips against hers before sliding first a hand between her thighs, then a finger into her dripping channel.

"Oh..." She sighed, gripping his shoulders.

"You see? I'll make it good between us. I promise." His digit slipped in and out of her moist tunnel, but Constantine desperately wished it was his cock instead. *Patience*, he told himself. Adding another finger into her sheath, he studied Sarah's lovely, upturned face to gauge her reaction.

"Constantine. Oh, God. Don't stop. Please don't ever stop."

It pleased him to know he could do this to her; it also made him stiff as hell. It was only a matter of time before she'd need more than his fingers could provide, and then *he'd* be the weak one.

"That's it, Sarah, ride my hand." He ran his tongue along the side of her neck, savoring the sweetness of her skin. In response, Sarah raked her nails down his chest, clawing and digging, but Constantine was too fucking horny to feel the sting. To his pleasure, Sarah's tongue met his, initiating an intensely wild dance. His heart thudded with heavy strokes as she grew more aggressive with their kiss, almost seeming to challenge him. Below, her pussy

juice flowed copiously now, covering his fingers in a wet, delicious warmth. He pulled his head back with a laugh.

“Easy, darling. I’m not going anywhere.”

Sarah buried her face against his chest with a cry of anguish. “Oh, no! It *is* worse now!”

Showering kisses on her face, he soothed her. “It’s okay, my darling. We’ll be fine.” Slowly, he removed his digits from her scorching hot cunt and placed his hands on her waist as he fell to his knees before Sarah, flicking his tongue over her navel. “Spread your legs wider.”

She did as she was told, but he needed more space. Taking one of her shapely legs, he placed it over his shoulder, causing her to tighten her grip on him.

“Please hurry,” Sarah pleaded.

Unable to help himself, he buried his nose between her labia, inhaling that wonderful, delectable fragrance. The beast within him couldn’t seem to get enough of it, and his cock throbbed with renewed urgency. Before this night was over, they’d both be singed to ashes.

Sarah dug her fingers into his hair, tugging the strands until he was sure they would be pulled from the roots. “Please, please, please...”

Extending his tongue, he allowed it to shift, elongating it to its rough lupine form. Parting her succulent pussy lips, Constantine licked her pulsing bundle of nerves, swirling around it and testing its texture.

*Wonderfu! Fabulous! Glorious!* popped into his mind. The incredible heat emitting from her dewy channel made him dizzy with lust. “Do you like this? Do you like how my tongue and mouth feel on you?” His voice was slurred from the thickness of his tongue.

“Oh, yes. More. Please, more.”

Wanting to thoroughly pleasure his beautiful Sarah, Constantine sucked her love bud into his mouth. She wiggled and squirmed, pulling his hair tighter still, her fingernails grazing his scalp. It was an erotic hurt that only served to heighten the wild hunger tearing through his body.

The water could do nothing to cool his ardor now, so he could only imagine how it felt to someone in heat. And just being so close to her had raised his temperature several degrees. He planned to love this dark beauty all through the night. However, although his stamina was greater than any mortal man’s, he would still need to pace himself in order to satisfy her adequately.

Sarah groaned as he feasted on her nubbin. Her orgasm was near; he could smell it. Releasing her clit, he thrust his tongue into her tight box. She was so snug; he couldn’t wait to get his cock was inside of her.

He tested the sweet resistance of her maidenhead that proclaimed her virgin state.

*Mine!*

A fierce possessiveness took over as his tongue fucked her with swift, steady strokes. It wasn't enough for him; he wanted to taste all of her. The tart muskiness of her ass filtered to his nostrils. His animalistic side prodded him to leave no part of her unexplored -- his very nature demanded it with a fiery need.

Having lived most of her life in the human world, Sarah didn't seem to understand. She released his hair and tried to back away, but his grip tightened on the thigh slung over his shoulder. "No. Give in. Let me do this for you."

"But... I'm not... it's not right to touch me there."

He looked up at her. "You mean taste you there. We are not human; germs and bacteria are mortal concerns, not ours. There's no part of you that I find repulsive -- everything about you turns me on, *mana mou*. Your soft brown skin, sexy hair, firm breasts, tight ass, and pussy." Emphasizing his point, he ran his tongue from her clit to her crack, stopping at the puckered hole.

"I..."

"That's it, sweet. Feel. Just feel." He returned his attention to her pussy and licked her with long, broad strokes until she sobbed with pleasure. His mouth was unrelenting in its quest to grant her this moment of bliss.

At last, she released a primal scream that filled the room. Her explosion came hard and swift, slathering her juices over his tongue. Constantine drank down her essence, not wanting to miss a single drop.

"My legs are going to give out," she whispered weakly.

Reluctantly, Constantine released her leg from his shoulder and stood in one swift motion. Sarah collapsed against him.

"Is it over? It doesn't hurt so much anymore."

He reached over and turned the tap off before lifting her in his arms and kissing her forehead. "Not by a long shot. The night has just begun."

## Chapter Eleven

And he wasn't kidding, either. Once he'd towel-dried Sarah, Constantine led her to his large California king-sized bed. "You're so lovely," he whispered, reverence in his voice and eyes.

Skittish laughter tore from her throat. "I probably look like Boomshiqua, Queen of the Jungle, with this wild afro of mine." She raked her fingers through her hair to cover her nervousness. She wasn't too innocent to not know what was going to happen next.

Constantine smoothed his hand over her still damp mane. "I love it like this in its natural state. It's beautiful, so soft and welcoming. From the moment our eyes met, I've wanted to do this." Grasping a length of her tresses with both fists, Constantine buried his face in it, running his cheeks and nose through the strands. "Gorgeous, just like the rest of you. Don't ever doubt it. I won't have anyone speak against you, not even you."

Sarah shook her head. "I wasn't disparaging my hair. It's part of me. I was simply saying what was probably on your mind."

Constantine raised one dark brow. "What I was actually thinking is how lovely it is, and how much I'll enjoy burying my hands in it when I take you." His smile at her. "Enough of this. We both know you're a knock-out, and we're out of time. Listen to the sounds outside."

"What does that--"

"Shh. Listen, I said. The howls are growing more fervent." Sure enough, the sounds she'd heard earlier seemed closer than ever and more urgent.

"Why?"

"I told you: they smell your scent. Lie on the bed so I can mark you. Once I stake my claim, they'll stop."

"But--"

“Please, just do as I say without arguing. You said you’d trust me, remember?”

Sarah wasn’t one to follow blindly without questioning why, but the sounds beyond the house were frightening, and the look of utter determination in Constantine’s eyes showed he meant business. Backing up, Sarah lay on the bed. A flash of fierce possession seemed to flicker in his eyes. She shivered.

“What are you going to do?”

“Silence the others. I have to warn you: what I’m about to do may seem distasteful to you, but it has to be done. It’s how we male shifters warn each other away from our bitches.”

“What... what will happen if you don’t?”

“Those shifters will probably try to tear the house down in an attempt to get to you.”

“But you’re the alpha-in-waiting. Don’t they have to listen to your commands?”

“In theory, but as I’ve already stated, the scent you emit drives unmated shifters wild.”

She moistened her lips with the tip of her tongue. “Even you?”

“Especially me.”

The scary part was, she wanted him to claim her, even though Sarah knew there’d be no going back after this. A sharp blaze of heat ripped through her again, causing sweat to bead over her skin. Sarah grew warmer than ever. “Oh, God, it’s happening again.”

“I told you it wasn’t over. In fact, until your pussy is full of my seed, each successive wave that hits you will be stronger than the one before it.”

“I burn.” Her moan was full of the agony she felt tearing through her system.

“I know, but I will quench that fire.”

She ran her tongue over her lips, no longer caring what he planned to do as long as it happened in a hurry. Sarah watched in fascination as Constantine fisted his long cock. It stretched and thickened before her eyes to a size which would have worried her even more in any other circumstances, but the incredible fever consuming her made Sarah anxious to get his cock in her. Perhaps if the situation were different, she’d be able to admire his male beauty and examine his perfect body to her satisfaction, but the need for relief outweighed all impulses.

Constantine’s hand slid along his turgid length; the purplish-red, mushroom-shaped tip looked angry, like a snake ready to strike. He walked closer until his jutting member rested directly over her.

“I’m going to mark you now,” he said softly, his pupils turning that peculiar shade of yellow again, but that was nothing compared to what he did next.

Constantine grunted and groaned over her, a light glistening of sweat dampening his body. A gelatinous, orange-red fluid spewed from his cock, spilling over her stomach and breasts. Sarah yelled more from surprise than anything else and attempted to sit up, but as soon as the fluid hit her skin, it was absorbed, disappearing without a trace.

“Hold on, sweetheart. I’m not quite finished.” More of the fluid shot from his shaft, saturating her skin until she was covered in it from her torso to her thighs. She should have been disgusted, appalled, but a primitive part of her rejoiced in this base ritual. What was more important to her was that as the fluid soaked into her flesh, it served to cool her down - - a little.

Mournful yips and yaps filled the air outside.

A satisfied grin crossed his face. “Now, you are truly mine,” he growled before falling gently on top of her. His mouth moved until their lips nearly touched. “Do you hear that, *agapi*? Those are the cries of my brethren who know they can never have you.” The soft caress of his breath made Sarah shiver. Then their lips finally connected.

All Sarah’s reservations had long since flown out the window, and the beast within took over. She returned his kiss vigorously, her tongue shooting out to meet his. She wanted to taste him as he had her. The flavor of him tingled her taste buds, sending a thrill of heady delight charging to her very core.

She grabbed his neck, holding his head close to her. Unable to get enough of this man, she squirmed beneath him, her pussy like molten lava, the overwhelming need to be filled driving her. He lifted his head, but not without a struggle because Sarah held tight, not wanting to break contact.

She whimpered “Please, I need you.”

“And you shall have me, my sweet, but I need relief, too. Feel what you’ve done to me.” Engulfing one of her hands in his, Constantine slid their fingers between their bodies until they reached the hard pulsing of his huge cock.

With tentative fingers, Sarah clutched it gently. “It’s so thick.” She couldn’t keep the awe out of her voice if she tried. Then she licked her lips nervously. “I don’t know how I’ll be able to take it all.”

He kissed her forehead in reassurance. “It will be all right, *agapi*. Though you may only be half shifter, you’re built to take my length and girth. There may be some discomfort when I breach your maidenhead, but I promise it won’t hurt beyond that.”

Her grasp tightened around his thick rod; he closed his eyes and shuddered. A tiny smile touched Sarah’s lips when she spied the result of her caress. Emboldened, she ran her fingers along his cock, testing the weight in her palm.

“Oh, God! If you keep doing that, I won’t be held responsible for what happens next.”

“But I like touching you.”

A soft laugh escaped his throat. “Is that so?”

“Oh, yeah.”

“Mmm, well, there’ll be plenty more time for that, but in the meantime, I need to get inside of you.”

The flames hit her again, and Sarah released his cock, moaning. “It’s starting again.”



“I know, *agapi*. I feel it, too. Spread your legs for me.”

Sarah hesitated for the merest of seconds, but her need for him was too great for defiance. Constantine positioned himself on his knees between her parted thighs.

“Wrap your legs around me. That’s it. Not so tight.” He guided his rod past her slick labia, slowly pushing into her channel.

“Jesus, you’re wet and snug,” he groaned through clenched teeth.

Sarah thought she’d die if he didn’t fill her soon. “Please hurry. I need you.”

“Do you know what happens now?” His eyes twinkled golden with that fierce possessiveness once more.

Sarah panted with her lust for him. Did he think she was a total innocent? “You may be my first, but I know the mechanics. Are you going to talk, or do I have to go outside and ask one of your kinsmen to heal this ache you’ve given me?”

A savage roar ripped from his throat, the golden shade of his eyes turning bright yellow. His canine teeth lengthened. “You are *my* bitch! Don’t *ever* mention or hint at going to anyone else to satisfy your needs.” His voice was gravelly and raw. “Not only will I be your first, but I’ll be your last.” To drive home his point, he pushed past the thin barrier with one forceful thrust of his cock.

She felt as though something inside of her had popped, but there was no pain from the initial entry, just a slight prick -- almost like getting a pinch. The discomfort she did experience, however, came from her pussy stretching to its limits from his width.

“Oh, God! Oh, God!” She screamed with a mixture of pleasure and pain -- but the pain was a pleasurable ache. He felt so damn good in her.

Constantine growled again, digging his fingers into her thighs. “We are bond mates. God can’t help you now, only I can.” She gasped as his sharp nails broke her skin. He started to move deeper within her, his eyes never leaving her face. “I tried to warn you. There’s no going back now. You’re bound to me for as long as either of us lives, and you’ll bear my cubs one day.”

Sarah wasn’t sure she was ready to hear this, especially as another scorching wave swept through her. She’d deal with his statements later. Right now, she frantically needed the sweet relief she knew only he could provide.

Instinctively, she clenched her pussy muscles around his cock. The hiss of a brisk inhalation was followed by a more powerful thrust. He was so deep inside her she could swear he reached her throat.

“You’re so fucking tight. Damn, Sarah. From the first, I knew you were mine; you can hardly deny it when your pussy fits so perfectly around my dick.” He punctuated his words with another pump of his hips. “This is my pussy.” He ran a finger over a taut nipple. “My breast.” Sarah shuddered; she was drowning in an ocean of tumultuous lust. He caressed her

sweat-drenched stomach. “This is my body. Mine and only mine. Say it. Tell me who you belong to.”

“You!”

“Say my name. Scream it for all to hear.” The demanding strokes of his shaft working in and out of her hot box drove her to the brink of insanity.

“I’m yours, Constantine. I belong to you. Take me!”

“Oh, I will. Over and over again.” He placed a hand on either side of her, his arms holding him braced over her. Then he slammed into her, so hard, in fact, that she was sure if it weren’t for her shifter side, he’d tear her apart. Instead, she loved every minute of his branding and possessive lunges. In the morning, she’d be sore, but it would be worth all this passion from him.

Sarah clutched his shoulders and bucked her hips to meet his cock, moaning and panting breathlessly. They moved together to the rhythm of her pounding heart. As a raging explosion burst inside her, she raked her fingers down his back.

Constantine threw his head back and howled, cock plunging wildly. When he looked at her again, his eyes were an intense gray. He smirked. “You little hellcat.” Then his body shook over hers, and he sent a blast of gushing, warm come into her thirsty hole.

Sarah clung to him tightly. “Oh, God, you feel so good!”

He grunted, emptying his balls before collapsing into her open arms. She accepted his weight, her breathing still ragged, and buried her face deeply into his hair-roughened chest. She could easily fall for this man, and that was the one thing she couldn’t afford to do. For now, she’d revel in the aftermath of what they’d just shared.

Closing her eyes, Sarah drifted off.

\* \* \* \* \*

Constantine wasn’t sure what woke him up, but Sarah’s delicious warmth curled so lovingly next to him would have made it difficult to sleep much longer anyway. Once again, his prick was hard as a rock. He needed to be inside her again.

He wondered what it would be like to slide between the soft cheeks of her rear. No, he’d save that for later. There was plenty of time to claim that ass as soon as he’d had more of her delectable pussy.

*His pussy.*

Rolling Sarah over onto her back, he moved on top of her and eased his cock between her already parted legs. Her cunt was still full of his seed from their last bout of fucking, helping to smooth the passage of his dick. Constantine felt a little guilty because this wasn’t the first time he’d awakened her. She needed her rest since they’d been fucking nonstop between brief rest periods, but he wanted her as much as her heat cycle drove her tonight.

And it wasn't quite over yet.

He had to keep her satisfied for the rest of the night or she'd be in agony from the insistent burning of her heat. As he moved gently within her, Sarah groaned, rousing from slumber.

"What are you doing?"

"I would have thought that's obvious, *mana mou*. I'm reacquainting myself with my pussy." He dropped a light kiss on her lips.

She giggled, wrapping her arms around his neck. "Don't you mean, *my* pussy?"

"No. Mine. You belong to me. Got it?"

"Oh, I remember now. So it stands to reason your cock belongs to me." She clenched her muscles around him, and he nearly went over right then and there.

"I suppose it does."

"Mmm, this isn't such a bad way to be woken up." Sarah raised her hips, moving to meet his dick. Her wet cunt held him like a tight fist. Constantine couldn't get enough of this woman and didn't think he ever would.

There were no more words as they held each other tight, grinding and undulating against each other. The only sounds in the room were an occasional moan and sigh. This time when he finally came, his release was different, slower, but no less intense. His heart swelled with what sure felt a lot like love.

Was it possible? This was what he'd wanted all along, wasn't it? Love had no rhyme or reason, after all. Was this how his father felt about his own lost love? His father!

Dammit.

Paris would arrive soon and bring a damper to what Constantine had just shared with Sarah. Constantine needed more time alone with her. After having warned him off Sarah, Paris wouldn't be pleased with Constantine's direct disobedience and would probably want to send him away. Well, screw that. He couldn't allow that to happen.

Constantine had to find a way to be alone with Sarah for just a little longer.

She shuddered underneath him with her own orgasm; then, to his surprise, she burst into tears. Alarmed, he raised himself slightly on his elbows, cupped her face in his hands, and dropped kisses on her face and cheeks. "What's wrong, *mana mou*? Why do you cry?"

"Because I didn't know it could be like this, so beautiful. Each time is like a fabulous new journey."

His heart filled at her admission. By God, he *did* love her! But he wouldn't say the words until he had her absolute surrender. Although she'd freely given her body to him, she was still withholding something. He had to have all of her, heart, body, and soul.

“It will always be like this between us.” He took a deep breath. “I’d like to take you away from here. There’s so much I’d like to show you. We could go to Crete, or Moscow, Paris, London, Milan. You name it, and we’ll go.”

A look of uncertainty crossed her face. “I don’t know.”

He kissed her love-swollen lips, silencing her protests, and felt his cock stir again. “Just say yes. You’ve spent so much of your life running, now it’s time to spend some of it living. Imagine making love under the stars as the sun sets over the Champs-Élysées.”

Her eyes sparkled slightly, a glint of interest entering them, as she wiggled her hips against him. “That sounds lovely. I’ve never seen the Louvre, either.”

“Ah, the artist in you?”

“Yes. And maybe Rome. I’d love to see the Sistine Chapel.”

“Then you will.”

She sighed. “This all seems like a dream I’ll wake up from any moment.”

“It’s not a dream, *mana mou*. Anything you want, I’ll do whatever it takes for you to have it.”

“I think I believe you.” She looked amused, her eyes gleaming..

“You’d better, because it’s true.” He thrust slowly into her tight channel.

Sarah placed her soft palm against his cheek. “You’re my knight in shining armor.”

Her declaration was a start, but he wanted to be more to her than a convenient rescuer.

Much more.

## Chapter Twelve

Paris was livid. It was bad enough his flight had been delayed due to inclement weather, causing him to layover in London, but to find his son and Sarah gone with only a note saying they'd be back in a few days was the final straw. He grabbed the sheet and stared at it, still not believing his son's audacity.

*Papa, Sarah and I will be gone for few days. I know this goes against your wishes, but I cannot obey your command regarding her. Sarah belongs to me. We'll speak more on this when I return. Constantine*

Crumbling the letter in frustration, Paris threw it across the room. He should have known this would happen, should have seen that his cub's lust for the half-breed was too strong to resist. How could his son deny his attraction for Sarah, when she had eyes of a warm, dark, molten brown that appeared to be mirrors to her soul? Just like her mother's, in fact.

Paris paced the length of the living room and sighed. "Zahara, I've failed you again."

He thought back to the night he'd fallen in love with his African beauty. She'd been standing on the beach of his family's island, a bright orange wrap fashioned around her body. The sarong style had emphasized the dark loveliness of her skin. Her hair had been loose, flying past her well-rounded ass. His cock had instantly hardened at the mere sight of her...

Zahara's face was upturned, facing the moon. On silent feet, he approached her, although he knew she'd soon catch his scent. When he saw her visibly stiffen, sadness ripped through him; he didn't want her to fear him. But just as quickly as that emotion came, it was replaced by anger.

She turned to face him, gasping as she looked into his eyes. "What have I done this time?" she'd asked warily, her Greek thick and heavily accented.

His eyes narrowed. "What are you talking about?"

Zahara turned her back to him. "I think you know. These past weeks I've been with your pack, you... how do you say... I wish I had spent more time practicing your tongue." She was obviously flustered, so he switched to Akan, the language of her people, then specifically to her family's dialect, Twi.

"Would you be more comfortable speaking your language?"

Her eyes lit up for only the second time in his presence. "You speak my tongue so well." The smile she gave him had his heart doing somersaults.

"I figured it would come in handy. Languages are one of my strong suits, I guess."

"I-I'm afraid I'm not very good at them. English and French are the only other languages I'm proficient in. I apologize for having butchered Greek so badly. Mama says I'm hopeless." The last bit was said with a hint of sadness.

Paris suddenly felt his anger flare again, but this time it was directed toward the Nkruma alpha for being so thoughtless as to say something like that to her obviously sensitive cub.

"I wouldn't say you're hopeless. I think you're quite beautiful. We'll make good-looking cubs."

She shrugged, as though that consideration was the furthest thing from her mind. "I guess."

His eyes narrowed. He'd never been dismissed so casually by any bitch before. "It's inevitable that you'll have my cubs, you know."

Again she shrugged. "I'm aware of that, but I... You've traveled all over the world, haven't you?"

Paris wondered what that had to do with anything, but this was the most she'd said to him since her arrival on Circe. "Yes. There aren't a lot of places I haven't seen."

A thoughtful expression crossed her face. "I'd hoped..."

"What? You can tell me." He tried his best to reassure her but he could still see the tension that was holding her body stiff.

"Can I really?" Large dark eyes looked at him uncertainly.

"Yes. Why would you think you couldn't?"

"Because you've disapproved of me ever since I arrived. You told me--"

"I'm aware of what I said, and maybe I was a bit rash in my handling of the situation. For that I apologize, but if we are to mate, we have to be open with one another."

"Mama thinks I'm full of foolishness."

"Your mother isn't here right now. Tell me what's in your heart, Zahara."

She searched his face for a brief moment, then, seeming satisfied, nodded. "I'd like to see the world, too. I've read about so many countries and wonders. I'd hoped Mama would allow me some time to explore before our betrothal, but I'm the youngest, and my eldest

sister, the alpha-in-waiting, is already mated and has borne cubs of her own. My brother constantly speaks of his adventures around the globe, but Mama has always kept me close. She says..."

When Zahara faltered, he waited patiently for her to finish. From what he'd observed, the Nkruma alpha was an extremely opinionated bitch. His grandfather had told him how difficult the mating negotiations had been, and Paris had already seen more than enough of Nana these past weeks.

"Go on," he prodded gently.

"She says I'm not strong enough to make it on my own in the world and that sometimes she finds it hard to believe I'm her daughter."

"How awful of her to say that to you."

"I'm used to it. Mama loves me, I know, but she has to be tough. Our pack is small, so we must stick together. I think it's one of the reasons she agreed to this alliance. She worried about the fate of our pack members, especially with the feral virus still out there. The added protection of Pack Kyriakis will ease her mind. This is my one chance to make her proud, to do something right in her eyes, but I've already made a mess of things haven't I? You don't like me."

When Paris touched her shoulder, Zahara flinched. "That's not true at all. Actually, I think we'll fit quite well together. And I can take you to those places you wish to see." He meant every word.

Her brilliant eyes lit up. "Really? You're not just saying that?"

"Yes, really."

"I'd like to travel with you very much."

"There's something I'd like from you, however."

The wariness from earlier crept back into her eyes. "What's that?"

Paris took a step closer and cradled her face in his hands; he couldn't help noting the contrast of his paler hands against her dark skin. How was it that such a simple difference could be so beautiful? To immortals, something as inconsequential as skin color didn't matter; that was purely a mortal concern -- and a silly one at that. The shifters' only real prejudice was against half-breeds. Stuck between immortality and mortality, half-breeds were believed to be blights against the very shifter existence.

Zahara trembled as Paris brought his mouth down to meet hers. Then he pushed his tongue past full lips to taste the sweetness within. Her flavor wasn't what he'd expected it to be -- it was much better. Only when she placed her small hands against his chest, surrendering to his ministrations, did Paris raise his head, knowing that if he didn't, he'd lose control. "*Ise omorfi*. You're so beautiful."

She pulled away from him abruptly, her eyes flashing. "There's more to me than my looks. Mama says--"

“Would you forget what your blasted mama says? It’s just you and me here.”

“But how will we deal with each other, when all I’ll ever be to you is some pretty, empty-headed fool? I have hopes and dreams, but you’ll crush them.”

He gripped her arms and tugged her against his chest. “Zahara, I know we’ve gotten off to a bad start, but I’m not your enemy.”

“Then promise you’ll never hurt me.”

“I won’t,” he vowed.

She paused, staring at him intently as though considering his words; then she gave him that shy smile of hers, making his heart melt yet again. It was then he knew he’d love her forever.

The following night, however, his jealousy had driven her away. Paris had told himself she was the one who would have to adjust, to follow his ways. His arrogance had made it impossible to give himself completely over to her.

And despite what happened after, Paris had always kept the memories of that one night on the beach with Zahara in his heart.

Now, recalling how Constantine looked at the Sarah -- the same way he himself must have gazed at Zahara -- Paris knew there was disaster ahead. Maybe it was too late to do anything, but he had to find his son... or something terrible could happen. He couldn’t explain why he felt this way, perhaps it was fatherly instinct, but something niggled in the back of his brain that wouldn’t go away.

\* \* \* \* \*

“I love it.” Sarah gaped in wonder at the picturesque view before her. When Constantine had told her about his hideaway in the Alps, she’d imagined some huge chalet overlooking the slopes. After all, the two Kyriakis compounds she’d visited were nothing short of grand, but the quaint cabin hidden in the woods was nestled by a crystal lake and took her breath away.

“I was hoping you would.” He came behind her, grasping her shoulders, his breath caressing her ear.

Sarah shivered and hesitated, briefly wondering if she should give in to the delicious warmth their bodies generated. Even after what they’d shared, Sarah still found it difficult to let her guard down completely, though she enjoyed the stolen kisses and soft caresses.

What the hell.

Leaning against his broad chest with a sigh, she let a slight smile touch her lips. His arms immediately went around her waist. “This is such a lovely spot that I wish I had some paint and my canvas. How long have you had this place?”

“About thirty years. It’s one of my own properties, exclusive of my family.”



“Ah, so you like simple things.”

“Don’t get me wrong. I have a couple of large homes, but this is where I come to think and decompress.”

“Are all immortals so wealthy?”

“A lot of the older ones are. As you can imagine, most of us have been around long enough to have amassed a fortune, but then there are those who don’t give a damn. They ease through by taking advantage of others. My great-grandfather Spyros started Kyriakis Shipping when he was quite young.”

“What happened to him and your grandfather -- Paris’s father, I mean.” You’re immortal right? Yet your father is alpha.”

“Both my grandfather and great-grandfather succumbed to the feral virus. Some say Spyros’s death was a result of the curse, but the older ones don’t talk about it much.”

“Feral virus? Curse?” Just the sounds of both made her shudder.

“The virus causes a rather nasty disease that only seems to affect shifters. No one really knows with absolute certainty how it came about, but it attacks the nervous system and causes one to shift into wolf form without the ability to change back into human form ever again. Because of this, it makes the infected shifter insane, and they usually end up attacking everything and anyone.

“As for the curse... that was done to our family by another pack years ago. Believe it or not, at one point Pack Kyriakis was much larger, but the feral virus wiped a vast number of us out, where before we’d pretty much not been affected by it. Some say that was a result of the curse and blame my father. My great-grandparents were infected, as were my grandfather and aunt’s husband. My mother was killed by feral wolves. Then there were Aries’s parents, who succumbed to the virus, too; his father was my papa’s younger brother. Aries’s parents’ deaths and my great-grandfather’s tore Papa apart. He feels guilty.”

Sarah turned within the circle of his arms. “This all sounds terrible.”

Constantine looked thoughtful for a moment. “I have theories of my own about the origin of the virus, but most say it was created by an immortal.” He shook his head. “Let’s talk about something more pleasant. We have only a few days before my father sends the hounds for us.” He pulled her even closer and nuzzled her neck.

“Mmm, that feels heavenly.” Sarah threw her arms around his neck. Before she knew it, they were on the ground, Constantine on top of her. His lips grazed the side of her neck; goose bumps formed wherever he touched her flesh. The solid proof of his stiff cock excited her, and Sarah went up into flames.

Her fingertips slid up and down his spine, and her legs hooked over his waist. She gasped at the sharp bite of his strong white teeth into her lower lip.

“I’m sorry, *mana mou*, I get carried away sometimes by your sweetness. Let me make it better.” Dragging his tongue along the tender spot, he lapped at her mouth as if he were tasting ambrosia from Olympus itself.

Sarah groaned, unable to believe how hot he could get her in such a short period of time. She simply couldn’t get enough of him. *Shameless. I’m utterly shameless where this man is concerned.*

She broke their kiss, and grabbing a handful of his unzipped jacket, she pushed it off his shoulder before struggling with her own, ignoring the crisp chill of the wind. All that mattered right now was being with him in the most intimate way possible between man and woman. She didn’t care they were still outside and on the cold, hard ground; the only thing Sarah could register was the glorious sensations searing through her body.

“I need you.”

Constantine chuckled. “There’s no rush, Sarah.”

Something came over her. Maybe it was the way she felt at one with her surroundings, or how this particular man made her feel. Perhaps she was still partially in heat; otherwise, where could this wanton hussy she’d turned into have come from?

“I want you now.” Sarah yanked his head back to her, shoving her tongue between his lips. His raw maleness singed her taste buds, sending a heady sensation through her veins down to her core. She held his face to keep his head still while she explored every bit of his mouth. She wanted more. Kissing was not enough.

Tightening her legs around his waist, she gripped his shoulders and, with a strength she didn’t know she possessed, she flipped him over.

Obviously Constantine was just as surprised by her power as she was, because his eyes widened. Sarah didn’t give him the chance to digest what she’d just done or the change in their positions, because she tore at his clothes as she straddled him.

“Sarah, what--”

She placed her fingers over his lips. “Let me do this. You had most of the fun the other night. Now, it’s my turn.”

“Outside? Like this?” he asked, amusement twinkling in his steady gray eyes.

“Yes, here and now. Just like this.” Sarah rent his t-shirt in two, before lowering her head to sample the flat disk of one hard nipple. Remembering how he’d teased and tormented her the night before, she circled and laved the hardened tip until he wiggled beneath her.

“God, what you do to me. Where the hell did you learn this?”

She giggled at his impassioned groan. “From you, silly. Now, shut up, and enjoy.” She moved to his other nipple, sucking the waiting peak with relish. She felt him untie the ribbon binding her hair before threading his fingers through the strands. He pressed her head against his damp skin as Sarah slowly worked her way down to his chiseled abs.

“You have a gorgeous body.” Did that husky voice belong to her? She wanted him really, really badly.

He laughed. “Isn’t that my line? When you’ve had your fun, I intend to do a little exploring on my own. In fact, I’m going to fuck your hot body until you’re walking bowlegged.”

“Promises, promises,” Sarah sighed, tonguing his navel. “I’m already bowlegged. In any case, I’m not finished tasting you.” She was so eager to set his cock free that her trembling fingers fumbled with his belt buckle. Jerking his jeans down lean hips, she bit her lips when she saw what lay beneath. “Don’t you ever wear underwear?”

“Whatever for? They’re no fun. Besides, this grants me easy access, baby.”

She wondered if he would be so cocky once she was through with him. Wrapping her fingers around his massive member, she flicked it with the tip of her tongue, the saltiness of his pre-come flavoring it.

“Yum. You know, I think I like the idea of you going commando. Otherwise, I wouldn’t be able to do this.” Sarah licked the rim of the mushroom-shaped head.

“Stop teasing me.”

She lifted her head with a pout. “But I like to tease you.” She slid her tongue along his length like it was a flavored icicle. “I love the way you taste. You’re so long and thick. I especially love it when you’re inside my pussy.”

“How about taking me inside your mouth first? You’re killing me.” He bucked his hips with apparent impatience.

“Uh uh. Haven’t you heard the best things come to those who wait?” She giggled.

“Fuck that. If it doesn’t involve your mouth on my cock, I don’t want to know about it. For God’s sake, I’m dying for you.”

Her own need for him made it difficult to argue with him. She was just as eager to close her lips around his rod as he was for her to do it. Though she’d never done it before, instinct guided her. Slowly, she opened her mouth over his shaft and gently sucked on him.

Constantine gripped her head, but she appreciated the fact that he didn’t push her further down his length, letting her set the pace. His moans of delight were like music to her ears. She quickly learned in that moment how rewarding it was to give pleasure as it was to receive it.

The pulsing member in her mouth coupled with his throaty groans sent spasms of blazing excitement through her body. Inch by inch, she swallowed him deeper until the tip of his cock touched the back of her throat. Even then, there was still a lot of him left outside her lips. Her pussy throbbed hungrily. Already her panties were soaked; she was ready to have him sink inside of her again, but first she wanted Constantine to call out her name as she’d done for him the night before.

Her lips tightened around his dick, and her head bobbed up and down part way, then faster. His fingers dug into her scalp, tugged at her hair. Sarah hummed around his shaft to send vibrations pulsing through his cock. He grunted.

“Sarah! Oh, *mana mou*, my precious one. Don’t stop!” He lifted his hips each time her mouth slid along his length, driving it deeper.

When she cupped his balls in one hand, gently squeezing and fondling them, Constantine released a primitive howl. His musky scent filled her nostrils, heightening the wicked sensations in her body. Releasing his cock, Sarah ran her tongue over his tight sac, flicking and lapping at it.

“Shit, I’m going to come.” Something primordial within her wanted his seed spurting inside her. Sarah pulled her head out of his grip and stood.

Passion-glazed gray eyes stared at her. “Where the hell are you going?” he growled ferociously, propping himself on bent elbows.

Sliding her jeans down, she smiled at him. “I’m not going anywhere, stud.” After pulling off her own shirt and removing her bra and panties, she lowered herself, straddling his hips. “Put your cock in me,” she commanded, her juices already dripping from her hungry hole.

Constantine grabbed his dick and placed it against her opening. The brush of it against her labia had Sarah squirming in anticipation. She parted herself, taking him into her channel. She sighed as her walls stretched to accommodate his size and slid down until he was fully within her.

“Oh, hell, yeah. This tight pussy is all mine.” He bared his lengthened incisors at her, his eyes changing from gray, to gold, to yellow, then back to gray. He filled her so utterly and completely that she didn’t want to move. But she knew she must.

He circled her waist with his large hands as she placed her palms against his slick chest and drank in the sight of his rugged good looks. His dark hair was plastered to his forehead, his skin was flushed, and there was a look of pure desire in his eyes that made Sarah’s heart leap.

She’d done that to him.

It took her a few moments to find her rhythm, but with Constantine’s help, she was soon bouncing up and down on his cock as if she’d done this a million times before. The slapping sounds of her ass hitting his thighs drifted through the otherwise quiet air. Suddenly changing positions, Constantine clasped her tightly and rose. Sarah gripped him with her legs and arms.

“I want to get my mouth on your breasts as you ride me. Seeing them jiggle as your pussy swallowed my cock drove me absolutely crazy.” And he buried his face against her chest, sensually attacking her sensitive mounds. With wild kisses and licks, Constantine

feasted on her breasts as their bodies moved and ground together in an erotic dance older than time.

She needed this, wanted this, had to have this. Sarah clamped down her muscles around his cock, knowing her orgasm was near.

Constantine finally yelled out her name. "Sarah!"

The moment of her climax was nothing short of earth shattering. Sarah spasmed and shuddered against him. Almost at the same time, he shot his seed into her hot box.

"Sarah. Oh, God, I love you!"

## Chapter Thirteen

Constantine stroked Sarah's hair while he watched her sleep. She was so damned lovely, and she was all his. He'd been fooling himself to think he didn't love her sooner; he'd probably fallen for her the minute he'd first spotted her, but that emotion had been so foreign to him outside of what he felt for his father, sister, and cousin, that he hadn't recognized it.

It bothered him a little that she hadn't expressed her feelings in kind. Instead, she'd buried her face against his neck as he'd carried her back to the cabin and told him what a wonderful lover he was. It pleased him to know she was satisfied with him, but he wanted more from her. Considering all she'd suffered in her life, maybe he was expecting too much of her too soon. Still, he wouldn't rest until she said the words back to him.

His ear twitched as he caught the faint sound of buzzing; then he remembered he'd put his cell phone on vibrate. He really should have turned it off, but Constantine hadn't thought it would matter much because reception was usually lousy in this area even with phones that had GPS capabilities. The sound persisted. Shit. He could have ignored it, but something told him he should answer.

Picking up his jeans, he dug into his pockets and pulled out his phone. Taking a peek at the caller I.D., he groaned before speaking. "Why are you calling now? Before I left Circe, I told you I didn't want to be disturbed."

"Don't give me attitude, Con. If anything, you should be on your knees kissing my hairy nut sac for the favor I've done you. It's going to get me into a lot of trouble with Uncle Paris."

He rolled his eyes. "I'm sorry, Aries, but you didn't pick a good time to call."

"Did I interrupt your fuck-a-thon?"

Constantine could hear the smugness in his cousin's voice; if the man were nearby, Constantine would have slugged Aries a good one. "Don't be do so goddamn crude," he hissed.

He stole a quick look at Sarah's sleeping form. A slow smile tilted the corners of her full lips as she pulled the extra pillow closer to her body. His prick instantly shot to attention. He was sure he had never wanted to be anything more than he wanted to be that pillow right now, nestled so snugly against her soft warm curves.

Turning his back to her, he whispered into the phone, "Okay, so I owe you one. What did Papa do when he found we were gone?"

"To say he flipped out would be putting it mildly. He lifted a recliner and threw it across the room. He also hoisted me by the collar and would have done the same to me had I not talked some sense into him. I thought he'd beat the living daylights out of me when I couldn't tell him where you were. It's a good thing you didn't let me know, although I have a pretty good idea where you are. And if I do, so does he. I'm just warning you, coz." Aries paused. "I just don't get it, though."

"What's there to get?"

"You've evaded every single one of your father's matchmaking attempts since you could walk; then suddenly this half-breed storms into your life, and you're ready to settle down."

"Don't call Sarah a half-breed."

"Why not? That's what she is."

"You don't have to say it in such a derogatory way."

"You need to stop being so damned sensitive, especially when you know I meant nothing by it."

Constantine didn't care for where this conversation was headed. "Do I?"

"Cut it out, Con. I put myself on the line for you. All I'm asking is what happened. What is it about this bitch that now has you outright defying your father?"

Constantine growled louder than he meant to. Stealing another quick look over his shoulder, he assured himself Sarah still slept. "What's it to you?"

"I'm only asking because I care, you idiot. Sarah obviously has powerful enemies if they've chased her down all these years. I gotta say I'm with Uncle Paris on this one. You shouldn't have left Circe. I'm worried about you. It's not as if you couldn't have had your little love fest here."

"I couldn't do that with Papa around. He didn't want me to be with Sarah in the first place. He doesn't think she's good enough for me."

"Are you sure you didn't misunderstand him?"

“He didn’t say it in so many words, but he didn’t have to. I caught his meaning loud and clear.”

“He seemed to like her.”

“But not for me. You know how he feels about half-breeds.”

“I know, but I got the impression... well, never mind. Whatever he said I’m sure you’ll work it out. There’s no changing things, is there? You’ve already claimed her. Had you not marked her when you did, I would have stormed the manor and taken her myself. Her scent drove me crazy.”

“Fuck off.”

“That’s exactly what I’d intended to do to her had you not done it first.”

Jealousy reared up so strongly, Constantine could feel his blood boiling. “Get to the point before I hang up. This reception is bad enough as it is, and the last thing I need is to be annoyed by you.”

“Just friendly words of caution. Uncle Paris is on the warpath, and if I were you, I wouldn’t stay in one place for long.”

“Gotcha.”

“Consider yourself warned.” Aries disconnected.

Constantine realized he’d spoken more harshly to his cousin than he should have but, damn it, so much for his plans of an idyllic getaway for a few days. They’d have to leave in the morning. Tossing the phone aside, Constantine slid back into bed with Sarah, gently pulling the pillow away from her.

Sarah’s breasts were small, but incredibly responsive. Palming them, he brought one distended tip to his mouth, drawing it to life, and rolled her other nipple between his fingers and thumb. He sucked voraciously, willing her to wake up. He needed her to the point of madness.

“Mmm.” She wriggled against him.

“*Mana mou.*” He transferred his mouth the nipple he’d been pinching. She sighed, her fingers stroking his jaw. After taking his time to bring her tips to swollen throbbing points, Constantine moved up to capture her mouth. It lit up his heart the way she returned his kiss so enthusiastically.

Moving on top of her, he dipped his fingers between her damp labia, still wet from their previous bout of lovemaking. Then he slipped two fingers between her ass cheeks, rubbing them on her puckered rose. Sarah’s sharp inhalation halted him. He pressed a kiss to the side of her neck. “Easy, *mana mou.* I’ve coveted this ass since I saw you at the gallery. I think you’re ready for me, for this.”

She gripped his biceps, her teeth gnawing at her bottom lip. “I trust you, but please be gentle.”



This gave him more hope than he'd had earlier. She actually had faith in him. So what that it only seemed to relate to them in bed? It was at least a step closer to what he wanted.

"Let me hear the words. Tell me you want my cock in your ass." Easing his slick middle finger into her rectum, he prepared the snug canal for the coming invasion of his dick. He licked his lips in anticipation of squeezing inside that tightness.

"I want your cock in my ass. I want you to take all I have to give."

"What I want is--" He stopped short of saying her heart.

"What?" Dark eyes searched his face.

"Your sexy body," he finished lamely.

"You have it. Take my ass. I've... I've been wondering when you would ever since you mentioned it when we first mated. I like it when you touch and lick me there."

"You'll like it even more when I fuck you there." When he felt she was sufficiently slippery to make his passage through her back door easier, Constantine folded her knees over his arms, bent her legs toward her chest, and parted her cheeks, his cock resting at her taut hole. "Just relax, *mana mou*. It may be uncomfortable at first, but once I'm inside of you, I swear you won't be disappointed." Sarah nodded, her eyes shining with passion.

With one smooth thrust, he juttied forward, his dick gliding into her ass.

"Oh, God!"

His eyes locked with hers. "Did I hurt you?"

"No. You could never hurt me," she assured breathlessly, even though he could sense her pain. "This is something I'll get used to." When she wiggled her hips, Constantine drove forward slowly, then pulled back until his tip nearly came out of her. Then he shoved it into her again, this time with a little more force. The heat she gave off was incredible. He knew she was beginning to enjoy this as much as he did.

"Don't stop!"

"You like this?"

"God, yes."

"You're just as wild for it as I am, aren't you? This ass has been waiting for my cock, hasn't it?"

"Yes! Yes! Yes! This ass belongs to you! Fuck me harder!" she screamed, clawing at his back. Had he known she would take him so willingly, he would have initiated her in the act of anal love much sooner.

Pushing in and out of her puckered ring sent a thrill of wondrous passion ripping through his body. Her ass jiggled when he pounded into it, generating a rhythmic slapping sound. She lifted her head and bit into his chest with a hungry growl. He grunted from the pleasure-pain and rode her backside harder than ever, frantically racing to reach his peak. She was so tight and slick around him, clenching his cock like a firm fist.

“Constantine! More! Don’t stop! I need you!” She clutched him closer against her as if this would be the last time they’d be together. The way she gave herself to him so completely cost him his control. Bellowing his release, he shot a load of come into her bottom even as he thumbed her clit. Sarah panted, her body starting to convulse.

“Let go. Give over, my beauty.”

Her climax rocked her body in shuddering, visible waves. Her fingernails ripped into his skin.

Constantine grinned fiercely, taking all she had. She most likely didn’t realize it, but she was marking him as well, branding him hers. As an immortal, his scars would mostly heal, but a slight scar would remain because she was his bond mate. Releasing her legs and lowering himself gently on top of her, he slid his cock out of her ass with a *pop!* and gush of come.

“I love you so much, Sarah.”

She turned her head away, avoiding his eyes. Catching her chin, he brushed her slightly parted lips with his. Then he searched her face and smiled. What he saw in the depths of her eyes was promising.

“You don’t have to say it now, but one day you will admit you love me, too.”

“Constantine--”

He covered her lips with his index finger. “You know what?” She shook her head. “I think you love me, too. I know it’s been only a few days, but that doesn’t matter when it comes to the heart. I know you’re scared to love me, but I’ll be patient -- to an extent.”

He grazed her cheek with his lips. “Let’s shower.”

She lifted one perfectly arched brow. “Shower or screw? Every time we step into the bathroom together, we end up doing much more than washing ourselves.”

“You make that sound like a bad thing.”

She giggled, burying her face against him. “It’s not. I’m just making sure we’re on the same page.”

Laughter tore from his throat. “You shameless hussy.”

A wicked gleam sparked in her eyes. “You read me so well.”

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Sarah rubbed soap into Constantine’s pecs, reveling in the feel of his hard muscles beneath her fingertips. His upper body was all hollows and ridges and muscle. His horniness only enhanced his masculinity.

“I think I’m going to have the cleanest chest in the world if you keep at this any longer.”

“Is it a crime that I like touching you?”

“Not at all. I love it that you want to acquaint yourself with my body, just as I adore touching yours.”

“I know I sound like a broken record, but I really would like to paint you. I think you’re the most perfect male specimen I’ve ever seen in the nude.”

When he swiftly pulled her against his soapy body, she gasped. His eyes had changed to that yellow gleam, full of possession. “And how many naked men have you seen?”

It would take her a while to get used to his mercurial moods. Sarah held his face and ran her tongue along the seam of his lips, her nipples brushing against his hair-roughened torso. She’d heard it was much better to catch flies with honey than with vinegar. When her studly shifter sighed, she stuffed her questing tongue into his mouth in a gentle exploration. Sarah pulled back gradually, noting his ragged breathing.

“I’m an artist and took some art classes at a local community college. It stands to reason I’ve painted nudes before. Occasionally we’d get naked subjects, male and female, but none of them ever did a thing for me. Not like you do.” She kissed his jaw.

“I’m being a jealous jerk, aren’t I? I can’t help it. You just make me... I’ve never felt this way about anyone before. I love you so much, and I... I don’t ever want to let you go. Every person you’ve ever come in contact with, smiled at, spent time with, I’m going to be jealous about. I know it’s not what you want to hear, but it’s in my nature to be proprietary where my mate is concerned.”

Sarah saw the sincerity in his eyes; something she thought had died within her a long time ago flourished to life. Could this be the love she’d long denied herself? But if she made that final declaration, she’d risk losing him. After all, hadn’t she lost every person she’d ever loved?

She leaned her head against his chest. “Your words are so sweet. I-I know you want me to say them back, but I need some time. When I do say the words, I want to mean them. I’m already halfway to loving you, but...”

Constantine lifted her chin with his forefinger, bringing her head up so their eyes met. “I know. I said I’d give you time, but I’m not a patient man.”

She nodded. “I’m just so scared. You’ve been so good to me. No one has ever made me feel this way. With you, I can let go and forget about my past. I feel safe with you, as if no one can get to me as long as I’m with you.”

“As God is my witness, I’ll protect you.”

And Sarah believed him. She threw her arms around his waist and pressed her cheek against his shoulders, letting the spray of the shower hit her back. “Mmm, I think I could remain like this for a very long time. How long will we get to stay in this lovely hideaway?”

“Unfortunately, we have to leave in the morning.”

She looked up at him, craning her neck to meet his gaze. Disappointment gathered in her breast. “Why? You said we’d be here for a few days before we headed back to Circe.”

“Sweetheart, I would love to spend as much time with you here as possible, but my father will probably be here tomorrow, demanding we return to Circe. He’s not very happy I’ve taken you off the island.”

“Why? I’m safe with you.”

“He doesn’t believe so, but I thought you and I needed this time together.”

Sarah frowned, not wanting this magical time to end. “If we leave, I’ll go wherever you want.”

“When the threat against you is over, I’ll bring you here again, where we’ll make love under the stars. You can paint to your heart’s desire, and I’ll teach you how to fish.”

Sarah smirked. “Who says I don’t already know how to fish?”

“Ah, a woman with hidden depths. And just where did you pick up such a skill?”

“My foster father used to take me fishing almost every Saturday. It was the one thing I enjoyed almost as much as painting.” She shivered. “Ooh, this water is starting to get cold. I think we’re sufficiently clean.”

Constantine stepped away from her, splashing a handful of water on his chest to rinse away the soap residue. Then he turned the water off and scooped Sarah into his arms. She gripped his shoulder to steady herself and laughed.

“You really know how to sweep a girl off her feet. What do you intend to do to me, now that you have me at your mercy?”

“I’m going to get you dirty all over again. We may have to depart in the morning, but we still have the rest of the night.”

She giggled. “I like the sound of that.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Gage paced the floor, waiting to hear some word on the matter most pressing on his mind. Where in the world was that good-for-nothing shifter? The creature was supposed to have contacted him a couple hours ago; for Gage, there was nothing worse than to be kept in limbo.

Jackal walked into the sitting room. “A call for you, Master.”

“Is it the one I’ve been expecting?” he snarled.

“Yes, Master. I’ve allowed no others through.”

Gage snatched the phone out of his servant’s hands and nodded in dismissal. Once he was alone, he roared into the phone. “What the hell took you so long!”

“I was delayed. There are some problems finding the half-breed. Apparently she’s not where she’s supposed to be, so it will be a couple more days before I can lead you to her.”

“A couple more days?!” Gage screamed his rage; he could feel the vein throbbing in his temple.

“That’s what I said. I’ll contact you when I’ve made progress.” A sudden click signaled the shifter had hung up.

Gage threw the phone across the room in his temper. He turned his gaze to Pet, who was cringing in her corner. The look in her eyes told him she knew exactly what was about to happen. Her fear was evident, and she had every right to be afraid.

Very afraid.

## Chapter Fourteen

Paris glared at his nephew as he clenched and unclenched his fists. The compulsion to wring the cub's neck grew stronger with each passing moment. He had sent Aries to Circe ahead of Constantine and Sarah to ensure everyone would be settled comfortably upon their arrival. It didn't hurt that there'd also be another protector for Sarah. But his son and the woman were nowhere to be found.

"You know where they are because I heard you warning him last night."

Aries flushed, his green eyes darting away.

"Look at me when I'm talking to you, dammit."

The guilt in Aries's face said it all. "I'm sorry, Uncle Paris, but--"

"I gave you only one task, and that was to keep an eye on your cousin and Sarah. Now what? You're covering for them?" He exhaled deeply. "Your apologies mean nothing right now. Do you understand the seriousness of the matter, you foolish cub! Sarah is in danger, and because Constantine is with her, so is he! If anything happens to either one of them, I'm holding you responsible."

Aries shot from his seat, his face red -- apparently from trying to keep his own anger in check. "Don't you think I realize that? I tried to talk him out of it, but he wouldn't listen. When has Con ever done anything he didn't really want to do? There's only so much I can enforce as his beta, so how about cutting me some slack?" He paused for a breath. "Yes, I did tell him you were looking for him, but whether you find him or not, he'll come home when he wants to, and there's nothing you or I can do about it. Furthermore, I am not a liar, and I don't appreciate being called one. I don't know where they are because I'm sure they left his little hideaway not too long after I called him." By the time, Aries reached the end of his tirade, he was yelling. "You may be alpha, but grant me the respect I'm due. I've done nothing to make you even think I'd be less than honest with you!"

Paris's head dropped into his hands, exhaustion taking over. His nephew was right, to an extent. He should not have mistrusted him, although that phone call he'd overheard had been so damning. Fear for his cub and Sarah was making him irrational. "I apologize for accusing you of lying, but you must realize you shouldn't have tried to warn him."

"My intention was to get him to come back to Circe. I'm just as worried as you are, but I have a feeling if we try to reach him again, he won't answer his phone even if he goes someplace that even gets good reception." Aries sighed, then took the seat opposite his uncle. "At least I've had a chance to do a little research on our man Gage."

"What did you find out?" Paris felt weary; thoughts of all the dangers waiting for his son consumed him. His concern for Sarah was just as great; she was Zahara's daughter and now his responsibility as well. Paris may have let Zahara down, but he wouldn't fail Sarah. Knowing his son discarded women so casually, the last thing Paris had wanted was for her to end up broken hearted -- or worse, taken over by Constantine as Paris himself had tried to do to Zahara.

"I had to find some of the older immortals to tell me about Gage because he's been around for a very long time. In fact, he's one of the founders of the Hunter movement. Around the time when immortals and humans lived in peace with one another--"

"That was a long time ago. Before Christ even."

Aries nodded. "At least a thousand years before that. Anyway, a group of mortals wanted what the immortals had."

"Their powers?"

"Yes. The mortals were willing to do anything to gain such powers, so they went to certain immortals for help. There were codes then that forbade immortals from divulging their knowledge; however, some of the immortals weren't above breaking such rules. They saw it as a way to amass wealth. That's how the art of black magic began; the dark arts and spells would only work if the essence of another immortal was stolen." Aries leaned forward in his seat. "Wizards are the closest thing to humans in terms of vulnerability, so their essence isn't good enough, and vampires are the most difficult to kill. Although shifters are difficult to take down, it's not impossible, so the rogues went after the young and inexperienced ones. Apparently there's something in our makeup that can be used to help the rogues wield their black magic. Shifters were soon being wiped out by a handful of immortals who, at first, were focused on material gain. In time, they concentrated on ruling whatever they surveyed. In short, they wanted to be worshiped like gods and goddesses."

Aries broke off a moment before resuming. "Another group of immortals decided it was time to end human and immortal relations forever -- but not before the rogues responsible for the shifter massacres were held accountable for what they'd done. Some rogues got away and went into hiding, but for those wizards involved who were caught, their powers were bound."

"Not all of the rogues were caught? They're still around?"

“I was just getting to that part.”

“I’m sorry; this so baffling. It still surprises me how much of our history we’re still unaware of.”

“As am I.”

“Continue, Aries.”

“The overall larger problem of the rogues was eventually taken care of, but a few may still be around. The bound wizards, however, weren’t content to exist in the world in which they lived forever but without special powers. Like most immortals, this was a sentence worse than death. Just imagine if our ability to shift was taken away from us.”

Paris agreed. “Yes, that would be torture. The psychological ramifications alone scare me.”

“And so the Hunters were apparently formed. With the shifter essence they’d stolen, they were able to practice their black magic. At around that same time, the Council of Immortals was founded. It didn’t really do much good, but it curtailed the Hunter activity for a while -- until the wizard Gage came on the scene, the offspring of a bound wizard and witch. You know what the result of such a union is.”

“An immortal with no powers at all. Unlike the bound ones who do stand a chance of getting their powers back, these offspring would never have any real powers.”

“Exactly,” Aries acknowledged. “But black magic was a great substitute for the inherent lack of powers. Gage’s parents were taken out by a group of shifters similar to the Grimaldis’ Underground. Great-grandfather Spyros was apparently a part of this movement.”

His grandfather had been a part of a secret organization to take out Hunters? Paris had always thought of his stern grandfather as someone who only adhered to his pack duties. He found it difficult to reconcile this information with the man he’d known.

“Grandfather?” he whispered in wonder.

Aries inclined his head.

“Who was your source?”

“And ancient shifter; goes by the name of Dark. I believe the story was second-hand however.”

“Where did you meet this Dark, and where can I find him?”

“I met him on Crete. He’s a lone wolf, and I don’t think it will be so easy to find him. I had to pull some strings just to orchestrate a meeting with him the first time.”

Paris huffed with frustration. “See if you can arrange a face-to-face between him and me. I don’t care how you do it, just take care of it. But let’s get back to the secret society. What happened?”

Aries paused as though trying to remember where he’d left off. “Gage came to power with the help of his acquired black magic. The shifter packs stuck closer together, but



unfortunately, the feral virus struck, leading to a massive loss of shifter lives. No one knows for sure what transpired next, except that Gage disappeared. For a long time, many believed he'd been killed, but now we know that isn't true. He's up to something that could be cataclysmic to all immortals, especially shifters. Why he wants Sarah in particular, I don't know, but if she's connected to Pack Nkruma, that tie could be part of his rationale. After all, they do have magical qualities in them. Perhaps there's something specific in their essence that Gage wants."

"All the more reason we need to find Constantine and Sarah. I don't know what I'm going to do if I can't find them; I swear, if that son of mine in one piece when I get my hands on him, I'm going to throttle him."

Paris had only felt this desolate once before in his life; he hoped the outcome would turn out to be more positive this time.

\* \* \* \* \*

Although he'd had Aries's assurance of finding the missing pair, Paris was still worried half out of his mind. He would have continued his search of them himself, had he not gotten an unexpected call from Eleni. Damn her. Why did she have to pick such an inconvenient time to turn up? Paris thought she'd have sulked for a little while longer. Once he had her settled, he'd leave Circe and join his nephew in hunting down the errant cubs.

Glancing out the window, he saw a silver limo pull up to the house. Eleni, of course. It was time to set her straight once and for all.

His former mate's sister stepped out the car with a self-assurance that any woman would kill for, and her strides were slow and deliberate. Today, she wore a form-fitting, black catsuit, cut down the front in a deep vee that stopped at her navel. A chain-link belt adorned her tiny waist in a lopsided fashion, emphasizing her rounded hips.

On any other woman, the outfit would have looked cheap, but on Eleni it looked like haute couture. Her dark red hair fell around her shoulders, blowing freely in the breeze. There was no denying what a stunning woman she was. Smart, poised, and confident -- why couldn't he take the step to mate with her?

Maybe things would have been easier if he had accepted her offer. She had been extremely supportive of him; on several occasions she had acted as his hostess, and she made herself available whenever he needed her in business matters. But making love to Eleni was the one thing he couldn't bring himself to do. The heart unfortunately didn't always play fair.

Paris walked outside to greet her.

A wide grin split her face. She held out her arms to him, her perfume drifting to his nostrils. He generally preferred the fresh scent of clean skin, but the fragrance she wore was tantalizing.

Hugging her, Paris pressed a perfunctory kiss on her cheek. “You look lovely as always, Eleni. What brings you to Circe?”

She pulled away, her smile faltering slightly. “Do I really need a reason to visit the place of my birth? I thought I was always welcome here.”

“Don’t be silly, Eleni, of course you are. I’m just surprised by your visit, that’s all. Considering how we parted, I didn’t think I’d hear from you for quite some time.”

Her lids covered her stormy green eyes and made it impossible to read her expression. “Let us go inside to have this discussion. I’ve had a long journey and would like a drink, as well as get off my feet.”

“Of course. Forgive me.”

Once they were within his study, Paris poured Eleni a martini on the rocks, which she took with a large grin. “It’s gratifying to know you haven’t forgotten my favorite drink.”

“There’s very little that escapes my attention, my dear, and I’ve known you long enough, so how could I forget? What’s brought you here this time?” He deliberately took a seat on the recliner instead of the couch Eleni occupied.

She pouted prettily before taking a sip from her glass. “Oh, pooh, you know very well why I’ve come.”

“I’m not in the mood to try to read your mind, so how about telling me?”

Her eyes narrowed slightly before her smile returned. She placed her martini on the coffee table. “You’re right, Paris. We’ve been through too much together for me to play coy with you. Yet it’s difficult for me, because I’m not used to apologizing.”

Paris lifted a brow. Eleni, apologize? He’d thought he knew her, but this surprised him. “Have you come to say you’re sorry? I admit, this does shock me.”

Eleni reddened. “Don’t make this harder for me than it has to be.”

“The only one making this difficult is you. Please continue. I’m rather short on time.”

Eleni’s plum-colored lips tightened slightly. “*Signomi*, I have been a foolish woman, holding onto the hope you’d one day see me as more than just your mate’s sister and a pack member. I thought we’d be good together, but I suppose it’s time for me to realize it will never happen. Besides, I’d like cubs of my own, and as you yourself pointed out, there are plenty of men who wish to mate with me.” She seemed sincere.

For the first time in a while, Paris was able to relax in Eleni’s presence. The tension straining his muscles slowly disappeared. Now he didn’t have to think so deeply about his words for fear of their being misconstrued by her. Perhaps he and Eleni could be the platonic friends he’d always wanted them to be. “I appreciate and accept your apology. What, may I ask, brought on this change of heart?”

She shrugged one elegant shoulder, a slight twist to her lips. “Well, even you have to admit we didn’t part amicably. I’ve had a lot of free time to reflect; I missed the friendship you and I shared. I’d rather have you as a friend than as nothing at all.”

"I'm glad to hear you say that, because your friendship would mean a lot to me right now. Do you plan to resume your job at Kyriakis Shipping? Of course, if you agree to return, I can't have you storming off whenever you don't get your way about something."

She waved her hand in a dismissive gesture. "That won't happen again, and naturally, I'd like to resume my position. I was selfish, only thinking of myself. Now I have the greater good in mind." She lifted her glass from the table and took another sip, green eyes watching him shrewdly over the rim.

"Fine. Get in contact with Stavros. Your position remains open."

Eleni grinned. "Ah. You knew I'd return."

"I suspected. Look, I would love to sit here and chat with you longer, but I have a pressing matter that needs attending to."

She set her drink down, concern flashing in her eyes. "What is it? Is there anything I can do to help?"

"Not really. It's just..."

"Please tell me. Haven't I been a sounding board for you in the past?"

Paris sighed. Why not? She'd find out eventually anyway. He explained the situation with Constantine and Sarah. Eleni's eyes never wavered from his face, and she gnawed her bottom lip with apparent worry.

"So now I have to get him first. I swear, if anything were to happen to either of those cubs, I don't know what I'll do with myself."

Her hands had gone to her face, and her eyes widened with what looked like horror. "I will come with you, of course."

"That's not necessary."

"How can I stay when my nephew is missing? I insist on joining you."

Paris shook his head. "No. Aries will be with me. If you really want to help, please remain in case they return. Keep them here."

"I could be so much more help if I were with you."

"I do appreciate it, Eleni, but I don't want to put you in harm's way."

A small smile crossed her lips. "Ah, so you do care about me, Paris Kyriakis."

"Of course, I do. I care about all my pack members." Did he imagine a slight frown?

"And that is why you're such a wonderful alpha, and how you've kept this pack strong for years. I'll remain in the house as you've instructed in case Constantine and his little friend return, although I wonder if getting involved with this half-breed will be more trouble than it's worth."

Paris didn't particularly care for the way Eleni spoke of Sarah so dismissively, but he supposed it was to be expected, as most shifters didn't think too highly of half-breeds. But Sarah was different.

“She is under my protection, and I won’t rest until they are both back on this island and safe.”

## Chapter Fifteen

Constantine growled. “How much longer do I have to stay still?”

“Not much. I’m doing this as fast as I can. Sheesh. You need to learn a bit more patience.” Sarah sighed as she moved her paintbrush across the canvas. “I’m trying a new technique, and I want this to turn out just right.”

He rolled his eyes as he leaned naked against the wall; this ridiculous pose was driving him nuts. When he’d brought her to the retreat in a small village outside of Nice, he’d surprised her by procuring painting supplies for her. Now he wondered if he’d made a huge mistake. His arms were stretched above his head, his back was arched, and his neck was strained taut. What he really wanted to do was make love to her, but she had told him he wasn’t allowed to get hard until she was finished.

Keeping still was difficult enough, but being around Sarah without being aroused was damned near impossible. It took every ounce of his willpower for him to keep his body from reacting. Even worse, she looked at him as dispassionately as she would an insect while she painted, and he didn’t like it one bit.

“My muscles are beginning to ache.”

“And I said I’d massage them when I done. Now stop moving.”

“With oil?” he asked hopefully.

“However you want, sweetheart,” she said, distracted. It was the first time she’d called him an endearment, and his heart raced. Added to that little triumph was the very thought of her running her hands over his taut body -- which, predictably, sent the blood rushing to his cock.

“Constantine!”

“What?” He gave her the most innocent smile he was capable of.

“Don’t give me that look. You know exactly what I’m talking about. It’s a good thing I’m stopping.” She put her brush down with a smile.

“I can finally look?”

“Yes. Come here.” Constantine didn’t need to be told twice.

His breath caught in his throat when he saw her work. From the way her brush had swished so rapidly across the canvas, he wouldn’t have guessed she’d created something so spectacular. She’d caught details on his body he wasn’t even aware of. And her use of colors and shadows brought made the painting incredibly real.

“The likeness is amazing. I mean, I saw the portrait of your mother, but this... I’ve only ever seen one other artist who’s as good as you.”

“Only one other artist? Surely, you’re pulling my leg. I’m okay, but surely I’m no master.”

“No, you’re not. You’re even better. I love it.”

She’d painted him in a way he’d never pictured himself. The love he felt for her gleamed in his eyes, there was a slight vulnerability about his mouth, and the proud tilt of his chin showed his strength. This could only have been created by a woman in love.

*Sarah loved him!* He’d only suspected before, despite her words about being halfway in love with him, but now he knew for sure.

“I’m glad you like it. Next, I’m going to paint you in wolf form.”

“Now?”

“Not now. I owe you that massage, remember? How about I run you a nice hot bath; then I’ll give you it to you in the tub. It’s big enough for the two of us.”

“Mmm, I like how you think.” He pulled her into his arms, rubbing his cock against her. “But I have an immediate need that must be taken care of.”

Sarah pressed her palms against his chest in a clear attempt to back away, but his grip tightened.

“Oh, no, you don’t.” She wiggled and squirmed, finally managing to get out of his grasp before she sprinted through the house.

Constantine quickly gave chase, catching up to her with little effort. He squeezed her against the wall before lowering his mouth. His balls pulsed with desire; he could make love to her a hundred thousand times, and it would never be enough.

He made short work of lifting her peasant skirt and tearing off her panties. When he lifted her in his arms, she twined her legs around him, gripping his shoulders tightly with her hands.

“I don’t know why I bother wearing underwear around you,” she grumbled as he rubbed her clit with the tip of his cock.

“Neither do I, although I have lots of fun ripping it off you. Look at how wet you are for me. I love the way this cunt gets so hot and moist.” Sliding two fingers inside her slick channel, he relished the smooth, warm sensation of her tight hole.

Her head rested on the wall as she groaned and wiggled on his hand. “You’re not going to tease me, are you?”

“Oh, like you haven’t been teasing me for the past couple hours, brazenly running that delectable pink tongue of yours over your lips every so often? Do you have any idea how many times I wanted to kiss, ravage, and fuck that sexy mouth? I think you knew exactly what you were doing to me, Sarah.”

She smiled slyly. “And if I did?” Her husky whisper drove him crazy. He wanted her total surrender.

“Then payback is a bitch.” Constantine slid a third finger into her sheath, stretching it.

“Oh, Constantine, please. I want you so badly. Give me that cock!”

He loved hearing her moans. “Not until I say so. I want you to feel the torture I was put through.”

“Please. I don’t think I can stand any more.” She writhed against the wall that was partially supporting her weight.

Constantine removed his fingers and brought them to her lips. “Suck them and remember I did this to you. I’m the one who got you this wet.”

She clamped her lips around his fingers and laved them with her tongue. The way her tongue slid over his flesh sent waves of scorching flames through his veins. Unable to hold off any longer, he thrust his dick into her tunnel with one hard lunge. Sarah gasped.

“Don’t stop what you’re doing,” he ordered. She continued to slide his digits in and out of her mouth, mimicking the motions of his cock. If she kept this up, he didn’t think he’d be able to last much longer, especially when a burst of carnal sensation raced from his groin.

Sarah nipped at his fingers, and he gave up. Removing them from her mouth, he then captured the very lips he’d been fantasizing about over the duration of his posing. He caught her moans in his mouth as he pounded into her pussy with each stroke. Each plunge found him closer to completion. Sarah’s muscles rippled around him.

“Who does this pussy belong to?”

“Do you still have to ask?” She buried her face in the crook of his neck.

“I want to hear it, anyway.”

“It’s yours. Only yours. My body belongs to you.”

“And your heart?” He couldn’t help asking.

She lifted her head briefly, eyes wide, before hiding her face against his neck once more, nibbling and kissing his heated skin. His mouth firmed; he wasn’t pleased with the

way she continued to avoid the question. One day soon he'd have her admission, but for now he'd have to be content to take her delightful body.

He slammed into her one last time, shooting his seed into her, but he continued to thrust, finally driving her to the point of a frenzied climax. She spasmed against him. Her legs fell from around his waist, and she leaned against the wall like a limp rag doll.

"You always get your way, don't you?" She sounded tired.

"Not always. If I had my way, you'd say you love me."

"Constantine--"

"I know. I'll wait for you, but my patience is wearing thin. The men in my family are known for going after what they want."

"And will I be just a possession to you?" Her dark eyes searched his face intently.

"You'll be so much more than that. You *are* much more than that." Constantine whispered. His emotions for her made his heart swell to near bursting. He didn't know what he would do if she didn't confess how she felt soon.

\* \* \* \* \*

"There has still been no word on Constantine and Sarah?" Dante asked.

Paris had moved beyond annoyance with his son into anger and fear. How could he do this? Where could he be? There were still a few other places he had to check. He'd fly his private jet himself to chase Constantine down if he had to. In addition, his nephew Aries hadn't been able to get a hold of the elusive Dark again to set up a meeting between Paris and the lone wolf.

Thank goodness for his friend Dante. Otherwise, he'd be out of his mind already.

"No, no word. But there are some more places they might be. It's late now, and we've been on the mainland all day and out all night. I'm exhausted. I suggest we get some rest and start our search in the morning if we haven't heard from the cubs by then."

"I think that's an excellent idea, my friend."

Both men abruptly paused simultaneously. The quality of the air seemed to have changed. Paris sensed that Dante was also aware of it.

Dante looked at Paris with a frown on his face. "You feel something, too, don't you."

"Yes, I--" Before Paris could utter another word, a tall figure in black appeared as if from thin air, two red-eyed wolves by his side. He didn't have to see this man clearly to know exactly who he was. "Gage."

"In the flesh. I see you've decided to pry into things that aren't any of your business, Kyriakis -- just like your grandfather. It's time to teach you a lesson as I did him -- the same way I plan to do to your son... and that precious half-breed."



Incandescent rage rushed through Paris; all reason flew out the window. He propelled himself toward the wizard. "You son of a bitch!"

Gage easily dissipated into smoke, leaving his two snarling wolves. One of them charged, knocking Paris down. Dante was already headed toward the second creature.

Sharp white teeth were inches away from Paris's throat, clearly attempting to tear it apart. The wolf was strong, but Paris was the alpha of Pack Kyriakis and he refused to allow this thing to get the best of him. Somehow he knew that couldn't let it bite him; Paris was vaguely aware that several shifters had contacted the feral virus after a feral wolf attack, but he wasn't positive if the virus was contracted from a blood exchange or the actual bite itself. In any case, he also didn't know whether this wolf was truly feral or not, and he didn't intend to find out today how the contagion might possibly be spread, especially when he had the well-being of his children and pack to think about.

Gathering his strength, he threw the creature off him. Paris made the decision to fight in his humanoid form; he knew if he shifted, the chances of his being bit would increase. When the animal ran at him again, he was ready. Ducking, he shot out his fist, connecting with the wolf's jaw.

It hit the ground with a whimper. Not giving the wolf a chance to recover, Paris was on him, grasping his neck in a strangle hold. He squeezed with all his might, wanting this beast to suffer. The animal, however, managed to wiggle out of his hold.

"Get back here," Paris snarled, grabbing its tail before flinging the creature and letting it crash to the ground once again. This time he heard bones snapping. While the animal was briefly disabled, he noticed from the corner of his eye that Dante was slowly tearing his opponent to bits, probably releasing some pent-up frustrations of his own.

Amazingly, the injured wolf he'd just tossed was getting back to his feet. Shifters could eventually heal from their wounds, but not at vampire speed like this one. Could this be another side effect of the feral virus or was this Gage's doing?

This time when the animal came at him, he didn't waste any time in dispatching him. Paris went directly into action when his adversary sprang, catching him. He grabbed a clump of skin and fur in addition to both limbs and tore them off. The feral wolf howled and flopped to the ground.

Paris moved toward its skull, then stomped the head beneath his heel, ensuring the creature's death. He tried to catch his breath and jumped when a hand descended on his shoulder. If he hadn't caught a whiff of Dante's scent, he probably would have hurled his friend.

"Are you okay, Paris?"

Paris shook his head. "No. I won't be fine until Constantine and Sarah are safely home."

\* \* \* \* \*

They lay in the tub together. Sarah had run them a bubble bath and now rested between his strong thighs, her back against his sinewy chest. She was content and wished they could stay like this forever. The time she'd spent with him had been magical, and the lovemaking was nothing short of fantastic. Still, a part of her couldn't help but think this would come to an end in the near future.

Constantine was everything she could possibly want in a man: he was handsome, considerate, an excellent lover, and his take-charge attitude was enough to leave her breathless. Could she put her trust in the new feelings coursing through her heart when it was quite possible that her love could put him in danger? She shuddered to think of anything bad happening to him.

His hands slid up from her waist where they'd been resting and cupped her breasts.

"That feels heavenly." She sighed with pleasure when he pinched her nipples lightly.

He pressed a kiss on her shoulder. "What were you thinking so deeply about?"

Not wanting to reveal her emotions, she said the first thing that popped into her mind. "Uh, who was that other artist you were talking about earlier?" His grip on her taut buds tightened momentarily before he relaxed his hold. She squirmed in reaction, knowing he was trying to distract her.

"For some reason, I don't think you're telling me the truth, but I'll humor you for now. I wasn't referring to anyone you would have heard of. Although he was never famous, he studied with some of the so-called greats, particularly those from the fifteenth century -- Botticelli and Michelangelo come to mind."

An art history buff, Sarah perked up at the mention of artists in one of her favorite periods. "Who was he?"

"You mean is."

"Is? If he was alive back then... oh, he's immortal."

"Got it in one. Although he stopped painting for a few centuries, my friend GianMarco is quite talented. My father has some of his pieces. From what I understand, he abandoned his art after the death of his first wife and child, but he has recently started up again. In fact, he's Dante's youngest brother. I'll have to get Dante introduce you two. I'm sure there's a lot you could discuss with GianMarco."

"I would love to speak to him. He must be very old if he's studied as far back as the 1400s. I'm sure there are many stories he could tell me."

"I'll make it happen, then."

"Thank you, Constantine."

"Now, tell me what you were really thinking about."

She stiffened. How did he know?

*You can't hide much from me, Sarah. We're connected in more ways than you realize.*

She trembled deliciously at hearing his voice inside her mind. "I feel so close to you when you communicate to me that way."

"*Mana mou*, we are bond mates and will be eternal life-mates; we have a pairing deeper than most." She shivered at his declaration, and opened her mouth.

He touched her lips with his fingers. "You don't have to say it. I already know. I feel your fears, but I will chase them away. Give yourself over to me." Tears sprang to her eyes. She'd never felt this intimate with anyone in her life.

His lips grazed her ear and played with her breasts again, squeezing them gently. "Say the words I want to hear, *mana mou*."

"How... how do you say I love you in Greek?"

"*S'agapo*, but don't say it unless you absolutely mean it."

"*S'agapo*, Constantine. *S'agapo*, very much. When I'm with you, I can be myself; I don't think about anything except the two of us. You make me feel safe and secure, something I haven't felt in a very long time; your kindness touches my heart and soul, and your masterful ways set my body on fire. I don't know what will happen after we leave here, but I want you to know how much you mean to me."

He remained still, not saying a word. For a moment, she feared he'd changed his mind about loving her. Twisting around in the tub, Sarah scrambled to her knees to face him. Her heart pounded harder than ever when she spied the expression on his face. Love was etched in every line there, in the trembling of his lips, in the way his eyes shone wetly, longing lighting their gray depths. He gripped her face.

"Say it again. Tell me this isn't a dream, my beautiful one."

She smiled tremulously. "I love you. I love you very, very much. I never thought I'd ever feel this way about anyone. I thought I'd have to resign myself to living a life without love and light. You showed me there could be so much more, taught me to accept who I am." She covered his mouth in a hungry kiss, this time dominating him, tasting and claiming what was hers.

When he made a move to pull her closer, she leaned back. "You said I belonged to you. I do. But you belong to me, too. I love you so much."

"You have no idea how happy it makes me to finally hear those words from your mouth."

Incredible heat flowed within her. Sarah's pussy twitched, on fire for his cock again. Straddling him, she reached for his penis. A smile touched her lips. "It's already hard for me."

"Did you have any doubt? I get this way whenever you're near. Thanks to you, I'm in a perpetual state of arousal where you're concerned."

Sarah giggled. "Well, it would be such a shame letting it go to waste, seeing as how it seems so eager for my pussy."

"Your tight, wet pussy."

She guided his length into her snug channel, sighing with fulfillment as it stretched her vaginal walls to the limits. “Ah.” She wrapped her arms around his neck, resting her head on his shoulder. “Don’t move. I just want to stay like this for a little bit.” He was so deep inside of her, she didn’t know where he ended and she began.

“I doubt I can hold on for too long. Once I’m inside of you, I can never help myself.”

“I can’t help myself, either, when you’re in me, but I want to savor this moment.” They sat in the tub, their bodies entwined; only the sounds of their breathing and beating hearts broke the silence.

“Constantine?”

“Yes, my love?”

“Where do we go from here? Do we have to return to Circe?”

“Don’t you like it there?”

“I love it, but we wouldn’t be alone anymore. I know it’s pretty selfish of me, but I want to spend more time with you.”

“And we’ll have all the time in the world, my love, but we should probably head back. Unfortunately, my father isn’t too happy that I removed you from the island.”

“Then why do we have to go back? He’s already angry. Nothing will change that now.”

He shook his head, amusement in his eyes. “My sweet Sarah, as much as I’d love to stay here with you, I’ve pushed the envelope as far as I dare. Not only is he my father, but our alpha as well. We have to go back to ensure your safety, but I promise, once your enemies have been taken care of, we will spend as much time alone as possible. Perhaps we can work on having some cubs of our own.”

Her hand automatically went to her stomach. The thought of carrying his child filled her with wonder and hope for a future she’d long since given up. “You want children?” she asked softly.

“No. I don’t want just any children. I want children *with you*. *Mana mou*, I’m about to burst if I don’t move inside of you now.” Grasping her hips in a tight grip, he guided her body along his length. She arched her back, absorbing the delights of their joining. No matter how many times they made love, it was like the first time.

Constantine buried his face against her bosom. “I love you very much. I promise, we’ll be happy together.”

And she believed him.

## Chapter Sixteen

Constantine squeezed Sarah's hand as he helped her out of the car. He knew his father was waiting for them, and he was prepared to receive another earful. He'd finally contacted his father the day before to say he and Sarah would arrive back on Circe today.

He sighed as he remembered the conversation.

"Papa, I'm calling to say Sarah and I are okay."

"Where the hell have you been?" his father had hissed into the phone. He didn't scream; that wasn't his style, but Constantine could practically feel the anger pouring through the receiver.

"Calm down, Papa--"

"You dare tell me to calm down after the past few days of hell I've been through, filled with worry for you two? Not to mention I told you to stay the hell away from her."

"That was an order I couldn't obey; she's my bond mate. Papa, I could no more walk away from her than I could give up breathing." He sighed. "Look, I didn't call to argue. We should arrive on Circe tomorrow by noon. We'll talk about things at that time."

Constantine had hung up on his father, then switched off his phone, even though he knew there would be consequences for his insubordination.

He now kissed Sarah's cheek reassuringly. God, he adored her. And she looked gorgeous, not that she wasn't always, but for some reason, he couldn't help admiring her loveliness at this moment. Her hair was in a French braid, making her eyes looked bigger than ever, and her face was bare of make-up. She wore a yellow sundress with spaghetti straps and an empire waist; the bright hue emphasized the beauty of her dark brown skin.

Constantine had never seen her more beautiful. He wanted to throw her on the ground and make love to her again and again. "Don't forget: I love you."

Sarah ran her fingers along his arm and gave him a shy smile.

They'd barely made it halfway up the walkway when the front door flew open with a force that sent it crashing against the house. The stormy expression in his father's eyes and the tightness of his mouth said it all.

Sarah halted. "Oh, no. He looks really angry."

"He's not mad at you, *mana mou*. All his rage is directed at me."

"But I feel responsible. I won't leave your side."

He was proud of how his bitch was willing to stand by him. He brought her hand to his lips. "I appreciate your support, but I will deal with him." He took a deep breath as they approached his father. "Papa."

"I trust the two of you have had a pleasant... getaway." Paris looked pointedly at their clasped hands. Though Sarah tried to pull out of his grip, Constantine tightened his hold. He wouldn't back down and deny their relationship; he wasn't ashamed of their love either, and his father would have to get used to it.

"Yes, it was quite pleasant."

His father's mouth tightened to an even thinner line. The red hue of Paris's face deepened to near violet. "Sarah, I'm sure you'd like to freshen up. I hope you don't mind leaving me with my son for a short time."

Her smile was clearly full of nerves. "Of course not. I'll be in my room if you should need me."

To Constantine's surprise, as she moved to go inside, Paris took her in his arms and embraced her as he would Persephone. "I'm glad you're back safely. Now go upstairs and rest. I'm sure you're jetlagged after your travels."

Sarah seemed as taken aback as Constantine was, but she gave both men an encouraging smile before brushing past them.

His father's face grew furious once again. "Inside, now." Paris turned on his heel, not waiting to see if he was obeyed.

When Constantine entered the house and moved into the living room, he was surprised to see Eleni lounging on the sofa, a stern expression on her face.

"Constantine, while I'm pleased to see you in one piece, don't you think it was a bit selfish of you to go off without notifying anyone of your whereabouts, especially when that half-breed could have put you in grave danger?"

Constantine didn't feel the same animosity toward his aunt that his sister did, but he certainly didn't appreciate her welcome, such as it was. "Aunt Eleni." He inclined his head, which was all he could muster under the circumstances.

She pouted. "Is that all I get from my favorite nephew, a cold nod? Come, give me a kiss." She held out her arms to him, and her fingers wiggled, beckoning him forward with

scarlet-tipped claws. Constantine fought to keep the distaste from his expression and walked over to her, giving her a quick peck on the cheek while avoiding her arms. The cloying scent of her perfume threatened to choke him.

She didn't seem happy with his greeting, but didn't say anything further. He turned to face his brooding father.

"I'm of the mind to rip you to shreds. How dare you flagrantly disobey me, and then flaunt your disobedience in my face? Do you understand what I've been through, what your pack has been through, not knowing at first whether you were dead or alive?"

Constantine knew it was best, in times like these, to let his father wind down before speaking. Except Paris was more livid than he'd ever seen him before.

"Answer me, goddamn you! You've done some damned irresponsible things in your lifetime, but this is beyond enough!"

"I'm sorry, Papa, but I'd do it again--" It was obviously the wrong thing to say because he found himself lifted off his feet by the lapels of his jacket. Never in his one hundred fifty years had his father ever gotten physical with him. As a shifter, and an alpha himself, it was his nature to strike out, but this was his father. Constantine had way too much love and respect for the man to even dream of hurting him. Aside from that, Constantine could gauge another emotion within the turbulent depths of his father's eyes.

Fear.

It was something he'd never thought he'd see in his brave papa, but this centuries-old shifter had been afraid. For *his* sake. Constantine slumped in the strong hands holding him off the ground, contrition finally settling in.

"I didn't mean to worry you, Papa. I'm truly sorry, but... I love her. She's my bond mate as I've mentioned."

Eleni shot to her feet, displeasure etched on every line of her face. "This is outrageous! She's just a half-breed, and a very troublesome one at that!"

With a harsh sigh, Paris set Constantine back on his feet. "Eleni, please leave us."

"But--"

"Now." The word was spoken softly, but the underlying steel would not be refused.

She pursed her lips. "Very well. I'll go to my room."

Paris gave her a curt nod, not speaking again until he and Constantine were alone in the living room. "My apologies for laying my hands on you like that." His father ran his fingers agitatedly through his hair.

"I shouldn't have defied you, but I felt I had to. The connection between Sarah and me... I-I don't quite know how to explain it."

"You don't have to. I already know."

Constantine's eyes widened. "You do? Then why did you warn me off? You made it seem as though a half-breed wasn't good enough for me. Despite what you think, we're perfect together. I fully intend to take steps to making her immortal."

Paris tilted his head. "You are aware that can only happen with the approval of your alpha?"

"I know."

Paris gestured to the couch. "Have a seat, son."

When Constantine flopped on the sofa, his father sat next to him. "If you thought my objection to Sarah is because she is a half-breed, you were wrong. I warned you off for her sake, not yours."

Constantine scratched his head. "I don't understand."

"I told you the curse on our family is twofold. At first we thought nothing of it when it was first placed on us; the words were, after all, the ramblings of a vengeful woman. We hadn't really considered Pack Nkruma's abilities with magic, although they were often spoken of." Paris clasped his hands together over his knees. "It wasn't until our numbers became decimated by the feral virus, although we'd been fairly immune before, that we began to realize the curse was not something to be taken lightly. My grandfather went to the Nkruma alpha, asking her to release us from the curse. Nana rebuffed him, but Grandfather was relentless; he refused to give up, even when she threatened our pack. Finally, Nana tacked on an amendment to the curse."

"What was it?"

"The Kyriakis men are destined to live without love for all of eternity, but should they give themselves with an open heart to an Nkruma pack female, and she returns that love, the curse will be lifted. Of course, in Nana's mind, that would never happen."

"Sarah is probably descended from Pack Nkruma. Does this mean the curse is broken?"

"Sarah is actually Zahara's daughter. I still haven't figured it all out, but she admitted to me that the woman she painted was her mother. As for the curse, I don't know. Does Sarah love you?"

"Yes, but this still doesn't explain why you tried to keep us apart."

Paris leaned back on the soft, releasing a deep breath. "I lacked faith in you. I thought you'd treat her like your other women and grow tired of her. It never occurred to me that she'd be your bond mate. When I realized the pack she derived from, I believed if anything adverse happened to her, it could mean further doom for our pack. I don't think we could handle the devastation of a loss like that from the feral virus again. Forgive my high handedness. I should have trusted you."

"Papa, I know I don't have such a great track record where women are concerned, but Sarah is different; she's always been different. In any case, I've claimed her; all that remains is for me to take her in wolf form to completely solidify our bond, but such a ceremony



would require the gathering of our entire pack, and I'd like to make sure she fully understands what will happen before I allow it to take place."

Paris nodded. "I won't stand in your way."

Constantine raised a brow. "And you have no problem with her being a half-breed?"

Paris fell silent.

"Papa?"

"No. I have no objection. She's so like her mother... not physically, except the eyes, but her mannerisms and the way she moves. I feel protective toward her and don't wish her to come to any harm, but I know you'll take good care of her. You'd better, or I'll wring your neck."

Constantine found himself grinning like an idiot. "You have no need to worry, Papa. I'll protect her with my life. She'll be safe."

"I'll hold you to that; however, I'm still not pleased with your disobedience. I understand your need to spend time alone with her, but you have to realize that sometimes what's right has to have priority over your personal desires. You put yourself and Sarah at risk. Until we know Sarah is completely safe, she'll remain on Circe."

"I'm sorry I disobeyed you, Papa."

Paris sighed and put his hand on Constantine's shoulder. "You may think I'm harsh or heavy-handed at times, but I only do it because I want you to be the best you can be, and because I love you."

"I know, Papa. I love you, too." He went into his father's embrace. There were times when the two men didn't see eye to eye, but it didn't change the love they felt for one another. Aware that he had his father's blessing, Constantine felt as though a huge weight had been taken off his shoulders. Now nothing would stop him and Sarah from being together.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sarah sat on her windowsill, watching waves crash against the shoreline. She didn't know what was going on between Constantine and his father, but she hoped her lover wasn't suffering on her behalf. Paris Kyriakis struck her as the type of man one wouldn't want to cross.

This time alone gave Sarah the chance to explore the newness of her feelings for Constantine. She'd never considered herself in love before, never thought it was an emotion she could afford... until now. Her feelings for him freed her, gave her hope for a future without fear. His love gave her strength.

A knock on the door brought Sarah out of her silent musings. It must be Constantine. She smiled, feeling like a silly school girl. "Come in."

When the door opened, her smile drooped slightly. She stood and rubbed her palms against her thighs nervously. There was something intimidating about her visitor, but she couldn't quite figure out what it was.

The redhead smiled, her teeth large and white. She was gorgeous, and Sarah couldn't help but stare. "I hope I wasn't interrupting anything," the woman began, running her finger along one of the dressers by the door in a proprietary gesture. She surveyed the room with an air of one who was familiar with her surroundings.

"Not at all. Umm, what can I do for you?" Why did the woman look at her so intently? Sarah refused to break eye contact with this woman, even though she felt uncomfortable under the elegant woman's scrutiny. She refused to be cowed by anyone. "Who are you?"

"I'm Eleni Kyriakis." She moved toward Sarah with an extended hand.

Sarah took it, but something didn't feel quite right, so she immediately pulled away. "I'm Sarah."

"I know who you are. You're the woman Constantine has risked his neck for."

"Oh, but he--"

Eleni held up her hand. "There's no need to explain, young one. I know all too well how the Kyriakis men can be when they've targeted a new flavor of the month."

Flavor of the month? Who the hell did this woman think she was? *Calm down, Sarah, maybe this is just her way. Not everyone practices basic courtesy.*

"I'd like to think I'm much more than a passing fancy to Constantine." Sarah spoke calmly although she was seething inside. She held her tongue because this was a relative of Constantine's; the last thing she wanted was to start a family feud.

"Of course you do, my dear. Every female pursued so ferociously by the Kyriakis men feels special -- until the men tire of them. Sarah, you're a... young and pretty woman so I can certainly understand what my nephew sees in you." The tone of her voice rang with insincerity.

Sarah's nails dug into her palms. "He's interested in me for more than just my looks."

Eleni sighed, eyeing her pitying. "I suppose he is. You have that air of vulnerability men seem to fall all over themselves for -- sort of like your mother."

The more Eleni spoke, the more irritated Sarah became, but that last bit of information certainly got her attention. "You knew my mother?"

"Of course. I met her when she was betrothed to Paris. It's a shame what happened to her."

Sarah's brow furrowed. "How do you know what happened to her?"

"Don't be so naïve. News travels fast within the immortal community. When one of our own is struck down, we all eventually find out."

"But who did it?"

“That still remains a mystery.”

Sarah saw now Eleni was up to something, but what? “I’m sure there’s a point to this somewhere, so I wish you’d get to it.”

Eleni sighed again, as if she were dealing with an exasperating child. “My dear, I was hoping you’d listen to some friendly advice, but I see you’re going to be difficult about it. The Kyriakis men are incapable of loving anyone. Your mother realized it and she fled. If Paris had really wanted her, don’t you think he would have chased her down?”

Every thread of Sarah’s being told her this woman was lying. “But he loved my mother. He said so himself. He searched for her.”

Eleni shook her head. “All that proves is he doesn’t like to lose; after all, she left him and not the other way around. Had she not disappeared, he would have grown bored with her.”

Sarah felt her nostrils flare. “Did he get tired of you, and now you’re so bitter you have to make up lies? You say you’ve come to give me advice, which I neither need nor want, but all you’ve done is piss me off. Please leave.”

Eleni crossed her arms over her ample breasts; the look flashing in her green eyes said she wasn’t going anywhere. “I’m telling you this because I’m concerned about my pack; if you cared even a little for my nephew, you’d leave tonight. You foolish girl, you’ll bring the wrath of your enemies down on us. Is that the thanks Constantine is owed for saving your worthless, half-breed hide? My nephew deserves a mate who won’t bring him grief -- a full-blood who’ll be strong enough to help him be the alpha should anything happen to Paris or if Paris decides to step down. Can you be that woman?”

Sarah knew Eleni wanted her to run away with her tail between her legs for whatever reason, but-- “Yes, I believe I can.”

The older woman narrowed her eyes to angry green slits. “Then you are dumber than I thought. When Constantine gets tired of you, and he will, what then?”

Sarah lifted her chin in defiance. “He won’t. I’ve already been marked.”

Laughter erupted from the other woman’s throat. “How quaint. So if he’s truly claimed you, he’s taken you when you were both in wolf form?”

Sarah frowned. What did she mean?

A grin of triumph crossed Eleni’s lips. “Your expression says it all. He hasn’t.”

“What does it matter? I’m his bond mate. Constantine told me so, and I’d believe him any day over a malicious bitch like you.”

Her statement seemed to further amuse the shifter. “You still have so much to learn about our ways, half-breed. Surely he told you that, in order to be truly bonded, he must take you in wolf form.”

For the first time in this conversation, uncertainty crept into Sarah’s mind. It wasn’t true, was it? She wouldn’t run away without asking Constantine first. “Even if that’s so, I’m

sure there's a reason he hasn't mentioned it yet. Your attempt to cause trouble between us isn't working. I can't figure out for the life of me what I've done to you to warrant your nastiness."

"It would be in your best interest to leave this island now and never come back," Eleni said tightly, her patience obviously slipping.

"I'm not going to give him up so easily. I've been running most of my life, and frankly, I'm tired of it."

"Then you'll be humiliated," Eleni sneered. "I won't pretend I like you, Sarah. I've tried to be nice, but you won't heed my warning. Constantine doesn't want you. If you're so sure of his love go ahead and ask him. I was hoping to appeal to your sense of prudence but..."

Sarah crossed her arms over her chest. "But what?"

"But when Paris was looking for you and Constantine on Crete, he was attacked and nearly killed by some henchmen of Gage."

Sarah gasped. "How do you know about Gage?"

"There's nothing Paris keeps from me; I will soon be his mate. Now do you see why it's important for you to go? Your very presence puts Pack Kyriakis in danger. Knowing this, will you selfishly stick around? You seem like a sensible enough girl. Think about what I've said; I'll arrange for transportation off the island later on. Meet me at midnight. If you really love Constantine as you say you do, you'll let him find someone worthy of him, someone who won't risk his pack." Eleni stared at her for a moment before finally turning on her heel and leaving Sarah alone.

The sense of security Sarah had felt was now gone.

## Chapter Seventeen

Constantine slipped into Sarah's room, eager to tell her about the conversation he'd had with his father. He found her sitting by the window, knees huddled close to her chest, profile sad. Alarm spread through him. Why did she seem upset? She'd been fine earlier.

He softly whispered her name, approaching her on silent feet. She didn't acknowledge his presence, merely stared out the window. "*Mana mou*, are you well?" He placed a hand on her shoulder only to have her flinch away. *What the hell?*

"What's going on? Speak to me, Sarah."

She turned to him then, her eyes bloodshot as if she'd been crying. Immediately, Constantine lifted her up and took her into his arms, holding her against him, "What's the matter? You were happy before you came upstairs. What's changed?"

"I want to ask you a question." Her voice was wobbly with obvious emotion.

"Anything."

"Do you love me? I mean, truly love me?"

For a moment he was stunned, unable to believe she'd asked such a question after what they'd shared. "You need to ask? You know I do, with all my heart. Why are you second-guessing my feelings for you?" Her expression became unreadable. Constantine noticed she ignored his question, but decided he'd address it later. "What?"

"Are we truly bonded? When you marked me, is that all it takes? Is there another step?"

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you have to take me in wolf form for us to be completely bonded mates?"

"Who told you that?"

"Is it true?"

Of course it was, but he'd wanted to tell her later, once she'd gotten used to the idea of them being together. "Yes, but--"

"So we're not truly bonded yet?"

"No, but--"

She held up her hand. "Say no more. Answer me this, too: when your father was looking for us, was he attacked?"

"How did you know?" His father had only just told Constantine of the attack against Paris and Dante.

"Does it matter?"

Constantine scowled. "Actually it does." It suddenly dawned on him who the culprit was. He should have known. "Aunt Eleni." Paris must have told Eleni as well, but why would his aunt tell Sarah about it? "Sarah, my father is fine. He's lived many years and is adept at taking care of himself in most situations."

"So it's true." Her voice was devoid of all emotion, and Constantine became even more uneasy.

"Whatever my aunt said has obviously upset you. If you're feeling guilty, then don't. We said we'd protect you, and that's that. Stop worrying about things." He lightly stroked her cheek. You don't need to pay too much attention to Eleni; she has a flair for the dramatic."

"I don't think she said anything untrue. After all, you just confirmed it."

"What the hell are you talking about? Whatever else you may believe about me, at least trust in the fact that I love you very much."

She studied him intently for a while, silent.

"You know I do love you, don't you, Sarah?"

"I believe you think you do."

It wasn't what he wanted to hear. "I do dammit! How can you possibly doubt me?"

"How can you withhold things from me?"

"What have I withheld from you?" he demanded.

"The mating thing."

He sighed with no little annoyance. "I would have told you, but it's not that simple. There are things I'll have to do first to prepare you."

"And when did you plan on telling me?"

When Constantine got a hold of his aunt, he was going to wring her neck. How dare she put uncertainties in Sarah's mind? Words, he saw, were not doing any good. It was time for action.

“If there’s anything you can believe in, believe in this.” She twisted her head aside, but he followed her movement, capturing her lips with his. He wouldn’t let her deny him or herself.

She stayed still in his arms, not fighting, but not responding, either. “Open your mouth. Goddamn you, open up,” he muttered against her mouth. When she didn’t, he threaded his fingers through her hair and gave it a hearty tug.

She gasped, and he took advantage of her parted lips, his tongue thrusting forward even as his cock stiffened and he rubbed it against her body. She tried to pull away, but his fingers tightened in the strands of her hair. He explored the sweet recesses of her mouth, savoring the taste unique to her. Triumph filled him when she finally sighed into his mouth and held him tight.

As she slumped against him in total surrender, he relaxed his grip on her and allowed his hands to slide down her back. He cupped her buttocks, molding and kneading her flesh in his palms. The fragrant scent of her filled his nostrils, making him want her more. He was so fucking hard, he was ready to penetrate her right now, but Constantine wanted her to see the love he felt for her. He had to put to rest her doubts once and for all.

He lifted his head, trying to catch his breath. “Make love to me, Sarah.”

She looked confused at first. “Me? Make love to you?”

“Yes, *mana mou*. I burn for you. I want to prove to you how much you mean to me. I’ve never given my trust so fully to any woman, but I’m putting myself in your hands. You have carte blanche to do what you’d like to me.”

She ran her tongue across her lips; the movement made his pulse quicken, but Constantine forced himself to remain still.

“Your father. He...”

“He knows how I feel about you and accepts it, accepts us. We won’t be interrupted. Besides, it’s only natural I’d want to make love with my mate. Take me.”

She paused for a moment before grasping the bottom of his t-shirt and pulling it from his waistband. Whenever this woman touched him, he always had such a difficult time thinking clearly. Her hands roamed his body; air stuttered within his chest. He lifted his arms so she could yank his shirt off and bare his torso. She tossed the material aside before working on his belt and buttons. He eagerly stepped out of his jeans when she slid them teasingly down his legs.

His cock ached for her. He didn’t know if he’d be able to withstand her deliberately slow movements. He wanted her so badly, he could hardly breathe.

“Still not wearing underwear?” Sarah grinned at him, her gaze never leaving his stiff member.

“I thought we agreed it was better this way.”

“Infinitely. I just like taking note of how scrumptious you are.” She ran her finger over his hard length. His breath caught in his throat as she twined her hand around his rod, giving it a gentle tug, and then another one.

“Oh, God. This is torture,” he groaned, his fists clenching at his sides. This time was for her, he reminded himself over and over. He had told her she was in control; he couldn’t go back on his word even though he desperately wanted to.

With his cock still firmly in her grasp, Sarah bent her head and ran her tongue over the flat disk of his nipple instead. Constantine shuddered in response. Her ministrations, though still amazingly innocent, sent pulses of molten sensation up his spine, taking him on an orgasmic journey he’d only ever experienced with her. He belonged to her just as surely as she belonged to him. “Sarah,” he sighed.

She nipped his pebbled tips, and with each passing moment, he found it more difficult to not haul her into his arms and fuck her blind. She slid her tongue the distance between his nipples before taking the other bud in her mouth, suckling it with seeming reverence, as though savoring his very flavor.

He had to touch her. Constantine brought his hands to her soft hair, releasing it from its braid. He always loved the way it flowed freely around her shoulders, like a dark cape. God, he loved this woman! The crippling passion shooting through his veins had his body shaking uncontrollably.

Sarah’s hand never left his dick, stroking him in steady motions and driving him insane. He was incredibly close to coming and had to will himself to hold on. In no way did he want her to feel cheated from his promise.

She lifted her head, a smile tilting her lips. “Do you like that?”

“You know I do,” he growled.

Her grin widened. “Good, because I enjoy doing it to you.” She released his cock. “Lie on the bed while I undress.”

He was reluctant to leave her side, wanting her body against his, but he obeyed her command. When he moved on the bed on his back, elbows supporting his upper body, Constantine watched in fascination while she slowly slid the straps of her dress off her shoulders.

Sarah revealed the brown globes of her breasts. The lovely mounds, high and firm, didn’t need the support of a bra. He wanted those dark peaks in his mouth, to nibble, lick, and suck them. She pushed her dress completely off, and then stepped out of her panties, finally standing naked before him.

She looked like a dark goddess, tempting him to every wicked delight imaginable. His cock literally throbbed with pain for her; he wanted that pussy on his rod more than he wanted air to breathe. “Come to me, Sarah,” he pleaded.



Sarah shook her head, lifting her breasts and lightly grazing her nipples with her thumbs, teasing him.

“Are you trying to kill me? If I don’t have you now, I think I’ll explode.”

“Then you’ll have to explode, because this is my time.”

Constantine kept the growl from his throat. “Oh, God, I need you. I can smell your delicious pussy from here. Put it on my face. I’ll make you feel good, I promise.”

Sarah’s hand drifted to her sex. “Beg for it,” she ordered as if she enjoyed seeing him suffer this way.

“Please. I want you bad. I need to taste you, fuck you, suck you -- whatever you want - - but please don’t deny me.” He watched in hungry fascination as her fingers slid deeper into her cunt.

“You say that with such eloquence.” Removing her fingers, she strolled over to him with slow, stalking movements, a total temptress. She rubbed her dew-soaked fingers across his lips, before slipping them into his mouth. He drew on her digits ferociously, wanted to swallow every bit of her essence.

“Did you like that?” She removed her fingers from his mouth.

“You know I did.”

“I hope you like this even more.” Climbing on the bed, she turned her back to him as she straddled his face.

Her pussy smelled heavenly. Constantine licked his lips in eager anticipation as she lowered her cunt onto his mouth. He latched onto her slick folds, grasping her hips. She wiggled and squirmed, her juices covering the lower portion of his face. Sarah bent forward and grasped his cock before sliding her tongue around the tip. It was difficult to concentrate with her lips on him, but he somehow managed. She was delectable.

His tongue pushed into her hot channel just as she engulfed his erection. The double stimulation of tasting her succulent pussy and having Sarah suck his cock aroused him to the extreme edge of his restraint. His body was on fire for her -- one burst of molten flame was all it would take to send him into the cauldron.

He loved the way she gave herself so freely. Her head bobbed up and down his cock, and she moaned, the sound a vibrating sensation along his rod. He would never get enough of this woman, never.

They sucked, licked, and sampled each other, neither speaking, engrossed in their activities as they were. Constantine reveled in their lust, stiffening when his climax was about to hit him. Pulling his mouth away from her cunt, he groaned. “I’m going to come.”

Unheeding of his words, she continued to move her mouth along his cock, her lips tightening around him. His fingers dug into the fleshy part of her thighs as he released his ejaculate into her mouth; she slurped and drank him greedily, moaning loudly around his

dick. When he'd released all he had to give, she finally raised her head and shifted away from him. He wanted to have more of her like this, but she wouldn't be denied her reward.

Repositioning herself to face him, she straddled his thighs. Even though he'd just come, Constantine grew hard again at the mere thought of being inside her pussy. Sarah took his dick and guided it into her, inch by inch. She was so wonderfully snug.

"Oh, yes," she breathed. "I love the way you feel in me."

"And I love being one with you."

She sat still for a moment, his cock embedded deep within her. Then she took his hands and placed them over her breasts; he happily squeezed the firm globes. At last, she began to undulate, riding him in steady motions. He'd never seen a more delicious sight than her sitting astride him, her eyes blazing with lust.

She was his. All his.

"I love you so much, Sarah. I don't know how I got by before you entered my life, but I know I can't do without you."

She paused in her movements, her eyes filling with the suspicious gleam of tears. "It means a lot hear you say that. I love you, too."

No other words were needed after her declaration. Constantine grasped her hips while she bounced up and down on his shaft. Her breasts jiggled with her every movement. Sarah leaned forward, her hands on his chest to steady herself and provide support for her plunges.

She strained and ground against him, her vaginal walls clenching his cock, sucking him deeper. Already he was unbelievably close to reaching yet another climax, but this time he would make sure Sarah came with him.

His fingers tightened on her flesh as he lifted his hips, thrusting deeper and harder into her. She arched her back, mashing her pussy against his cock and belly.

"Oh, yes! Yes! Yes! Yes!" She screamed once more before collapsing forward and shuddering against him, gasping for breath with her own orgasm. He continued to pound into her in frenzied motions.

"Tell me you love me again," he demanded.

"I do. I love you, Constantine," she moaned, her exhaustion evident. Her words rang in his head. Then his peak hit him like a thunder clap, lightning rushing through his body. He emptied his balls into her tight sheath and released a shout of pure satisfaction. Surrounding her with his arms, he rolled them both over to their sides, his cock clamped tightly in her pussy.

"Constantine?"

"Yes, *mana mou*?" He stroked her hair and kissed her forehead.

"I... I just want you to know, no matter what happens, I love you very much."

He found that statement odd. "What are you talking about? Why do you think anything will happen? We're bond mates. That means forever. I hope you're not still harboring doubts about my love for you."

She smiled. "Not anymore. I just wanted you to know how much I love you. No matter what." The grave way in which she spoke those words bothered him a little, but maybe he was imagining things.

He hoped to God he was.

\* \* \* \* \*

"You're doing the right thing. There can be no other way." Eleni patted her hand as though to offer comfort.

Sarah scooted away along the rail, blinking back the tears that threatened to spill down her cheeks. Leaving Constantine was the hardest thing she'd ever had to do. It gnawed at her gut, but Eleni was right. If she truly loved him, she'd leave. Learning that Paris had been attacked because of her had been the clincher. Sarah didn't think she'd be able to handle it if any of the Kyriakises were to become hurt simply because she was with them. Especially Constantine.

They'd made love one last time before he'd drifted into slumber. She'd waited as long as she could until she was sure he was sleeping before she'd dressed and slipped out of the room. There's been no sign of Paris, thank God, so the coast had been clear. And just as she'd promised, Eleni had been waiting with a boat for the two of them.

Now Sarah could see the mainland ahead of them, and there was no turning back. "Are you sure Paris didn't hear us leave?"

The redhead shrugged. "Even if he did, I told him I had to go to a party. Besides, I'm sure he assumes you're with my nephew. The two of you were certainly loud enough." Eleni's face contorted in disgust. "By the time they realize you've left, you'll be long gone, I trust."

"That's my intention."

"Hmm. To ensure that, I've secured you a couple of escorts. You'll be in their hands when we dock."

Sarah frowned. "Escorts? I don't need--"

Eleni laughed. "Of course you do. You deserve no less." The boat's speed decreased, and then the woman skillfully maneuvered the vessel to the dock.

A sense of danger suddenly struck Sarah's heart. Something wasn't on the up and up, and the uneasy feeling she'd had about Eleni earlier came back. A feeling of doom dropped on her. There was something familiar about this. Something nagging in the back of Sarah's mind that she couldn't quite get a hold of. Why did this woman's laughter seem so familiar?

The look of malicious anticipation in Eleni's eyes definitely sent the red flags up and waving frantically. The knowledge suddenly came to her, and she gasped.

"You were there that day," Sarah whispered.

Eleni didn't bother to pretend ignorance, somehow instantly knowing what Sarah was referring to. "Of course I was. As long as your mother lived, Paris would continue to carry his misguided torch for her. The way he used to go on about her made me sick! Your mother wasn't worthy to be the alpha fem! But I am. She stole what was always meant to be mine!"

"You killed her... and my father. You were there with those men."

"Unfortunately, it didn't turn out quite as I expected. I should have taken care of all of you myself instead of letting the help handle it. They bungled the entire affair; you should have been killed first."

"You're the one who's been chasing me all these years."

"That credit actually belongs to Gage, but I let him know where you were when Paris and I saw that painting in the gallery. I knew there was only one person who could have painted it, and I wasn't going to allow some little half-breed ruin my plans. I've waited years to be Paris's mate. Years, I tell you! Once I convinced your stupid mother to run away -- just as I did with you -- she later ended up with Gage. Why he didn't kill her then, I don't know, nor do I care, but word soon got back to me that she'd escaped and was living with a human who apparently didn't know what she was." Eleni's smile was filled with glee.

"They had you, of course, and I knew I wouldn't rest until the three of you were gone. There was no way I would let Paris know of Zahara's existence after I had worked so hard to first get rid of my husband long ago, then later, my sister, too. You see I'd been keeping tabs on your mother. Once she escaped Gage and I finally tracked her down again, I sent some... friends of mine to get rid of her and your father. They were supposed to take care of you as well; they swore they had. I shouldn't have trusted them. No matter, I had them killed so there'd be no tales told later. Once your mother was out of the way, I led my sister to an ambush. I won't let you destroy my beautiful plan now."

Sarah's eyes widened. "You killed your own sister?"

Eleni batted her lashes in mock innocence. "Feral wolves did. I had no clue they'd be there." The little girl voice in which she said it made a lie of her words.

"You're crazy."

"No. I'm determined to get what I want. And when I'm alpha fem of Pack Kyriakis as I was always meant to be, I'll rid the world of every single half-breed." She laughed again. "You know what, you're just like your mother. I wonder if you'll scream like she did when you're being torn apart."

Enraged, Sarah flew at Eleni, going for the woman's throat. Fury like nothing she'd felt before tore through Sarah. This woman was responsible for all her pain and suffering, had

deprived her of her parents. Though Sarah had loved her father, the loss of her mother had hit her the hardest.

Despite the fact that she was many years younger and a half-breed, the full-blood shifter still had a difficult time throwing Sarah off. The boat rocked violently in their struggle.

Eleni punched Sarah in the face hard enough to send her reeling, but Sarah kept her arms firmly around the shifter's neck. Eleni dealt Sarah another powerful blow, this time to the side of her head, dislodging her.

Sarah fell back, nearly going overboard. That was when she noticed two men racing toward the boat. She immediately knew they weren't human, but neither were they shifters. Before she could recover her balance, Eleni pushed her hard, sending Sarah flying into the water. Sarah was a pretty strong swimmer, but the blows she'd suffered had disoriented her and caused her to react more slowly than she normally would.

When Sarah surfaced, she could hear Eleni's laughter. "You are so pathetic. Did you actually think you could best me, half-breed?"

In a desperate attempt to flee, Sarah tried to swim away, but something yanked her below. She struggled, kicking and clawing to reach the surface, but the invisible force held her under the water. Just when it felt like her lungs would burst, she managed to break through.

The sweet relief of air filling her lungs was short-lived; she looked up to see the two men standing above the plane of the water as if it were solid ground.

"You've caused us a lot of problems, half-breed. This is only a taste of what you'll get from Gage," the tall menacing blond said to her before the invisible force drove her back under.

As much as she fought, she couldn't come back up. She wasn't sure if she ever would.

## Chapter Eighteen

Constantine tore through the house, but there was still no sign of Sarah. He should have known something was going on when she'd acted so strangely earlier, but he hadn't examined her behavior too clearly. Now he wished to God that he had.

When he'd awakened a short time ago to find her gone, he'd thought she might have gone out to the beach. But she hadn't been there; a quick check had revealed one of the boats was missing.

His father walked into the house, the set of his mouth grim. "I've contacted everyone on the island. No one has seen Sarah, and no other boats are missing except the one your aunt took. The only thing I can think of is that your mate might have left with Eleni. Damn the woman's meddling!" Paris pounded his fist against the wall. "I heard the boat leave, but I didn't suspect..."

Constantine's heart sank. "How long?"

"Less than an hour ago. It takes a half hour to reach the mainland; if we use the helicopter, it's possible we can catch up with them."

"Then let's go. Sarah is out there somewhere, and so are her enemies." He rubbed his face. "Why would Aunt Eleni do this? Earlier, she already tried to turn Sarah against me."

Paris frowned. "What?"

"Let's discuss it on the way. We have no time to lose."

His father nodded. "I'll call Aries and Dante, too. They should still be on the mainland; I'll have them meet us when we land at the heliport."

When they lifted off from the island, Paris in the pilot's seat, his father resumed their aborted conversation. "What did you mean when you said Eleni tried to turn Sarah against you? What did she tell Sarah?"

“As I told you, I hadn’t mentioned bonding in wolf form to Sarah yet because I wanted to wait for the right time. Aunt Eleni, on the other hand, was only too happy to fill in the blank. From my understanding of Sarah’s questions and words, Aunt Eleni made it seem like I was purposely withholding that information from Sarah because she’s not my true mate. Not only that, but Sarah was upset about the attack against you when you were looking for us with Dante.”

Paris’s face lost all color. “The attack?”

“What is it, Papa?”

“I-I never said a word about it to Eleni.”

“Then how the hell would she know about it unless--” A sense of utter horror swept through Constantine; he could practically feel the blood freezing in his veins. His aunt had made no secret of her contempt for Sarah, but would she be devious enough to scheme with Sarah’s enemies? “No,” he whispered, not wanting to believe Eleni capable of such evil.

His father released a heavy sigh. “Now that I’m taking a harder look at your aunt, several things aren’t adding up. It’s a good thing I contacted Dante and Aries because we’ll need all the backup we can get.”

Constantine was sure the sense of betrayal by one of his father’s own pack members must cut Paris very deeply. To have the traitor also be a family member... A tense silence fell between the men. Although it was only minutes, it seemed like several hours before Paris navigated the helicopter to land on their private helipad.

Aries and Dante were grimaced and waiting for them by a car. No words were exchanged among them as they drove down to the docks.

Constantine threw his door open the second the vehicle came to a halt. The three shifters and vampire made it to the docks just in time to see Eleni starting up the motorboat. He wondered what was going on. His father had told him Eleni had claimed she was going to attend a party, yet it looked like she wasn’t going to get out of the boat. There was no sign of Sarah.

“Eleni!” Constantine yelled, ready to dive into the boat after her.

She looked startled, but then seemed to recover. She cut the engine as she climbed out and swiftly secured the boat before rushing over to his father. Eleni threw herself at Paris before bursting into tears.

“Oh, Paris. it was awful! We were attacked! I barely got away with my life!”

Paris shoved her away so hard that Eleni stumbled back and would have fallen on her butt if Dante had not caught her. Surprise crossed her face.

“Why are you treating me like this? Didn’t you hear me? I was attacked!”

Constantine lunged for her himself, yelling, but Aries yanked him back. “Don’t pretend you don’t know what’s going on. You’re in league with Gage! You led Sarah to him, didn’t you?”

Eleni's jaw dropped. "You can't believe that. Why would I... I mean..." she looked at the other men for support. "Paris, tell your son he's insane."

His father's gray eyes flashed. "I don't think I can. Why did you take Sarah off the island when I'd already told you about the danger she is in?"

"She's an adult. You can't hold her against her will. She wanted to go. I was doing her a favor. How was I to know there would be men waiting for her?"

"Perhaps because you set it up? Cut the crap, Eleni. You told Sarah about Gage's attack. I never mentioned it to you. Explain your way out of that one."

Her green eyes widened. "B-but you must have told me. How else could I possibly know?"

Paris lifted one dark brow and in that voice of dead calm that didn't bode well for his temper, he asked, "How else, indeed?"

Eleni must have recognized that tone, too, because the façade of astonishment began to crack. "Why do you even care? She's just a goddamn half-breed!"

Constantine strained against his cousin's grip; he wanted to take Eleni by the throat and tear her apart.

Paris's eyes narrowed. "That half-breed was under my protection, and you were aware of it. Who has her?" He walked to her with steady strides.

Eleni lifted her chin defiantly. "You'll never catch up to them. They're long gone."

"So it's true. You have been scheming with Gage, would give a defenseless cub over to the Hunters despite knowing what they're capable of. I thought I knew you, but obviously not if you could do something like this."

"I did it for us! For the good of the pack! She would have brought trouble on all our heads. You should be thanking me," Eleni spat out.

Paris shook his head in apparent disbelief, equal shades of anger and sadness in his eyes.

Constantine's rage could no longer be contained. Propelling himself free of Aries's hold, he managed to grab his aunt by the shoulders and throw her to the dock. Baring his fangs, he went for her throat, but she was ready for him. Swiping him across the face with her razor sharp nails, she managed to gouge his cheek, but the pain didn't register.

Two sets of hands pulled him away from the clawing fem. He struggled against Dante and Aries's grips.

"She is your aunt, Constantine. Don't do it." Dante tried to calm him down, but his words only increased Constantine's wrath.

"Damn right! Family is supposed to look out for one another; instead, she's put my mate in danger. I *will* kill her."



Paris shook his head. "There's no point. It's already too late for her. Step away from her. Now." He pointed to Eleni, who was slowly rising to her feet. Her eyes had gone from green to a bright orange ringed with black.

"What?" Eleni demanded. "Why are you all staring at me like that?"

"You reap what you sow, Eleni. Your usefulness to Gage is probably at an end."

"What are you talking about? I-- oh!" She doubled over and fell to her knees.

"She's going feral," Aries whispered in amazement. "The Hunters must have infected her somehow."

"No!" Eleni screamed, but her body was already morphing. "No! No! No! I did it all for us, Paris! I should have been your mate; it should have been me! Everything I've done, getting rid of your precious Zahara and my insipid sister, my mate -- it was all for you! Ahhrrrooo!" she howled as her face elongated, hair popping out of every visible pore.

"You did it all for nothing. I would never have chosen you for my mate. I made the mistake of joining with your sister when I didn't love her, but I won't err like that again. You and I could have been friends; now there is nothing."

Constantine knew that Eleni didn't register his father's last words. She was forever tied to her wolf form now, her human mind gone. Shaking herself out of the tatters of her clothes, she looked as if she were about to spring. His father, however, moved swiftly, taking her head in his hands and twisting it until there was a loud crack. Then he ripped her skull from her sagging body as her blood sprayed around him. He straightened and released the remains as Constantine stared, mouth agape. Despite Eleni's treachery, his father had killed her in the most humane way possible: quickly and without much pain.

"It had to be done. Once she went feral, she was already dead inside." Paris sighed. "Even so, before she was completely subsumed, I was able to gauge her thoughts and saw the direction a large black sedan took Sarah and where they're headed. If we speed, we can probably gain on them, but we have to go now."

They raced to the car and took off. Constantine's heart had never pounded so hard. They had to make it to Sarah in time. They just had to!

\* \* \* \* \*

Sarah struggled fruitlessly against the force holding her immobile in the back seat of the sedan between her two attackers. Her muscles remained weak from trying to keep herself alive in the water, and her lungs still burned. She was exhausted, yet she couldn't give up. There had to be a way out of this mess. Why had she listened to Eleni? That terrible laugh still rang in her ears.

"Stop struggling, half-breed, or you'll get more of what you got at the marina," the blond hissed at her. He was the one called Jackal. The other was Dorn, a tall, nearly emaciated-looking man with eyes as black as his long, stringy hair.

She glared at them in turn. “Two against one? That hardly seems fair, don’t you think?” There was no way she’d be able to overpower these men, so she’d have to use her brain.

Jackal glared at her. “You’ve been very elusive until now. We’re not leaving anything to chance.”

“Fine, but can’t you let me move at least? I can’t very well go anywhere in a speeding vehicle.”

“Do you think us so foolish?” Dorn asked. “It would best if you kept your mouth shut -- or we can shut it for you.”

She rolled her eyes heavenward and spoke in a mock scold. “Two men picking on one helpless woman. How... pathetic.”

“Shut up, half breed, before you feel the flat of my hand across your face.”

Sarah closed her eyes, not wanting to give into despair. She’d hoped she could anger them enough that they couldn’t concentrate on keeping her restrained. *Constantine, please help me.*

*Sarah, where are you?*

She frowned. How was it possible he was speaking to her telepathically when he wasn’t near? *Constantine?*

*I’m here, Sarah. Can you tell me where you are?*

*I don’t know. I’m in a car, and everything is so dark outside. I can’t see anything except that we’re on a narrow winding road.*

*Hold on, mana mou, I can feel us getting closer to you.*

*I didn’t realize you could communicate with me from afar.*

*I heard you call my name. I told you, we’re connected, Sarah... you are my bond mate. If this doesn’t prove we’re meant to be together, I don’t know what will.*

*I know we are. I’m sorry for leaving you; I shouldn’t have done it.*

She felt Constantine release a mental sigh. *No, you shouldn’t have, but we’ll discuss it when you’re back in my arms again. In the meantime, do you think it’s possible you can slow them down -- maybe get the car to stop somehow?*

*I’m not sure if I can. I’m being held by some intangible force. But I’ll try.*

*How many are there?*

*Three. Two in the backseat with me, and one driving. I think the driver is of little consequence, though.*

*What kind of car is it?*

*Black Mercedes sedan. I’m not really sure what the model is, but I made out the hood ornament when they put me in here.*

*Aries is driving like the devil. We’re getting near. Hold on for me, mana mou. I love you. I--*

*Crack!*

Sarah heard the sound of the hand smacking her before she felt the actual sting on her cheek. Her eyes popped open in surprise. She hadn't even known she'd shut them.

Jackal hovered over her, a snarl on his face. "Who were you communicating with half-breed?"

"No one."

*Smack!*

Her head banged against the seat from the force of the blow.

"Don't lie, you stupid cunt."

Anger took over, burning in her gut. She glared at him. "Go ahead and hit me again, you coward. Is this the only way you can best me? Holding me down with your magic? Aren't you supposed to be a powerful Hunter? What a loser. I may be a half-breed shifter, but you're only half a man. You're low. Lower than low." Sarah lobbed some spit at him.

She braced herself for the blow he sent her way, but it didn't connect.

Dorn was holding Jackal's fist. "No. Gage doesn't want any marks on her."

"We're wizards; we can heal her before we get there. This little bitch is responsible for our fallen comrades. She needs to pay!"

Dorn snorted. "No. Leave her be. Gage will be able to tell. I, for one, don't want to feel his wrath when he examines her."

"Who's in charge here?" Jackal demanded.

In the midst of the two wizards arguing, Sarah realized neither one of them was concentrating on her. She found she could move; she had to seize her chance before they realized it, too. Taking a deep breath, Sarah sprang forward, flying toward the driver. She reached the wheel and gave it a powerful wrench to one side.

Her action sent the car careening off the narrow road. The driver shoved her hands away while Jackal and Dorn yanked her back. It was too late, however. The driver had already lost control of the car. Dorn's hands shot out, somehow halting the car's headlong movement, and Jackal wrapped his fingers around her throat.

"You stupid bitch! You shouldn't have done that." He ignored Dorn's repeated warning about Gage.

Sarah wouldn't give up; she had mobility and help was on the way. She clawed at the wizard's face, then tried to gouge his eyes out, but he turned his head away just in time. However, his grip tightened around her, cutting off her air supply. This was far worse than being dunked under water. Bright spots danced in front her.

Constantine's voice reverberated in her mind. *Hold on, Sarah. We're almost there.*

She tried to whisper his name, but the words were stuck in her bruised throat. Sarah continued to kick, hit, and scratch, refusing to give up.

Just as consciousness was slipping away, something rammed the car from behind, jerking them all forward. “What the--?” Jackal’s grip loosened enough for her to send a fist into his stomach in one last burst of strength.

“Shit, we’ve been followed!” Dorn stated the obvious just as the car was pushed further off the road, sending it nearly off the hill.

Sarah lunged for the car door and wiggled the handle, but Jackal grabbed her hair. He let her have another blow to the head, making her mind reel. She would have passed out if sheer will hadn’t kept her lucid.

“Start the fucking car,” Jackal yelled.

“I’m trying to, but something must be wrong with it! I think the undercarriage must have hit something,” the driver whined.

“You fool! Use your powers to get this car moving again,” Dorn shouted in vain.

The back passenger door was ripped off the hinges. Sarah reached for the extended hand, instinctively knowing who it belonged to. Constantine pulled her out of the car and quickly set her aside.

A big bolt of electrifying power shot at him, catapulting him away from the car. Jackal jumped out and looked ready to deliver another round when a large gray wolf jumped at him, going for his neck.

Another wolf sprang at Dorn, but it was knocked back by a swinging fist. The vampire, Dante, went after the driver, who obviously wasn’t as strong a wizard as his companions.

Sarah watched in shocked horror as the vampire ripped the young wizard’s arm out of its socket and hit the screaming man. Blood spurted everywhere; there was so much of it that Sarah felt bile rise within her throat. She knew Dante could have easily killed the wizard, but he didn’t.

She turned away from the gruesome scene to make sure Constantine was okay, but when she rushed to his side, he pushed her away. “Get back, Sarah. I won’t have you hurt again.” Before she could protest, Constantine flew at Jackal, who managed to swat the large wolf he’d been tangling with -- just barely. She figured the animal attacking Jackal must be Paris and the other wolf was Aries.

A punishing blow from Constantine sent Jackal falling backward and gave Paris a chance to engage again. Large teeth sank into the shrieking wizard’s neck.

Sarah looked away, covering her eyes, but she couldn’t block out the sounds of the man’s dying struggles. Her resolve not to watch didn’t last long; she peeped through her fingers in time to see Constantine and Paris rip Jackal to shreds, until there was nothing left but torn body parts and blood. Her stomach lurched at the sight of Paris eating the dead wizard’s entrails. She shuddered. There was still a lot in the shifter culture she’d have to adjust to, but she didn’t know if she’d ever get used to *that*.

To his misfortune, Dorn suffered the same fate as his companion. Both strong wizards were dead, but the driver was alive, lying on the ground with his dismembered arm. He clutched his bloody stump, which sported a tourniquet consisting of part of his shirt. Instinctively, she knew Dante had kept him alive for one reason -- to send a message to Gage.

Pack Kyriakis and its allies were definitely a force to be reckoned with.

Despite being covered in blood and gore, Constantine rushed to her side and tugged Sarah into his arms.

"Is it over?" she whispered.

"For now." He kissed the top of her head reassuringly.

She knew there was still Gage to deal with, but the relief of the moment was so overwhelming, she fainted.

## Chapter Nineteen

“Dante, I can’t thank you enough for your help.” Paris was glad to be back on Circe, knowing Sarah and his son were safe for the moment. “Those wizards were stronger than I thought they’d be. It annoys me to no end that there are more of those bastards out there, and that they want Sarah. But for what purpose? I’m still trying to figure that one out. I should have killed that little twerp, but no matter how hard I beat him, he still wouldn’t reveal what he knew.”

“Perhaps there was a greater danger to him from Gage if he did tell us what he knew.”

Paris sighed. “You’re probably right, Dante.”

“Could it possibly be because of her mother’s pack? The Nkruma aren’t like other shifters,” the vampire mused.

“I thought the same thing. I’ll just have to renew my efforts in finding out Gage’s plan.” Silence fell between the old friends as they sipped drinks in Paris’s study.

“I’m sorry about Eleni,” Dante offered softly.

Paris shrugged. He blamed himself more than anyone for Eleni’s betrayal. He should have set her straight a long time ago. To think she had been determined enough in her efforts to win him that she had orchestrated her own husband and sister’s murders. While knowing the truth of Melanie’s death saddened him, it didn’t cut as deeply as the loss of Zahara. It was time he truly moved on with his life without thoughts of her haunting him, although that would probably be damned near impossible. From what Sarah had revealed, he now understood that Zahara had taken on the identity of Anne Devereaux to escape her past. Paris doubted he ever would get over his loss of her. How could he do so when every time he looked at Sarah he saw the eyes of his lost love?

When Constantine and Sarah had cubs of their own... what if one of them reminded Paris of the cub's grandmother? What then? Would his torment ever end? Was he doomed to love Zahara forever?

Paris believed the joining of Sarah and Constantine would lift the dark cloud of Nana Nkruma's long-ago words from Pack Kyriakis... so why did he still feel cursed? And would the curse truly be broken if this was how he'd feel about Zahara for eternity? These thoughts tore at him.

"Are you all right, Paris?" Dante patted him on the shoulder.

Paris swallowed the remainder of his gin and tonic before speaking. "I suppose I am."

"You're thinking about her, aren't you?" the vampire asked perceptively.

"I can't remember a time when I'm not. But enough about me. I had an interesting conversation with Persephone while you were cleaning up. She says you and Isis seem to be getting a little cozy with each other."

Dante's face turned beet red. "She's... she's a lovely young lady."

Paris chuckled, amused at his friend's reaction. "So it's like that, eh? I knew you would hit it off. My daughter tells me Isis has a thing for vampires. Do I take it your interest is reciprocated?"

Dante shrugged. "I don't know. When I talk to her, my mind isn't on Maggie. As a matter of fact, ever since I met her... I've realized that maybe what I need is a mate of my own, but I still have to sort out my feelings. There's too much going on with my family right now to consider such emotions properly. Speaking of my family, I checked my messages earlier and have to get back to them. I have a new niece." Dante sounded awed.

"Maggie had the baby?"

The vampire nodded. "Yes. There hasn't been a female child born in our family, so this is a miraculous feat she's accomplished... And all my brothers are there with their families. I've stayed away too long. Hell, I haven't even been properly introduced to Romeo's children yet. In fact, I've been a lousy brother." He snorted in evident self-disgust and rubbed his jaw.

"I'm sure your brothers wouldn't accuse you of that. You've been there for each of them when they needed you. And you've never let me down, either. I appreciate that, my friend, and I'm sure your brothers won't begrudge you your time away from them. You deserve to have selfish moments every now and then. We all do."

"Deep down, I know this, but it doesn't lessen my guilt."

"It's the kind of person you are. You give so much. I've always admired that in you."

"As I have you, especially at how much you've matured over the years. I remember a time when you were just a brat, chasing skirts and causing trouble -- not unlike my brother Romeo. Spyros would be very proud of you."

Paris always got choked up at the mention of his grandfather. He wished Spyros were here now to offer him guidance, but Paris was alpha, and it was his responsibility to watch

over the welfare of his pack. “Thank you, Dante. It means a lot to me to hear you say that.” He reached for the gin to refill his glass, not bothering to mix it with the tonic water.

“These next coming months will be a challenge. Not only will we be dealing with the Gage threat, but Constantine and Sarah’s mating ceremony is in a couple of weeks. I’ll be inviting Pack Eriksson so I can formalize Persephone’s betrothal. I’m sure she won’t like that. Then I have to focus on finding Aries a mate.” Paris sighed, taking a healthy swallow of his drink. At least he could forget about his worries for a while.

“Should you need me, you know you can call on me for anything.”

“I know, but your family has its own set of problems to deal with. It must be terrifying to face these new threats who claim to be your older brothers. I don’t know what I would do in your situation.”

“Or I, in yours.”

“Here’s to getting out of our respective messes in one piece.” Paris held up his glass, which Dante clinked with his own.

“I’ll drink to that,” the vampire murmured.

\* \* \* \* \*

Gage paced the room, furious at the turn of events. Pack Kyriakis would pay for interfering yet again in his plans. Dammit! He knew he should have killed Paris Kyriakis when he’d had the chance.

Once more, the half-breed had eluded him, but it wouldn’t be long before she was in his grasp. No matter. He had yet to play his ace in the hole. He looked at Pet sleeping in front of the fire.

Laughter rumbled in his chest.

Oh, yes. When he struck again, the Kyriakises wouldn’t see it coming.

\* \* \* \* \*

Constantine moved in and out of Sarah’s tight sheath, immersing his senses in the moist warmth of her. He didn’t want this moment to end. When he thought of how close he’d come to losing her, it made him drive harder and deeper into her.

“Constantine! Oh, yes! Please take me! Don’t stop!” She clawed at his back, holding him closer, her pelvis grinding against him. Her vaginal muscles clenched around his cock so tightly, the sensation was mind blowing.

This was his bitch, his woman, his mate. No one would ever separate them again. His mouth met hers in a hot, hungry possession; his tongue thrust into Sarah’s mouth, devouring her. The taste and feel of her seared through his body, sending bursts of fire through his veins. His love for her only intensified the sensations.



Sarah's tongue darted forward to meet his, twining, licking, and twirling with his. As their bodies moved and strained against each other, the fiery lust within him grew until Constantine tensed. Ripping his mouth from hers, he roared, his orgasm hitting him like an earthquake, yet he continued to pump rapidly, shooting his seed into her tight cunt.

"Constantine!" Sarah screamed her own release until she was writhing and shaking uncontrollably beneath him.

He collapsed on top of her, his breathing ragged. Nothing compared to being with Sarah like this. Nothing. He'd walk through fire, kill, and lay down his life for her.

"I love you so much, *mana mou*. Don't ever doubt it for a minute. And if you run away from me again, I will find you and drag you back by the hair."

Sarah laughed.

Constantine lifted a brow. "Oh, you think I'm kidding?"

"Not at all, but I didn't know you could be so very much the caveman."

"You'd be surprised at the lengths I'd go to keep you by my side," he growled. "From the moment I laid eyes on you, I knew it was forever, even if it did take me a little while to fully realize it."

She kissed him. "Thank you for not giving up on us. I'm sorry I ran away instead of coming to you and expressing my concerns. I suppose I'm so used to running, it was an automatic reaction."

"Whatever challenges we face, we'll do it together. My pack may not be as large as some, but we're strong, and we stand together."

A worried expression crossed her face. Sarah nibbled on her bottom lip.

"What is it, Sarah?"

"You don't... I know this is an awful thought, but if Eleni could turn on her pack, how can you trust anyone else?"

Constantine sighed. His aunt's treachery had surprised the hell out of him. He'd known she was selfish and had harbored an unhealthy obsession with his father, but Constantine never would have believed her to be capable of the havoc she'd wrought. That she was responsible for both Sarah's mother and his mother's deaths affected him the most. Her own sister! There was only one explanation he could come up with to make sense of any of it: she hadn't been in her right mind for a very long time. Sometimes obsession could warp a person until nothing else existed except achieving a single goal.

"Unfortunately, I think there's an exception to every rule. I don't believe she's been quite sane for a while. Like humans, immortals can be crazy, too. There are certain incidents that come to mind now to make me think that she has had long-standing mental illness, but no one really noticed it, or I suppose we all just attributed it to her flair for the dramatic. I know that real evil exists in this world, but I'd like to think she was more misguided than evil. It's the only way I can rationalize her killing my mother and yours."

She looked at him sympathetically. "I'm sorry, Constantine."

He put his forehead against Sarah's. It felt good to have someone in his life who understood.

Sarah stroked his back. "Constantine?"

"Yes, my love?"

"The ceremony you were telling me about... will all your relatives be there?"

"Yes. When we join, it's tradition that the entire pack be present. But we don't have to actually perform the act in front of everyone. Only the alpha and immediate family."

"I'm a little nervous about doing that with people watching."

"Every mated couple has to do it, sweetheart. I know this must frighten you, but it's our way."

"And we'll have to mate in wolf form?"

He smoothed her hair back in a loving gesture, unable to take his eyes off her lovely face. "Yes. Does that make you anxious?"

"A little, but I trust you."

It warmed his heart to hear her say that. Constantine was so in love with this woman he could barely contain himself. Squeezing her tightly, he kissed her.

"I love you, Constantine," she sighed against his mouth.

"And I you, *mana mou*. After our formal joining, your body will go through changes until you're completely immortal."

"This living-forever thing is kind of daunting, but I can't think of anyone I'd rather spend the rest of eternity with than you."

Constantine hugged her close.

Sarah's eyes glistened with unshed tears. "Not long ago, I didn't think I'd ever find love, but then you came into my life. Thank you for loving me and giving me hope. With you, I'm no longer afraid."

"And because of you, I have a reason for waking up every morning to become a man you can be proud of."

She laid her hand against his cheek. "You do make me proud, and I'm honored to be the woman who'll always be standing by your side."

He kissed her again. There was so much love in his heart that he wished all the people he cared about could know the same happiness he felt, especially his father. With the Kyriakis curse broken, Paris was free to love again -- or, at least, Constantine hoped so.

The sleep he'd been fighting was slowly taking over. The last time he'd drifted off with Sarah, she'd left. "Don't go anywhere," he muttered drowsily.

"Never. I'll never leave you again," she whispered.

And he knew she'd be there when he woke up and for the rest of his life.

 THE END 

## **Eve Vaughn**

Eve Vaughn enjoys writing above all else. She began writing short stories to amuse herself since she could form letters. Mischievous as a child, she lost her television privileges quite a bit and found writing to be her outlet. Besides writing, Eve likes reading, baking, volunteering, traveling, and spending time with her family. She currently resides in the Philadelphia area with her husband and turtle.

Eve loves hearing from her fans so feel free to contact her at [EveVaughn10@aol.com](mailto:EveVaughn10@aol.com) or join her yahoo group at [evevaughnsbooks@yahoo.com](mailto:evevaughnsbooks@yahoo.com).