



Witch's Moon

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Description: A witch and a werewolf—a match made in hell. Regan is about to play a leading role in someone's plans for world domination. And all they need to do to ensure her cooperation is bite her. Regan doesn't do scared. It's not who she is. But right now, she's panicking. Being a werewolf is dangerous and one wrong step could mean the End of Days. And the only person who can help is the stunningly gorgeous, embittered son of the werewolf who bit her. Caleb Stone wants an ordinary life. After a horrendous childhood, he fled the pack and now does a pretty good job of pretending he's human. Self-delusion at its best. The last woman he wants to get involved with is a witch turned werewolf. However explosive the chemistry between them. But soon it becomes clear that Regan and Caleb need each other, and together they're going to uncover secrets that will turn both their lives to chaos.

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Chapter 1

“Don’t go out there.”

At Lola’s words, Regan paused, her hand stretched out to open the door. She turned around. Her sisters, Catrin and Lola, hovered by the kitchen table.

“Why? Have you seen something?” she asked.

Lola often had visions of the future, and they invariably came true. “No. But it’s dinnertime, and I’m starving.”

Regan shook her head. Her baby sister, Lola, was nineteen and always hungry. She almost gave in, but something nagged at her mind, urging her out into the night, and beside her, Satan and Diablo, her hounds, whined and scratched at the door.

Ignoring Lola’s exaggerated sigh, she turned back, reached out her hand, and opened the door. The dogs pushed past her, out into the open, then stood, bodies trembling, muzzles raised.

She went still.

Enchantment filled the air.

Regan sensed it calling to her as she stood in the open doorway, staring out into the forest. The breeze carried the whisper of her name, and the night throbbed with the hum of a magic she’d never encountered before. It shivered over her skin, and a

tremor of anticipation ran through her, coiling in her belly, tensing her muscles.

“Regan?”

She ignored Catrin’s question as she stepped out onto the porch.

The sky was clear, filled with stars, and a sickle moon hung high overhead. A light wind rustled the leaves in the thick woods that surrounded the house, and in the distance, a dog howled. Satan and Diablo pricked their ears, and she laid a hand on each huge head, murmuring soothing words. The howl came again. Her hounds shook her off and stalked into the forest. Regan followed, a frisson of energy quivering along her nerves as she stepped under the cover of the massive oak trees.

The ground was soft under her feet, the air heavy with the scent of growing things. These woods were ancient, maintained by a magic even older than Regan. Normally, she felt at one with them, and her own magic gained strength from being here, but tonight, something was different.

She quickened her pace as she followed Diablo and Satan through the shadowed forest. They broke into a lope and were soon out of sight, but she didn’t turn back. The trees grew thicker, closer together. Regan could no longer even hear her hounds, but some inner sense kept her moving until the trees finally thinned and opened into a wide, circular clearing.

At the far side, a man lounged against the trunk of a huge oak, and she came to an abrupt halt. For a moment, Regan thought he hadn’t noticed her, then he glanced up and straightened.

She hadn’t encountered humans in the forest for many years, and she stepped closer, eyes narrowed. He was tall, taller than she was by at least six inches, dark-haired, dark-skinned, and a faint miasma of evil permeated the air around him. As she

studied him, she realized he wasn't human after all. At least not completely. Maybe once he had been, but no longer. His amber eyes glowed wild and feral, and a quiver ran down her spine.

Moonlight glinted on something he held in his hand—a crystal star twirling at the end of a silver chain.

“Regan?”

She glanced up at his face. A cruel smile curled his lips, but she felt no fear yet, just a deep curiosity. She nodded.

He laughed softly. “He told me you would come. I didn't believe him, but here you are.”

“He?”

“An old”—he paused as if unsure of the right word—“lover of yours.”

Regan gritted her teeth as a wave of remembered pain washed through her. “I don't have any old lovers,” she said. “They're all dead.”

He shrugged. “Never mind—you'll meet him again soon enough. My name is Ethan Stone.”

“So? What do you want?”

“You, of course.”

He appeared handsome enough, well-built, broad-shouldered and powerful, but there was something cold and repellent in his expression, and a shudder of disgust rippled

across her skin. She allowed it to show on her face. “No, thank you. You’re really not my type.”

He laughed. “Don’t get me wrong.” His gaze lingered on the swell of her full breasts so that Regan had to resist the urge to pull her jacket closer around her. “Under other circumstances I could be tempted, but even if I did want you, you’re not for me. In fact, I was told I’d have my heart ripped out if I touched you that way.” He paused. “Not that I don’t mean to touch you.”

“What makes you think I’d let you anywhere near me?”

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“You won’t have a choice.”

“Yeah, right.” She was bored with this. Where were Diablo and Satan? Looking around the clearing, she whistled, but there was no answer, the woods surrounding them silent.

Something moved at the edge of her vision, and she whirled around.

For a moment, she saw nothing. Then from all around her, they came out of the darkness, huge forms emerging from the shadowy trees. Her mind clouded as their combined wills concentrated on her. Adrenalin coursed through her veins, and she forced herself to calm down and breathe in deeply. She needed to work out which spell to use, and it would help if she knew what she was dealing with. They stood upright like men, but their features were not human. Their bodies were covered with dark fur, their heads misshapen with protruding jaws, long curved teeth, and pointed ears. They reminded her of her hellhounds, and suddenly she knew what they were.

“Werewolves!” She stared, wide-eyed, at the man who stood in front of her. “You’re a goddamn werewolf.” She’d never seen a werewolf before, not in two thousand years. “Wow.”

“Glad you’re impressed.”

“I never said I was impressed.” She glanced around at the hulking figures circling her. “You’re not exactly a good-looking lot, are you?”

He smiled. “This is our half form. We find it easier to stay in control and perform

certain tasks. Not quite as aesthetically pleasing as our full-wolf form as you'll soon see for yourself."

"Thanks, but no thanks. I think I'll skip that one. Some other time, perhaps."

All around her, the bodies pressed closer. A bitter, feral stench filled her nostrils, and she swayed, but at least she knew the magic she needed to stop them. She raised her hand, but before she could speak the words, two of the creatures leapt for her. She went down, crashing to the forest floor where she lay winded, more angry than afraid, but unable to free herself from the hard hands that pressed her into the earth. Fury surged through her, and she fought, writhing against them, but they were stronger than anything she had ever encountered. After a minute of pointless struggle, she forced her body to go limp and allowed the magic to build inside her.

Something touched her side. She peered up to see Ethan Stone standing above her, and she snarled. He laughed and nudged her again with the toe of his boot.

"Do you know who I am?" she asked, her tone deadly.

"I not only know who you are," he replied. "I know what you are."

"Then you also know you've just signed your own death warrant."

Ethan ignored the comment and crouched down beside her. "He told me you were spirited. He was right. But don't worry—we'll soon cure you of that."

"You'll—"

"Shhh," he murmured, putting his finger to his lips. He was still holding the silver chain. Now he lifted the necklace over her head so it settled around her throat.

As the crystal star touched her skin, a jolt of power slammed through her. She flung her head back as a vise-like grip seized control of her mind. For a moment, it held her frozen, then ripped free. Relief washed over her, and she opened her mouth to fling out the words that would destroy those who dared to hold her.

And nothing happened.

She closed her eyes and searched her mind for her magic. Behind her closed lids, she could see the words, but she couldn't speak them, only a wordless croak issuing from her throat. Panic flared, clawing at her insides. She tried again, concentrating hard, but the sound that emerged bore no resemblance to the phrases running through her head. Forcing her eyes open, she glared at the man who crouched beside her, a small smile playing across his face.

What have you done?

The words whispered through her head but refused to leave her lips. She reached up to tear the crystal from her throat, but something stopped her, she couldn't make herself touch the thing. She stared up into Ethan's darkly amused expression. "What is it?" She mouthed the words.

"The crystal? Oh, it's just a little trinket, impregnated with witch's bane. A present from that old acquaintance of yours. Don't worry—it's not permanent. That would rather defeat the purpose of this whole little scenario."

Regan bit down sharply on her lip, the pain focusing her mind, as she searched for an identity. She'd only had one old lover who would have this much power—Sardi. But it couldn't be Sardi. He was long dead, destroyed by her magic.

"Stop thinking so hard. You'll find out soon enough." Ethan straightened. "Get her on her feet and tie her hands."

They hauled her upright and dragged her wrists behind her, securing them tightly. She stood between her two attackers, not fighting, her mind frantically hunting for answers.

They'd said they needed her. They weren't going to kill her, or at least not yet. She had to think. She would find a way out, and then they would pay. Especially their leader. She would make sure he regretted this night's work before he died.

He was studying her now, his face filled with a curious anticipation. When he caught her eye, he grinned, then pulled his T-shirt over his head, tossing it to the ground. He held her gaze as his hands went to his waist and unbuckled his belt. Leaning down, he tugged off his boots then shrugged out of his jeans to stand before her.

Naked, he appeared even bigger, the smooth bulge of muscle clear beneath his skin. Nausea churned in her gut, and her legs trembled with the need to run. He stalked toward her, coming to a halt only a foot away.

"Hold her," he said, and the claws tightened on her shoulders.

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She swallowed, her breath coming hard and fast, her heart pounding. Gritting her teeth, she glared defiantly at him, hoping her fear didn't show.

He grinned again. "You think you can fight this, but in the end, you'll do what we want because you'll be one of us." He took a step closer. "I'd like to tell you this won't hurt, but—" He shrugged.

It came to her then, what he planned to do. His eyes changed, until they glowed amber in a face that was blurring, losing its definition. She gasped but couldn't look away.

This was no painful transition; instead, his body flowed into his new form until he stood before her, half-beast, half-man. He flung back his head and roared.

Regan fought then. She couldn't help herself. She struggled, writhing and twisting until she could fight no more, and she hung, limp and exhausted, only held upright by the hands that still gripped her shoulders. Ethan stood before her. She searched for some faint glint of humanity but could find none.

A beast stared back.

His hands were covered in a coarse fur and ended in vicious claws. Reaching out, he pushed her jacket from her shoulders, clasped a clawed hand in the front of her shirt and ripped it open. A low growl trickled from his mouth as he looked at her breasts.

Regan focused over his shoulder, forcing her brain to go blank. She had no choice. This was going to happen, and she tried to make her mind go to another place.

One claw scraped across her breast. The pain brought her back, and she glanced down. A trail of crimson welled up, stark against her pale skin. She clamped her mouth closed to prevent the whimper escaping as he leaned closer. The fetid stink of his breath filled her nostrils before he lowered his head and licked the line of blood from her breast.

For a moment, he peered up into her eyes, and through the pain, she saw there was a flicker of humanity there after all. Then it was gone. His lips drew back, revealing razor-sharp incisors, and he lunged forward, his teeth tearing into the soft flesh where her shoulder met her neck.

Red-hot agony wrenched through her. She opened her mouth and screamed, could still hear her own screams as the darkness took her.

Chapter 2

A howl shattered the night's silence. Caleb raised his head. Then he shrugged—not his business, climbed into his truck, and slammed the door on the sound. He turned the key in the ignition and slowly pulled away.

He'd only gone a few feet when a woman's scream tore through the night. The sound was inhuman, a creature in agony, and without conscious thought, his foot crashed onto the brake. The force of the stop stalled the truck and hurled him forward, slamming his body into the steering wheel. For a moment, he sat, his hands gripping the wheel, his knuckles white.

He tried to tell himself it didn't have anything to do with him. That the scream was probably some ruse of Ethan's to drag him back. But even knowing it might be a trick, Caleb couldn't ignore that cry.

He'd turned his back on Ethan's world over twenty years ago, and he'd sworn he'd never return. But Ethan knew him too well, knew the one thing that would induce Caleb to come anywhere near him or his pack.

Caleb's mother had died when he was born, and Caleb knew nothing about her except she was human. He'd clung to that fact through the horrors of his childhood, dreamed of one day finding his mother's family, a human family.

Tonight, Ethan had lured him here, claiming he was finally willing to talk, tell him the truth at last. And Caleb, like a fool, had come running.

Of course, it was a lie. He should have known Ethan would never reveal the secrets of the past. Instead, he'd had to listen to yet another crazy plot for world domination, some nonsense about the wolves finally getting their proper place in the world, and how Ethan wanted Caleb at his side.

Caleb had walked away without a backward glance, but he could still feel the rage churning in his gut.

The scream came again, and he cursed loudly. He restarted the truck and backed it off the road. Climbing out, he slammed the door and listened. The screams had stopped, the night was again silent, but Caleb's whole being vibrated with a sense of wrongness.

He glided through the forest, following the direction the screams had come from. After a few minutes, he paused. The trees were thick; he could sense their age, feel the magic. He closed his eyes and allowed his inner sense to guide him. The air of foreboding increased with each step he took, until it was a tangible thing pressing against him. Finally, he came to a clearing.

His hatred rose as he breathed in the familiar, feral scent of the pack. But beneath that, he sensed something new and sweet mingled with the sharp, acrid aroma of fresh blood.

Ethan was no longer in the clearing, but two huge creatures stood guard over the huddled shape of a body lying at their feet. Caleb swore softly. No way could he put both of them out of action without bringing the rest of the pack down on him. Not that he had any worries he couldn't take on the pack, but he'd had his fill of Ethan for one night.

Hell, for one lifetime.

He settled in to wait, but at that moment, a man appeared at the edge of the trees. Caleb recognized him instantly—Tom, the pack's second-in-command. He spoke quietly with the two weres, who nodded and melted into the forest. He'd probably sent them off to hunt before they shifted back. Feeding always made the transition easier.

Tom glanced once around the clearing, and then turned his attention to the body. He appeared relaxed, oblivious to Caleb's presence.

Caleb pulled his gun from the holster at his shoulder and crept forward. At the last minute, Tom swung around, but it was too late. Caleb brought the pistol down sharp on his temple, and he crumpled to the ground. Holstering the gun, Caleb leaned down and checked his pulse before moving on to the body.

He'd found the source of the screams. A woman lay curled on her side, her knees drawn up to her chest, her hands tied taut behind her back, the rope looped around a fallen tree. She was dressed in jeans, boots, and a black leather jacket, her long, dark red hair loose about her face. He crouched down and touched her on the shoulder. She didn't move, and he slid his hand up under her hair and pressed his fingers to her throat. She was alive. Beneath his fingertips, the blood pulsed steady through her vein.

Sitting back on his heels, he thought about his next move. He drew his knife from the sheath under his jacket, sliced through the ropes that tied her hands, and gently rolled her onto her back. The scent of blood was stronger now. Hot blood and warm flesh. A craving burned in his belly, but he forced himself to ignore it.

Her jacket was open, and her shirt ripped apart, revealing breasts covered by a black lace bra. For a moment, his eyes lingered on the full curves. A deep scratch marred the perfection, and he reached out and ran a finger over the soft swell of flesh. Her skin was warm, feverish. Then his gaze moved upward. She'd been bitten, her

shoulder a bloody mess, and his muscles tightened as he studied the wound.

Werewolf.

Unmistakable, and he cursed Ethan again.

The wound was deep, but it was obvious they hadn't intended to kill her, or she would be dead. He guessed they wanted to turn her, but it was unusual to turn an unwilling victim.

He had to get her out of there before the pack returned.

Stroking her long red hair away from her face, he studied her features. She appeared to be a normal human woman, maybe in her late twenties. She was beautiful, with strong bones and a wide mouth, her skin creamy, flawless, her brows dark. As he stared down at her, her lashes fluttered open, and Caleb was captured by the gaze of enormous silver eyes.

"Shit," he muttered. Things had just gotten a whole lot worse.

The eyes were luminous, rimmed with black, and he knew in that moment that whatever else she was, human did not come into it. For long moments, she returned his stare, then panic flared, and she opened her mouth to scream. He clamped his palm over her lips, trapping the sound.

"Hush," he murmured.

She wasn't listening, lost in some dark world of her own, her expression wild with panic. Caleb kept one hand tight over her mouth and used the other to press her into the ground. He was strong, but she fought against him, thrashing beneath his hold. The wound at her neck opened, and the scent of fresh blood filled his nostrils.

His body responded with a sharp jolt of hunger. He didn't want to hurt her, but they had to get out of here. He straddled her body, using his own to hold her immobile. Raising his hand, he clenched his fist, and clipped her hard across the chin. She went instantly still, her body collapsing limp to the forest floor.

For a moment, he stayed where he was, staring down at her. Then he rose to his feet, bent down, and lifted her in his arms. She was heavier than he'd imagined, but he carried her easily through the dark forest.

As he laid her on the back seat of his car, she didn't regain consciousness. The bite on her neck was bleeding, and he went to the trunk and pulled out the first aid kit. He ripped open a pad and pressed it against the wound. After a minute, the bleeding reduced to a slow seepage, and he stepped back.

This was Ethan's world, and Caleb wanted nothing to do with it. But what was the alternative? Leave her to Ethan's tender mercies? That wasn't an option.

He could take her to the nearest emergency room, but if she reacted badly to the bite, they'd have no clue what was going on, and she would die. Besides, the pack was sure to check the local hospitals.

He should have just driven away when he had the chance. But he hadn't. Now she was his responsibility.

Shit. He hated responsibility.

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Chapter 3

Regan woke to the sound of screaming.

Pain blazed along her nerves, her whole body on fire.

She clamped her mouth closed, and the screams stopped. She lay, eyes screwed shut, panting hard, her heart thundering.

“Thank Christ,” a man’s voice muttered. “At least we know there’s nothing wrong with your lungs.”

The words were a blur. She couldn’t take them in. Searing pain filled her mind, slamming into her, tearing through her. She tried to focus, to control her reaction, but the agony was like nothing she’d ever experienced before. She swallowed the scream building up in her throat but couldn’t prevent the whimper that trickled from her sealed lips.

“Shh, hold still, and I’ll give you something for the pain.”

Hard hands held her down, and she panicked then, writhing against the bonds, struggling to escape the pain that rose to a crescendo as she tore the wound in her shoulder.

“Goddamn it, I said hold still. You want me to hit you again?”

Hit her again?

The words broke through the pain. He had hit her? Curiosity gave her the strength to lie still and open her eyes. She blinked at the bright sunlight filling the room. A man hovered above her, pale skinned and dark haired. She knew she'd never seen him before. Then she stared into his eyes, deep-blue, blazing with something wild. They were beautiful, and she was caught, mesmerized. She remembered another set of eyes, wolf's eyes that glowed amber, and she threw back her head to scream.

Before the scream could emerge, she felt a sharp stab in her upper arm. She glanced down in shock as he pulled the hypodermic needle free.

“There. Done. You should—”

But his voice faded, and a blessed relief flooded her body. Her lashes fluttered closed as the darkness took her.

When she woke again, the room was in semi-darkness. She lay quiet. The pain was still present but reduced to a dull, throbbing ache.

Her dreams had been of teeth and claws, of savage, bloody carnage under a full moon. Her mind shied away from that. She didn't want to think of what had happened in the forest and what might come of it. Not yet. She would confront those problems later.

She was lying on a large, soft bed, a light cotton sheet covering her naked body. Pulling herself up, she dragged the sheet with her, ignoring the sharp jolt of pain that shot through her shoulder. She sat, her back resting against the cool wall behind her.

The curtains were open, and the light from a half moon shone in through the window. From the moon's phase, she could tell she must have been here at least two days. Had she been unconscious all that time? Was she a prisoner of the werewolf who'd attacked her? But that didn't make sense—she wasn't restrained in any way.

She peered around the room, then focused sharply. A man slouched in an armchair across from the bed, his head resting against the back of the chair. His eyes were closed, his lashes dark shadows on his pale cheeks. It was a face full of hard lines and would no doubt appear harsh when he was conscious. Now it was softened by sleep and moonlight, his lips slightly parted, the pulse throbbing in his throat. Her gaze drifted lower. He was big, his long jean-clad legs stretched out in front of him, his shoulders massive under a black T-shirt.

Who was he?

It came back to her. He'd been there when she woke before. He'd told her he'd hit her. Then stabbed her with a needle and taken away her pain.

She needed to get away from here. Her sisters would be concerned, and Regan was worried about her hounds. Had they found their own way home? She hoped so but doubted it. They must have been captured themselves; otherwise, they would have died protecting her that night. She had to find them.

First, she needed clothes.

She opened her mouth to speak the spell, and no words came out. Panic flared, and she forced herself to concentrate. She needed to think this through. Then she remembered the witch's bane and glanced down. She was still wearing the chain that Ethan Stone had placed around her neck. The charm must prevent her from speaking her magic. She studied it closely and realized it wasn't silver after all, but white gold, which would make sense. Weren't werewolves sensitive to silver? Couldn't you kill them with silver bullets?

The truth was, she'd never thought much about werewolves. They existed on the periphery of the supernatural world, and most of the other immortals regarded them as little better than savages. Obviously, with good reason, but now she wished she

knew more.

A clear crystal hung on the chain, nestling between her breasts, and radiating a faint hum of power. If she could remove it, maybe her words would return, and she could get out of here, go hunt down that bastard Ethan Stone, and kill him.

She lifted her left hand to tear the chain from around her throat but couldn't make her fingers to touch it. There must be some sort of compulsion spell built in. She tried again, focusing all her mind, but her hand stopped barely an inch from the chain. Her fingers shook with the strength of her concentration, but she could not make them go closer. She dropped her hand and gritted her teeth.

Across the room, the man shifted in the chair, and Regan glanced over at him. His eyes were half-open, gleaming beneath the heavy fringe of lashes. When he saw Regan watching him, he sat up and ran a hand through his hair.

"You're awake," he said. "About bloody time."

He got to his feet and stretched. The action dragged up his T-shirt and bared his lean belly. The skin was pale, ridged with muscle, sprinkled with a light covering of dark hair. Regan stared, riveted, and a ripple of awareness ran through her. Her eyes narrowed at the unexpected—and unwelcome—response.

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He caught the look and frowned. “What’s the matter? Still in pain? Do you need another shot?”

She shook her head. She wanted no more drugs.

“You do speak, don’t you? I know you can make a noise—you scream loud enough.”

She glowered at him.

With a shrug, he crossed the room toward her. He switched on the lamp by the bed and stood, staring down at her, arms folded across his broad chest.

“I’m going to take a look at that wound,” he said. “Don’t scream. Don’t fight. Don’t move. Okay?”

She nodded. As he bent over her, the sharp musky scent of his body filled her nostrils. Awareness surged, heat washing over her, and she drew back slightly.

He stopped and glanced at her face. “What?”

She wrinkled her nose.

“I smell? Yeah, well, so do you, but then, neither of us have showered for a while. Now you’re better, perhaps we can do something about that. Just let me look at this first.”

He sat down on the edge of the bed, his muscular thigh far too close for comfort, and

Regan pulled the sheet tighter around her. The gesture was futile since he must have seen her naked countless times over the last couple of days.

She steeled herself to peer down, as he peeled away the bandage. She frowned; she could just see the edges of a red scar curling around her shoulder. The wound appeared almost mended, as if it had had two weeks' worth of healing rather than two days.

He stroked one long finger over the mark. Her skin prickled, and she shifted uncomfortably.

"I don't think you need another bandage," he said.

Regan opened her mouth then closed it again.

He grinned. "I thought you were going to be a problem." He considered her, head cocked to one side. "You have that 'problem' look about you, but you know what? I think I like you. Silence in a woman is an underrated commodity."

She glared at him, and his lips twitched.

"Right, I'm going to sort out some coffee and food. Why don't you go have a shower?"

He made to stand up, but Regan reached out a hand and rested it on his thigh. The muscles tensed under her palm. He paused, one eyebrow raised in query.

She pointed at the chain round her throat.

He looked at it. "Yeah, nice necklace. So?"

She rolled her eyes. He wasn't going to make this easy. Or perhaps he was just stupid. She obviously needed two hands for this. She tucked the sheet firmly under her arms and used her hands to make a snapping gesture.

“You want me to break it?”

At last!She nodded.

“Why?”

Did he have to be so difficult? She wanted to scream,just do it,but if she could do that, she wouldn't need him. She could just turn him into a toad and get the hell out of there.

She took a deep breath. She could do this.Please,she mouthed.

He grinned then shrugged. “It's your necklace.”

He leaned in closer, reached out, and looped the chain through one finger. His other hand rested on her shoulder, warm and hard against her bare skin. She held her breath.

“Sure you want me to break it?” he asked.

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She nodded again.

He tugged. The chain pulled at the back of her neck but didn't break.

He frowned "You know there's an easier way to do this. Lean forward."

She bent her head toward him, and his hand slid beneath her hair, his fingers lingering, almost a caress, as he moved it to the side.

"I've always liked redheads," he murmured. "Red hair and dumb. You're the perfect combination."

Regan gritted her teeth but stayed where she was as he lifted the chain from around her neck. The air crackled, and a jolt of power shot through her. Was it gone?

For a moment, she was scared to try. She sat, head bowed. His hand still cupped her shoulder, his thumb stroking little circles on her skin. It felt good, and for some reason that fact annoyed her.

She raised her head and stared him in the face. "I am not dumb. And if you don't get your hands off me, you will be very, very sorry."

Thank God!

Relief washed over her in waves. She could speak. He didn't appear quite so impressed. Regan realized she'd been less than polite, which was rude considering how he'd cared for her. But at his touch, all her defenses had risen to the surface.

A resigned expression crossed his features. "I knew it was too good to last."

He held the chain up by one finger. The crystal swung gently, glinting as it caught the light from the lamp. "So, what is this thing?"

"Nothing you need worry about."

His eyes narrowed. "You know, I really did like you better before."

And she had an idea he was going to like her even less soon. She focused on the crystal, searched her mind for the right words, and muttered a spell of destruction. The crystal shattered. He jumped to his feet, dropping the chain to the floor.

"What the hell was that?"

She didn't answer. The spell had left her exhausted, which shouldn't happen. Hopefully, it was temporary, and she would soon regain her full powers. She rested her head against the wall behind her and looked at him. "I want to go home."

He studied her face, a slight frown on his own. "You sound calm. You do understand what happened, don't you? Back there in the forest."

A wave of fury washed over her. "Yes, I know what happened. I was bitten by a freaking werewolf."

"Good."

"Good?"

"Well at least you know what to expect. I'm not going to have to deal with a whole load of female hysterics when you discover you're going to turn furry once a month."

His words brought her up short.

She'd forgotten that bit.

How the hell could she have forgotten that bit?

Then she remembered Ethan's words out in the forest, just before he'd turned into a creature from hell and bitten her—"you're going to be one of us," he'd said.

"No way," she muttered.

He regarded her coolly. "You won't have any choice. It's too late. It was too late from the moment you were bitten." He got to his feet and looked down at her. "Learn to live with it."

No choice? She didn't do "no choice." In her world, there was always a choice. Granted, the options weren't always good, but anything was better than that. She just had to find the right spell at the right price, but she would find a way out of this.

"Do you know what I am?" she asked.

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He shrugged. "I could make a guess, but I'm not going to. To be perfectly honest, I don't really care. I got you out of there. I've looked after you until you could care for yourself. Now you're on your own."

He turned away from her. When he glanced back, his expression was hard. "You know, you might be better off going back to the pack."

Regan stared at him in disbelief. "You've got to be kidding."

"Lone werewolves don't do well. Wolves are pack creatures; they need company."

"Well, I don't."

He shrugged again. "That's up to you. I don't know why the pack wanted you, presumably something to do with this." He nodded at the chain where it lay curled at his feet. "You must be important to them. They'd look after you, give you protection."

"I can protect myself."

"You haven't done such a good job of it up to now."

She wanted to point out that she'd managed to protect herself for over two thousand years, but something held her back.

She studied him curiously. She couldn't make out what he was. Was he human? What had he been doing out there in the forest? She didn't believe in coincidences. She'd

heard of men who hunted wolves, maybe he was one of those, a werewolf hunter; it would explain how he knew so much about them. But he didn't feel entirely human, there was something different about him, she just couldn't pinpoint what it was.

"Tell me what happened in the forest," she said. "How come you found me?"

"I heard you scream, followed the sound, and there you were. That's it."

Why did she think there was more to the story than that? "What were you doing there?"

He shrugged. "I was driving through. What is this—twenty questions?"

"I'm just trying to work out what your part is in all this."

"I have no part. I told you. Once you leave here, you'll never see me again."

"Right, so how come you know about werewolves?"

"Mind your own damn business."

She analyzed his features. Something was familiar; she'd swear she'd seen eyes like his before but couldn't place where. "What are you?"

He looked at her sharply. "What makes you think I'm anything?"

"Female intuition."

He snorted. "My name's Caleb; that's all you need to know. Now the bathroom's through there." He pointed at a door. "I'll get us that coffee and food." He turned to go.

He was right. Regan knew it. She wanted out of here, and she would be more than happy never to see him again. Wouldn't she? A faint flicker of regret echoed through her mind at the thought, but she forced herself to ignore it. There was no place in her life for a man, even if she wanted one. It was a decision she'd made a long, long time ago.

She'd taken human lovers in the past just to feel close to someone for a while, but it was too hard to hide her true nature, and besides, they all grew old and died, and she'd lost the heart for it.

And she never considered taking a lover from one of the immortal races, not since that first time. She'd learned her lesson at a very early age.

In the end, she'd come to believe it was easier to do without, but now with one touch, this man had made her body burn with long-denied need. Which didn't mean she had to give in to that need.

No, it was better to leave now, but she didn't want to use her magic just yet, wasn't even sure she could—that last spell had exhausted her, so she needed him for one more thing.

“Caleb?”

Chapter 4

At the sound of his name, Caleb paused. For a minute he stood, hands thrust in his pockets, staring at the door. Could he just ignore her and walk away? He sighed and turned back. She was on the bed, the sheet pulled up over her breasts and tucked tightly under her arms.

The problem was he knew exactly what was hiding under that sheet. Every creamy curve and hollow. He'd looked after her for two days, and he'd kept everything strictly business, but it had been damned hard, and while he'd managed to keep his body under control, his mind was another matter. The number of times he'd imagined slaking himself in that sexy body was embarrassing. But for the most part, she'd been unconscious, vulnerable, and he'd never been attracted to vulnerability in a woman. He liked his women to be strong, independent. And awake. The sort of women you could rely on not to fall apart when you told them it was time to say good-bye.

Well, she looked pretty strong right now; any signs of weakness had vanished as soon as her voice returned. She was watching him with those amazing eyes, as though she could see into his very soul. He shook off the notion.

He had an idea she was about to get difficult. Want more than he was willing to give. So he needed to get her out of here. Fast. Before he decided that giving her whatever she wanted, and maybe getting a little something in return, was well worth the future aggravation.

“What?” he asked, injecting as little interest into the word as possible.

Her full lips curled into a smile. “I just wanted to say thank you.”

Her voice was soft, and little tremors of excitement skittered down his spine. He tried to ignore the sensation, concentrate on what was going on. She wanted something, and if he wasn’t careful, his dick was going to override his brain and decide it was worth whatever she asked. “What do you want?”

“I need to get home.”

“I’m not stopping you.”

“Would you take me?”

He could swear she actually fluttered her long eyelashes at him. His jaw clenched. Did she think all she had to do was flutter her lashes and he’d be hers to command? She allowed the sheet to slip, and the muscles tightened in his belly. He sighed and took a step closer.

“If you take me home,” she murmured, “I’ll reward you well.”

Her voice lowered to a husky contralto that sent shivers through his body. It had been a whole lot easier when she couldn’t speak. Another step brought him to the edge of the bed, and he stood, staring down at her. He allowed the heat to rise up in his eyes, and a flicker of uncertainty flashed across her features. A wild recklessness filled him. He tried to remind himself of all the reasons this was a bad idea.

He didn’t know what she was, but he was sure she wasn’t human—even before she’d been bitten. She came from a world he wanted no part of, a world he had turned his back on as soon as he’d been able to stand on his own. On top of that, she was now a werewolf, and heloathedwerewolves. But his logical arguments were being washed away by a need unlike anything he had experienced before. He tried to tell himself it

was only lust, but the truth was he didn't know what it was. He'd never felt anything like this. She called to something deep within him. He didn't want it, but he couldn't deny it, and maybe he shouldn't fight it. Giving in would feel so damn good. He took a long deep breath.

“What if I want my reward now?”

The uncertainty in her expression was replaced with a flare of panic that she hid quickly. She was nowhere near as confident as she appeared—the thought pleased him.

Then she shrugged. “I don't have any money with me.”

“I don't want your money.”

“You don't?”

He lowered his gaze to the swell of her breasts above the white cotton sheet, then back up to her face. “You know what I want.”

Her eyes flickered around the room before returning to him. She licked her lower lip, and Caleb's temperature shot up. The last remnants of his good intentions vanished into the night. His cock pressed painfully against the fly of his jeans, and his balls ached. He needed this. He deserved this. It didn't have to mean anything, just a quick fuck, then he'd take her home, and that would be it.

He placed one knee on the bed and leaned over her. She didn't try to back away, and some of the tension inside him relaxed. He ran his fingers through the long, silky strands of her hair—so soft—then curved his hand round her nape, cradled the base of her skull, and tipped her head back for his kiss.

She had a wide, lush mouth, and with the first taste, he was lost. His mouth slanted over hers and his tongue pushed inside. She was all hot, moist sweetness, and he groaned against her lips, deepening the kiss. He needed to be closer, and he climbed onto the bed and straddled her hips without breaking the contact. She kissed him back, and the first stroke of her velvet tongue sent him over the edge.

A need awoke inside him—a need he hadn't even known existed. He leaned back on his heels. She was flushed and breathing hard. He hooked a finger in the sheet held at her breasts, tugged it down so the soft cotton fell to her waist.

His eyes dropped, and his breath caught in his throat.

“You are beautiful,” he murmured.

Her breasts were full, pouting, the peaks dark-red, already swollen. He breathed in deeply and caught the scent of her arousal. Cupping both breasts in his palms, his thumbs rubbed over the taut peaks, and she moaned. He bent his head and stroked his tongue over one, then the other, until they glistened with moisture. Her arms lifted, her fingers sliding through his hair, holding him to her.

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It had been so long since a man had kissed her, held her. When his mouth closed over her nipple, Regan melted inside, and when his teeth bit down gently, a jolt of intense pleasure shot from her breast down through her body to pool at the base of her belly. She clenched her thighs, pressing the swollen nub that lay between them. Her head fell back, her hips rose without conscious thought, and a whimper of need trickled from her throat. She was past caring. It felt too good. She couldn't believe she had gone so long without this, without the caress of a man's hands, a man's mouth.

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She needed to touch him, and she slipped her arms down over his back and gripped the hem of his T-shirt. He raised his head from her breasts so she could tug the shirt from him and toss it to the floor. His body was hard with powerful muscles clearly defined under satin skin, his chest broad with a light covering of dark hair that disappeared into the waistband of his jeans. She rested her palm flat against his chest. His skin was hot, and the rapid thud of his heart beat against her palm. Sliding her hand down, she raked her fingers through the silky hair, dipping into his navel, then lower to his jeans. She could see the bulge at his groin, pressing against his fly, and moist heat flooded her. She hooked her finger into the waistband, pulled him to her, and he kissed her again.

Her hands slid up over his broad back, her fingers snagging on the roughness of his skin, and he froze above her. She explored with her fingertips and found his whole back a mass of scar tissue. His mouth withdrew from hers. He leaned away, gripped her wrists in his hands, and dragged them from him.

“What—”

He pushed himself up from the bed and stood staring down at her, his expression blank. She shifted her gaze lower to where she could see the pulse throbbing in his throat.

“I think it’s time you went home,” he said.

Her body clamored for his touch, her breasts ached, and her sex was swollen with need. She forced herself to ignore the feelings and concentrate. Why had he suddenly pulled back?

She pushed the rest of the sheet away, swung her legs over the side of the bed, and stood up. He didn't move as she walked slowly around him.

As she touched one raised scar with her fingertip, he flinched. She knew it wasn't from pain. His back was a mass of scars, but they were old, years old, and it was clear they hadn't been done all at once. It looked like he'd been systematically flogged, time after time. Then she noticed a pattern to the marks. She traced the lines with her fingers.

"They're claw marks," she murmured, more to herself than to Caleb. She moved around to face him.

He didn't answer.

"And at a guess," she said, "I'd say they were werewolf claw marks."

His hands clenched at his side, his tall figure radiated tension, but his eyes wandered over her naked body, lingering on her breasts and the dark red curls at the junction of her thighs. A dull flush stained the pale skin of his hard cheekbones.

Regan liked the idea that her nakedness affected him, that she wasn't the only one aching with need, and she stood up straighter and raised a hand to brush back her hair.

His lips tightened, then he turned away abruptly. She half expected him to stalk out of the room; instead, he crossed to a set of cupboards. He opened one and pulled out some clothes.

"Here," he said, tossing the bundle to her. "Get dressed."

Regan caught the clothes. They were obviously Caleb's—a pair of grey sweats and a

matching T-shirt. “What about that shower?”

“Forget the shower. I’ll take you home, but I want you out of here in five minutes.”

“No coffee then?” She knew she was pushing him, but for some reason, she wanted to push him. She wanted a reaction.

Caleb ignored the question. He strode to the door, paused. “Five minutes,” he said and was gone.

Chapter 5

The sun was rising as the truck pulled up beside the house. Regan sat stiff and tense in the passenger seat next to Caleb, regretting every second she had spent in his arms.

He hadn't spoken a single word since they'd gotten into the vehicle. She'd asked a couple of perfectly innocent questions and received nothing more than a grunt or two in return. She wasn't sure what he was, but she was starting to suspect that there was a good dollop of werepig in there somewhere.

"No need to get out," she said when he made no move.

As she reached for the door handle, intent on jumping down, he touched her arm. She tried to shake off his hand, but his grip tightened. Sinking back into her seat, she turned to face him and glared. "Yes?"

"What I said about the pack—"

"What about it?"

"You need to think about it—joining them, I mean. You shouldn't be alone when you change for the first time."

"I won't change."

"Yes, you will."

She rolled her eyes; there was obviously no point in arguing with him. “Then I’ll make sure I’m not alone.”

Alarm flashed across his features. “You can’t be with a human either. The first few times, you’ll lose control.”

“Ineverlose control.”

His stare dropped to her mouth, then to her breasts, as if reminding her of one time, very recently, when her control had gone out the window. Her breasts still ached from his kisses, and her nipples pressed urgently against the soft material of her T-shirt.

“Oh yeah?” he murmured, his gaze never leaving her breasts.

Regan scowled. “Look, this concern is really sweet, but totally wasted. One, I won’t turn, and two, if I do, I’ll take sensible precautions. Okay?”

He nodded and dropped the hand that rested on her arm.

Regan sat for a minute, unsure of why she wasn’t moving as fast as she could away from him. There was no point in pursuing this. She’d promised herself long ago—no more lovers. No more immortals thinking they could use her powers for their own purposes. And no more human men growing old without her, dying on her. She couldn’t take it. Not that Caleb had shown any sign of wanting to spend any more time with her.

With a sigh, she reached again for the door handle. “Good-bye, and thank you for saving me. I do appreciate it, you know.” There. She could be fair.

He didn’t answer. Surprise, surprise.

She stepped down from the truck. At the same time, the door of the house burst open, and her sisters rushed out. Catrin, tall, her long, honey-blond hair in a plait down her back, her grey eyes worried. Beside her, Lola appeared tiny, like a pixie with her short cap of glossy black hair and pointed face. They hurried over, halting in front of her, glancing between her and the strange truck. They didn't have many visitors. Catrin stepped closer, wrapped her arms tight around Regan, and hugged her hard.

“Oh my God, Regan, we didn't know where you were. We knew you were alive, but we couldn't find you.”

She pulled back a little. “I'm sorry, I had a small accident. I was unconscious for a while, but I'm okay.”

“I know.” Catrin turned from Regan and looked at the truck. Through the window, Caleb sat, fingers drumming on the steering wheel, no doubt impatient to be off. Unfortunately, right now, Lola was in the way.

“Are you going to introduce us?” Lola asked, moving to stand beside her sisters.

“No,” Regan replied, quite aware that wouldn't be the end of it. Catrin, she might have convinced to leave well alone. Lola...not in a million years.

Her sister peered into the cab. The engine was still running. Caleb was clearly desperate to be away. But Lola was not to be put off. She tapped her fingers on the glass. For a moment, it looked like he was going to ignore her. Then a resigned expression settled on his face. He heaved a huge sigh and rolled down the window.

“Hello,” Lola said. “I'm Lola—Regan's sister. And this is Catrin...also Regan's sister. Would you like to come in?”

“No.”

“Please.” Catrin entered the conversation. She was reserved compared to Lola, slow to give her trust, but she was obviously intrigued. “I’m sure Regan will want to thank you properly.”

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“Wanna bet?” Regan muttered. “Anyway, I’ve already thanked him, and he needs to go.”

She took Lola’s arm and tried to pry her away, but her diminutive sister stood her ground. It was easy to forget how strong Lola was; she might be small, but underneath, she was as stubborn as a bulldozer.

Caleb stared at her and shrugged. “Regan’s already said her thanks.”

“Well, we would like to thank you, then.” Without waiting for a reply, Lola reached up and opened the cab door. Regan almost laughed. She was annoyed with Lola for pushing this—her baby sister was tenacious—but at the same time, she couldn’t help but be amused watching Caleb try to squirm away.

People always found it hard to say no to Lola, especially men. She had a sweetness about her that was impossible to refuse. God knows where it had come from—certainly not from their mother. It must be from her father, whoever he was. All her sisters had different fathers. Lola’s must have been a nice man, though she was sure that nice wasn’t something the Morrigan looked for in her mates.

Caleb obviously realized he wasn’t going to win this one. He sighed and stepped down from the cab, then glanced at Regan, who shrugged. She didn’t know what Lola was up to.

They both followed her into the house. Lola led them into the kitchen and started making coffee. The house was quiet, and Regan’s heart sank. She’d been desperately hoping that her hounds would be here to meet her. But they would have come

bounding out by now. They hadn't returned. Were they alive?

"Have you seen Diablo and Satan?" she asked her sisters.

Lola shook her head. "They never came back. But they're fine, Regan, I promise. I don't know where they are, but they'll be back with you one day."

"You've seen this?"

Lola nodded, and some of the tension drained from Regan. Of all the sisters, Lola saw the future most clearly. If she said her hounds were alive then somewhere, they must be alive. Did the werewolves have them? One more reason to find Ethan Stone and make him pay.

"Diablo and Satan?" Caleb's question interrupted her thoughts.

Catrin answered. "They're Regan's"—she paused—"pet dogs. They went missing the same night she did."

Regan turned to him. "Did you see them, Caleb? That night in the forest. They're big, you couldn't miss them."

He shook his head. "I saw nothing else."

Lola handed a mug of coffee to Caleb. "There's cream and sugar on the counter." She handed a second mug to Regan, who bent her head and breathed in the rich scent.

"Right," Lola said brightly. "What have you two been up to?"

"I got bitten by a werewolf," Regan replied.

Lola's eyes widened. "I never saw that." She studied Regan, head cocked to one side. "But you know, it would explain something I did see." She cast a speculative glance at Caleb. "It wasn't you, was it?"

"No!" They both spoke together.

"Good," Lola said. "But you do know something about werewolves?"

He shifted uncomfortably. "A little."

"So, are you going to stick around and help?" Catrin asked.

"No," Regan snapped.

Catrin ignored her. "She'll need you."

He snorted. "She doesn't need anybody."

Regan decided it was time to step in. "No, I don't."

"See."

"You're wrong. She's not as hard as she makes out."

Caleb looked at Regan. She wiped all expression away and stared back.

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“Yeah,” he drawled, “she’s a real marshmallow. I can see that.” He took a swallow of coffee then put his mug down on the counter.

He was leaving. She should have been glad—she didn’t need him. She didn’t need anybody.

But she didn’t feel glad.

A hard lump formed in the pit of her stomach, her eyes ached, and she had to bite back the urge to beg him to stay. She didn’t know why. He’d made it clear he wanted nothing to do with her, and that was for the best. So instead, she lounged against the counter, sipped her coffee, and tried to appear nonchalant as he strode across the room.

Catrin put her own mug down and hurried after him. She took a card from her pocket and held it out.

“The house number. And my cell,” she said. “Call if you need anything.”

He took the card and shoved it in his own pocket without glancing down. At the door, he turned around and looked back at Regan.

“Just—” he paused, then shook his head. “Be careful and remember what I told you.”

The door closed behind him. Regan stood unmoving. She listened as the truck started up, and he drove away. For a moment, she couldn’t believe he was gone.

Catrin came up beside her, took Regan's mug, and placed it on the counter, then put her arms around her and hugged her tight.

"Don't worry," Lola said from behind them. "He'll be back."

Regan pulled away and turned so she could see into her little sister's eyes. "You've seen this?"

Lola shrugged. "Not as such."

"Then he won't be back. And you know what—that's good, because I don't want him back, and I certainly don't need him back."

She took a deep breath. Time to try and sort out this mess. "Come on. Let's go find a spell that will stop me from turning furry. I reckon we have ten days to do it in."

Regan slammed the spell book closed and sat back in her chair, running a hand through her long hair. Her scalp hurt, and her eyes were gritty from lack of sleep.

"There's nothing here," she muttered. She thumped her fist down on top of the book. "How can there be nothing? It's like they don't exist."

Over the past nine days, she had read every book in the library. She'd been expecting a simple "How to counteract a werewolf bite" sort of spell to jump out at her. But there was nothing.

She sprang to her feet, paced the room. Finally, she came to a halt by the window and stared out into the darkness. The night was cloudy, but as she watched, the wind blew the clouds aside, revealing the almost perfect circle of the moon. It pulled at something deep inside her, called to her, and she reached out and savagely dragged the curtains closed.

She didn't need any reminders that tomorrow was the full moon. She could sense it with every fiber of her being.

"You know, you could try praying to our mother."

Catrin's voice came from behind her, and Regan stiffened at the words. She whirled around. Catrin was lying on the maroon velvet sofa, an enormous leather tome balanced on her stomach. She looked as tired as Regan felt, with dark shadows under her eyes. Lola was fast asleep in the armchair opposite—an open book on her knee.

"That's your answer to everything, isn't it?" Regan asked. Then she sighed—there was no point taking this out on Catrin. "Anyway, do you think I haven't? And a totally pointless exercise it was, too. Just like always."

She sank onto the sofa next to Catrin and lifted the book slightly, so she could read the title. "A History of the Supernatural Races. Any good?"

"It's fascinating."

"I don't suppose there's anything about werewolves in there."

"Actually, there is."

Regan perked up. "Anything useful?"

"No, not really."

"Why doesn't that come as a surprise?" She pushed Catrin's legs out of the way and sat back, leaned her head against the sofa, and closed her eyes.

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“There’s a lot of stuff about why there isn’t a lot of stuff, if you know what I mean.”

Regan sighed again. “As usual, I have no idea.”

“Well, you said it yourself—there just isn’t anything here on them, and there should be.”

Regan blinked. “So?”

“Well, when the Council was formed, they refused to let the werewolves in. Aden, the first head of the Council, was a vampire, and they hate the weres. They consider them savages.” She giggled. “They had them downgraded to animals.”

“Hmm, I wonder why?” Regan said, rubbing at her shoulder. She could feel the effects of her own meeting with one of those “animals,” and she wasn’t going to argue with the description. Actually, it was a little insulting to animals.

“Anyway, they went off in a huff and since then have pretty much kept to themselves.”

“Well, that’s interesting, but it doesn’t help.”

“It also says that werewolves can’t be born; they all start off as humans who get bitten. Apparently, female werewolves miscarry when they shift at full moon, and humans don’t seem capable of getting pregnant by a werewolf.”

“Again...interesting, but how does it help me?”

“It doesn’t,” Catrin conceded. She closed the book and put it on the floor. “We could go ask the Council.”

“No way.”

Catrin sighed. “Then maybe you should go see Caleb.”

Regan would have liked to say the idea had never occurred to her, but it had, and more than once. It was obvious that Caleb knew a lot about the wolves. But it was unlikely that he would know a way to stop what was happening to her. In fact, he’d told her categorically that there was no way to stop the change. Still, he knew more than they did, and she wouldn’t be going into it quite so blind.

She was scared.

There—she’d admitted her fear. Which made it real.

Regan wasn’t happy about admitting it, even to herself, and certainly wasn’t about to say it aloud. But she hated not knowing what would happen, and if nothing else, Caleb could help with that.

Only two things held her back: One, he had made it very clear that he wanted nothing to do with her or her problems; and two, she wanted way too much to do with him, and that terrified her. She couldn’t forget how he had made her feel. Her body burned for his touch. All she had to do was close her eyes, and he was there in her mind.

So, was she more scared of her feelings for Caleb than she was of turning furry?

Hell, yes!

“I’m not going anywhere near Caleb.”

“Why?” Catrin asked. “I know he can help.”

“No. Besides, we don’t know anything about him. We don’t even know what he is. Why he was there that night. We can’t trust him.”

“Him? Or yourself?”

Regan’s eyes narrowed on her sister. “What do you mean?”

Catrin shook her head. “Nothing. How’s your magic?”

“Still shaky, I can’t seem to get a grip on it. It seems to slide away from me.”

Catrin reached out and touched her. “It will come back. Now, we should go to bed. You might not get much sleep tomorrow night.”

“You mean because I might be running around the woods and howling at the moon. Thanks for reminding me.”

“You’d actually forgotten?”

Hell no.

Chapter 6

Caleb had no clue what he was doing here.

He didn't want to be here, and if he'd had any sense, he would be miles away. Instead, he was standing outside her house like some lovesick idiot.

He leaned against the rough trunk of one of the huge oak trees, arms folded across his chest, and stared at the house. It was a beautiful building—dark stone, thatch, and a host of mullioned windows. Old and sprawling, it appeared as much a part of the landscape as the ancient trees that surrounded it.

Caleb had wandered over every inch of the forest that afternoon, needing to make sure the pack was no longer in the area. He could find no trace. They were gone. Probably back to their usual hunting grounds way up in the north.

He liked the forest—a sense of timeless magic pervaded the place. Normally, he avoided any hint of the supernatural; he'd turned his back on that part of his existence long ago, but this place felt welcoming. It called to something inside him. He also knew it would be the perfect place to shift—he hadn't seen a single human in all his time here.

He returned to the house as the sun was setting. The building appeared to be in darkness. No hint of light emerged from the many windows. Perhaps Regan had drawn all the curtains, closed the shutters tight, hoping to keep out the full moon. If she believed that, she was in for a bitter disappointment.

She was in there. He could sense her. And the fact that he could sense her was not making him happy. He tried to tell himself he was doing this for Regan's sisters. The brunette had been a cute little thing. The blonde had seemed ...nice. How could three sisters be so different? Neither of them deserved to die at the hands of an out-of-control, newly turned werewolf. From what he'd seen of her, Regan was bitch enough as a human. God knows what she'd be like as a wolf.

He pushed himself up off the trunk and paced. He was lying to himself—the truth was, he needed to see Regan again, hadn't been able to get her out of his mind. The feel of her. The taste of her. She was stuck firmly inside him and wouldn't be dislodged.

She appeared so tough, so in control. How would she take to losing that control so completely? Maybe he just needed to see her through this first time. Or maybe he needed to have her, just once, and then he'd be able to walk away and forget her.

Tonight, there was a thick layer of cloud cover, and a light drizzle misted the air, but he sensed the exact moment when the moon rose. Something wild welled up inside him, a wave of exhilaration as the adrenalin surged in his veins. Unlike the pack, he'd never had to change at the full moon. Usually, he avoided it, just to prove to himself that he could, and he'd always tried to deny the excitement. But it was there nevertheless. He forced it down and strode across the clearing. At the front door, he raised his fist and banged.

The door flew open. Catrin stood there, panic clear on her face.

"Caleb, thank the Goddess, you're here." As she stared up at him, her eyes widened, and he knew his own must have changed.

He pushed past her into the hallway. "Where is she?"

“She made me lock her in the basement. Come on, I’ll take you.”

“Your other sister?”

“Lola’s in her room.”

A shrill scream tore through the building, more animal than human, and Catrin whirled around and raced down the hallway. Caleb followed.

Catrin’s hands were shaking, she couldn’t get the key in the lock, and Caleb took it from her and pushed her gently out of the way. The scream came again, and he quickly unlocked the door. He turned to Catrin. “Go. Join your sister. Lock yourselves in, and don’t come out until morning.”

She nodded, then reached out and rested her hand on his arm. “Look after her, Caleb.”

“I will. Now, go!”

She left, hurrying up the stairs. Halfway up, she paused. “Thank you.” Then she was gone.

Caleb turned back to the door. He opened it cautiously. “Regan?”

No answer.

The door opened onto a narrow staircase. He switched on the light and started down. As he descended, his nostrils filled with the acrid scent of sweat and fear. At the bottom, he looked around. The room was small, about ten feet across, bare walls, no furniture. Regan was huddled in one corner, arms wrapped tightly around her knees, her red hair falling forward, hiding her face. He called her name, and her whole body

went rigid.

Slowly, she raised her head. Her silver eyes were almost black, wild in her pale face. As she stared at Caleb, a small flicker of humanity broke through, and horror filled her expression. “Get out of here,” she whispered.

“We’re both getting out.” He took a step toward her.

“Can’t. Too dangerous. Get out and lock the door.” Her voice was hoarse and strained, and Caleb knew she hovered on the brink of changing. He stepped closer, and she cringed back against the wall.

“You’ll kill yourself if you change in here,” he said. “You’ll tear yourself apart trying to get out.”

“Doesn’t matter. I won’t hurt anyone else.”

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Crouching down beside her, he reached out a hand. She flinched, but he ignored her and stroked the long strands of hair away from her face. “Trust me. I can see you through this.”

“I’ll hurt you.”

“No, you won’t.” He straightened, then leaned down and lifted her in his arms. Her body tensed, and he thought she would fight him. If she did, he’d have to knock her out, but after a few seconds, she relaxed, burrowing her face into his shirt.

She wasn’t light, but he held her trembling body with ease, up the stairs and down the hallway. The front door was open, and he carried her through, kicking the door closed behind him, and headed into the forest.

He glanced back once. Catrin stood silhouetted in one of the first-floor windows, watching them. She raised a hand, and Caleb nodded in return and continued on. He carried Regan a good way from the house. It was raining harder now, and he welcomed the cool drops against his heated skin. His own change was tugging at him, clawing at his belly, all his senses sharply focused. The smells of the forest filled his nostrils: damp leaves, rich soil, and, in the distance, warm prey.

He stopped under a large oak tree. It had a distinctive shape, and he’d noted it earlier—they’d need to find their way back here in the morning. He gently lowered Regan to the ground. Her knees gave way, and she collapsed to the forest floor.

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Regan lifted her face to the sky. The rain was cool against her burning skin.

“How do you feel?”

She glanced up at the question. Caleb loomed over her, hands thrust in his pockets, staring down, his expression closed, giving nothing away.

She thought about it, searched inside herself. “Better.”

It was true; most of the panic had receded as soon as she was out of the house and into the open air.

“Wolves hate to be trapped,” Caleb said. “Your wolf wanted out of that place.”

“I didn’t want to hurt anyone. I thought that was my best bet.”

She still didn’t want to, and while the panic might have receded, she knew this thing wasn’t over. Her skin prickled with energy, tremors rippled up her spine, and her clothes felt too tight. She could sense something alien inside her, something that wanted out, so it paced the confines of her body, nudging at the edges of her consciousness. She pushed down her fear. She needed to concentrate.

“You won’t,” Caleb said. “There’s no one to hurt out here.” He paused. “Besides, I’ll be with you all the way.”

“You will?”

He nodded, and relief swept over her. She couldn’t understand it. She’d always stood alone. She preferred it that way, but when he reached a hand down to her, she slid her palm into his. A wave of calm washed through her, soothing the worst of her fears.

He pulled her to her feet, then dropped her hand and stepped back.

As she watched, he plucked open the buttons of his shirt and tugged it out of his pants. He shrugged it off and tossed it to the ground, to stand before her bare from the waist up. Raindrops glistened on his broad, powerful chest. His hand went to the waistband of his jeans, and her gaze dropped to follow the movement. He flicked open the button, lowered the zipper, and a jolt of heat fired through her body.

What was he doing taking his clothes off at a time like this?

He glanced up, caught her avid stare, and amusement flashed briefly in his face. “This isn’t a floor show,” he murmured. “You need to undress. That is, if you want anything left of your clothes to put on in the morning.”

Understanding filtered through the strange new sensations crowding her mind. He was a werewolf! She stared at him—why hadn’t she seen it?

When she didn’t move, he raised an eyebrow. “I have seen you naked before.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?” she asked.

He paused his undressing and glanced across at her. “It wasn’t any of your business.”

“And it is now?”

He released his breath in a long sigh. “You know, now really isn’t the time for this conversation.”

She thought about arguing, but he was right. She hated to admit it, but she could sense that time was running out. There would be occasion enough to clear things up—if they survived this night.

When she didn't speak, he went back to undressing. He tugged off his boots and socks, then hooked his hands in his jeans and pushed them down over his lean hips.

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He stood before her naked, and, for a brief moment, the creature inside her stilled as the woman took over. She stared at him. He wasn't aroused, but as she watched, his cock twitched and pulsed.

He groaned. "This really isn't the time for that either." His voice was gentle, but at his words, the beast rose up and clawed at her insides.

She whirled away, tore at her own clothes, and in seconds, she stood naked in front of him. His gaze flickered down over her body, and her skin burned hotter. The rain was coming harder now, but no longer cooled the burning heat.

Shooting pains speared through her body. She was losing control, and she hated that. She couldn't afford to lose control. Her breath came in short, hard gasps, and she forced herself to slow it. She remembered Ethan changing. It had appeared so painless, so easy. There must be something wrong, and she fought frantically against the agony that threatened to consume her mind and body. But Caleb didn't seem in pain, instead his hard face was stamped with excitement, and his eyes no longer appeared human, the pupils dilated.

"What must I do?" she asked.

"Relax. It only hurts because you're fighting it. This is magic, let it flow through you."

Well. She knew all about magic. She held herself immobile, closed her eyes, and the power welled up inside her.

“Good girl.”

Regan heard the murmured words and almost smiled. It was a long time since anyone had dared call her a girl, but then all thoughts were wiped from her mind as the magic took over, and the creature within her roared to be free. For a moment, she held it at bay. She opened her eyes. Caleb stood before her and then he was gone, and in his place stood a huge, black wolf, with deep-blue eyes. He raised his head to the sky and howled.

Regan relaxed her mind and let the magic overwhelm her.

The world was changed. She twisted her head and stared at the rich, dark-red fur that covered her back. She lifted each paw in turn, placing it down with exaggerated care, digging her sharp claws into the soft earth.

She looked around her. Everything was sharply defined. Her ears swiveled to pick up the sound of the wind in the treetops above her, and somewhere far off an owl hooted. She opened her mouth and tasted the rain on her tongue. The scents of the night filled her nostrils, the damp air, leaf mold, the musky aroma of wolf. Her muzzle twitched, and she searched the clearing. He was standing, watching her from his dark wolf's eyes, his black plumed tail waving. He caught her gaze, yipped once, then turned and headed into the trees.

She ran through the dark forest, the pads of her paws making no sound on the soft leaf-littered floor. Effortlessly, she weaved her way between the gnarled trunks of the oaks, chasing the sable wolf. As the trees thinned, she picked up speed, running ever faster, until she was aware of nothing but the wind flowing past her. All her tension, the restlessness that had plagued her for so long, fell away beneath the relentless stretch and release of muscle and sinew. A wild exhilaration filled her. She didn't falter as she reached the edge of the forest, and she was racing out in the open under the full moon.

Without warning, a huge form slammed into her from the side, crashing her to the ground, knocking the air from her lungs. She rolled, then jumped to her feet, shook herself, a growl rising up in her throat.

The black wolf faced her, hackles raised. When he saw he had her attention he growled softly then looked back toward the dark shadows of the forest. She knew he wanted her to return to safety, but she didn't want safety. For the first time in so long, she was wildly alive, filled with joy. Laughter bubbled up in her mind but could find no release, and she sank to her haunches, threw back her head, and howled.

When she opened her eyes, dappled daylight filtered through the forest canopy. Regan lay curled up on a bed of leaves under the shelter of a deep overhanging rock. Beyond the rock's edge, the rain fell steadily, and she could hear each drop as it splashed against leaves and stones. She breathed in the musky scent of wild garlic that grew nearby, the loamy smell of the rich damp earth. All her senses were acutely alert; she felt more alive than she had for a long, long time, as though she'd been experiencing the world through a veil, and now she had ripped it away. Or rather, wolf had ripped it away. At the thought, her wolf stirred sleepily, sated and content, but still present.

For a minute, Regan lay quiet, her eyes tracing the patterns on the rock's surface above her. She was back in her own body, she was no longer wolf, and a faint flicker of regret ran through her mind.

She'd been thinking of wolf as some sort of alien creature, taking her over, but it hadn't been like that at all. The wolf was part of her, perhaps had always been part of her, lying dormant, lurking in her subconscious, waiting for something to set her free.

But wolf couldn't be allowed her freedom. Regan remembered clearly the loss of control the night before, and she was too powerful to ever lose control.

She was naked, but despite the rain, she felt warm and cozy, probably because she was snuggled in the arms of a large, equally naked man. Caleb lay behind her, his body pressed along the whole length of her back, hard and hot. One hair-roughened leg was thrown across hers and one muscular arm wrapped around her. She glanced down, her gaze captured by the sight of his huge hand cupping her breast, his skin dark against her paleness. His fingers were long, sprinkled with short black hair. As she watched, they tightened on her, sending a spasm of intense pleasure shooting from her breast to her belly, then lower, so she squirmed against him.

His breathing was even, and she relaxed. She knew she should slip away now while he slept, but instead she lay in his arms and listened to the rain. It had been centuries since she'd lain in a man's arms like this.

She shifted against him, restless, and the small movement must have woken him. His hand tightened again, then relaxed, and he slowly rubbed his palm over her nipple. It stiffened under his touch, and a wave of heat rolled over her, settling in the pit of her stomach.

His breath feathered against the skin along the back of her neck, and a shiver ran through her. He nibbled at the sensitive spot where her throat met her shoulder—small teasing bites that stoked the fire already burning inside her.

As Regan pressed herself back into his body, the heat of his hard shaft nudged at the cleft in her bottom, and a sharp stab of satisfaction knifed through her. She wriggled against him, and he bit down harder. At the same time, his long fingers tugged at the tight peaks of her breasts until she was writhing against him, held in place by his thigh thrown across her own.

His other hand slid over her flat belly, his fingers drifting through the curls at the base, to where her thighs clenched tight together. He lowered his leg to give him better access.

“Open your legs for me, sweetheart,” he whispered against her ear. His voice was low, husky, a caress in itself, and tremors rippled through her. For a moment, she fought the feelings, but they were too strong.

Just this once, she told herself.

The last week had been fraught—the loss of her magic combined with the constant thought of the wolf lurking at the back of her mind. Now the relief that it was over, that she had come through it, if not unchanged, then at least unharmed, urged her to some sort of consummation. She wanted this as a celebration of life. It felt right.

She bent one knee, allowing his hand to slide between her thighs. His fingers slipped inside the folds of her sex, and he sighed his satisfaction against her skin as he found her already hot and wet.

She moaned softly as he drew back his hand. He turned her so she lay on her back and then came up on one elbow and stared down into her face, his dark eyes gleaming in the dim light.

He brushed her hair away, then leaned down and kissed her.

Chapter 7

Regan had often been the aggressor in sex, but now she lay quiescent beneath him. His tongue pushed into her mouth, stroking against her own, filling her with the hot, spicy taste of him. She sighed against his mouth.

After a minute, he backed off slightly, and his gaze wandered over her.

“You’re beautiful,” he said. His hand drifted down to skim lightly over her body, to graze over the peaks of her breasts now taut and almost painfully engorged. Then lower, his fingers lingering over the mark above her right hip.

“What’s this?” he asked. “I noticed it when I was looking after you. Is it a tattoo?”

She raised her head slightly, so she could peer down the length of her body. His fingers traced the outline of the coal-black mark, which showed stark against her pale skin.

“It’s a birthmark,” she said. More like a brand of ownership. All the daughters of the Morrigan bore the mark, a crow with outstretched wings, but she had no wish to go into that right now.

“Pretty,” he murmured, then let his hand drift lower.

She watched as his fingers ruffled the dark red curls at the base of her belly. She held herself tense as they slid between her open thighs. Her breaths were coming faster now, and she gasped as he parted her sex and pushed inside her.

The sensation was incredible, and her legs tightened around his hand.

“Relax,” he muttered.

For a moment, she remained tense, then his finger flexed inside her and a spasm of pure pleasure shot through her body. She wanted this. She let her head fall back to the soft earth, her eyes drifted closed, and she gave herself over to the exquisite sensations.

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Caleb slowly withdrew from the hot, wet heat of her. She'd gone boneless against him, but he could hear her shallow breaths. He slid his fingers over her sex, found the swollen nub at her core, and stroked slow lazy circles around it until her hips rose and pushed against him. When he knew she was ready, he ran the pad of his thumb over the sensitive spot. She went rigid against him, every muscle clenched as her back arched, and her sex pulsed against his hand.

He glided his palm over her belly and cupped her full breast, soothing her. His cock was hard, had been from the moment he woke with her wrapped in his arms, now it ached with the need to be inside her. He came up over her, kneeling between her open thighs. Her eyes opened, huge, languid, containing no hint of denial as her hand moved between them. She cupped his balls, and pleasure shot up his spine. She shifted her grip, caressed his shaft, then held it at the entrance to her body.

He hadn't meant to do this, but holding himself poised above her, it felt inevitable; as though it was meant to happen from the time he'd laid eyes upon her in the forest all those days ago.

Mine. The word whispered through his mind.

He ignored it.

It didn't have to mean anything. It wouldn't mean anything. He wouldn't let it. All the same, he had to have her this one time.

When he sank into her, it felt like coming home. He held himself still, closed his eyes, and fought against the feeling of rightness. This was just sex. Nothing more. Just an affirmation of life, a natural continuation of what they had shared together in the forest.

Unlike the rest of the pack, Caleb had always been able to shift at will, and while he experienced the pull of the full moon—it did not rule him. He rarely allowed his wolf to run and always alone, but last night he had given in to the need. He had run with Regan's wolf, and it had felt so good.

Now her muscles contracted around him, his head went back, and he fought for control. He stared down into those strange, inhuman eyes and started to move inside her. She was so tight that each thrust was an exquisite drag of pleasure. He took her slowly at first, withdrawing only to push back in, reveling in the way her hips rose up to meet him. When he saw she could take him, he increased the pace until he was slamming into her. Her legs came around his waist, her hands gripped his shoulders, and he rode her hard.

She came apart beneath him, and he released the last of his control. He came seconds later in an explosion of pleasure more intense than anything he'd ever experienced. Throwing back his head, he roared.

Mine.

Again, the word echoed through his mind, and he knew he was in trouble. Deep trouble, and he needed to get out of there before he got in even deeper. He had an

idea that Regan had the power to bury him so far down he would never climb out, and that was something he would never allow.

He pulled out of her and rolled onto his back, ignoring the sense of loss that washed over him.

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In the aftermath of their lovemaking, Regan lay relaxed in both body and mind for the first time in what seemed like forever. She rolled her head to the side to watch Caleb. His eyes were closed, but he opened them as though he could feel her gaze upon him.

“What?” he asked when he saw her watching him.

Regan wasn’t used to thanking people; it didn’t come naturally, but without him, last night could have been a total disaster. She knew her wolf now, and she would have torn herself apart if she’d remained locked in that cellar. Regan likely owed Caleb her life. Why was it so hard to put into words?

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“Thank you,” she said. “Not for the sex,” she added quickly. “For being with me, showing me how it should be.”

A slight smile flickered across his face, as though he could tell exactly how hard that had been for her. Then the smile was wiped away, and a grim determination took its place.

“You’ll be okay next time,” he replied. “Just remember a couple of rules—away from people but out in the open, and you’ll do okay. You already have strong control, stronger than I’ve ever seen in a new wolf. You won’t need me again.”

Regan sat up, hugged her knees to her chest, and studied him. She realized with a start of surprise that he was warning her off. Telling her this was a one-off and not to expect anything more from him. Wasn’t that supposed to be her line? She was always the one to set the boundaries.

“You sound like you’re not planning on being around next time.”

He pulled himself up so he sat facing her, the top of his head almost grazing the rock roof above them. His face took on a closed, shuttered look. “I’m not.”

Regan knew she should leave it alone. He obviously wanted nothing to do with her, and she was fine with that.

Or maybe she wasn’t.

“Why?” she asked.

She thought he wasn't going to answer. Then he shrugged. "This isn't my world."

"This?"

He gestured toward her. "I don't know what you are, exactly, but I'm pretty sure you're not human."

"I'm a witch."

A flare of surprise showed briefly on his face, and his gaze wandered over her. "That figures, but it really doesn't matter. I decided a long time ago that I didn't want any part of your world."

Regan frowned. She was missing something here. "How can you say that—you're a werewolf."

Something dark flashed in his eyes. "I amnota werewolf."

"But I saw you change."

"Werewolves are humans that get bitten. I wasn't bitten."

She looked at him carefully, sensed he was telling the truth. How fascinating. "Have you ever been human?" she asked.

His eyes narrowed. "I'm as much human as anything else."

"Who are you, Caleb?"

"You really want to know?"

She nodded.

“Ethan Stone is my father.”

Her mouth fell open. Shock filled her mind, quickly replaced by fury as her brain tried to make sense of what he was telling her.

“Ethan Stone? As in Ethan Stone, the goddamn, stinking werewolf that bit me?”

He nodded.

How could Ethan be his father? She clearly remembered Catrin telling her werewolves couldn't have children; that werewolves were made, not born. Then again, Caleb had told her he was not a werewolf. But she'd seen him change.

Regan scrambled to her feet and backed away, needing to put some distance between them. She was naked, it hadn't mattered before, but now it felt wrong, and she muttered the words of a spell. Caleb's eyes widened as her clothes appeared, but she ignored the look. She'd told him she was a witch. Didn't he know what witches did?

If he was Ethan's son, what did that mean? Had it all been a setup? Caleb finding her in the woods. “Rescuing her.” Coming to her aid last night.

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Was it all part of some hidden agenda? She didn't want to believe it, but she remembered Ethan's promise that she would do what they wanted because she would be one of them. Could this be part of a plan to get her allegiance?

She paced the small clearing in front of the shelter. The rain continued to fall, but she ignored it. If it was a setup, then why would he say he wanted nothing more to do with her? She shook her head. None of this made sense.

Caleb watched for a few minutes then stood up abruptly and stalked toward her, coming to a halt only inches from where she stood. He was still naked. It was distracting. Regan whispered a spell, and he was dressed in a pink satin robe that stopped abruptly at mid-thigh. He glanced down, then back up at her his eyes narrowing. "Don't do that," he snarled.

She raised an eyebrow but ignored the comment. "Are you working with your father?" she asked.

"I told you, I have nothing to do with that world."

"Why do I find that hard to believe?"

He shrugged. "It doesn't matter what you believe. With any luck, we'll never see each other again."

"So, what does he want? Your father, I mean. Why did he change me?"

Caleb shrugged. "I don't know."

“What were you doing there, that night? You say you have nothing to do with that world, but you were there. Why?”

“My father asked me to meet him. He—”

“Here?” she interrupted. “Had you ever been here before?”

He frowned. “No, but he told me he had some information I wanted. Then when I got here, he started on about some world domination crap. Werewolves taking over. He said he was working with someone. They had plans, and this person was going to make it all happen.” Caleb ran a hand through his hair, then tightened the belt on the pink silk robe. “He wanted me to come in with him. I told him I wasn’t interested and left. I was on my way out of there when I heard you scream.”

“And came running to my rescue—how sweet.”

He scowled and turned away. “I should have left you to Ethan,” he muttered. “Would have served him right.”

Regan stared at his broad back. She didn’t know whether to believe him or not. She wished she knew what Ethan’s plan was. Obviously, he wanted something from her. But what? And who was the old acquaintance he’d mentioned? Was it the same person he’d told Caleb he was working with?

On balance, she decided she did believe Caleb. It had been so obvious that he wanted to get away from her, as fast and as far as possible, on both occasions they’d met. Still, she didn’t trust him. She didn’t trust many people.

She needed to get out there, hunt down Ethan Stone, and find out what was going on. And rescue her hounds, presuming Ethan had them. She hoped so, but how could she go now? She didn’t want to leave Catrin and Lola alone, not while Ethan might be

sniffing around. He might just decide that one witch was as good as another and take one of her sisters instead.

On the other hand, she couldn't just wait for Ethan to go ahead with his plan for taking over the world. No way was the world being taken over by a bunch of dogs. Even if she was one of those dogs now. It was enough to make her brain explode.

Her thoughts were interrupted by a movement behind her.

"Here," Caleb said.

She turned to see him stripping off the pink robe. He tossed it to the floor between them and stood before her, naked. He was beautiful, and she didn't even try to look away. She let her eyes wander over the tall, powerful body; if she wasn't going to see him again, she might as well get her fill. She worked her way up to his face, as beautiful as the rest of him. His expression was blank.

She realized he was leaving. Right now, and a sharp pain stabbed somewhere in her middle. Always in the past, she'd been the one to walk away. But she remembered the feel of his hard body on her, in her, and she couldn't bear to go. To never see him again.

Her brain struggled to come up with some logical argument as to why he should stay. And came up with nothing.

"Good-bye," he said.

She opened her mouth to argue, but instead only one word came out. "Good-bye."

He turned and walked away.

Regan watched until his tall figure disappeared into the trees, then she sank down onto the forest floor and clutched the pink robe, holding it to her nose and breathing in the last trace of him.

Chapter 8

Regan spent the remainder of the day wandering the forest, first as a human, but then she started experimenting. She'd thought she might need the full moon to change but found that now she recognized the magic, she could change at will.

As the sun lowered in the sky, she made her way to the stone altar that lay in the center of the forest. She tiptoed out of the trees, her pads making no sound. Changing back into her human form, she knelt on the altar and prayed to her mother.

She stayed on her knees for hours, and darkness had fallen by the time she rose stiffly to her feet. No one had answered her prayers. Had she really expected them to? The old resentment and bitterness escalated inside her as she turned her back on the altar and headed for home.

Catrin and Lola were seated at the scrubbed wooden table in the kitchen. They both glanced up as she entered the kitchen, and relief flashed across their faces.

Catrin looked past Regan and frowned. "Where's Caleb?"

Regan scowled at the question. "Long gone."

"I thought he'd stay with you."

"Well, you thought wrong." Then she shrugged. "He stayed last night, then left this morning."

“Why did he go?” Lola asked.

The question made it sound as though it was Regan’s fault he’d done a runner. “I suppose he had better things to do.”

A small frown played across Catrin’s face. “So, are you okay now?”

She glared. “No, I’m not okay. I’m a freaking werewolf.”

A noise came from behind her, a cross between a cough and a snort, and she went instantly still.

The sound came again, and she turned to see two people framed in the open doorway. Her eyes fixed on the smaller figure, and a warm rush of pleasure washed over her. “Gina!”

Gina came forward, wrapped her arms around Regan’s waist, and hugged her. Regan held her tight while she glanced over her sister’s shoulder to where her husband stood lounging against the doorframe, arms folded across his broad chest, watching them with a slightly wary expression in his dark eyes.

She hadn’t always gotten along with Gina’s husband, and Regan could admit that a small part of that was her fault. A very small part. Regan had hated the vampire from the first moment she’d set eyes on him. And with good cause—Darius Cole had stolen her baby sister. That Gina hadn’t exactly objected to being stolen was beside the point. They had eventually reached some sort of truce because in the end, he had also managed to save her. Though in Regan’s mind, if he’d kept out of their lives in the first place, then Gina wouldn’t have needed saving.

He caught her gaze, raised an eyebrow, then stepped into the room. “Did I hear you right?” he said. “You’re a werewolf?”

There was a wealth of disdain in that last word, and Regan bristled. She ignored the question and held Gina slightly away from her so she could peer down into her face. Her sister grinned, flashing small white fangs.

“You look good,” Regan said. It was true; she had never seen her sister look so alive. Which was ironic, really.

“I feel good,” Gina replied. “Very good.”

She stepped back and slipped her hand into Darius’s. He pulled her tight against his chest and stared across at Regan through half-closed eyes. It was a gesture of pure ownership, and Regan’s own eyes narrowed on the couple. Then she forced herself to relax.

“So,” Darius said, “about this werewolf thing...?”

He appeared to find the whole idea fascinating. Regan scowled, but said nothing.

“Regan got bit by a werewolf a couple of weeks ago,” Catrin volunteered.

Darius studied her, head cocked to one side. “And last night was full moon. Did you—” He paused as if unsure how to word his question.

“Go all furry and howl at the moon?” Regan snapped.

“Yeah.” He must have liked the idea because his lips curled into a smile.

Regan considered denying it, but what was the point? She nodded.

“Christ almighty,” Darius murmured. “This is priceless.” Gina punched him on the arm, and his smile broadened into a full-blown grin of delight. “Haven’t I always said

your sister was a bitch?”

“Ha, ha,” Regan muttered.

Giving her husband a look of reproach, Gina pulled out of his arms. She crossed to Regan and put a hand on her shoulder. “How are you?” she asked.

Regan saw the concern in her sister’s face. Gina had always been too compassionate; it had gotten her into trouble many times. “Actually, I’m fine.” She gave what she hoped was a reassuring smile.

Gina gave her a look of disbelief.

“Really,” Regan said. “The furry bit was... kind of fun.”

“What was it like?” Darius asked.

Regan was unsure how to answer. Instead, she closed her eyes and allowed wolf to rise up inside her. When she opened her eyes, she knew they were changed—wolf’s eyes peering out from her human face. She stared at Darius and allowed a small growl to trickle from her throat.

He appeared fascinated, but unafraid, which pissed wolf off a little, but Regan forced her back down.

“Can you change when you want? Or does it have to be full moon?” he asked. “Can you think when you’re a dog? Do you—” Her eyes narrowed again, and he shut up. Then he gave a shrug. “We know very little about the wolves.”

“Join the club,” Regan said.

“You could be a great source of information for the Council.” He frowned. “Though I suppose you’re hardly going to be typical.”

“I have no wish to help the Council with anything,” Regan said. “And I’m certainly not going to be some sort of specimen for you to study. But I do need to find out why it happened, and what they wanted me for.”

Darius pulled out a chair for Gina and sat down next to her at the big wooden table. He regarded Regan curiously. “How much do you know?”

Regan forced herself to take a seat opposite. She hated him, but maybe he would have some information that might be useful to her.

“In your work with the Council, have you ever come across a man named Caleb Stone?” she asked.

Darius shook his head.

“What about Ethan Stone?”

He thought for a moment. “That name rings a bell.”

“He’s the wolf who bit Regan,” Catrin said.

“And Caleb Stone?”

“His son,” Regan said.

She heard Catrin gasp. “Caleb is the son of the wolf that bit you?” she asked.

Regan nodded.

“I didn’t see that,” Catrin said. “How did you find out?”

“He told me.”

“Okay,” Darius said, “tell me what happened.”

She related the events of the night she’d been bitten, right up until that evening, only omitting the fact that she and Caleb had made love.

“And you have no idea who this past acquaintance is?” Darius asked when she fell silent.

“I told you—I just don’t know. I’m over two thousand years old. I’ve met one or two people in that time.”

“And probably pissed off most of them.”

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Regan didn't deny it, but she was confused by something Ethan had said. That he wasn't to rape her. That "the acquaintance" would rip out his heart if he touched her that way. It didn't sound like the threat of someone who hated her. She gnawed on her lower lip, trying to make sense of it all, but failing miserably.

She glanced across at Gina and realized now that her sister was back, Regan at least had the chance to go off and look for some answers. "Are you two going to stick around for a while?"

Gina nodded. "Catrin has decorated some rooms in the basement for us."

Regan knew that. Catrin had worked hard to make her sister and her new husband feel welcome. There was a whole suite of rooms down there. She glanced at Darius. He didn't look too thrilled with the idea, probably worried about Regan sneaking down in the daytime and sticking a stake through his heart. She smiled at the thought.

"We'll be bolting the doors," he said.

She raised an eyebrow. "You really think that will help?"

Gina laughed and patted his knee. "I'll protect you."

It was good to see Gina so happy. It wasn't what Regan would have chosen for her sister, but she was willing to suspend her hatred of the bloodsucker as long as he looked after her. She left them talking with Lola but was aware of Catrin behind her as she left the kitchen. Her sister followed her into her room and watched as Regan dragged a bag out of the wardrobe and started to pack. "What are you doing?" she

asked.

Regan glanced up. “Gina’s back.”

“I know. So?”

“So you can cope without me.”

“We need you, Regan.”

“But you can manage without me, and I need to find Ethan Stone.”

“And Caleb?”

“What about him?”

“Will he be there?”

“No. Even if I wanted him—which I don’t—he’s made it perfectly clear that he wants nothing to do with me or my world.” She zipped up the bag and picked it up. “I need to finish this.” She leaned across and kissed Catrin on the cheek. “Keep looking for that spell for me. And make sure Lola doesn’t get into trouble.” What else? “And don’t invite any more vampires into the house.”

Catrin nodded. “Please keep in touch,” she said. “Let us know where you are.”

“I will.”

Finding Ethan Stone turned out harder than she’d anticipated.

He’d vanished without a goddamn trace.

Regan had tried every spell she could think of, but Ethan's Stone's location continued to elude her. She'd been searching for nearly four weeks now, but it was time to give up.

It was full moon in two days.

She could feel the pull in her blood. She'd changed many times now, and she and wolf were familiar companions, but at the thought of the full moon, excitement rose up from deep inside her. Always since the first time, she had been in charge, but full moon was wolf's time, when wolf would reign supreme and own the night.

And wolf didn't want to run alone. Wolf knew exactly who she wanted to run with.

A bond existed between her and Caleb. Regan had tried to deny it, but it was real. His pull was as strong as the pull of the moon.

She hadn't phoned home since she left, and her cell phone had remained switched off. Now she dug it out from the bottom of her bag and punched in Catrin's number.

"Have you found a spell to reverse the werewolf bite yet?" she asked as soon as Catrin picked up.

"Hello, Regan, how are you? We're all well—thank you for asking."

Regan sighed and tried to ignore the twinge of guilt. "Sorry," she muttered.

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“And no, I haven’t found the spell yet, but I’m still looking. Where are you?”

“It doesn’t matter. I haven’t found Ethan Stone.”

“Caleb’s called a few times. He wanted to know where you were. I told him I had no idea, but he left a number. I sent it to your phone.”

“He did?” Regan tried for nonchalance, but a frisson of excitement shivered through her at the thought. “I wanted to talk to Caleb anyway,” she said. “I’m pretty sure he must know where Ethan is.”

“Well, now you can.”

Regan frowned. Catrin sounded pissed off with her. Which was odd. Catrin never got pissed off with anyone. “Are you okay?” she asked.

“Of course I’m okay. Why shouldn’t I be? My oldest sister just vanished off the face of the earth. My younger—” She stopped in mid flow.

“Is there something wrong with Gina?” If that vampire had done something to her baby sister, she would really kill him this time—stake him through the heart.

“No, nothing, but honestly, Regan, the two of them never get out of bed.”

“Oh.” Then something occurred to her. “Are you jealous?”

Catrin was silent for a moment. “Maybe.”

Regan needed to get home. She needed to get her life sorted out and get back before Catrin decided to head out and look for a vampire of her own.

“How’s Lola?”

“Fine. She misses you.”

She sighed. “I’ll be back soon.” She hoped. “Don’t do anything drastic. And find me that spell.”

Ending the call, Regan stared down at her cell phone. She had Caleb’s number, but she didn’t want to talk to him—she wanted to see him, touch him. Reassure herself that he was okay.

She was going hunting for a wolf.

Chapter 9

Regan peered up at the huge glass and steel building that loomed over her. In the end, finding Caleb had been easy. Or at least so she'd thought, but this hardly looked like the lair of a werewolf. Maybe she'd hunted down the wrong Caleb Stone.

She was in the heart of the city of London, right slam in the middle of the business district and at the headquarters of Stone Enterprises, a private security firm that provided services all around the world. And according to her research, Caleb owned it.

The glass doors slid open, and Regan entered the reception area. Glancing around her, she couldn't help but be impressed. The place was opulent, ultra-modern, with loads of stainless steel, marble, and lush, green, potted plants. In the center of the room was an actual pond with fat, orange carp swimming lethargically and a waterfall at one end. Caleb was obviously doing all right for himself.

Across the huge expanse of floor, a perfectly made-up blonde sat behind the reception desk. Regan stalked up to the desk, ignoring the dismissive glance the other woman gave her. "I want to see Caleb."

The blonde looked her up and down, clearly unimpressed. "I'm afraid Mr. Stone doesn't see anyone without an appointment."

"Look"—Regan leaned across the desk and read the name label pinned to the woman's left breast—"Gretchen, just call him up and tell him Regan's here to see him."

Gretchen smiled—it didn't reach her pale blue eyes. "I'm sorry, but that's not company policy. If you would like to leave a name and number, we'll contact you if Mr. Stone wishes to see you."

The tone implied it was extremely unlikely.

Regan pursed her lips and contemplated which spell to use. She'd always had a preference for the toad one. She glanced at the pond, it would be so convenient—the toad wouldn't even have to leave the building—perfect. Of course, while personally satisfying, that wouldn't help her get to Caleb, so she settled on a simple compulsion spell. She opened her mouth to speak it when the phone on the reception desk rang.

Gretchen picked it up, listened, and a flicker of annoyance flashed across her face. She put the phone down and looked at Regan.

"You're to go up—top floor."

"Thank you, you've been so helpful."

Caleb's top floor office was bigger than the reception area, and it took her a few seconds to locate him. His back was to her. He was standing in front of one of the floor-to-ceiling windows, staring down at the city below, looking unfamiliar in a dark business suit that fitted him to perfection.

He didn't turn as she entered; made no indication he even knew she was there. But his shoulders were stiff, every line of his body radiating tension.

She moved to stand beside him. Breathing in deeply, she smelled that musky, almost feral scent she had come to associate with him, and inside her, wolf stirred to life, sensing his presence. Wolf was pleased to see him. She'd been lonely and was willing to admit it, even if Regan was not.

Pleased or not, coming into his presence was like coming home. A sense of peace washed over her, stilling the restlessness that plagued her spirit. The reaction brought her up short.

She might have gone through periods of emptiness during her long life, but she'd never been lonely, never needed anyone else. Or so she'd believed. Now she realized she'd been lying to herself for just about her whole life.

She'd always been lonely. Two thousand years, and the burning guilt of what she'd done still plagued her. Deep down, she'd never considered she deserved anyone of her own. So she pretended it didn't matter and kept her distance from anyone she might come to care for, but she had never really been tested. Never met a man she couldn't easily turn her back on. Until Caleb.

She shook her head, banishing the memories. Her feelings were irrelevant anyway. Caleb had made it clear he wanted nothing to do with her. And that was fine. Once he gave her the information she needed, helped her find his father, then she would exit his life forever.

Finally, he turned to her. He appeared tired, dark shadows under his eyes, his mouth held in a stern, uncompromising line. It didn't matter; he was beautiful, and Regan's heart rate picked up as she looked at him.

"How did you find me?" he asked.

She raised an eyebrow. "I am a witch."

"You used magic?"

She shrugged. "I did consider it, but then I thought—what the hell, let's use the phone book instead. You weren't hard to find."

“I’ve never been hiding. I never needed to, until I met you.”

A flash of irritation shot through her. “You can’t blame me for what your father did.”

He sighed and ran a hand through his hair. “Where have you been? I’ve phoned Catrin every day—she said she hadn’t heard from you. I thought—” He broke off and scowled.

“Were you worried?” She hadn’t meant to sound sarcastic, but it obviously came out that way because annoyance flared in his eyes.

“I thought maybe you’d found my father. Or he’d found you.”

“No.”

“So, why are you here?”

“I have been looking for Ethan. Unfortunately, he’s not in the phone book. I thought you might have some information that could help me.”

“You could have called.”

She ignored the comment. Thrusting her hands into the back pockets of her jeans, she studied him. “So?”

He moved away from her and took a seat behind the desk, then motioned to the chair opposite, but she was too restless to sit down, and she paced the floor in front of the desk instead.

???

Caleb watched her long legs in her tight jeans as she moved across the floor. Only force of will kept him in his seat when he wanted to leap up, take her in his arms, drag her down, and make violent love to her.

If it had just been a case of mere lust, he might have done it, but it went deeper than lust. She called to something inside him. No, not something. He admitted it at last—she called to his wolf.

Wolf had always asked for very little from him, content to remain in the background

of Caleb's life. Now he wouldn't be quieted. For the first time, there was something wolf wanted. Caleb could sense him so close to the surface, hungry, clamoring to be free. He realized, with a jolt of surprise, that it was full moon in a few days' time. He'd actually forgotten in his constant fear over Regan's safety.

Caleb hadn't been able to put her out of his mind. Worry had gnawed at his every conscious moment. He didn't want to worry about her. He didn't want to feel anything for her.

Then an alternative explanation slipped into his head. After all, she was a witch. He glanced at her sharply, and she raised an eyebrow.

"What?" she asked.

"Have you put a spell on me?" he asked.

She looked taken aback by the question. "What sort of spell?"

"Some sort of—" He paused. He'd been about to say love spell. Luckily, at the last moment he'd realized what she would infer from that. That he was in love. Which he most definitely wasn't.

She was watching him; he could almost see her brain working—the second when enlightenment struck. Her eyes widened, and then she grinned. She came around the desk and sat on the edge only inches from his chair, swinging her long legs. He resisted the urge to push himself away from her, and the urge to push himself closer.

"A love potion? You think I've put some sort of love spell on you." She stared down at him, and those strange witch's eyes penetrated into his soul. He wanted to drown in them, lose himself completely. "Are you inlovewith me, Caleb?"

He forced his gaze away. “Not love,” he growled. “I never mentioned love. Some sort of attraction spell, to make me want you.”

“I’m hurt, Caleb. Do you really think I need a spell to make men want me? Am I so ugly?” She pouted at him, fluttering her long lashes.

“God, you’re a bitch.”

She grinned. Then her eyes widened in alarm.

“What?” he asked.

“I had a thought. When you were with Catrin, that time you brought me home, she made you coffee, didn’t she?”

“Yes. So?”

“That’s it then. Catrin’s put one of her lust spells on you.”

Relief hit him. This wasn’t natural—it was some sort of spell, and it would fade, or she’d remove it, or something. He glanced up to see her watching him, amusement still on her face.

“Oh, for God’s sake, Caleb—I’m joking. Of course, Catrin wouldn’t put a spell on you to make you fall in lust with her sister. What do you think we are?”

She laughed then. He’d never heard her laugh before. Not in genuine amusement. It was a beautiful sound, musical, and he listened, entranced. Then she fell silent. She looked at him, head to one side, her gaze drifting down over the length of his body.

“So,” she murmured. “Do you lust after me, Caleb? Do you want me?” Her voice

lowered to a husky drawl that sent frissons slithering down his spine.

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She licked her lips, moistening her slightly parted mouth, and the banked fires in his belly roared into life. He knew she was taunting him; it didn't make any difference. He rose to his feet, and before she could react, he moved in close against her, pushing her farther onto the desk, nudging her legs apart with one knee, so he could step into the V formed by her thighs.

His arms went around her, his hands sliding down over her back to grip the firm cheeks of her bottom and pull her tightly to him. His cock had been hard since she'd entered the room; now he pressed himself against her.

“Does that answer your question?”

He didn't wait for an answer. His head swooped down, and he took her lips, thrusting his tongue into her mouth and tasting her as he'd been starving to do since the last time. Her hands came up to grip his shoulders, one sinking into his hair, to pull him down harder against her.

Without breaking the kiss, he skimmed his palms over her thighs, then lifted them so she wrapped her long legs around him, and he ground his hard cock against her core. She whimpered words of need against his lips, and his mouth slid from hers, to drop kisses over her cheek. He burrowed his head against her throat, breathed in the warm, spicy scent of her and knew he would never get enough. The thought made him go still. He concentrated on his breathing, counting each breath until he had the will to release his hold on her. He reached behind, loosened her legs from around him, and stepped back from between her thighs.

“Please,” she whispered, the need clear in her face, and satisfaction rushed through

him. If he was somehow enthralled, then she wasn't free of the spell. This was no one-sided attraction.

His balls ached, and his pants felt too tight. He wanted her, but he had to prove, if only to himself, that he could control this.

She reached out a hand to him. He looked at it for a moment and then turned away. Crossing the room, he poured them both a drink, placed hers on the desk next to her, and swallowed his in one mouthful.

He put the glass down, proud that his hand was steady, then sank into his seat, watching as the sanity returned to her face.

Hopping down from the desk, she picked up her glass and retreated to the other side. She sat in one of the chairs facing him, sipped her scotch, and studied him.

Caleb had a sudden, unexpected need to explain himself. "I just want to be left alone to live a normal life."

She stared at him, her expression one of incredulous disbelief. "Normal? You? How do you expect to do that?"

He scowled. "I've done alright so far."

Shaking her head, she looked him up and down. "Do the words "in denial" mean anything to you?"

"I am not in denial." He shifted in his chair. "I'm half-human. I've every right to this life. The human side of me has always been dominant. I was never like the others in the pack—I can control my wolf. I've never wanted anything to do with your world—"

“Until now,” she interrupted. “Because you do want me, don’t you, Caleb? And you hate that.”

She paused as if waiting for him to deny it but, how could he? Something flashed across her face and her expression hardened.

“There’s something between us,” she continued. “I’ve felt it too. My wolf senses it. And I’m sure that’s all it is. A bond between our wolves. Not between us.”

“Does that make it better? We still need to find a way to make it go away.”

“Catrin is searching for a spell to counteract the wolf bite. Once she finds that, I’ll be normal again—well, as normal as I’ll ever be. Hopefully, the bond will disappear, and we won’t ever need to see each other again. You can go back to pretending you have a normal life and forget I ever existed.”

Her voice was laced with bitterness, and he frowned. “Don’t tell me you want this any more than I do?”

“Why would I want a bond with some sniveling fool who won’t even accept what he is?”

Anger rose in him at that. He stood up abruptly and turned away without answering.

She came up to stand beside him. “So, are you going to tell me how to find your father?”

For a moment, he actually considered it. It would serve them both right.

But he didn’t want Regan anywhere near Ethan. Caleb had no clue why his father had targeted her, but it was unlikely to be for something good. He turned to face her.

“No.”

She smiled with saccharin sweetness. “Tell me, and I’ll go away.”

“Tempting as the offer is—still no.”

She regarded him through narrowed eyes, her lips pursed as she considered her next move. “Are you going to tell me why?”

“Ethan is dangerous to you. He changed you—he can control your wolf.”

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“So sweet that you care, but I can look after myself.”

“Not against this, you can’t.”

Regan opened her mouth, no doubt to argue, then she shrugged. “Okay. I’m going to pop out—leave you alone for a little while.”

He looked at her in surprise. “That sounds too easy.”

She shrugged again. “Don’t worry, I’ll be back, but I have people I need to see. People who might be able to give me the information I need. The information you won’t give me.”

“Who could give you that?”

“The Council.”

“What’s ‘the Council’?”

She looked at him, then shook her head. “Don’t you know anything?”

Caleb frowned. “I told you—I never wanted to know.”

She heaved a sigh. “The Council is the organization that keeps your normal world safe. Or at least gives you the illusion of safety.”

Caleb found he wanted to ask more questions about this mysterious Council. He

couldn't remember Ethan ever mentioning it, but Regan was already walking away. She paused at the door and turned to face him. "Do you want to inform your receptionist to let me back in or would you rather I turn her into a toad."

"You could do that?"

"Well, she wouldn't actually be a toad, but she'd certainly look like one."

He couldn't help but smile at the idea, and Regan raised an eyebrow. "You want me to turn her into a toad?"

"Of course not."

"Then tell her, because I'm coming back."

Chapter 10

Caleb did not want to be here.

He hadn't been back to this house since he'd run away on his sixteenth birthday. Now he stood facing the huge studded oak door, fighting down the urge to turn and run again. He held his ground. These days, he ran from nothing.

After Regan had walked out of his office, he'd sat for a while considering his next move. It occurred to him that only by finding the answers behind Regan's attack could he make this thing go away and get his life back on track. Also, if he could discover what Ethan wanted with Regan, then maybe she would give up her search—a search that could only end badly for her. His wolf didn't like the thought of anything bad happening to Regan.

He'd tried to tell himself it wasn't his problem, but some inner voice plagued him constantly, whispered in his mind that she was his.

Which was stupid.

First, she was not his, and second, he'd never met anyone more capable of looking after herself than Regan. All the same, he couldn't get rid of the nagging need to take care of her.

So, here he was.

He pushed at the door. It swung open, but he hesitated a second longer, reluctant to

step inside. This was the house where he had spent much of his childhood. Being here made his skin crawl and the scars on his back burn like fire. He swallowed the loathing and stepped into the dark, wood-paneled hallway, pausing to allow his eyes to adjust to the dim light.

He found Ethan in his study, seated behind the huge oak desk. Caleb swallowed the rush of hatred and stepped inside.

“So,” Ethan said, “are you here to tell me you’ve changed your mind about my offer?”

“You mean the offer where I come in with you and we take over the world?” Caleb shrugged. “Perhaps. Why don’t you tell me a bit more about it?”

Ethan’s eyes narrowed, and his gaze ran over Caleb before returning to his face. “What are you really doing here?”

Caleb crossed the room and sat down in the chair opposite. “I want to know about the woman in the forest that night.”

Ethan’s gaze flew to his face. “Shit. I thought she’d gotten away, that maybe the charm hadn’t worked, but you took her.”

Caleb said nothing.

“I wondered if you were involved,” Ethan said. “But I told myself you wouldn’t be so stupid. Obviously, I was wrong. I suppose you took the charm off her.”

Caleb nodded. “Who is she? And what did you want her for?”

Ethan’s gaze burned into him, and curiosity filled his eyes. “What’s it to you? You

want nothing to do with this world, remember?”

“Tell me.”

Ethan pursed his lips. “I might. If you tell me something first—did she change?”

Caleb nodded. “Why didn’t you go after her again? You obviously know where she lives.”

“The only reason we managed to take her the first time was because she wasn’t expecting it. It won’t be so easy next time. She might be arrogant, but she’s not stupid.” Ethan smiled. “But that’s not going to matter if she has changed. She’ll have to come to my call.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure about that.”

“All new wolves must answer to their maker.”

“Maybe, but she’s strong. She already has control of her wolf. I doubt she’ll come to you.” He gave his father a cold smile. “Unless it’s to kill you.”

“You sound as though you admire her.” He looked at Caleb closely. “Don’t tell me you’ve gotten involved with this woman.”

Caleb didn’t answer.

“You’ve slept with her? Jesus, do you know what she is? She’s a witch, and not just any witch. She’s the oldest, strongest—”

“How old?”

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“No one really knows, but she’s been around for at least two thousand years.”

Caleb’s mind reeled, and shock surged through him. Two thousand years old? No wonder she came across as hard. What would it be like to live that long? He was thirty-seven, and sometimes that seemed like way too many years.

“But that’s not what you should be worrying about.”

Caleb had been lost in thought. Now, he glanced back at his father. Ethan’s face was set in grim lines.

“What should I be worrying about?” Caleb asked.

“I told you I wasn’t working alone in this. The”—he paused as if unsure of his wording—“person I’m working with told me where to go and how to capture the witch. He gave me the charm.”

“So?”

“He also told me if I touched her any more than I absolutely had to, then he would rip out my heart and feed it to my wolves.”

Caleb thought about that. He could sympathize with the idea. If anyone else touched Regan now, he would likely want to rip them into tiny, bloody, little pieces. Hell, want didn’t come into it—he would rip them to pieces.

“Who is he?” he asked and knew he hadn’t kept the rage from his voice when his

father raised an eyebrow.

“I don’t think it would be wise to tell you that.”

“Since when has wisdom dictated your decisions?”

“Whatever you may think, Caleb, I have never wanted harm to come to you.”

Bitterness washed over him, and the scars on his back flared to life. He wanted out of there. He would relate the information back to Regan. Perhaps she could work out what was going on. He’d done what he could.

“I’m leaving,” he said.

Ethan looked about to argue, then he shrugged. “Perhaps you could return something to your witch.”

He followed his father down the stairs into the basement. He knew what was down here. A cage made of silver bars, used to keep out-of-control werewolves from causing too much damage. Caleb had spent much of his early teens in there. Though he’d never been out of control.

Now, two huge hounds occupied the cage. They growled softly as Ethan approached.

“Diablo and Satan,” Caleb murmured.

The hounds heard their names. Their ears pricked, and the growls were cut off. They rose to their full height, which was almost to Caleb’s shoulders and eyed him with burning crimson eyes.

“Nice pets your girlfriend keeps,” Ethan muttered.

“What are they?”

“Hellhounds. Magnificent animals. I couldn’t bring myself to kill them.”

The name certainly suited. They were huge creatures, bearing only a vague resemblance to dogs, with rough russet coats, and a thick black stripe down their backs. Powerful legs ended in long savage claws. Their heads were misshapen, with pointed ears and razor-sharp teeth. As he approached the bars, they sat calmly, only growling when Ethan came up beside him.

“What do you expect me to do with them?” Caleb asked.

“Give them back. There are chains over there. I’ll get out—they don’t like me very much.”

“Well, you can’t fault them on their taste in people,” Caleb said as Ethan left the room.

Caleb spoke to the hounds softly, but they gave him no trouble as he attached the chains around their necks. His father was waiting for him at the top of the stairs.

Ethan walked with him to the truck, keeping his distance from the hounds. Caleb opened the back and they jumped in. He was climbing into the cab when Ethan stopped him with a hand on his arm. Caleb glanced down at it then pulled free. “What?” he asked coldly.

“I know you’ve never wanted anything to do with the pack, and in some ways I understand that, but there’s something you can’t afford to ignore.”

“And that is?”

“What do you know of the mating bond?”

“It doesn’t exist. It’s a myth.” He shook his head. “I’ve seen you with women, and there’s never been anything remotely mystical about it.”

“That doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist.”

“Did it exist with my mother?”

Ethan turned away.

“I heard the stories,” Caleb called after him. “You abducted her, raped her, and then let her die. Where was the mating bond in that?”

Ethan paused then turned back slowly. “You shouldn’t believe all the stories you hear, and I wanted a son.”

“And you got me. Was I worth it?”

Ethan looked him over. “I thought so at the time.” He shrugged. “I still think so, or would if you’d stop being so stubborn and join me.”

Caleb climbed into the truck and slammed the door shut. He drove off without another word, but when he looked in the mirror, Ethan was still watching him.

He thought over what he had learned. He'd never wanted to be involved, had turned his back on the pack as soon as he'd been able, but he didn't like the sound of this. The world was not perfect, but he knew there were far worse things out there, and it sounded very much as if Ethan was involved with one of those things.

As he turned a corner, the house and his father disappeared from sight, and a tall figure stepped out of the trees at the edge of the drive. It was Tom, his father's second, and Caleb swore softly. He pulled the truck to a halt and wound down the window. "What?"

"I need to talk to you."

"I can't talk now."

"Caleb, please."

Caleb sighed. Of all his father's people, Tom was the only one who'd stood up for Caleb when he was a child. Caleb owed him, but he couldn't do this so soon after seeing his father; he needed some space. He took a business card from his pocket, then paused. He didn't want Tom at the office, he didn't want his two worlds colliding any more than necessary. He picked up a pen from the dashboard, scribbled an address on the back of the card, and handed it to Tom. "Come here tomorrow afternoon around five," he said. "I'll speak to you there."

Tom nodded and stepped back, disappearing into the forest.

Caleb made to drive off when a whine from the back seat reminded him he had company, and he frowned.

He took out his cell phone and punched in Catrin's number.

She answered immediately. “Caleb.”

“How the hell—” He broke off—perhaps he didn’t want to know. “Is Regan there?”

Catrin was silent for a minute. “Not right at this moment,” she said.

“I have her hounds.”

“You do? That’s wonderful. Can you bring them here?”

“Yes,” he replied.

“Good. But Caleb—”

“Yes?”

“Can you wait till after dark?”

He frowned. What the hell? “No problem. I’m a couple of hours away anyway.”

“Okay, I’ll see you then.”

She cut off, and he sat staring at the cell phone. What happened after dark?

Catrin opened the big wooden door and ushered him inside. As soon as he was in, she crouched down and hugged the two hounds.

“Thank you,” she said.

Caleb peered past her down the dark hallway. “Is Regan back yet?”

Catrin straightened. “She’s still in London.”

A stab of unwelcome disappointment hit him. “When will she be back?”

“I don’t know.” She gave a little shrug. “She hasn’t been home in over three weeks.”

“And you didn’t think to mention this when I phoned?”

“I did, but I wanted you to come here. I want you to meet someone.”

He sighed and ran his hand through his hair. “I don’t want to meet anyone.” Certainly not the type of person he was likely to meet in a house belonging to three witches.

“Please, Caleb.” She reached out and laid a hand on his arm.

A sense of peace washed over him, and he stared down at her with narrowed eyes.

She was so different from Regan, almost delicate, with an air of sweetness totally lacking in her older sister. Still, he didn't trust her. The same blood ran in their veins. "Are you using magic on me?"

She glanced down at the hand on his arm and smiled. "No, not magic. I have this calming effect—very boring. Now, please, come and meet my sister and her husband. They're worried about Regan."

"Jesus, another sister? Is she anything like Regan?"

"No, thank God." A man's voice spoke from behind him, and Caleb whirled round. A tall figure lounged in the kitchen doorway. The man was big, his arms folded across his chest. He appeared relaxed, almost indolent, but the air around him throbbed with tension. He was black haired, olive skinned, and when Caleb looked into his eyes, they were almost black and filled with menace.

Every instinct told Caleb to move away, as fast as he possibly could. Instead, he took a step forward until he stood only a foot from the other man. They were the same height and Caleb stared into those dark eyes without flinching.

The man raised an eyebrow, then he raised the corner of his upper lip revealing the tip of one sharp white fang.

"Holy shit," Caleb muttered. Some primitive fear roiled in his gut, but he stood his ground. He swallowed, then let his eyes change so his wolf peered out, and a low growl trickled from his mouth. The man pushed himself off from the doorframe, and his whole body tensed as if ready to leap. Caleb stood poised on the balls of his feet, every cell in his body urging him to take the initiative and attack first.

"Darius, stop it!"

The words broke the tension. Caleb glanced past the man to see a tall woman, with shoulder length blond hair and Regan's eyes, standing behind him. She put a hand on the man's shoulder, and the tension seemed to ease from him. He turned to the woman, his lips curving into a smile.

"Hey, we were only kidding around. Guys need to do this sort of thing, work out who's boss."

"Hmm, and have you?" she asked.

He stared at Caleb, and a small frown played across his features. "No," he said. "Not yet."

"Well, you'll have to find out some other way then." She stepped forward and held out her hand. Caleb hesitated, he looked from one to the other, uncertain whether the threat had passed, but the danger had eased, and he reached out and took the hand offered.

"I'm Gina," she said. "Regan's sister. And this is my husband, Darius."

"He's a vampire?"

She smiled and nodded. "So am I."

He stared at her and her smile widened revealing a pair of small, white fangs. Christ, witches and now vampires. So much for keeping away from that world. He needed to get out of here. "Okay, well, nice meeting you, but now I really have to go."

"Not so fast," Darius spoke, and Caleb's gaze swung round. Darius stepped forward. "Let me shake your hand," he said. "You're a brave man."

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Caleb's eyes narrowed on the outstretched hand. "I am?"

"Anyone who'll take on Regan must have balls—"

"Shut up, Darius," Gina muttered.

He grinned. "Hey, your sister has tried to kill me at least twice."

"And next time, I'll let her do it."

"No, you won't."

He pulled her against him and kissed her. Caleb folded his arms and watched, fascinated. Catrin came to stand next him and he glanced down. She lifted one shoulder. "They're newlyweds," she said.

"Vampires get married?"

"Obviously. Come on, I'll make us some coffee."

Caleb thought about arguing, but the evening had taken on a surreal quality, and coffee sounded like a good idea. Scotch sounded like an even better one. He allowed Catrin to lead him around the kissing couple and into the kitchen.

She pushed him toward one of the chairs around the big wooden table and then put the coffeemaker on. Then she went to a cupboard, got out a bottle, and poured him a long drink.

He had a brief memory of Regan telling him that Catrin had drugged his drink the last time. Then he shrugged and took it. “Are you a mind reader?”

It wasn’t meant to be a literal question, but she considered it anyway.

“Sometimes,” she answered. “But I tend to see emotions rather than actual thoughts.” She paused. “Though sometimes I see thoughts as well.”

“Great,” he said.

She grinned. “Don’t worry, I can’t see yours. You just looked like you needed a drink.”

Taking a long swallow, Caleb sat back in his chair and waited. He had to admit he was curious.

A minute later, Gina and Darius entered the room. They both took seats opposite Caleb, and he sipped his drink and tried not to twitch under their intense stares. Catrin put mugs of coffee in front of them all and sat down next to him.

“So, Caleb,” Gina said. “Tell us all about yourself.”

Caleb frowned, and across the table, Darius grinned.

“They’ll get the details out of you in the end,” he said. “So you might as well give it up now and tell them what they want to know.”

Caleb reached across to where Catrin had left the bottle and topped off his drink. “Except I have no idea what it is they want to know.”

“All about you and Regan, for a start. I must admit, I’m a little curious about that

myself.”

“There is no Regan and me.”

“Okay, maybe we’ll leave that part for now. So, you’re a werewolf?”

“No.” His gaze wandered slowly over the other man. “So, you’re a vampire?”

“Yes, and not ashamed to admit it. Then again, I don’t turn into an animal at regular intervals. I’d probably be ashamed of that, too.”

Caleb was aware the other man was trying to get a rise out of him. “I’m not ashamed, but I was born, not bitten. I’m half werewolf.”

“What’s the other half?” Darius asked.

Caleb frowned. “Human, of course.”

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“I don’t think so,” Catrin said from beside him.

The words didn’t make sense and he glanced at her. “What?”

“I’ve been doing some reading up on the subject since Regan was bitten. A human woman could never have carried you to term. No, whatever you are, it isn’t human.”

Caleb held himself very still, as though if he didn’t move he could ignore the shock pouring over him, choking him. It was a lie. How could she possibly know? He’d always clung to the belief that his mother was human, and Ethan had never denied it. Caleb had embraced the idea of that humanity. All through his childhood, it had given him strength to know that he didn’t belong completely in Ethan’s world. And when he’d turned his back on his father, he thought he had a right to a life among men. Maybe he had no right at all.

What else could his mother be?

He looked across the table, where two vampires sat watching him, then glanced to his side, where a witch sat, staring at the table. The fact was, far more existed in this world than he’d been willing to consider. The wolves had always kept to themselves, and he’d never encountered any other supernatural beings before. He’d suspected they existed, but never gave it much thought. As long as they left him alone, he’d wanted nothing to do with them.

He pushed back his chair and rose to his feet.

Darius regarded him curiously. “Don’t you want to know what she was?”

The question brought him up short. Could the vampire actually tell him, and did he was to know?

“Do you know what she was?” He had to force the question out.

“No. But maybe I could find out.”

“How.”

“I could taste you.”

For a second, Caleb didn’t understand. Then anger rushed through him. The vampire meant his blood. No way was he letting a bloodsucker anywhere near his neck.

“Fuck off.”

Darius laughed softly. “It won’t hurt, and it won’t be in any way”—he glanced at his wife and something passed between them—“sexual.”

“Jesus,” Caleb muttered. “It never occurred to me that it would be.” He shook his head. “I’m out of here.”

Nobody tried to stop him as he left the kitchen, stalked down the hall. He pushed open the front door, then came to an abrupt halt. Regan stood on the other side.

She raised an eyebrow when she saw him, a small smile curling her lips. “Well, well,” she murmured. “Come back for some more of that love potion?”

He couldn’t take this right now. “I’m just leaving,” he muttered and strode down the stone steps without waiting for another word.

“Caleb.”

Catrin spoke from behind him, and he turned to see her framed in the open doorway beside Regan.

“What?”

“You’re a good man; don’t forget it.”

“Actually, it appears I might not be a man at all,” he said and stalked away.

Chapter 11

Caleb spun, raised the pistol, and squeezed off ten shots. They formed a neat little circle at the center of the target.

A slow clapping came from behind him, and he whirled around. Regan leaned casually against the doorway. For a moment, his black mood lifted, then he scowled—Tom would be here soon, and he did not want Regan present at that meeting. He put the pistol down, just in case she riled him too much.

“How the hell did you find me?” he asked.

“This time I did use magic.” She shrugged. “I went to your office. You weren’t there, and I thought you might be avoiding me.” She pushed off the wall and strolled across to him, glancing around the cavernous room. “What is this place?”

“A training facility for the company.”

She came to a halt close to him. “I wanted to thank you for returning Satan and Diablo. You left last night before I had the chance.”

“My father had them. He seemed keen to send them back.”

“I’m glad—I was worried they might have been killed.” She looked at him. “So you went to see your father. You know, I’d have been happy to tag along.”

He sighed and glanced at his watch. “I suppose you wouldn’t consider going away

and coming back later.”

“You suppose right.”

Caleb rubbed at his temple, trying to ease the tension. He’d spent a sleepless night attempting to come to terms with the idea that in all likelihood, he was not in any way human. Part of him wanted to ignore it, pretend he’d never been told, get on with his life. But another part needed to know the truth. He pushed the thoughts down; he had to concentrate on Regan, persuade her to leave this alone, go away somewhere until it all blew over. Whatever “it” was.

“I need a coffee,” he said. “Come on.”

He led her into a small office and poured them both a drink. “Sit down.”

Regan took the cup and sank into the chair he indicated. He took his own seat behind the desk.

“So what did you find out?” Regan asked.

“Nothing much. Ethan is working with someone, someone very powerful. He wouldn’t tell me who, but he said you knew the guy. I got the impression it was an old lover of yours.”

He watched her carefully as he spoke, gauging her reaction.

She pursed her lips and frowned. “That’s pretty much what Ethan told me the night he bit me, but it doesn’t make any sense.” She ran a hand through her long red hair, and then shook her head. “The only old acquaintance I have who possessed that sort of power is dead.”

“How can you be sure?”

Her face turned cold, and she looked him straight in the eyes. “Because I killed him.”

Shock ripped through him. “An old lover?”

“Yes,” she snarled.

“When?”

“A long time ago.”

“How long?”

She flicked her gaze to his face at the question. Her expression held something he couldn't identify. “Two thousand years long,” she replied dryly. “Give or take a few.”

He breathed out. “I have to admit, that sounds pretty dead to me. Who was he?”

“It doesn't matter. Sardi is gone, so it can't be anything to do with him.”

“Well, you need to think hard about who it could be, because according to my father, this thing is still on.”

“So where is he?”

“I don’t know.”

It was the truth. The pack must have moved out of their usual home after his visit yesterday, because he’d been trying to contact other pack members and not managed to reach anybody. He wanted to know about the mating bond thing his father had mentioned, because the more he thought about it, the more he was sure something weird was going on with his wolf. Still, maybe Tom could give him some information.

There must be a way around these feelings for Regan. If it was some sort of mating bond, there had to be a way to cancel it before it was irrevocable. He didn’t want to be mated, certainly not to a stroppy witch who was two thousand years older than he was and would no doubt rub his nose in it every chance she could get.

“Don’t know or just not telling?” she asked now.

He shrugged again. “It doesn’t matter. Whatever you believe, you are vulnerable to Ethan, and I don’t want you anywhere near him. My father is evil.”

“I could make him talk.”

“Maybe, but it’s not going to happen.”

They sat in silence for a few minutes. Caleb was trying to think through this, but the answer remained elusive. “Maybe if we knew what they wanted you for, we could

work it out. Any ideas? What is it witches do, anyway? Apart from love potions, that is.”

“We open the gates between the worlds.”

What the hell did that even mean? “I have no clue what that means. Or why you would do it.” Or what other worlds existed. Or a thousand other questions. He really had never understood the extent of his own ignorance.

“We guide the souls of the dead from this world to the Shadowlands and then beyond. We also have the power to open other gates. We could open the gates to Hell if we wished.”

Yeah, right. He’d think about that later. “Anything else?”

“We have power over the sun and moon. We can extinguish the light and turn the world to darkness forever.”

A deep sense of foreboding washed through him at her words. She was telling the truth—he could hear it in her voice—and the idea of so much power made his stomach roil. And she wasn’t finished yet.

“We could probably stop the world turning if we so desired.”

How could she have lived with such power for so long? How did she not collapse under the weight of responsibility?

Then she smiled. “We can also do tricks.”

“Tricks?”

She whispered a word and her jeans and shirt were gone, and she was sitting before him in a black lace gown that clung to the long lean lines of her body, molded her full breasts so her dark-red nipples peeked through. It was split up the side, one slender leg bared to the thigh, and she wore four-inch stilettos on her feet.

“Caleb,” she murmured huskily, and his gaze shot to her face.

Holding his gaze, she stretched sinuously, raising her arms and leaning her head back, so her red hair hung down behind her and her breasts lifted, thrusting toward him.

The blood rushed to his groin, and the heat coiled low in his belly. He wanted nothing more than to leap on her, but he was held in place by some unseen force. Or maybe it was shock. He didn’t know. His brain had ceased to function.

She rose slowly to her feet and stalked around the desk toward him. She was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen and probably the deadliest. His brain wanted to concentrate on that; his cock didn’t care. It throbbed inside his pants, and he shifted to ease the pressure.

Reaching toward him, she trailed one scarlet-tipped finger down over his chest. It hovered over his groin, and he held his breath, fighting the instinctive urge to thrust his hips upward.

She ran her tongue over her lower lip so it glistened with moisture, and his brain immediately filled with a vision of her kneeling before him, taking him between those succulent lips. He gritted his teeth.

“Jesus,” he muttered.

She laughed softly. Then the black gown was gone and she was back in her jeans. “Worthless tricks, glammers for show,” she said, stepping back and sinking into her

seat.

He took a deep breath, willing his body under control.

“And that’s it?” His voice was hoarse, but he was impressed he could speak at all.

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“Well, we sometimes get visions of the future, but that’s more Gina and Catrin’s thing than mine.”

A pulse thumped in his head, matching time with the one that pounded in his groin. He needed to be alone to try to ease some of the painful pressure in his cock.

“So,” he said, “I’ve told you what I know. It’s probably time for you to leave.”

She shook her head. “You’ve told me nothing I didn’t already know, and I’m not going anywhere until you tell me how to find your father.”

He sat back in his chair and sighed. “Then I guess you’re not going anywhere.”

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Regan felt almost sorry for him.

No, she didn’t feel sorry for him. She also felt sorry for herself. Her whole body throbbed, her sex swollen with need, and if she closed her eyes, she had an instant flashback to the way his body had filled hers that morning they had made love in the forest.

She knew she could have him. When she’d used the glamour, he could have been hers for the taking—she’d sensed his desperate need. But her whole being rejected the idea of using magic for her own ends. It went against everything she believed in.

On top of that, she was pissed off with him.

Caleb could help her if he wanted to. He was just being stubborn, denying he was a part of all this. She needed to find a way to make him cooperate. She picked up her coffee, drained the cup, and slammed it on the desk between them. “You need to accept what you are.”

His eyes narrowed. “You don’t know what I am.”

“And neither do you, apparently.”

A look of resignation settled on his face. “Catrin told you?”

“Yes. You say you’ve always believed you were half human; well, not any longer.”

“What did she tell you?” He had to admit he was curious. And shit-scared.

“She said you didn’t know what you were, and you weren’t interested in finding out.”

He pursed his lips. “I met your brother-in-law.”

“That must have been fun.”

“He offered to drink my blood.”

She raised a brow. “Kinky.”

“Not according to him. He said he could taste what I was. I declined the offer.”

“Instead, you’ll carry on pretending you’re human?” She gazed blankly out of the window behind him, fighting her anger. Then she sighed, and the tension drained from her. “Well, whatever you are, for now we’re stuck with each other.”

He nodded, looking no happier with the situation. “So did you learn anything useful from this Council?”

“No. There was no one there to talk to, but I’m going back later. Catrin told me that Darius is going to look into what you might be—should be interesting.”

“Why would he do that? It’s none of his goddamn business.”

“Duh—your father is involved in a conspiracy to take over the world. I think that makes you the Council’s business.”

“Darius works for the Council?”

“Hmm, didn’t I mention that? And it’s run by his son-in-law.”

“He has a daughter? I thought he and Gina were newlyweds.”

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“It’s a long story. The son-in-law is a shapeshifter.”

“Is that like a werewolf?”

She grinned. “No, and don’t let Kael hear you suggesting such a thing. The Council apparently looks on werewolves as animals.”

“What does that make you?”

“A temporary animal.”

She didn’t add that Kael had very good reason to hate her, as did his wife, Gina’s daughter. Raven had spent years of her life imprisoned in the dungeons of the fire-demons, and a lot of people considered that to be Regan’s fault. She never bothered to deny it. What was the point? Besides, she didn’t care what people thought of her. She never had.

But that wasn’t the only bad blood between her and the Council. Kael had hated her long before that. And all because she’d helped save his life once a long, long time ago. She wasn’t going to explain that either. Let them hate her.

“What’s the matter?” Caleb asked.

She glanced up to find him watching her. She shrugged. “Nothing.”

Caleb rose to his feet and stood, hands thrust into his pockets, aggression in every line of his body. “Darius has no right to investigate me.”

She frowned. "I can't believe you don't want to know. Aren't you just a little bit curious?"

His expression was hard but beyond that she could sense, or rather wolf could sense, his anxiety. Caleb was scared. Scared of what he would discover. That it would forever put an end to his hopes of a normal life. She had a strange urge to wrap her arms around him, hug him, tell him it didn't matter. That she liked him whatever he was.

Instead, she studied him closely, attempting to gauge what he could be. He certainly looked human, so whoever his mother was she must have appeared normal.

Who did Ethan Stone find to bear him a son, and how did she manage to carry the baby to term? She must have used some form of magic, so one of the magical races.

"I'm coming with you," he said.

"What? Why? I thought you weren't interested in knowing."

"I never said that. And I don't want you people discussing me behind my back."

"You people? Don't tie me in with the Council. Anyway, I'm not sure they'll let you in. I don't think they allow dogs in the building."

"Ha ha. I'm coming."

"Hmm, I suppose I could put you on a leash."

"You could try."

She shrugged. "Come along if you like, but perhaps you should have a cold shower

first”—she allowed her gaze to trail down the front of his body—“to get rid of that bulge in your pants?”

His eyes narrowed, he opened his mouth to reply, but at that moment, the phone on his desk rang. He picked it up and listened, his eyes flicking to her, a frown forming on his face.

“Okay, send him in.” He put the phone down and turned back to Regan. “I’m sorry,” he said pleasantly. “I have some business to sort out first, but perhaps we can arrange to meet later.” He came around to stand beside her chair, she could almost see him twitching with the need to pull her to her feet and shove her out the door.

Something was definitely up. He wanted her out of there. Which of course made her want to stay. She sat back in her chair and rested her booted feet on the desk in front of her. “Actually, there’s no rush,” she said. “I think I’ll stick around.”

His eyes narrowed. “It’s a business meeting.”

“I’ll sit in the corner and be very quiet.”

He jammed his hands into his pockets, his whole body radiating frustration. Then he closed his eyes, and the tension drained away. When he looked at her again his lips turned up in the semblance of a smile, and she knew he was going to try to appeal to her better nature—how strange.

“Look,” he said, his tone conciliatory. “It’s one of my father’s men on his way up. He needs to speak with me, but he’s very shy, and he won’t talk in front of outsiders.”

Her smile was equally sincere. “You’re forgetting something.”

“I am?”

“I’m not exactly an outsider. I am, in fact, a werewolf.” She bared her teeth to prove the point.

Regan could almost hear the grinding of his teeth. Then he threw up his hands in an admission of defeat. “Stay then. You know, my life used to be simple.” His eyes narrowed on her. “Why the hell didn’t I just drive away that night?”

A knock sounded at the door and she grinned, then swung her legs down off the desk. “I’ll go sit in the corner then, shall I?”

Chapter 12

Caleb watched as she crossed the room and sat on one of the leather sofas. He took the seat behind his desk and pressed the button that would open the door.

Tom looked tired. Like all the wolves, he didn't age, but lines of strain bracketed his face. He glanced across at Regan, his eyes widening in recognition, but he said nothing, just took the seat opposite Caleb.

Not all Caleb's childhood had been bad, and many of the good bits were because of Tom. He'd taken him camping, taught him to fish, tended his wounds after...

Caleb shut the thought down. What was the point in rehashing the past?

"What is it, Tom?"

Tom answered with a question of his own. "How did it go with your father yesterday?"

"How does it ever go? We piss each other off and agree to go our separate ways."

"Do you think he's changed?"

Caleb frowned at the question. "I don't see him often enough to tell, but he seemed his normal megalomaniac self. Why?"

"You know, he wasn't always like that. He was a good leader once, before he became

obsessed with gaining power.” He paused and looked at Caleb. “And with the idea of having a son to follow him.”

A wave of bitterness washed through Caleb. “So now this is my fault?”

“Not your fault, no. But you could have a lot of influence on him if you wanted.”

Caleb laughed, but the sound held not even a hint of amusement. “Why would I want that? I walked out when I was sixteen with no intention of ever going back, and nothing has happened since to change my mind.”

He stood up and walked to the window, staring out, unseeing.

“What if your father was no longer around?” Tom asked quietly.

At the question, Caleb swung back to face him. “What do you mean?”

Tom licked his lips and his gaze shifted back toward Regan.

“You can talk in front of her,” Caleb said.

Tom looked unsure, but then nodded. “There are some of us in the pack who would like to see Ethan no longer leader.”

Caleb stared at him. The only way to depose the alpha male from the pack was to kill him. Were they really thinking about killing Ethan? He searched his mind for a reaction, but it remained blank.

“Good luck,” he said. “I won’t stand in your way.”

“We’d like you to consider coming back as pack leader.”

Shock flared in his mind at the words. “Why the hell would you want that?” he asked. “I’ve had nothing to do with the pack for over twenty years, and besides—”

“And besides,” Tom finished for him, “you hate us all.”

Caleb sighed and ran a hand through his hair, then pressed his fingers to his temples. Tom spoke quickly into the silence. “There’s no one left in the pack strong enough to rule. No alphas. Ethan has seen to that. He’s killed any wolf that’s come even close. We need you, Caleb.”

Anger flashed through him then. They needed him? What about when he had needed them? Had anyone been willing to stand up to Ethan back then? Now they expected him to come back and sort out their problems.

“But thankfully, I don’t need you. Not any longer.”

A weary expression of acceptance passed across Tom’s face. “I told them that would be your answer, and I don’t really blame you, but I said I’d try.” He shook his head. “You have to let go of the bitterness, Caleb. You can pretend you’re human all you like, but you’re not, and one day you’ll wake up and realize that. Just don’t leave it too late.”

“I’m as much human as I am wolf.” But even as he said the words, he realized they were no longer true.

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Tom snorted. “You’re more wolf than anyone I’ve ever met. Why do you think the pack is willing to follow you?” He ran a hand through his already ruffled hair. “I won’t say any more, I can see it’s pointless. But one thing—will you consider helping Sarah get away?”

Caleb frowned. “Why?”

“I believe Ethan is losing his sanity, and I think she could get hurt.”

“Ethan would never harm his mate, and Sarah would never leave him.”

“She would if you offered to help.”

“I can’t do that. If she wants to leave Ethan, then she’s going to have to stand up to him.”

Tom shook his head. “You’ve grown into a hard man, Caleb.”

“I’m what my father made me. What you all made me.”

Tom sighed. “You’re right. We all let you down. Maybe—” he pinched the bridge of his nose. “Never mind—it’s too late to change the past now.” He rose to his feet. “I promised I’d try, and I’ve done that. I hope everything works out for you and you get the life you wish.”

He nodded once to Regan and trudged from the room.

As the door shut behind him, Caleb slammed his fist into the wall. Why the hell was he feeling guilty?

“Well, that was fascinating,” Regan murmured.

He turned to face her. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

She looked into his eyes for a brief moment and must have seen something there because she shrugged. “Okay. Let’s go see the Council then.”

He’d forgotten all about the Council, but perhaps that’s what he needed. A meeting with a whole load of people even weirder than he was.

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Poor Caleb, it seemed as if the supernatural world was unwilling to let him go.

Clearly, the pack weren’t happy with Ethan and wanted Caleb to take over. Regan wasn’t surprised. She’d seen Caleb as both human and wolf, and in either form, he was formidable. He’d refused the offer, but despite his words, it was obviously not a decision he made easily. Now, she watched as he turned away from her and took off his suit jacket, tossing it onto the back of his chair. Crossing the room, he opened a cabinet and pulled out a shoulder holster, shrugged into it, and then slotted in a wicked looking pistol. He came back and picked up his jacket, slipping it on over the top.

“Ready?” he asked.

She raised an eyebrow. “I don’t think you’re going to have to shoot anyone.”

“You never know.”

“You’re nervous.”

“No, I’m not. I’m just taking sensible precautions. So where are we going?”

She pulled a crumpled piece of paper out of her back pocket and handed it to him. He glanced down at it. “This is just around the corner.”

“Well, isn’t that amazing? All the time you’ve been almost right on top of the very things you’ve been trying to avoid. So how do we go there?”

“I drive.”

Regan called Catrin from the car and by the time Caleb drove down into the underground parking beneath the Council building, it was obvious they were expected. There were three sets of gates between here and the outside world, and they’d all opened silently as they approached. Caleb pulled into a parking space and turned off the engine.

“Have you never worked with this Council?” Caleb asked. “You know, protecting the normal world from the bad guys?”

“No, we’ve always kept to ourselves, and would have continued to do so if it hadn’t been for Darius Cole.”

“Why? What did he do?”

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She stared out of the windshield, drumming her fingers on the dashboard in front of her. She thought about ignoring the question, then she sighed. “Over twenty years ago, Darius came to us for guidance, to see if we had any visions of the future that could help them in the war.”

“The war?”

“Yes, the Council has been involved in an ongoing war with the fire-demons for...”

“Fire-demons?”

“Jesus,” she muttered. “You know, this is going to take a long, long time if you keep interrupting me.”

“Sorry—go on.”

“Well, he saw Gina, decided he wanted her, and so he took her.”

“Took her?”

“Came back later that same night and abducted her from under our noses.” She scowled; it was over twenty years ago, but the memory still rankled.

“What did you do?”

“Took her back, of course.” Caleb said nothing and she flicked a glance at his face. “I didn’t have a choice,” she snapped.

“Hey, I never said anything, but why no choice?”

“I had a vision. I saw Darius take her life.”

“Well looks like you got that wrong.”

“No, I didn’t. He killed her.” She released her grip on the steering wheel and leaned back in her seat. “He killed her, and he saved her. Six months ago, Gina used the earth magic to save their daughter, a price had to be paid, and Gina’s life was forfeit. She would have died and been lost to us forever. Instead, Darius turned her into a vampire. Darius works for the Council, so now it’s sort of family.” She frowned. “In which case, I wonder where our welcoming committee is.”

“Who are we going to see?” Caleb asked. “Shapeshifters?”

“Not unless Kael is here. There aren’t any other shapeshifters—Kael’s the only one, the last of his people. I asked Catrin to organize something, set up a meeting with anyone who might be able to give me information. At a guess, we’ll probably be seeing vamps. God, I hate vampires.”

“Why?”

“Because they’re blood-sucking leeches.” Without waiting for him, she climbed out of the car and slammed the door. She leaned against the car bonnet; her arms folded across her chest, and hoped he’d get the message. No such luck.

He climbed out and came to stand beside her. “Your sister’s a vampire.”

“Gina’s different.”

“And Darius?”

“The biggest blood-sucking leech of them all.”

Caleb opened his mouth, then shut it again as a door across from them was flung open and three figures emerged—two women flanking Catrin's tall, slender figure. One of the women was Gina, the second Regan had never seen since she was a baby, but she knew immediately who she was, and her whole body stiffened.

Catrin caught sight of them and ran forward. She wrapped her arms around Regan and hugged her. Then she released her, turned to Caleb, and hugged him as well. He looked at Regan over the top of Catrin's head, one eyebrow raised. Regan shrugged.

“Sorry,” Catrin said, “but it's good to see you together.”

Gina stepped forward then and embraced Regan. She drew back. “Come and meet your niece.”

Regan hated to admit it, but she was nervous about this meeting. She swallowed the lump in her throat as she stared at the tall, slender woman who stood behind Gina. She had pale skin and long black hair, her eyes were witch's eyes, but there was a strong look of her father in her face. Regan tried not to hold it against her.

She hadn't seen Raven since she was a small baby, when Regan had handed her over to her father. She'd been invited to Raven's wedding but had stayed away, certain she wouldn't be welcomed by either the bride or the groom and not wanting to spoil the day.

Now she lifted her chin and kept her expression blank as she met the other woman's gaze, but there was none of the expected hostility in Raven's eyes. They were clear, curious, then she smiled, and Regan saw the flash of small, white fangs. Further evidence of who her father was.

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Raven stepped forward, clasped Regan's shoulders, and kissed her on each cheek, and she went still in shock.

Stepping back, Raven searched her face. "I know you think I blame you for what happened, but I don't. You did what you needed to, what you saw had to be done. And it worked out in the end."

Regan nodded, and then glanced around to see her sisters smiling at her, looks of intense satisfaction on their faces. "What?" she asked.

"I told you," Catrin said. "We're just pleased to see you and Caleb together and all right."

"We're not together, and things are definitely not all right. A megalomaniac werewolf is about to take over the world with the help of God knows what, and you're all standing around grinning."

They grinned harder.

Regan rolled her eyes. "Let's get on with this."

She stared around her with interest as she followed them through the building. Beside her, she could sense Caleb doing the same. She could also sense the anxiety washing out from him in waves. She could understand that—they were deep underground, and her wolf didn't like it. She felt trapped, and she knew Caleb's wolf would be experiencing the same sensation of claustrophobia. She slipped her hand into her pocket to prevent herself from reaching out to grip his. God knows what her sisters

would make of that.

They stopped in front of a steel door. Gina pressed her palm to the panel beside it, and the door slid open. They all followed Gina into a large room, empty of furniture except for a round table surrounded by upright chairs. At the far end, Darius and Kael sat close together, deep in conversation. They glanced up as the others entered.

Regan met Kael's gaze, and his eyes were cold. She held his stare and refused to back down.

Catrin came to stand beside her. "I need to say something before we begin." There was a tremor in her voice, and Regan turned to look at her.

"What is it?" she asked.

Catrin bit her lip. "I know there's bad feeling between you and Kael, and we need to clear it up."

Regan knew where Catrin was going with this. "No we don't," she said quietly. "Things are fine the way they are."

"No, they're not," Catrin replied. "It didn't matter before, when we had nothing to do with the Council, but it matters now. All this time, Kael has blamed you for keeping him from his people, when it was my fault."

"What?" Kael asked.

"Shortly before you came to us," Catrin said, "I'd had a vision, I saw your people die. There was no way out, no way to stop it. Then you turned up, and I thought I could at least save you." She swallowed. "But I couldn't do it myself—I'm a terrible liar—so I asked Regan. Regan was always the strongest of us. She kept you there, seduced

you—”

“I did not seduce him,” Regan snapped.

“Maybe not with your body, but you seduced him with promises of power that would help him save his people, while all the time they were being slaughtered.” She turned back to Kael. “I know you’ve always blamed Regan, but you couldn’t have saved them.”

Raven moved forward. She put a hand on Catrin’s arm. “I’m glad, and so is Kael.”

Kael nodded slowly. “She’s right. I was bitter for a long time, but I understand better now. Through Raven, I’ve seen the nature of the visions. I know I could have done nothing, except perhaps die with my people. And I’m glad I’m not dead.” He smiled, and Regan saw the first warmth in those summer sky-blue eyes. “Now perhaps we can get down to business.”

Kael’s gaze looked beyond her and settled on Caleb. His eyes widened. “Is this the werewolf?”

“Half-werewolf,” Caleb snarled.

Regan nodded, and Kael walked around her. She turned to watch as he came to a halt in front of Caleb. A wave of pride washed over her as Caleb stood his ground. For long seconds, the two stared into each other’s eyes. Something passed between them, then Kael swung away, his fists balled at his side. Everyone was silent as he took control of his emotions. When he turned back, his face was expressionless.

“Your father is Ethan Stone, the werewolf?”

Caleb nodded.

“And who was your mother?”

“I don’t know.”

“Is she alive?”

Caleb shook his head. “No, she died shortly after I was born.”

“How?”

“Again, I don’t know.” He paused. “But I think she committed suicide.”

Kael turned away. Raven cast them all a concerned glance, then hurried over to her husband. They spoke softly together, and Raven glanced around to examine Caleb, her eyes puzzled.

Regan frowned. “What’s going on?”

Kael shrugged. “I think we all need to sit down.”

Why?

Regan didn’t want to sit. Wolf was not happy to be here, but she pushed her unease down and took a chair at the round table.

Clearly, Kael had something to say, and she had an inkling it wasn’t going to be good news.

Chapter 13

Caleb settled himself in the seat next to Regan. She was nervous; his wolf could sense it, but if she could act as if everything was okay then so could he. This place gave him the creeps, he needed to be up in the open air away from all these—he glanced around—dead people. Because there was no getting away from it; vampires made him uneasy.

Then there was that Kael guy—the shapeshifter. He'd looked at Caleb as though he saw something. Something that had shocked him to the core. And while part of Caleb wanted to get out of there fast, the rest of him hovered on the edge of intense anticipation.

And terror.

Did Kael know something of Caleb's mother? And if he did, was it going to be something Caleb could bear to hear? Since he'd learned that he might not be half-human after all, he'd refused to consider what his mother might have been, but he wasn't so much of a coward that he couldn't face the truth. And deep down he wanted to know. His father had always refused to speak of her and had banned the rest of the pack from mentioning his mother. Still, Caleb had learned enough from the other wolves to know that the relationship had not been a happy one. Why didn't that surprise him?

He glanced up and realized that he and Regan were on one side of the table everyone else was arrayed on the other, and they were all watching him. Kael sat in the center with Raven beside him and Catrin next to her. She smiled as she caught his gaze. On

Kael's other side sat Gina and Darius. The Vampire grinned with a brief flash of fangs, and Caleb ignored him. He did not intend to get into a who's-got-the-biggest-teeth competition with a vampire.

Instead, he leaned back and placed his hands on the table in front of him, just to prove they were steady.

"So," he said. "Regan tells me you've been investigating my father and me. Have you found Ethan?"

Kael frowned. "We'll get to that later. First, there's a story I must tell. It takes place a long time in the past, but I believe it has some relevance to the present."

He fell silent, clearly deep in thought. Raven's hand reached out and clasped his arm. He smiled at her, then continued, "My people were wiped out over a thousand years ago, but many years before that, my two sisters were abducted by the fire-demons. We rescued Sasha, but we never found Kyla."

Caleb frowned. "And what does this have to do with me or my father?"

"We always presumed Kyla was dead, we'd searched and found no trace. Now I have to accept that she must have been alive all that time, because I believe Kyla was your mother."

Caleb tried to process the information. But his mind refused to cooperate. "How?" he asked. "Why would you even think that?"

"We"—Kael paused and gestured to Darius—"have been looking into your birth, and the truth is, you shouldn't exist. There has never been a 'born' werewolf—they don't survive. The most popular theory is that the unborn babies turn at the full moon and die in their mother's womb."

“So how do you explain me?”

“At a guess I’d say you didn’t turn until puberty. Is that correct?”

Caleb nodded. “I was eleven.”

“That explains why your mother managed to carry you to term.”

Caleb’s frustration boiled to the surface. Shoving back his chair, he stood up. Unable to keep still any longer, he paced the length of the room before coming back, bracing his hands on the table. “But it doesn’t explain how she did it.”

“She wouldn’t have had to do anything if she was a shapeshifter,” Kael replied. “Our children don’t change until puberty.” He looked Caleb in the face. “Just like you.”

Caleb shook his head, gritted his teeth. “It doesn’t prove anything.”

Kael ignored the comment and continued. “At first, we thought it must have been magic at work, but really, I didn’t want to accept the possibility that Kyla had been alive all that time. Kyla was my twin sister. We shared a bond. One of the reasons I thought she must be dead was that I couldn’t feel that bond any longer.” He ran a hand through his hair, his expression tortured. “Over a thousand years as a prisoner of the fire-demons. What must she have gone through?”

Caleb sat down again. “But you don’t know. Not for sure.”

“No, I wasn’t sure, and then I saw you. You have Kyla’s eyes.”

“He has your eyes.” Regan spoke to Kael, and Caleb turned to her.

She stared into his face. “The first time I saw you, I knew I’d seen those eyes

somewhere before. I couldn't place it, but looking at you now, it seems impossible that I didn't realize. Jesus."

Caleb had no clue what to think. He'd wondered about his mother for so long, wondered whether somewhere, he had relatives. Human relatives. No such luck. It appeared this man sitting opposite could be his uncle. It was the end of his dreams. Or rather his delusions. "You still have no proof."

"There is one way we could prove it," Kael said, and gave a sideways glance at Darius.

Caleb followed his gaze and understood immediately where this was going. "No way! I'm not letting him or his teeth anywhere near me."

Darius smiled. "Perhaps you'll have no choice."

“Just try it,” Caleb growled.

Darius rose smoothly to his feet, and the tension mounted until it was thick in the air. Caleb held the vampire’s gaze and allowed his wolf to rise to the surface, peer out of his eyes.

“Oh, for God’s sake,” Regan muttered from beside him. “Cut the testosterone crap. Both of you.”

Caleb took a deep breath and glanced around the room. Kael was expressionless, Catrin had a little frown line between her eyes, and Gina was smiling, her eyes glinting with laughter. She obviously found the whole thing amusing and, strangely, it made Caleb relax. He released his breath, forced his muscles to unlock, and sat down in his chair.

Darius also sat. “You know,” he said, “I hope you don’t actually think that I want to drink your blood. Normally, I’d have to be really desperate to touch an animal.”

“Ha, ha.”

“I’ll do it,” Raven said.

Caleb’s gaze swung around. “Do what?”

“Taste your blood.”

“No, you won’t,” Kael snapped from beside her.

She put a hand on his arm. “It makes sense,” she said. “I know what shifter blood tastes like.”

Caleb had to admit that the idea of her tasting his blood didn’t fill him with the same sense of revulsion. In fact, he couldn’t deny the combination of reluctance, horror, and excitement that filled him. Maybe it was because she reminded him of Regan. At the thought, he glanced at her, and caught a flash of fury in her eyes. Then her wolf peered out at him. She was jealous, and a stab of elation hit him in the gut. But even as he watched, she fought it down.

“Do it,” she said.

He glared at her.

“You need to know.”

He blew out his breath, then nodded slowly, pushing down the nausea that roiled in his gut. He could do this.

“So what’s she going to do—bite my neck?”

“No!” Kael answered.

Caleb glanced at the other man and realized he wasn’t the only one unhappy about this.

“Your wrist will do,” Raven said.

She rose to her feet and came around the table to sit on the other side of him, holding out her hand. Caleb pushed back his chair and laid his palm in hers. He looked up to find everyone focused intently on him, and whatever Darius had said, there was a

look of hunger in his dark eyes. Caleb forced himself to concentrate on Raven.

“Relax,” she murmured. “This won’t hurt.”

She turned his hand over in hers, holding it palm up, then stroked a finger along the vein in his wrist. She raised it to her face.

“You smell of Kael.”

Breathing in deeply, she leaned closer to him. She smelled of wild flowers and honey. Then her lips drew back revealing razor-sharp fangs, and she bit down sharply.

Despite what she’d told him, Caleb braced himself for pain. Instead, as her teeth penetrated his skin, a wave of intense heat flooded him, taking him by surprise. He tried to remember where he was, but his body had a mind of its own. At the tugging pull of her mouth, heat pooled in his groin, and he grew heavy and hard.

His fingers twitched with the urge to reach out and stroke her hair. Then she raised her head, and he was caught by her witch’s eyes, as she slowly licked the wound on his wrist.

Someone coughed.

Raven shook her head, and her eyes widened in alarm as she came back into herself. It took Caleb a few seconds longer, and he was glad he was sitting down.

“Sorry,” she said. “I didn’t mean to—”

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“I think what my daughter is trying to say, is she didn’t mean to turn this into a sex show,” Darius said.

“Dad!”

“And perhaps she didn’t realize the effect that sex show would have on her husband.”

“Oh God,” she muttered.

Caleb glanced across the table.

Kael’s hands gripped the arms of his chair as though to keep himself in it. “Get away from her,” he growled.

Raven stood up. Caleb wondered whether he needed to do something to protect her. Did she need protecting? He made to stand, but Regan put a hand on his arm.

“If I was you, I’d stay where you are and get that look off your face before Kael turns into something really big and nasty and eats you.”

He looked at her. Her eyes were narrowed on him.

“Sorry,” he said, though he had no clue why he was apologizing to Regan. “I wasn’t expecting it. He”—he nodded toward Darius— “said it had nothing to do with sex.”

“Actually,” Darius replied, “I said it didn’t have to be sexual, not that it never was.” He grinned. “I wouldn’t have made it sexual—you’re not my type, but Raven doesn’t

have that good a control over her hunger yet.”

Raven kissed the top of her husband’s head, and then glanced across at Caleb. “Sorry,” she said. “I never meant for that to happen, but you smell of Kael, and it took me by surprise. You taste of him as well, of magic. You have shapeshifter blood.” She paused and smiled. “I guess this makes us family.”

Caleb closed his eyes briefly. When he opened them, Regan was still watching him. “You were hoping we were wrong, weren’t you?” she said. “That you were human, after all.”

Caleb didn’t answer. The truth was, he didn’t know what he was thinking, or what this meant, whether it changed anything. He looked across the table, and his gaze locked with Kael’s. From when he was a young child, he’d fantasized about finding his mother’s family. This man, now staring at him with something close to hatred burning in his eyes, was all that remained. But then, how could he do anything but hate Caleb as the ultimate cause of his sister’s death. How had she ended up with Ethan? Caleb searched his brain for explanations, and the answers slowly formulated.

“My father always wanted a son,” he said. “It was an obsession with him.”

“And?” Kael prompted.

“If someone wanted to buy his loyalty, and they’d known anything of him, then that person would have realized it. My guess is that he was given Kyla in exchange for his support.”

“Which means,” Regan said, “that whoever he’s working with now had something to do with Kyla’s abduction.” She turned to Kael. “Do you know who took Kyla?”

“Sorien. But he’s dead. Your sister killed him. But Kyla could have been passed on to

anyone. We found no trace of her when we rescued her sister, so perhaps she was kept on another world.”

“Another world?” Caleb asked.

“There are other worlds parallel with our own. Most are closed off but there are always some gaps where things slip through. Also, the witches can open portals between them. Probably what they want Regan for.”

“Which brings us back to who wants Regan.”

“Have you found any trace of Ethan Stone?” Regan asked.

“None. He’s vanished.”

“Damn.”

Caleb sighed. He wanted to be alone to think this through. He also wanted to try to contact his father, question him about Kyla. He pushed his chair back and stood up. “I’m out of here.” He turned to Regan. “Are you coming?”

“No.” But she rose to her feet. “I’ll see you out, then I need to talk to Catrin.”

“Caleb.” Kael’s voice stopped him at the door. He turned.

Kael’s eyes were cold. “The wolves will pay for what happened to Kyla.”

His jaw clenched and his hands fisted at his sides. He stared into the other man’s icy-blue eyes. “My father is responsible. Do what you like to him—it’s more than time he paid. But none of the others. Keep off them.”

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His words surprised him. The wolves were not his responsibility, but neither were they the Council's. Get rid of his father, and the wolves might have a chance to redefine themselves.

Kael raised an eyebrow but didn't answer, and Caleb turned away. He strode out of the room with Regan behind him. They'd only gone a few feet when the door behind them opened, and Raven hurried after them. Caleb kept on walking, but Raven placed her hand on his arm so he had no choice but to stop.

"Caleb, when you want to learn more about your people—come back."

"I don't think your husband will be accepting me as family anytime soon."

"You're wrong," Raven said. "He's feeling guilty—"

"Guilty? Why the hell should he feel guilty?"

"Because he gave up on his sister, because he believed her dead. He can't bear the idea of her being a prisoner for so long, what she must have gone through. I was a prisoner of the fire-demons for seven years, and they nearly broke me. Kael saw that. Now he knows that Kyla had so many more years of such an existence. It's hard for him, but he will come around." Caleb nodded once, and Raven smiled. "We'll meet again."

Caleb wasn't so sure. He wanted to get away from this place. He waited as she went back into the room and the door closed behind her, then started walking again with Regan beside him.

They were silent on the way back to the car, but as he made to climb in, Regan put her hand on his arm. She stared into his eyes.

“It’s full moon tomorrow night. Run with me.”

He nodded once.

“It doesn’t mean anything,” Regan said. “We’re not a pack or anything like that. I just think it will be better for both of us not to be alone. I don’t trust your father.”

“Neither do I.”

“Okay then. I have to get back.”

He nodded again, then reached out a hand, slipped it beneath her hair. His fingers curled around the back of her neck, and he pulled her toward him. He held her close, feeling the steady thud of her heart against his, then he tilted her head and kissed her.

It felt so right, and he didn’t want it to feel right. He needed to sort out his life and these feelings for Regan only muddled the waters. Raising his head, he saw the same confusion mirrored in her face. He dropped his hands from her and stepped back.

“I’ll see you tomorrow night.”

Chapter 14

Regan lounged against the wall, arms folded across her chest, as she waited for Caleb to emerge from the elevator.

Exhaustion tugged at her mind. She'd spent the whole night and most of the day going through the Council's archives, trying to find something, anything that could help her either find Ethan or reverse the werewolf bite. She'd found nothing and had finally left Catrin to continue while she came back here to meet Caleb.

The elevator doors slid open, and she watched as he strode out and across the floor. For a moment, their eyes clashed, and the shroud of weariness lifted from her mind. Then he turned away to talk to the woman at the reception desk. Regan straightened and moved in a little closer, wanting to hear the conversation. She found this whole "normal life" thing fascinating.

"You have a finance meeting at ten tomorrow morning," Gretchen told him.

Caleb glanced toward Regan before answering. "Cancel it. I won't be in tomorrow."

"But—"

Caleb turned away without waiting for the woman to finish. He came toward Regan, moving like some sort of jungle animal, radiating a leashed power that had the blood thundering in her veins. How could he pass for normal? How could they not see him for what he really was?

Then she glanced at the receptionist and realized in all likelihood he wasn't fooling anybody. The woman's eyes were fixed on him as he walked away. They might not know what he was, these people who worked with him daily, but they recognised him as something more than human.

“I think your receptionist has a hankering for you,” she murmured as Caleb came to a halt in front of her. “I may have to turn her into a toad after all.”

A look of surprise flickered in his eyes. He glanced back then smiled. “No need to be jealous. I never have relationships with people at work.”

“Who said I was jealous?” She studied him closely. “So, you don't have relationships with your own kind, and you don't have relationships with people at work. Who do you have them with, Caleb?”

“If I need it badly enough, I pick up a woman in a bar. We have sex, and that's it.”

“Hmm, you know, I think you're even sadder than I am. At least I have Catrin and Gina and Lola. Who do you have, Caleb? Don't you ever feel lonely?”

He took a minute to answer. “Probably. I don't really think about it.”

“Perhaps you should.”

He shrugged. “What good would it do?” He put his hand to her shoulder, tugged her toward him, and kissed her lightly on the lips. “Just in case the toad has any ideas,” he said, drawing back.

The brief taste of him woke the hunger slumbering inside her. She was suddenly aware that it was late in the day, and soon the full moon would rise. She wanted Caleb as she could never remember wanting anyone before.

She hooked her hand around the back of his neck and dragged him to her. Staring into his dark eyes, she recognized her own hunger reflected there.

“A kiss like that will just give her ideas,” she whispered. “But a kiss like this—”

She kissed him, putting all her need and desire into her embrace, not hiding anything. For a moment, he resisted, then he moved closer until his body touched hers, his mouth opened, and his tongue thrust into her, filling her with the hot, wet taste of him.

She forgot everything, where she was, who she was, and inside her wolf awoke, threw back her head, and filled Regan’s mind with a howl to be free. She sensed Caleb’s wolf answer, and he went still against her.

He drew back and stared down at her, his expression vaguely rueful, and Regan had to fight the urge to pull him back into her arms. Then she remembered where they were. They were in a busy reception area, surrounded by humans, perhaps not the best place to turn wolf and start howling.

She licked her lips, and his eyes followed the movement.

“Let’s get out of here,” she said.

He nodded.

“Where are we going?” she asked when they were in the car and driving out of the city.

“An area of forest about an hour away.”

“Is it safe?”

“It’s as safe as it can be that close to the city. It’s fenced and sign-posted as private.”
He grinned. “I reckon anyone who ignores that deserves to get eaten.”

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She turned in her seat so she could watch him as he drove. “Tell me,” she said, “how come you became a businessman? You don’t seem the type.”

He sat in silence for a minute, and Regan was sure he wouldn’t answer. Then he began. “After I left the pack when I was sixteen, I wandered around for a few years, then joined the army.” He glanced toward her briefly. “I didn’t mind the fighting, but I was crap at taking orders, so I did my time and got out. Afterward, I put my own unit together, did some lucrative jobs, and earned enough to start the company. That’s it.”

He made it sound easy, but she guessed that Caleb was the sort of man who would succeed at whatever he did.

Less than an hour later, they drew up outside a set of electric gates. A metal fence extended on either side of the gate as far as she could see. Huge warning signs were posted every few metres. Caleb hit a button on the dashbaord and the gates slid open. They drove on for a while farther until they reached an area of dense pine forest. Caleb pulled the truck off the road and parked.

He turned to her, and she could see his excitement flare, his eyes darkening with a restless anticipation.

“Where does your father and the pack run at full moon?” she asked.

“They live well away from the city, well away from everywhere.” He glanced across at her. “I’m not telling you where, so don’t bother asking.”

“Why? I’m forwarned. He won’t take me by surprise again.”

“You still don’t understand. He won’t need to surprise you. You’ll crawl to him with your tail between your legs like a good little wolf.”

“I don’t believe he could change me. I’ve got more control than that.”

He shook his head. “Still arrogant. Let me try something.”

“What?” She eyed him suspiciously.

“You say you have control over your wolf, but all wolves answer to the call of the one who made them. I have my father’s blood, let me try and call your wolf.”

Of course he wouldn’t be able to. “Why not?”

He shook his head. “Always so confident.”

“I’ve had two thousand years to get that way,” she replied.

“And in all that time no one has ever bested you?” She looked away but didn’t answer, and he shrugged. “Come on, then. Out you get.”

Regan climbed down from the truck. Wolf stirred restlessly inside her, but she quieted her with a thought. She stood waiting for Caleb to make his move.

“You might want to strip,” Caleb said.

“I don’t think so.”

He shrugged. “Your loss.” He moved to stand in front of her. “I’m going to try and

call your wolf. I want you to stay human as long as you can.”

Regan rolled her eyes. “Get on with it.”

He smiled, then stared into her face. Inside her, wolf came instantly awake. She threw back her head and howled. It was unlike anything Regan had ever experienced before. Wolf was frantic, pacing inside her, clawing at her, fighting to be free.

She closed her eyes, shut out Caleb’s tall figure and fought the compulsion, but wolf tore through her body, whining and snarling.

“Regan, let it go.”

She heard Caleb’s words as though from a distance, but couldn’t seem to stop fighting the change. She clenched her hands until the nails dug into her palm, fell to her knees and onto her side, biting her lip to prevent the scream of agony escaping her. Her spine spasmed and she did scream, so it filled her ears. Something snapped inside her, and wolf broke free.

She lay on her side and whimpered softly, her whole body wracked with pain. Caleb crouched down next to her, and she flinched from his touch but couldn’t get up the energy to move away. She snarled softly as he stroked the fur of her muzzle, soothing her, and after a few minutes, the pain faded enough for her to struggle to her feet. She swayed, her nose hanging almost down to the ground. She closed her eyes and summoned up her human form.

Regan lay, naked and panting, ripples of pain dancing through her. She hugged her arms around her body and fought for control. Next to her, Caleb straightened up and held out a hand to her. She looked up into his face expecting to see triumph. Instead, he looked grim.

She slid her hand into his, and he pulled her to her feet and into his arms, cradling her against his hard body as the tremors shuddered through her. The pain faded, and her mind filled with shock. Caleb was right; she'd been thinking of herself as invulnerable. That all she had to do was find Ethan and kill him. It seemed it wasn't going to be so simple after all.

The roughness of his clothes scraped against her sensitized skin. Pushing herself back away from him, she forced herself to stand upright on her own.

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“That was...” She shivered, unable to put into words the feeling. It wasn’t the pain so much as the loss of control, the loss of self.

Caleb reached out and stroked her hair from her face. “Forget it,” he said. “I won’t do it again, but I needed to point out that you’re not as invincible as you think. If my father has the power to turn you, then what good is your magic?”

“Has anyone done that to you?” she asked.

“No, though not for want of trying on my father’s part. Probably my mixed blood prevents it from happening. But I’ve seen it done before—plenty. My father uses it as a punishment.”

She shivered again. “I can see why.”

For the first time, she was scared. It was unexpected, and she almost didn’t recognize the emotion, but it didn’t change anything, really. She would just have to be prepared, not give Ethan the chance to try to turn her.

She shook off the feelings and glanced down at herself. A light sheen of sweat coated her skin, and beneath it, goose bumps covered her body in the chill air. She looked up to find Caleb’s eyes on her. As she watched, he reached out, cupped one full breast in his large hand, and stroked the pad of his thumb over the nipple. Her nerve endings, already sensitized from the pain, burst into life and pleasure shot through her. His head lowered, and he took the now taut nipple between his lips and bit down gently. Heat flooded her belly, and she gasped.

He released her, stepped back, and started to unbutton his shirt.

Together, they raced through the darkness of the night. At the top of a hill, she came to a clearing in the trees. It was a cloudless night, and the full moon lit up the landscape. She sat on her haunches, the black wolf beside her, and together they threw back their heads and sang to the moon.

Regan rested her head back against the car seat. She was sated. Her whole body relaxed. No doubt, the problems would resurface soon enough, but for now, she emptied her mind of the future. Beside her, she could sense Caleb also at ease. She recognized his moods now, and this morning, he was definitely mellow. He drove with one hand on the wheel, the other resting on her denim-clad thigh. The contact felt good.

Their wolves had run together through the night, and as dawn broke, they'd taken their human forms and made love on the dew-damp grass. At the memory, Regan had an instant flashback to his dark head between her thighs, his hot, wet mouth caressing her sensitive flesh, and her muscles clenched beneath his hand.

He turned his head from the road and glanced at her briefly.

Something must have shown in her eyes, because he steered the truck over to the side of the road, switched off the engine, and dragged her across the seat into his lap. His head swooped down, and he kissed her until the sound of a passing car blaring its horn brought them to their senses. He put her from him, and she slid back to her own seat.

"Are we going back to London?" she asked as he turned on the engine and maneuvered back onto the road.

"No, we're going to my place. I thought we could do with a shower."

“Hmm, sounds good. Where is your place?”

“We’re nearly there.”

She lapsed into silence again; content to gaze out of the window at the passing countryside. About five minutes later, Caleb turned into a long driveway. An electric gate opened for them, and they drove along a narrow lane edged with huge oak trees. Finally, they pulled up outside a square Georgian manor house, the simple straight lines pleasing to the eye.

Caleb got out and came around to open her door, and she smiled at the small courtesy. A gentleman werewolf. She was climbing out when he went still beside her. She looked up and followed his gaze.

A man and woman emerged from the woods to the side of the house. The man was hurt, his arm draped around the woman’s shoulder as she supported his weight. As they drew closer, she saw that his clothes were bloodstained, the blood crimson against the white of his shirt.

“Do you know them?” she asked softly.

He nodded curtly.

She studied them curiously. Both were tall. The man had shaggy, dark-blond hair down to his shoulders. He appeared muscular and strong, or he would have been if he hadn’t been in such obvious pain. The woman had short, dark hair and worried blue eyes.

They came to a halt in front of Caleb and Regan.

Caleb nodded, but his eyes were cold. “Kelly, Jason.”

Regan wondered whether they were something to do with the security company, a job gone wrong maybe, that would account for Caleb's closed expression. Then they took a step closer, and she breathed in their scent—wild, feral, and instantly recognizable.

Werewolf.

They were werewolves. Why would they come to Caleb?

“Caleb, I'm sorry,” the woman spoke. “I know you don't want us here, but we had nowhere else to go.”

He shook his head. “Never mind that now. Let's get inside, and you can tell me what's going on.”

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The last of the man's strength seemed to leave him and he slumped. Caleb reached for him before he hit the ground and lifted him easily in his arms. He turned to Regan. "The house keys are in my pocket."

She reached in and got the keys, went ahead and unlocked the door. Caleb followed her inside carrying the now-unconscious Jason. Regan stood aside to let them go past. He led them into a large sitting room and lowered Jason onto one of the sofas, uncaring of the blood that stained the cream leather.

He stood staring down, a brooding expression on his face. After a minute, he swore, turned around, and left the room.

Regan looked at the woman. Kelly was staring at the unconscious man, her face furrowed with worry, and a tear welled up and trickled down her cheek. She wiped it away with the back of her hand.

"Sit down before you fall down," Regan suggested.

Kelly jumped at the sound of her voice, but she backed up to one of the matching chairs and collapsed onto it, all the time never taking her eyes from Jason.

A minute later Caleb returned, carrying a first aid box. He put it down on the floor next to the sofa and crouched down. Ripping open Jason's shirt, he swore again. Regan came to stand beside him. The man had been savaged; his chest scored with livid claw marks that ran from his right shoulder to his waist. The shoulder was a mangled, bloody mess. It was obvious he'd been attacked by another werewolf.

Caleb glanced up at her. “Why don’t you go and make some coffee?”

Regan shook her head.

No way.

She wanted to know what was going on. Caleb shrugged but didn’t push it. “Then at least go get me some water and towels from the kitchen. It’s at the end of the hall.”

Instead, Regan whispered a few words and a bowl of steaming water and a pile of towels materialized beside them. Behind her, Kelly gasped, but Regan ignored the sound. Caleb’s eyes narrowed, but he didn’t say anything further, just got to work cleaning the wounds. When he was done, he rose to his feet and turned to Kelly. “He’ll be fine. He’ll recover. When he wakes up, if he can he should shift. It will stop the scarring.”

“Thank you,” Kelly said stiffly.

Caleb glanced back at the man. “My father did this?”

She smiled bitterly. “Who else?”

“What happened?”

She ran a hand through her short hair, her fingers trembling. Regan crossed the room, poured a glass of whiskey, and handed it to Kelly. She looked at Regan, as though about to ask something, but didn’t have the energy. Instead, she took the glass and swallowed the contents down. She coughed and handed the glass back. Regan refilled it and put it on the table beside her.

Kelly took a minute to gather her thoughts. “You know what’s been going on in the

pack?" she asked Caleb. Then she laughed bitterly. "No, of course you don't. Why would you? You left us all behind, didn't you?"

"I had no choice."

Regan glanced at him in surprise, he sounded almost defensive. Who was this woman who could make Caleb sound guilty? Regan studied her closely. She appeared to be in her late twenties, but she knew that meant nothing for a werewolf. Caleb had told her that they could live hundreds of years, although they mostly came to a violent end before that.

"You always have a choice," Kelly said, her voice tinged with bitterness and exhaustion. She picked up the glass and swallowed the contents. Regan decided not to get her a third.

"No, you made your choice. You chose to pretend to be human, but that's not an option for most of us. We're not like you. We need the pack. You never needed anybody."

Regan turned to Caleb, fascinated by these revelations. He glanced from her to Kelly as though he really didn't want this discussion in front of Regan.

Hard luck.

She wasn't going anywhere. Besides, it looked as though here was someone who knew Ethan Stone's whereabouts. Or at least where he had been last night, which was a lot closer than Regan had gotten so far.

Caleb changed the subject. "Tell me what happened."

"Ethan's been working with someone else. He wouldn't tell us who, just that it was

going to bring major changes, and the wolves would finally get the recognition they deserve. You know what he's like."

Caleb nodded, and she continued. "Not everyone in the pack agrees with him. Many of us don't want any more recognition. We're happy to live quietly, not bring attention to ourselves."

She picked up her glass, realized it was empty, and put it down again. "Last night there was a big meeting set up for before we all went to run. A few of us stood up and said we weren't happy."

Another tear welled up, and she swiped it away impatiently.

“And...?” Caleb prompted.

“He killed them.”

“Who? Who did he kill?”

She took a deep breath. “Tom. He killed Tom. He tore his throat out without even giving him a chance to defend himself.”

“I’m sorry.”

“He also killed Sarah.”

“What?” he said, and Regan could hear the shock reflected in his voice. “Why would he kill Sarah? She wouldn’t stand up to anyone. I should know that.”

“Who’s Sarah?” Regan asked.

“Ethan’s mate,” Kelly answered. “She brought Caleb up. Was the closest thing to a mother he had.” She shook her head. “I don’t know what happened. Sarah went crazy when he killed Tom. She went for him. Something snapped inside her.” She shrugged. “I don’t think Ethan meant to kill her, but he was insane with bloodlust. He probably wasn’t even aware of who it was. He ripped out her throat. She died instantly.” She sniffed, then wiped a hand over her face. “He went crazy when he realized what he’d done, but it was too late. In the chaos afterward, I managed to get away with Jason. And we came here. That’s it.”

They were all silent for a time. Regan watched Caleb; she'd learned more about him in the past half hour than in all the time before. He sat down in one of the chairs opposite Kelly. The good mood of earlier had fled completely. He appeared drained, and a deep sadness lurked behind his eyes. She guessed that whatever he might say about this Sarah—and he obviously had a deep well of bitterness—her death had hit him hard. After a few minutes, he drew himself together.

“So, what is it you expect me to do?”

Kelly cast him a look of scorn. “We don't expect you to do anything. We'd like you to come back, get rid of your father, and lead the pack. You know they would follow you.” She stared into his face for long moments. “But that's not going to happen, is it?”

“I don't want to lead the pack. I never wanted that.”

“And Caleb Stone always gets what he wants, right?” Kelly leaned back and closed her eyes. “You want us to go?” she asked without opening them.

“No.” Caleb rose to his feet. He paced the room. “You can stay here. I'll protect you from my father. You'll be safe.”

“We'll never be safe, not while Ethan is alive. You know what he does to renegade wolves.”

Caleb didn't answer.

“What does he do to renegade wolves?” Regan asked.

“He hunts them down and kills them. All except Caleb,” Kelly said. “The pack was never sure whether that was because of fatherly feelings, though we found that hard

to believe. More likely that he knew he couldn't beat Caleb."

"Why," Regan asked. "Is he strong? For a werewolf, I mean?"

Kelly looked at her in amazement. "Caleb could beat anyone from the time he turned fourteen. Of course he never fought Ethan." She looked at Regan. "Who are you?" she asked. "I can scent wolf, but I don't know you." She sat up straighter and her eyes narrowed on Regan. "You're the woman Ethan bit, aren't you?"

Regan nodded. "How did you know?"

"I was there that night. I caught a glimpse of you."

"Well, thanks a lot for helping."

Kelly shrugged. "He was furious when you disappeared. He wants you back. More than that, for some reason, he needs you back."

"Well, he's not getting me." She looked across at Caleb; he appeared lost in his own thoughts. Regan sighed. The problems had caught up faster than she could have imagined, and it looked as though it was up to her to sort this one out.

"Look," she said to Kelly, "why don't you get some sleep?"

"Can Jason come with me?"

"I don't see why not. Caleb?"

He shook himself and looked at her. "What?"

"Is there a room Kelly can use?"

“Of course. I’ll bring Jason. He rose to his feet and crossed the room, picking up Jason, who groaned but didn’t wake. Kelly followed them out, and Regan sank into the chair. She glanced across at the drinks, muttered a word, and a full glass appeared on the table beside her. She picked it up and sipped, savoring the smoky taste.

At least she had a lead now. She could find Ethan.

Chapter 15

Half an hour later, Regan glanced up as Caleb entered the room. He'd obviously showered and changed into clean jeans and a black T-shirt. He sank down onto the chair opposite her. Regan whispered a word and a drink appeared beside him. He picked up the glass and stared at the amber liquid. "Can you teach me how to do that?"

"No."

"Pity." He took a sip of his drink. "What would you like to do for the rest of the day?"

She looked at him in amazement. "You can't avoid the situation."

He turned to her. "I'm not avoiding the situation, because there is no situation to avoid."

"Your mother was killed last night."

The look Caleb sent her was fierce. "She was not my mother. My mother died when I was born."

"Sarah brought you up."

"She was Ethan's mate—she had no choice."

“So, she didn’t love you?”

He shrugged. “Maybe. It didn’t matter. When it came down to it she wouldn’t stand up for me.”

“Against Ethan?”

He nodded, and then sighed. “Ethan wanted a son. I don’t know exactly how he got hold of my mother, but he did, and she had me. Only thing was, Ethan wanted a werewolf son to follow him, and I never shifted. Of course no one knew what to expect of me; there had never been a werewolf child before, or at least not that anyone could remember.”

He took a sip of his drink. Regan bit her lip; she had a feeling she was going to learn something here that would explain Caleb, but he couldn’t be pushed. She held her breath, waiting for him to continue.

“Anyway, Ethan decided that I needed a little encouragement. He’d already tried biting me. I reacted badly, and he gave up on that idea. But it’s known that weres often change under pain and stress. So he decided to test the theory on me.”

Shock surged through her as she realized where he was going with this. “The scars on your back?”

He nodded. “I was always aware he was bitterly disappointed in me, and I thought it was a punishment for being a failure. I was five years old at the time.”

She blinked away a tear at the thought of the little boy, subjected to all that pain and suffering.

Caleb looked at her in surprise. “Don’t waste your tears on me. It’s in the past.”

“Of course it is, and it has absolutely no effect at all on the man you are today.”

He ignored the comment. “I came to hate the full moon. I came to hate the wolves, and I came to hate ‘my mother,’ who stood by and did nothing. All of them who stood by and did nothing. And now they expect me to go back and save them.”

“Not everyone is as strong as you, Caleb.”

“I know that now. Unfortunately, I didn’t know it when I was five.”

“So, did it work? Did it make you change?”

“No. Luckily, my father gave up after a few years. I changed when I was eleven and managed to keep it a secret from him for another year. Just out of spite. I wasn’t like the others. I could always control my wolf. I didn’t have to turn at full moon.”

“Will you help them?”

“I’m not going back to the pack, but they can stay here. They have my protection until they can get away, find somewhere safe.”

“And if your father comes after them?”

“He won’t.”

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She pursed her lips. “You know, it would be much easier if we went and killed him.”

“Perhaps.”

“You’re agreeing with me?”

“No, I just said perhaps.”

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Caleb glanced across at her. He couldn’t believe he’d told her all that stuff about his childhood. He’d never told anyone before. A single tear had spilled over, trailing down the flawless skin of her cheek, and he fought the urge to go to her and wipe it away. He’d thought her too hard to cry for anything.

He leaned his head against the back of the chair. The night had been perfect and the morning even better. For the first time he’d felt as though he was reaching Regan at some personal level. Then it had all turned to shit.

Sarah was dead.

It was true he’d hated her for a long time. In his mind, you didn’t let anyone you love suffer like that, and consequently he’d come to believe that she couldn’t have loved him, had looked after him only out of a sense of duty. But he knew it wasn’t true. She was as much a victim of Ethan as he was, but unlike him, she had never gotten away, and Caleb had in fact abandoned her. He hadn’t spoken to her in over twenty years. Now she was dead. He held up his empty glass to Regan, her lips moved, and it was

filled.

He drank slowly, keeping his mind blank.

A wave of tiredness washed over him. They hadn't slept much last night, and now he wanted nothing more than to lie next to Regan and lose himself in her body.

"Let's go to bed."

Her eyes widened, but she rose gracefully to her feet and held out her hand to him.

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Regan lay on her side and watched him. The hard lines of his face smoothed out in sleep and he appeared younger. How old was he?

She understood now, why he was the way he was. Why he wanted nothing to do with the pack. But even though she understood it, she knew it wasn't right. All his life he had denied his true nature. She had more of a feeling for wolf now, and Caleb was right when he said that wolves were pack animals. He was speaking from experience. Yet all his life, his wolf had run alone.

Until he'd run with her.

She remembered how it been to wake that morning wrapped in his arms, to make love in the forest. She didn't believe in happy-ever-afters, but she couldn't deny the feeling of rightness, of belonging. Maybe Caleb felt the same, maybe he was starting to believe they could have a life together.

They could have nothing unless they brought Ethan down.

She pulled away, careful not to wake him. He rolled onto his back, and she slid from the bed. Grabbing a black silk robe that hung on the back of the door, she pulled it on over her nakedness and left the room. She headed down the corridor, coming to a halt outside a door. Leaning close, she breathed in and knew the two werewolves were inside. They could tell her where Ethan was.

She tapped on the door and slipped inside the room.

Kelly lay motionless, still fully dressed on top of the bed nearest the door. She looked up as Regan came into the room, then pulled herself into a sitting position, leaned across and switched on the bedside lamp.

Regan's eyes flashed across to the other bed, where Jason lay on his back. He didn't move, but his eyes were open.

"What do you want?" Kelly asked, her tone vaguely hostile, and Regan frowned.

"I want to know where to find Ethan Stone."

"I don't know." Kelly sounded sullen now.

"So where was he last night?" When Kelly didn't answer, she continued. "Look, I can kill him for you."

"You? How? You're new—weak. You could never fight Ethan and survive."

"I don't need to fight him to kill him."

"I can't tell you anything," Kelly said.

Frustration nipped at her. “Why?”

“Because I told her not to.”

Regan whirled around. Caleb stood in the doorway, naked except for a pair of faded jeans, the button unfastened. She stared at his chest for long seconds before raising her head to meet his eyes. They were cold.

“I told you we weren’t going after Ethan,” he said.

Suddenly, she was angry. It felt good. “No, you told me you weren’t going after him. I never agreed. You might be able to sit back while the world goes to hell, but I can’t.”

“Are you sure this isn’t just personal revenge? He got the better of you, and now you have to go kill him.”

He was being purposefully obtuse, and her anger rose a notch. “You know there’s more at stake than that. You told me so yourself. Do you really believe you can sit on the sidelines and do nothing?”

“I don’t need to do anything. Your friends at the Council are sorting it out. I don’t think they want any help from a werewolf.”

“Half-werewolf,” she snapped.

He shrugged. “Half-animal according to them.”

He actually sounded offended on behalf of the wolves, which surprised her. “The werewolves aren’t animals—you know that. Whatever they are, your father has molded them. Take him down. Give the rest of your people a chance to try a new way of living. Let them join with the Council and fight this thing.”

“What’s the Council?” Jason spoke from his bed. He’d raised himself up on one elbow and was watching them.

“I’ve heard of them,” Kelly said, swinging her legs round and going across to Jason. She smoothed the hair from his forehead, inspected him closely. Then she turned back to Regan and Caleb. “Ethan told us that the Council would destroy us, that they looked on us as little better than animals.”

“Well, there is that,” Regan said. “But on the other hand, if they wanted you dead, they would have done it a long time ago.”

“Ethan said this new ally would protect us from the Council.”

Regan gritted her teeth and took a tight hold on her temper. “Was this before or after he killed your friends and Caleb’s mother?”

“She was not my mother.”

Regan ignored him. “The Council has never done you harm—can you say the same for your so-called leader?”

“At least Ethan is one of us.”

“Better the devil you know? Don’t you see? He’s cut you off, isolated you all. Isn’t it about time you stood up to him? Help me find Ethan, and I promise the Council will protect you.”

“Do you know that for sure?” Caleb asked. “You heard what Kael said. He means to make the werewolves pay for what happened to his sister.”

Regan remembered, but she didn’t believe Kael would take his revenge out on innocents. “He was hurting,” she said. “But he’s a fair man.” A flicker of doubt flashed through her mind. Caleb must have seen it.

“You don’t trust him entirely either,” he said.

“He’ll do what’s best for the Council.”

“Which doesn’t necessarily mean good for the wolves.” He turned to Kelly. “I’ll send you away somewhere. Somewhere Ethan or the Council won’t find you.”

Regan ground her teeth in frustration. “And is that what you plan to do as well? Run away and hide? And when this ally of your father’s takes over, you’ll keep your heads down and hope he doesn’t notice you. Like the wolves have always done.”

“Why not?”

She shook her head in disgust. “Hey, you know what—I don’t actually need your permission, and I don’t need your help.”

His eyes narrowed. He took a step toward her, then stopped, and his gaze wandered over her slowly. Regan held herself up straight.

“No,” he said after a minute’s silence. “You don’t need anyone, do you, Regan? So tell me, why is that? You know the secrets of my past, you’ve seen my scars, but what happened to you? What made you the way you are?”

She stared at him.

What made her the way she was?

Oh, she knew very well, and it wasn't something she'd ever shared with anyone, and she wasn't sure she could start now. Only her mother knew what had happened all those years ago. Her mother had been there at the end to pick up the pieces and try to put them back together.

"I love you, Regan." She remembered Sardi's words so clearly, even after two thousand years.

"I love you," she'd replied, and she'd meant it. Then she'd turned away and whispered the words that had destroyed him forever and shattered her heart into a thousand pieces.

She shook her head to clear out the echoes from the past.

Love caused you pain. She'd nearly allowed herself to forget that.

She looked at Caleb. He was waiting for her answer, and something twisted inside her. She didn't want to feel that pain again. Her wolf woke and whimpered. Wolf wanted Caleb. Regan forced her down and stood up straighter.

"It's none of your business," she said, and she could hear the ice in her voice. Something flickered in his eyes. She ignored it and continued. "I've managed on my own for over two thousand years. I think I can manage a little bit longer."

Without waiting for an answer, she turned and stalked away.

Chapter 16

Caleb sat at his desk, staring into space and wondering where Regan had stormed off to last night.

Shocked by her words, he'd let her go.

She didn't need him.

He hated to admit it, but the words hurt him more than he would have believed possible. He wanted her to need him. They'd told each other that this attraction was a thing between their wolves, but Caleb knew it was more than that. He was falling in love with her, and right now, that thought brought him no pleasure at all.

A deep, nagging sense of concern tugged at his mind. The only consolation was she still had no idea how to find his father, but all the same, he wished he knew where she was. His wolf needed her close to him where he could protect her.

He almost laughed at the idea. As if Regan needed anyone to protect her. She could stop the sun, for Christ's sake. What could he do for her that she couldn't do for herself?

The phone on his desk rang. He reached across and picked it up.

"Mr. Stone. There's an Ethan Stone in reception for you."

At the sound of the name, a rush of black hatred ripped through him.

“Mr. Stone?”

“Send him up.”

What the hell could his father want? He considered calling the Council and telling them Ethan was here, but he couldn't be sure they wouldn't pass the information on to Regan.

He forced his hatred down; he needed his mind unclouded by rage. By the time Ethan came through the door, he had his expression schooled to blankness.

Ethan looked around the office. “I'm impressed. You've done well for yourself.”

Watching his father stroll across the office, Caleb realized that all his life, he'd been conflicted. He'd hated Ethan, but at the same time, deep down had been the need for his acceptance and approval. Now that need was gone—finally banished by Ethan's own actions. Caleb could look at him without the blinkers of need, could see clearly the cold ambition that had deemed it acceptable to drive Caleb's mother to suicide, to torture a young boy.

“What do you want?” he asked.

“Not going to offer me a drink?”

“What do you want?”

Ethan shrugged and sat down in the seat opposite. “I believe you have something of mine.”

Caleb was silent for a moment, wondering how best to play this, how best to ensure Kelly and Jason's safety.

“I want them back,” Ethan said. “And I want the witch.”

“Why do you want them back?” Caleb asked, genuinely curious. “Why not let them go?”

“You know I can’t let the others see that. They have to understand the consequences of disobedience. I need to make an example of them.”

“Are your wolves getting restless, Dad? Are you losing control?”

“No!”

“You killed Tom and Sarah.”

Pain flashed across Ethan’s face. “Sarah was a mistake.”

“A mistake?” Caleb slammed his fist onto the desk. “You killed your mate, and you call it a mistake?”

His father ignored the question. “Where are they?”

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“That’s no longer any of your concern. I’ve given them my protection.”

“That was stupid.” Fury stamped across his father’s features. “You had a chance to come in with me, to be part of something great. I guess some people aren’t meant for greatness.”

“And you are? Greatness?” Caleb shook his head. “You’re deluded. You’re the one thing that has held the wolves back all these years.”

Ethan didn’t respond, but Caleb could hear his breathing, ragged and uneven.

“Tell me about my mother,” Caleb said.

Ethan sighed. “We’ve been through this. I’ve told you everything you need to know.”

“Ah, but I’ve found some things out on my own. I know her name, and I know what she was.” He looked at Ethan and allowed a small smile to play across his face. “What I’m wondering is—do you?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well if you’d known what she was, then you probably wouldn’t have wasted your time torturing a child to make him turn.”

“Tell me what you know,” Ethan growled.

“You first.”

“I wanted a son. They gave me the woman in exchange for my promise that when the time came I would do their bidding. I didn’t know anything about her except they told me she was capable of bearing a werewolf’s child.”

“What was she like?”

“She was”—Ethan stared at him for long moments, clearly thinking what to say—“broken.”

Shock ripped through him. “What?” Then he remembered Kael saying his sister had been a prisoner for many, many years. He couldn’t even begin to imagine what that would be like.

“She was beautiful,” Ethan said. “Like some sort of fairy princess. Blond hair like the sun, eyes like the summer sky, and inside she was nothing but a broken doll.” He looked into Caleb’s eyes. “Whatever you’ve always thought—I didn’t kill her.”

Grief for a woman he had never even known washed through Caleb. “You didn’t try to save her either.”

For the first time, real anger showed on Ethan’s face. “You know nothing of what I did. I would have put Sarah aside, kept this woman as my mate for the chance of children.” He raked a hand through his dark hair. “I tried everything I knew to get through to her, but she was already dead in every way that mattered. In the end, I let her go. I gave her peace.”

“After you’d used her.”

“Yes, after I’d used her. After I’d got you.” He looked at Caleb. “I actually thought the one thing that might bring her back was a child. But I laid you in her arms, and she stared at you blankly.”

“Tell me something,” Caleb said. “Did you rape her?”

Ethan looked away. “She never fought me.”

Caleb shook his head in disgust. He got up, crossed the room, and poured himself a drink. He swallowed it in one go, and then came back to stand in front of Ethan.

“She was a shapeshifter.”

“A what?”

It occurred to Caleb then that Ethan was almost as ignorant about the supernatural world as he was. “A shapeshifter—they were an immortal race that was almost wiped out a thousand years ago. They can shift into any animal at will, but only change after puberty. Her name was Kyla, and she’d been a prisoner since long before her people were killed. Over a thousand years of God knows what torture. It’s no wonder she was broken.”

He glanced into his father’s face. It was avid with interest.

“Are there others?” Ethan asked. “Like your mother.”

“Still thinking about yourself? Think you have a chance for another son? Do you really believe you’d have better luck next time? That your next son wouldn’t hate you the way I do?” Caleb smiled. “Well, you’re out of luck. They’re all gone except for one.”

“Who?”

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“His name is Kael Hunter. He was my mother’s twin brother—and he’s looking for you.”

“Have you told him about me?”

“I won’t need to. He’ll find you.”

Ethan shrugged. “I have protection.”

“This ally of yours? I doubt he’ll protect you from Kael. Or from Regan and her sisters. They’re all looking for you.”

“Well, soon it will be too late.”

Caleb shook his head. “Just get out of here.”

Ethan rose to his feet. “I want Kelly and Jason.”

“They’re mine. Now go.”

He turned away and crossed the room to stare out of the window. He was sick of it all. He wanted nothing more to do with his father.

“Caleb—”

He swung round. Ethan was standing in the doorway. “What?”

“The witch.”

“You’re not getting her.”

“It’s not that. I want you to be careful. Don’t trust her.”

“What?”

“I have reason to believe that once this plays out, she may not be on your side.” He hesitated as if unsure of how much to say, and Caleb had to fight the urge to go over and shake it out of him. “It wasn’t coincidence she was chosen,” Ethan continued. “There are other witches, less powerful but easier to manipulate, but my associate was specific. He’s got very good reason to believe Regan will side with him.”

Caleb opened his mouth, but Ethan held up a hand. “I don’t know the details, so no point in asking me.”

“Why tell me this?”

“You’re still my only son. Be careful.”

The door clicked shut behind him. Caleb stared at it for a long time. What the hell had that been about? He crossed the room and sank into his chair, running his hands through his hair. His ordered life had turned to chaos.

Part of him wanted nothing more to do with shapeshifters, vampires, or witches. But another part admitted that wasn’t the case anymore. He wanted to know about shapeshifters. It was slowly dawning on him that he wasn’t human—no part of him—and now the shock of that discovery was wearing off, a deep craving to know his mother’s people was growing inside him. One day, he wanted to talk to Kael. The question was—would Kael ever want to talk to him? Raven had thought so.

He could do without vampires, but witches, or at least one particular witch, he was beginning to think he didn't want to do without, perhaps even couldn't do without. That was if she ever deigned to talk to him again.

What could his father have meant? That Regan would turn on him? He didn't believe it, but he needed to tell her what his father had said. Except that brought him back to the fact that he had no clue where she was. He would call Catrin. She might have some idea. He reached for the phone, but it rang before he could pick it up.

It was Regan.

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Regan had changed as soon as she left the house. She needed to run, and wolf was quite happy to oblige. She raced through the darkness until exhaustion finally claimed her, and then she lay flat out in the bracken, panting. In the deep recesses of her brain, she knew she should change back, think it through, go and persuade Caleb to let Kelly talk to her, tell her where Ethan had been last night. But things were so much simpler as wolf, and she fell asleep, head resting on her paws, breathing in the musky scent of wild garlic. It reminded her of making love to Caleb on the forest floor, and she dreamed of him through the night.

The sun was already high in the sky when she finally awoke. She shifted at once, sat up, and shivered as the chill autumn air brushed her naked skin. A few whispered words and she was clothed.

Rising to her feet, she looked around her. She stood at the edge of a forest glade surrounded by pine trees, but other than that, she had no idea where she had run to. She thought about walking, finding a track to follow, but in the end, she whispered another spell and opened a portal outside Caleb's house. She stepped through and realized that her magic was undiminished by the spells—she was back to her full

strength.

She'd come to a decision during the long night.

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Last night, with Caleb, she'd been angry, frustrated that he wouldn't accept what needed to be done. And perhaps, if she was honest with herself, she'd been a little scared that she was beginning to care for him.

But scared or not, she couldn't run away from this, and somehow, she had to persuade Caleb that he couldn't run either.

She also needed to face her own demons. She couldn't see how her past could be connected to all this—she'd always believed the past was dead. Now it appeared to be coming back to haunt her. Maybe by speaking of it aloud, facing it, she could finally put the nightmares behind her and move on.

A black SUV stood parked in the drive. Regan didn't recognize the vehicle, and a sense of foreboding washed over her. She reached out with her mind, discovered Caleb was not at home, and some of her anxiety seeped away.

Kelly and Jason should still be here though. Had Ethan come after them? Was he here even now?

A movement at the front door caught her eye. She stepped back behind the broad trunk of a tree. Two men came out of the house and down the steps toward the vehicle. Both wore grim expressions, but neither of them was Ethan Stone, and her tense muscles relaxed. She thought about stopping them, and then decided checking on Kelly and Jason was more important. She waited until they'd driven away and then ran to the house.

She was too late. She knew it as soon as she opened the door, and the scent of fresh

blood hit her nostrils. Pushing open the door to the sitting room, she stared down at the lifeless bodies. For a minute, she stood, trying to sense if the souls remained, but they were gone. It was often like that when death came suddenly, sometimes they lingered, but mostly they fled the scene. She hoped Catrin or Gina would see them safely on their way to the Shadowlands.

She crossed the room, picked up the phone, and called Caleb's office.

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The electric gates were wide open. Caleb's hands tightened on the wheel, and he drove through at breakneck speed, slamming on the brakes and screeching to a halt outside the house. He leapt from the car. Regan stood on the steps, her beautiful face expressionless, her eyes cold, hard as ice.

"Where are they?" he said.

"You're too late," she replied. "They're both dead."

Rage roared through him. He charged up the steps and past her into the house, coming to an abrupt halt as the heavy, acrid scent of fresh blood filled his nostrils.

He found them in the sitting room where he'd treated Jason's wounds. Kelly sprawled facedown across the sofa in a pool of crimson, Jason on the floor beneath the window.

Crouching down beside Kelly, Caleb turned her gently and swore under his breath. Her head fell back, revealing the jagged open wound at her neck. Her jugular vein had been severed with one deep claw cut across the throat—his father's classic method of dealing with anyone who stood against him. For a minute, guilt warred with the rage burning inside Caleb. This was his fault.

He viewed the room through a red veil as the fury rose up inside him. And as his fury rose, wolf stirred in the deep recesses of Caleb's mind. He woke and stretched, scented the fresh blood, and threw back his head and howled.

Mine.

The word screamed through Caleb's head, and he realized something then. It wasn't only Caleb who had offered his protection to Kelly and Jason. It was his wolf as well. And wolf was howling for revenge.

"Are you satisfied now?" Regan asked.

Caleb fought for control. He gave a silent promise to wolf that there would be a reckoning for this. Ethan had gone too far, and he would pay the price. With the promise, wolf quieted, and Caleb glanced up from the body. Regan stood in the doorway, leaning against the wall, arms folded across her chest.

"No," he said.

She stared at him, and he allowed his outrage to show in his eyes. She nodded once. "So, are you willing to do something about it?"

"Ethan will pay."

"Good. I saw them," she said. "They were leaving as I got here."

"Who was it?"

"Two men. Both tall, dark-haired, one had a scar down his right cheek—"

He recognized the description immediately. "Stefan and Dave—they'll be my father's

seconds now that Tom is gone.”

“I’m surprised he didn’t do it himself.”

Her voice cracked, and he looked at her closely. He’d thought she was cold, feeling nothing, but now he saw the pain in her eyes. He considered lying, but the time for lying was over. He’d told Ethan that these two were under his protection, and his father had killed them anyway. Or maybe anyway was the wrong word—maybe they died because Caleb gave his protection. Ethan was making a point, and Caleb wasn’t too stupid to get it, but Ethan had also made a big mistake. Caleb could no longer stand on the sidelines and pretend this was nothing to do with him.

“He couldn’t,” he said now. “Ethan was with me.”

Her eyes widened. “What?”

“He came to my office this morning.”

“What did he want?”

“He said he wanted Kelly and Jason, but I’d bet he was checking I was out of the way.” He paused for a moment, and then continued. “He also wanted you, and when I wouldn’t give you up, he warned me against you.”

“Warned you against what?”

He shrugged. “Actually, he was very cryptic, but he did tell me not to trust you. That when it all came out, you were just as likely to be on their side as mine.”

She frowned, then turned her head to gaze out of the window. Caleb could almost see her turning the thoughts over in her mind, and she was not happy with the results.

“Do you want to tell me what he’s talking about?” he asked.

When she turned back, she’d wiped all expression from her face. “I have no idea.”

“Why do I find that hard to believe?” he asked.

He glanced down. Kelly’s blood stained his hands. He stared at them in disgust, then walked past Regan, through the hall and into the bathroom. He washed his hands then went to the linen closet and pulled out two blankets.

“What are you doing?” Regan asked as he came back and stood over Kelly’s body.

“I’ll take them out and bury them away from the house.”

“I can—” she paused, and he looked at her curiously. “I can get rid of them for you.”

“What? You mean magic?” He thought about it then shook his head. “No thanks. They have friends who might like to know where they rest.”

“They’re gone, Caleb.”

“I know, but some people get comfort from a grave.”

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Regan watched him as he laid one of the dark red blankets across the back of the sofa, and then wrapped Kelly’s body in the other. He picked up the bundle with ease and carried her, cradled against his chest, from the room. Blood had pooled beneath her and dripped onto the cream carpet. Regan whispered a word, and the blood was gone.

She moved across to Jason, picking up the second blanket. Crouching down, she rolled the body onto it and wrapped it tight around him, then sat back on her heels and stared at the shapeless bundle that had been a living person only a short time ago.

She should be elated. Caleb had finally agreed to help her and go up against his father. With Caleb’s help, they would find Ethan and finish him off forever. But the price of these two lives was too high, and she couldn’t rid her mind of the misgivings. Something was wrong.

She hadn’t lied when she’d told Caleb she had no clue what Ethan was talking about when he questioned her loyalty. She could think of no one who would believe they

possessed the power to claim her allegiance. Well, no one living.

A nagging thought hammered at her mind, refusing to be dismissed. But it couldn't be Sardi. He'd been utterly annihilated two thousand years ago. In her mind, she could see his face as she'd spoken the words that destroyed him.

Not for the first time, she wished her mother were here. The Morrigan was the only other person who knew what happened so long ago, had been there with her at the time. But what was the point of wishing for her mother. She hadn't listened in the past; why should she come now?

She was still staring at the body without really seeing it when Caleb returned.

"Tell me," he said.

"Tell you what?"

"You know something."

"I don't—honestly, Caleb." He looked skeptical, and she knew she had to give him something else. "I was thinking about someone, that's all."

He tilted his head to one side and regarded her. "Thinking about who?"

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“Actually, I was wishing my mother was around.”

“You know, I find it hard to imagine you with a mother. Is she a witch as well?”

Regan grinned. “No, she’s not a witch.” He raised an eyebrow and she thought—why not? “She’s a goddess.”

His eyes widened. “A goddess?”

“Hmm. The Morrigan—goddess of war and pestilence, among other things.”

He looked at her closely. “Well, that figures. Right, so your mother is a goddess. And your father?”

Regan shrugged. “I don’t know. My mother isn’t the type to kiss and tell, but I do know she has atrocious taste in men.”

“So, where is she?”

She shrugged again. “Who knows? The last time she was seen was just before Gina was turned. Darius asked our mother’s help, and she came.”

Regan was surprised at the bitterness in her voice. That her mother should listen to the prayers of a blood-sucking vampire, but refuse to hear her own daughter, was hard to accept. She suspected her mother had always felt an element of guilt for her part in the whole Sardi affair, and the Morrigan did not do well with guilt. It was far easier to ignore her than to face it.

“Could she help us here?”

“She probably could, but whether she would is another matter.”

He looked at her then shrugged. “Okay. I’m going to bury Kelly and Jason. You rack your brain for anything that could help. Anything.” He reached down and picked up Jason’s body. “I know you have something else on your mind. So get ready to spill it.”

He walked from the room, carrying his burden as though it was weightless. When the front door slammed, she rose to her feet. She opened her mouth to speak the spell that would clean up the pool of blood congealing on the carpet, and then clamped her lips closed. The blood would serve to remind her of why she wanted Ethan Stone dead. Not that she needed much reminding. She rubbed her shoulder where he had bitten her to the bone.

Sinking into one of the armchairs, she stared at the stain, trying to decide what she should tell Caleb. She still didn’t really believe all this could be anything to do with Sardi. Nevertheless, she was going to have to bring it out. Maybe there was no direct connection; on the other hand...

The shrill ring of the phone broke her concentration. She reached across and picked it up.

“Caleb?”

She recognized Ethan’s voice straight away. “I’m afraid not. He’s out burying bodies.”

He was silent for a minute. “It’s the witch, isn’t it?”

“Right first time. So, would you like to leave a message for Caleb, or can it wait until we come and see you? We won’t be long.”

“Aren’t you curious as to who I’m working with?”

“Oh, I’m very curious, but I’m sure I can summon up a little truth spell when we meet. Or maybe we’ll do it the old-fashioned way.”

“You think you could get me to talk.”

“I’m sure of it. And I’m sure Caleb will help—you’ve really pissed him off this time.”

He was silent for a minute, then he spoke again. “You know, I get the impression that Caleb cares about you.”

“So?”

“And do you care about him?”

“That’s none of your goddamn business. I think you gave up the right to fatherly interest a long time ago.”

He sighed. “I’m just warning you, if you have any feeling for my son, you’ll leave him out of this.”

“If you’d had any feelings at all, you wouldn’t have tortured a five-year-old boy.”

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“He told you that? My, aren’t we getting cozy.”

She sighed. “Caleb won’t stay out of it. Not now.”

“You could make him.”

Regan frowned. “Not that I couldn’t take you on my own, but why would I do that?”

“Because I’m telling you this forhisgood—he’s my son, and whatever he thinks, I love him, but you bring him anywhere near my ally, and you sign his death warrant.”

“Are you sure you aren’t just a little bit afraid of your son?”

“Maybe, but I won’t be facing him alone. And there’s no way Caleb can take on this thing and survive. Are you willing to risk that?”

Was she? At the thought of anything happening to Caleb, her gut clenched in protest. She wished she had more information. She wished that thoughts of Sardi didn’t keep clouding her mind. Sardi, who it had taken the combined powers of Regan and her mother to bring down.

“Who will be with you?” she asked.

“Why don’t you come and find out?”

Her hand tightened around the phone. “You’ll tell me where you are?”

“If you promise to leave Caleb out of this, then yes, I’ll tell you.”

She sat for a minute thinking it through. She could sense the truth in his words. He really believed that Caleb would die.

This ally of Ethan’s wanted her for something, and she guessed that something was to do with her ability to open the portals between the worlds. That suggested the underworld, which suggested demons, which brought her back to Sardi.

God, it all came back to Sardi. She closed her eyes and pictured him, lying beside her, whispering words of love.

She forced the memory away and concentrated on the present. Caleb would never forgive her for doing this, but that had to be better than dead. Besides, despite his readiness to go up against his father, she suspected he might balk in the face of actually killing him. And Ethan was going to die. She would make sure of that.

“Are you still there?” Ethan’s voice jolted her out of her thoughts.

“Yes, I’m here. I’ll make sure Caleb can’t follow. Now, where are you?”

She put the phone down a few minutes later and sat staring at the bloodstain on the carpet. She should move, she wanted to be away but there was something she needed to do first.

Ethan thought her arrogant, and she’d played up to that. But she wasn’t a fool and knew when she needed help. She picked up the phone again.

Time to call in the cavalry!

Chapter 17

Caleb got to the end of the drive and slammed on the brakes. He sat, gripping the steering wheel. His mind had been fogged by grief and rage; now it cleared slightly, allowing his brain to function once more.

Regan knew something. He was sure of it. He also suspected that even after his demonstration, she didn't accept that his father possessed the power to control her. Regan was arrogant enough to believe she could go up against Ethan alone and win.

Suddenly, he was filled with a conviction that he needed to get back. That he shouldn't let her out of his sight.

He turned the truck around and headed back to the house.

He was aware, as he strode through the front door, that she was still here, and some of the tension oozed from his body. He found her sitting in the seat where he'd left her, with the phone clutched in her hand. She glanced up as he entered the room, a look of resignation settling on her features, and he knew he'd been right.

"I thought you'd be longer," she said. "I meant to be gone." She put down the phone, stood up and walked toward him. "Why did you come back, Caleb?"

"Because I realized I don't trust you."

A small smile curled her lips. "I would never hurt you." She reached up, stroked a finger down over his cheek, and his skin tingled under her touch. "But you're

probably right not to trust me. I wouldn't hurt you, but I can't promise to protect you from everything else out there."

"I don't need protecting," he growled.

She ignored him. "And I realized that you don't need to be involved after all. Go back to your normal life, Caleb."

"How can I?"

"Easy," she replied. "Now sit down." She put a hand against his chest and pushed gently.

He resisted. "Why?"

"Because you may as well be comfortable."

"I'll sit, if you tell me what's going on. Why have you changed your mind?"

"Okay." She nodded, and he sank into the seat behind him.

She looked down at him, her expression rueful. His instincts went on instant alert, but before he could move, Regan whispered a word, and every muscle in his body locked in place. Shock ripped through him, quickly replaced by outrage. She'd put a spell on him!

He could move his head slightly, and he glared at her.

"Let me go," he ground out. "Now."

"Don't worry, the spell will only last a couple of hours, but I'll be long gone by then,

and you'll never find me."

Rage poured through him. He gritted his teeth and forced himself to calm down. He had to persuade her to listen. "Why are you doing this?"

She shrugged. "Ethan phoned. I know where he is, so I no longer need your help."

"He told you?"

She nodded, and his brain scrambled to make sense of it. "The only reason he would tell you is because he knows he can take you, but he can't take us both."

"I did consider that, but I think he's genuinely concerned for you."

Panic was rising inside him. "Regan, listen to me. You can't trust him."

"I know that."

"He can call your wolf." She frowned, and he pressed the advantage. "You've seen it for yourself. He can turn you."

"I won't give him the chance."

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“Don’t be so bloody arrogant. You can’t do this alone.”

“I have to finish it.”

Caleb struggled to move, but his body refused to obey him. Finally, he rested his head against the back of the chair and stared up at her, his mind working furiously. There had to be some way to get through to her. “I love you,” he said.

Her eyes widened in shock. “That’s not very sensible.”

“I’ll never forgive you if you get killed.”

She leaned down and put her lips to his, kissed him. “I’ll be careful.”

Straightening up, she whispered a word and the air in front of her shimmered. She turned to look at him one last time, then vanished.

The time passed incredibly slowly. He watched the clock, after half an hour—the longest half hour of his life—he was ready to explode.

He’d told her he loved her. He was a fool. Why had he done it? Why did he think for one moment that it would make a difference to her? She didn’t love him—he was an inconvenience that she planned to put behind her as soon as she was able. She was incapable of love.

But why was that? Was it just a response to having lived so long and seen so much? He didn’t think so. Which brought him back to this past admirer of hers.

Regan had said she'd loved once, and that she had killed her lover, but why, and if so, then how could he be back now and in league with his father?

He needed to get out there and find her. Then he had an idea. He closed his eyes and allowed his wolf to rise to the surface, willed the change, and suddenly, he was free. Wolf bounded up from the chair and out of the room. The front door stood open, and he raced out onto the steps as a black van pulled up outside. He stood poised, ready to run, every instinct screaming to hide. Instead, he stood motionless as Catrin climbed out of the van. She stood staring at him.

“Caleb?”

At the sound of her voice, he willed himself to change back, and a moment later, he was standing before her—naked.

Her eyes widened, but she didn't budge.

“Do you know where Regan is?” he asked.

She nodded.

“Give me one minute.” He ran into the house, pulled on some clothes, and was back well within the minute.

“We'll go in my truck,” he said.

Catrin shook her head. “I have the hounds in the back.” She nodded at the back of the van. “We may need them to track Regan.”

“Okay.” He climbed into the passenger seat and waited, fingers drumming on his thigh as Catrin climbed in and started the engine. “How did you know to come here?”

he asked as the car pulled away.

“Regan phoned.”

“She did?” He frowned and turned to look at her. “She told you to come here?”

“No, she specifically told me not to get you involved.”

“So, why did you?”

She shrugged. “A hunch, I guess. Regan still believes that she can change things, and sometimes you can, but most of the time, the future as we see it is fixed.”

“You’ve seen the future.”

“Just flashes, but enough to know that you’re involved.”

“What did you see?”

She shook her head. “Nothing that will help you.”

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He opened his mouth to argue, but at that moment, a low, whining growl came from the back of the van. Caleb turned around in his seat and saw the two hounds, Diablo and Satan through a metal grill.

“Are they really hellhounds?” he asked.

Catrin nodded.

“Actually, for that matter, what is a hellhound? Where did they come from?”

Catrin grinned. “Presumably from Hell, but we don’t know. They were an anonymous gift to Regan around forty years ago. No doubt from an old admirer.”

Caleb went still at the words. An old admirer? Could it be coincidence?

“You really don’t know who they came from?”

Catrin cast him a glance, her eyebrows drawn together in a frown. “Regan said they must have been a gift from our mother, but she’s always denied it.”

“You know my father is working with someone. Someone he claims has feelings for Regan?”

“Beware an old lover,” Catrin murmured. “Of course.”

“Regan told me she’d been in love once a long time ago.”

“She did?”

“Hmm, she told me she’d killed him. What do you know about it?”

“Not much. It was before I was born, and Regan won’t talk about it.” She glanced at him. “Though she’s obviously talked to you.”

“I think it was more a warning than a sharing of past memories.”

“She’s scared.”

A flicker of surprise ran through him. “Scared of what?”

“She falls in love one time, he betrays her, and she kills him. Hardly a happy-ever-after ending and unlikely to make her want to risk it again. But she does care for you, Caleb.”

“It won’t matter if we don’t find her.”

“We’ll find her.”

They were silent for the rest of the drive. After around an hour, Catrin pulled up at the side of the road and turned to Caleb.

“This is as far as we can go. Regan told me your father gave her instructions to come here and she’d be met. She told me to bring the hounds to track her. Come on, let’s get them out.”

It was late afternoon, and the light was fading. Caleb climbed out of the van and looked around, praying to see something that would give him an idea where Regan had gone. To the right lay open farmland, but on the left was a thick wooded area. As

he watched, a herd of deer ran out from the cover of the trees, racing across the open ground.

He would bet his father was in there somewhere, and he turned impatiently. Catrin moved to the back of the van and opened it. Instantly, the hounds whined. Caleb came around to watch as she unfastened their chains and the huge animals leapt down. She handed one of the leashes to Caleb. “That’s Satan,” she said.

Caleb stroked the huge head and watched as the hound sniffed the air, nostrils flaring red, tongue flicking out. It let out a small yelp and put its nose down to the ground. Growling low in its throat, it tugged on the leash, then glanced back at Caleb as if to say let’s go.

Looked like they had the scent.

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There was an awful lot that could go terribly wrong with this plan.

The thought occurred to Regan as the huge half-wolf, half-man creature tossed her over his shoulder. She dangled upside-down as he headed off into the forest. At least she presumed they were heading into the forest. She couldn’t actually see from this position, but she could sense the trees around them, smell the resin from the pines. And with a gag in her mouth and her nose squashed against the coarse fur of the were-creature’s broad back, she was struggling to breathe. Unfortunately, with her hands tied behind her, there was little she could do about it.

Despite all this, and whatever Caleb might think—and she was certain his thoughts would be far from complimentary—she knew what she was doing. They needed to discover who was behind this, and to do that, she needed Ethan to think he had Regan exactly where he wanted her.

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Mind you, right now, there was very little “thinking” about it. Ethan did have her where he wanted her. But not for long.

Hopefully, Catrin wouldn’t be far behind, and she would have called in the cavalry. While Regan hated to put her life in the hands of the Council, she hadn’t been able to think of an alternative.

Ethan had met her at the appointed place, and for a brief moment, she’d actually thought he was alone, as promised. Then something slammed into her from behind. She’d gone down on her knees, and before she’d had a chance to fight back, the gag was thrust between her lips and her arms wrenched behind her back and securely tied.

Of course, it was all part of her plan. Sort of.

She’d scrambled to her feet and stared at Ethan, allowing the loathing to show clearly in her eyes. And he’d laughed at her.

Bastard!

She really didn’t like being laughed at. Never had. Catrin was always telling her she took herself too seriously, but that was just the way she was. Now she forced herself to remember that her time would come.

She tried to ignore the panic rising up inside her, to push it down deep where it wouldn’t impair her judgment, but she hated to be helpless. It must have shown in her eyes, because he laughed again, then reached out and took her chin between his fingers and stared into her face. She met his golden gaze and recognized the madness

lingering there.

“Hello, again,” Ethan murmured. “As arrogant as ever, I see, but at least you’ve left Caleb out of this. Was he pleased?”

She rolled her eyes. He wasn’t seriously expecting an answer, was he? She was gagged, for God’s sake.

He must have realized the stupidity of trying to have a conversation with a gagged woman. He gestured to someone behind her, and something big and strong lifted her from the ground and tossed her over a hairy shoulder.

The trip seemed endless, and all the while, her mind kept going back to Caleb. He’d said he loved her. Had he meant it? A little flame of excitement had burst into life at the words. And now, however much she told herself she didn’t want his love, the flame refused to die, warming her through the long, uncomfortable journey.

At last, her captor came to a halt. Regan wriggled, but before she could slide free, she was tossed to the hard ground. The little air that remained in her lungs exited via her nose, and she lay winded. It took her a moment to sense that something was not right. She opened her eyes and scrambled to her knees.

She was within a circle, and she could sense it depressing her magic. She’d expected something like this, but still the panic clawed at her mind.

Ethan crouched down in front of her and pulled the gag free.

Regan spat. “There was really no need for that.”

“Of course not.” He drew a knife from the sheath at his thigh. “Turn around.”

Regan scrambled around on her knees and felt him slice through the bonds at her wrists. She turned back to face him, rubbing her hands over the red rings left by the rope.

She swallowed, trying to ease the dryness in her mouth. “Could I have a drink, please.”

Ethan raised a brow at her polite request, but he turned and spoke to someone behind him, and a moment later, he was handed a bottle of water. He gave it to Regan and watched as she drank slowly. She took a deep breath and looked around her. They were standing in a clearing in the forest. At the center, a pyre had been built of freshly chopped wood, piled high.

Of course, it was Samhain—night of the bonfires, when the borders between this world and other worlds were at their thinnest. She knew it wasn’t coincidence. All around the country, anyone who believed in the old ways would be lighting fires to the dead. It was also the night when the restless dead would find a way through to this world—if they were strong enough.

A lump formed in her belly, icy cold. All her life she’d lived with the guilt of what she’d done. Firstly, her stupidity and gullibility in falling for Sardi. It was all very well saying she’d been young and naïve, but what sort of person fell in love with a demon? And not just any demon, but one of the high lord demons of Hell.

Then she had compounded her guilt by destroying the one she loved. What sort of person did that? Because she had loved him. Even when she discovered how he meant to use her, that love hadn’t died. Was she now going to have to face her guilt all over again?

She wanted to believe it couldn’t be true, that Sardi was gone forever. Her mother had told her that was so. Had she lied? Not for the first time, she cursed her mother.

Always taking the easy way out, at least as far as her daughters were concerned. No doubt, she'd thought telling her Sardi was gone would save her pain—in the short run.

She turned back to Ethan. "Do you have any clue what you are doing?" she asked.

"Of course."

She shook her head. "You're an ignorant man who is meddling in things beyond his comprehension."

"I know what I'm doing. I've got you, haven't I? That's my part of the bargain."

"And now that you've got me, what do you plan to do with me?"

"I hand you over tonight." He searched her face. "So, my son is in love with you. It's a pity—you're going to break his heart."

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“Perhaps you could consider letting me go, and I promise to keep his heart in one piece.”

He smiled. “Too late.”

All around her, people were entering the clearing. The air was charged with tension as though all that was needed was a mere spark to set off a conflagration. The excitement was building. Regan could sense it herself, and her wolf awoke and paced inside the confines of her body.

One by one, the people undressed, fell to their knees, and the change came over them, until the clearing was full of wolves. They prowled the perimeter occasionally throwing their heads back and howling to the moon. In her mind, Regan whispered soothing words to wolf.

Not yet.

In the distance, a dog barked, and Regan raised her head to listen. She recognized her hound, Satan, and the tightness eased from her limbs. Catrin had found her. The Council wouldn't be far behind. The sun was well down now, and even the vampires would be on the move.

She needed to keep Ethan sufficiently distracted to give them time to get here.

“Why did you kill Kelly and Jason?” she asked.

“They left the pack—pack law says they die.”

“Tell me, did you make up that particular law?” When he didn’t answer, she shrugged. “You really pissed Caleb off. I stopped him today, but he will come after you.”

“Caleb will keep out of it, like he’s always done.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure—he’s changed. And Caleb’s not the only one coming for you. Have you heard of the Council?”

He stared at her through narrowed eyes.

“Yes, of course you have. Well, Caleb’s uncle heads the Council. He’s just found out what you did to his sister, and he’s not happy.”

“I didn’t know who she was.”

“And you think that makes it all right. I somehow don’t think Kael will see it that way. But don’t worry, I doubt he’ll kill you straightaway. His sister was a prisoner for over a thousand years. Can you imagine what that would do to a person? Don’t bother trying. I think you might find out for yourself.”

“Enough,” he snapped. “Jesus, you talk too much.” He regarded her thoughtfully for a minute, and then smiled. “There is one way to shut you up.” He reached out and gripped her chin in his hard fingers forcing her to look into his eyes. Inside her, wolf cried out in distress.

The memory of the pain when Caleb had called her wolf filled her mind as the real pain ripped through her. She’d known this was a possibility and thought she was prepared for it, but her body still convulsed as wolf was torn from her. She didn’t try to fight, and it was over quickly. She lay on her side, panting.

The man reached a hand toward her, and she growled low in her throat. He laughed then drew a length of rope out of his pocket and tied it around her neck.

“That’s better,” he murmured.

Wolf rose shakily to her feet as he dragged on the rope. She locked the muscles in her legs, but it was futile—she was too weak to fight him so soon after the forced change. Finally, she allowed him to pull her across the clearing and tether her to a tree close by the pyre.

“Now,” he said, “let’s see if we can persuade your old boyfriend to come to the party.”

Taking a lighter out of his pocket, he moved toward the pyre. He flicked it open, and Regan whined softly. Then he went still.

Chapter 18

Deep in the forest, the trees grew close together, cutting out the moonlight, so Caleb and Catrin moved through near-darkness. Their initial fast pace slowed to a walk, but the hounds never faltered, keeping their noses to the ground. They'd barked madly when they first caught Regan's scent, but now they were silent. Caleb gripped the leash tightly in his hand and fought down the need to urge them to move faster. He knew it was impossible in these conditions, but the panic clawed at his gut.

He tried to tell himself his father wouldn't harm Regan—she was too valuable. But he couldn't help but remember the warnings he'd been given, first by Tom, then Kelly, that his father was no longer entirely sane.

He had killed his mate in a fit of temper. What would he do if Regan wound him up? As she no doubt would—she wasn't very good at not saying what she thought, and sensible just didn't figure in her character.

Behind him, Catrin moved easily, and it occurred to him that this time Regan had been sensible. This time she hadn't gone in alone, she had called for help.

Diablo came to an abrupt halt in front of him. Straight ahead, the land rose steeply. The trees had thinned a little, and in the dim light, the hound stood stiff-legged, tension in every line of his body. Caleb turned to Catrin and put his finger to his lips. She nodded once.

He listened. Up ahead the muted sound of voices floated down on the night air.

“I think they’re up there,” he whispered to Catrin.

“Do we wait for the Council?” she asked.

He shook his head. “I need to make sure Regan is all right—I don’t trust my father. I’m not convinced he’s entirely stable anymore.”

“So, what’s the plan?”

Caleb frowned. “The plan is we go in there, get Regan, and get the hell out as fast as we can.”

“That’s not what Regan wants. She needs to find out who’s behind this.” She came up beside him and put her hand on his arm. “That’s why she’s here, Caleb. I think we should go check, then wait for the others.”

“That won’t be an option. Once we get any closer, they’ll sense us straight away. “

She nibbled on her lower lip, obviously not happy, but after a minute, she nodded. “Okay, let’s go.”

For a brief moment, guilt flared in his mind. He had no right to take Catrin into this. “Perhaps you should go back and wait by the car,” he said.

“Are you mad?” Her silver eyes flared at him and for the first time, he saw the resemblance to Regan. There was obviously no point in arguing. He sighed.

“Okay. But keep out of the way.”

Catrin scowled. “I’m not exactly helpless, you know. I am a witch—I have powers.”

“They don’t seem to have done Regan much good.”

She pursed her lips but didn’t answer. Caleb turned away and headed up the hill. Even the hounds were cautious now, stepping softly on the forest floor, noses raised to the air. Caleb took a deep breath and realized why.

Wolves.

And a lot of them. Was the whole pack here?

He came to a halt at the edge of a clearing and peered in, trying to make sense of the scene, searching for Regan.

He found her in wolf form; tethered to a small tree by a rope around her neck. At the sight of her, his own wolf woke, straining to be free.

Regan raised her head and looked straight at him. Her silver eyes held his, and he was sure he saw real human emotion in there—fury. Her gaze flickered past him to where Catrin stood at his side, and the wolf’s eyes narrowed.

“She doesn’t look particularly pleased to see us,” Caleb murmured.

“I think it’s you she’s not happy about—I’m supposed to be here.”

His eyes moved on from Regan, looking for his father. There were a large number of wolves milling around the clearing, but he finally located Ethan standing not far from Regan, beside a large pyre of stacked wood. He held something in his hand, and looking closer, Caleb realized it was a lighter—he was about to set fire to the wood.

Catrin touched his arm. He jumped and turned to look at her. “What?”

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“Don’t let him light the bonfire.”

He opened his mouth to ask why, then realized there was no time for questions. Taking a deep breath, he stepped out into the clearing. His father turned to face him, the lighter held in his hand.

Shock flashed across his face as he saw Caleb, and his arm dropped to his side. Caleb heard a low growl from Regan, but ignored her, keeping all his concentration on Ethan. He could sense the wolves all around them, circling. They were not happy, and he was hardly surprised; four of the pack had been killed in the last couple of days.

“She told me you wouldn’t be coming,” Ethan said, nodding toward Regan.

Regan growled again, a low rumbling sound.

“She tried,” Caleb replied.

“Not hard enough.” Ethan’s gaze flicked from Caleb to Catrin, who had come to stand at his side. “Who’s this?” he asked.

“This is Catrin, Regan’s sister.” He turned to Catrin. “And this is my father, Ethan Stone.”

Catrin’s eyes narrowed. “I’ve been looking forward to meeting you, Mr. Stone.”

Ethan stared at her briefly and then turned back to Caleb. “Another witch?”

“Yes.”

“Well, make sure she keeps her mouth shut. Or her sister will be sorry.”

“She’ll keep quiet.”

Caleb studied his father. He appeared in control. In fact, he appeared too controlled, too confident, and a shiver of apprehension ran down his spine.

“Step away from the fire,” Caleb said.

“I don’t think so.” Ethan raised the lighter and reached out toward the pyre.

Catrin muttered a word under her breath, and the lighter flew out of Ethan’s hand. His face contorted in fury, and Caleb saw the first cracks in his control.

“I told you to keep the witch quiet,” Ethan snarled.

He moved toward Regan. The wolf growled but stood her ground as Ethan lashed out with his booted foot. The kick took her in the ribs with a sickening crack, and the force of the blow knocked her sideways to the ground. She struggled back to her feet, but she was clearly hurt, and rage roared to life inside Caleb. Ethan’s foot came back to kick her again, and Caleb leapt forward.

Ethan paused. He looked around with narrowed eyes. “Hold him.”

Caleb realized he was talking to the pack wolves. He expected to be stopped but the other wolves kept their distance, watching.

“I said stop him,” Ethan ground out.

“I think they’re finished with doing what you say,” Caleb said. “I don’t think they’re very happy with you anymore.” He glanced around him at the wolves. “Do they know you murdered Kelly and Jason?”

A low growl came from the watching wolves.

“I didn’t kill them,” Ethan said. “I was with you.”

“No, you got your henchmen to do your dirty work.” Caleb looked around for his father’s seconds and spotted them at the edge of the clearing. They were trying to make their way toward Ethan, but the rest of the pack blocked their way. He turned back to his father. “You shouldn’t have done it,” he said. “I gave them my protection.”

“You had no right. The pack is mine.”

Caleb shook his head. “I don’t think so.” He gestured to the wolves all around them. “They’ve had enough of taking your orders.”

“They’ll be happy to take my orders again once you’ve gone back to your other life—forgotten them once more. They need a strong leader, not a man who hasn’t got the guts to accept what he is.”

“I’m not going anywhere, ” Caleb said, and with those words, he knew that his life was changed forever. That finally, he had let go of his dream of a life among humans. He wasn’t sure he wanted to lead the pack, but one thing he was sure of—Ethan wasn’t going to be in charge any longer.

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Ethan stared at him, disbelief in his face. "You'd go up against me because of two wolves who meant nothing to you?"

"They were mine," Caleb growled.

"So, are you going to fight me?" A hint of amusement tinted Ethan's voice, as though he didn't believe Caleb would fight, and in truth, Caleb didn't want this to end in combat. Something deep inside him resisted the idea, because whatever else this man was, he was also Caleb's father. All through his childhood, Caleb had yearned for his acceptance and approval. That need was gone, banished by his father's actions, but the memory would always linger deep beneath the hatred. Now he stared Ethan straight in the face.

"You can walk out of here," he said. "Promise never to return, and I'll let you go free."

A low growl came from the surrounding wolves. According to pack law, the old leader had to die. But things changed.

"You really think I would walk away?" Ethan asked.

Caleb strode toward him. They were of a similar height, and he looked into his father's eyes. "Walk or die."

Ethan shook his head. "You haven't the balls to kill me."

Caleb held his gaze as he shrugged out of his jacket and tossed it on the ground. He

reached up and started to unbutton his shirt, pulling it off and throwing it on top of the jacket. The cool night air felt good against his hot skin.

His father had gone instantly still as Caleb started to undress. Then he nodded and dragged his T-shirt over his head. Caleb kicked off his boots and unzipped his pants and a moment later, he stood naked.

The circling wolves fell silent, and an eerie stillness pervaded the clearing as Ethan stripped off the rest of his clothes.

Caleb turned to where Catrin stood beside him. "Move."

She stared at him wide-eyed, her gaze flickering from him to Ethan, then she backed away. She hurried to where Regan sat, still tied to the tree, and sank to her knees beside the wolf, digging her hands into the dark-red fur.

Caleb's eyes moved slowly around the circle. He knew there was a chance he would not survive this. He had seen his father fight before, but there was no turning back now.

He reached into his mind and released his wolf.

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As Caleb shifted, Regan threw back her head and howled. She rose to her paws, ignoring the pain in her ribs, and tugged at the rope that held her tethered. A hand stroked down the fur of her back, and she twisted her head around to look at the woman kneeling on the ground beside her.

"Regan."

She turned as best she could and nudged at the hand, willing her to understand, and after a moment, she nodded, and her fingers went to the knotted rope at Regan's neck and untied her.

She turned back to watch, just as Ethan shifted into a huge black wolf...

...and she was back in her own body, naked on the forest floor, the pain in her ribs excruciating. She whispered a healing spell and dragged herself up into a sitting position where she could watch the two circling wolves. She hadn't wanted this, but maybe it was for the best. Perhaps this was the only way Caleb could resolve his issues with his father.

"Should we do something?" Catrin asked from beside her.

"Like what?"

"A spell. Something, to help Caleb."

"Caleb doesn't need any help. And he needs to do this on his own—it's been a long time coming."

"Will he kill him?"

Regan rubbed her sore ribs. "I hope so."

Caleb turned to look at her out of dark-blue wolf's eyes. He cast Ethan a glance and then padded toward her. She moved so she was kneeling and opened her arms to him. He pushed his cold nose against her and rubbed his head against her breasts. Regan stroked the silky soft fur of his neck, then laid her forehead against him and burrowed her face in his thick pelt. He smelt of Caleb.

She raised her head and framed his face with her hands, stared deep into his eyes, seeing beyond the wolf to where Caleb lurked deep in his mind. His warm breath caressed her skin.

“Do this,” she said. “Do it for Kelly and for Jason. For Sarah and for your mother.”

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He growled low in his throat, then padded back to sit on his haunches facing Ethan's coal black wolf while the others formed a circle around them.

Regan scrambled to her feet. She was about to whisper a spell to dress herself when she saw Caleb's pile of clothes. She whispered a word and his shirt was in her hands. She held it to her nose, breathing in the musky male scent of him. Then she pulled it on and stepped toward the circle of wolves. They opened to allow her space, and Catrin came to stand beside her.

Tense excitement filled the clearing, barely suppressed. Neither of the two wolves within the circle moved, as though they were waiting for some signal to begin.

"You know Caleb has to kill him, don't you?" Catrin said.

Regan glanced at her briefly then back to Caleb. "He does?"

"According to pack law. I've been reading up on it. Which reminds me—I've found your spell."

This time Regan forced herself to turn and look at her sister. "My spell?"

"The one to reverse the werewolf bite."

Regan should have felt something, some sensation of relief, but her mind went blank at the idea. She couldn't think about that now, not when Caleb was about to fight for his life.

“I’ll tell you later, shall I,” Catrin said. “But I found a lot of other stuff about the wolves, and one of their laws is that the old leader must die.”

“Laws change.”

“Yes, but maybe not his time.” She paused. “The old leader must be killed in one-to-one combat, and then the rest of the pack eats them.”

“Ugh!” Regan said. “Thanks for sharing.”

One thing was certain, if by some means Caleb lost this fight, no one was eating him.

She knew that even if he won, this whole thing was going to cost him dearly, and she hoped the price wouldn’t break him. She had come to realize how hard he fought for his chance at a normal life, and after tonight that would be gone forever.

“Then after that,” Catrin continued, “there’s some sort of bonding—”

“Shh,” Regan murmured. “Something is happening.”

The two wolves rose and began to circle. Up until that point, their audience had been silent, now they threw back their heads and howled. Inside her, her own wolf strained to be free, and Regan forced her down. She had to stay in human form in case she needed to help Caleb.

Would she use magic if the fight went badly for him? She knew she would, but she was also aware that Caleb would never forgive her for interfering. But did that really matter? Presumably, when all this was over, she would do Catrin’s spell, and the ties that bound her to Caleb would be gone forever. She need never set eyes on a werewolf again. The thought did not fill her with the expected sense of pleasure, and wolf whined softly.

Inside the circle, Ethan came to a halt. He stared at Caleb stiff-legged, his muzzle drawn back in a snarl revealing long white canines, sharp as daggers. Then he crouched back on his haunches and leapt in a blur of speed. Caleb went down under the force of the blow. He rolled to his feet and shook himself.

“Fight,” Regan urged under her breath.

For a minute, it appeared as if he wouldn’t. He stood unmoving, watching as Ethan prowled around him. Catrin’s hand slid into hers and squeezed.

Regan’s gaze flicked between the two wolves, waiting for Ethan’s next move, silently praying that Caleb would fight back. She saw the moment Ethan’s muscles tensed as he readied himself to leap again. Her gaze flew back to Caleb. Resolve hardened his eyes. He leapt forward at the same time as Ethan, and the two wolves slammed into each other in midair.

They crashed to the ground together in a snarling mass of teeth and fur, then rolled, jaws snapping as each sought to get a hold. Their movements so fast Regan found it impossible to distinguish one from the other.

Finally, they parted, only to repeat the whole process over and over with neither gaining an advantage. They were both panting heavily now.

Equal in size and strength, it was obvious that Ethan was the more experienced fighter, but Regan suspected he was overconfident. Caleb seemed to be playing a waiting game, always letting his father make the first move before countering with one of his own.

Then Ethan managed to gain a grip on Caleb’s shoulder; his teeth sank in and the sharp, acrid scent of fresh blood filled the air. Caleb threw back his head and roared his fury. The pain seemed to awaken the rage inside him, and he thrashed his whole

body until Ethan was tossed from side to side. His grip loosened, and he was flung across the circle. He came to his feet immediately, the blood dripping from his jaws.

Caleb shook himself and growled. Regan's fingers tightened on Catrin's as he stalked around the circle. His whole being radiated menace as though he had at last realized this was a fight to the death, and his father meant business.

This time he attacked first, taking Ethan by surprise and driving him to the ground. Ethan countered but Caleb came back relentlessly, until Ethan's sides heaved with exhaustion while Caleb now appeared unaffected

But Regan was still unsure whether he would see this through to the end.

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Finally, he got what had to be a death grip, his teeth sinking deep into Ethan's throat. He shook him mercilessly, blood spraying across the clearing, and the watching wolves howled as the blood lust took them all.

Ethan was no longer fighting back.

"Finish it," Regan muttered, but at the last second, Caleb released his hold, and the other wolf collapsed to the ground.

Regan held her breath, waiting to see if he would rise. His eyes were open, gleaming dull gold.

The other wolf vanished, and Caleb stood in the center of the circle. A savage bite marred the smooth muscle of his shoulder but otherwise he appeared unharmed. He stared down at his father.

Ethan raised his head slightly but collapsed back. Then the wolf was gone, and Ethan lay on the ground, an open wound at his throat that spilled his blood to the dirt beneath him.

"Caleb's not going to do it, is he?" Catrin said from beside her.

Regan shrugged. "I don't know."

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Caleb's whole body ached, and his shoulder burned with pain. He knew he should

finish this now but couldn't bring himself to make the final move. Did that make him weak? He didn't care.

"Keep still," he said to Ethan. "I'll get help."

"No, you won't," Ethan replied, his voice hoarse. "I'm finished. You won." He smiled. "I really never thought you had it in you."

Caleb glanced up as Regan came to kneel beside him. "Can you help him?" he asked.

"Maybe, but he's dying, and the cost will be high."

"The cost?"

"There is always a price for magic, and magic that overcomes death is never cheap."

Ethan looked up at her. "Don't do it. This is over—my choice."

Caleb had hated his father for near enough all his life. It seemed impossible that this could be the end. He looked back at Regan, and her eyes filled with a compassion he'd never believed she could feel.

"Let him go, Caleb."

Caleb closed his eyes briefly, and then nodded. "It finishes now."

The light was fading from his father's eyes. "I need to tell you something before I go."

"Forget it." Caleb didn't think he could take some deathbed apology right now.

“No, you need to know this,” Ethan said. “I lied.”

Caleb frowned. “What about?”

“Your mother.”

A tremor ran through Caleb—what could be worse than the truth as he knew it?

Ethan must have seen something in his expression. “Not bad,” he said. “She’s alive. Or at least she was back then.”

Shock ripped through Caleb at the words. “What? How? You told me she died.”

“I made a deal with her. Whatever you think of me, I couldn’t take her by force, and I wanted a son. I told her I would set her free if she cooperated and gave me what I wanted.”

“And she agreed?” Caleb shook his head. “Of course she did,” he muttered. “Here I am, after all. So, what happened to her?”

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“She wore a spell around her neck like the one he gave me for the witch. After you were born, I took it off, destroyed it, and she simply disappeared. I never saw her again, but I—” He broke off and coughed, blood staining his lips, and Caleb fought back the need to shake him, to make him tell what he knew. Beside him, Regan whispered a word and a moment later, she handed him a glass of water. He held the glass to Ethan’s mouth. He swallowed and licked his lips.

“When you told me that she was a shapeshifter, I wondered. I often got the feeling we were being watched, but I could never discover anything, and I shrugged it off. But I think she stayed close and watched you grow.”

Caleb’s mind reeled. He couldn’t take this in. He stared at Ethan unable to decide whether this was better or worse.

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I promised her—it was part of the deal. I told you she was broken. I think she needed to be on her own, but maybe in the end she couldn’t stay away.” He shrugged, and then grimaced in pain. “I don’t think it will make a difference—you’re unlikely to survive the night, but I thought you should know.”

Regan slipped her hand into Caleb’s and squeezed. He glanced across at her.

“Ask him who he’s working with,” she said.

He turned back to Ethan, but it was too late. The light had faded from his father’s eyes. A shudder ran through his long frame, and he went still. As the life force left

him, a howl went up from the wolves all around them.

Caleb threw back his head and screamed. Inside his wolf howled to be free, and he fought for control, felt Regan grip onto his hand tight and not let go.

It was over.

Rising to his feet, he pulled Regan with him. All around, the wolves were pressing in closer, and he realized it wasn't over at all. It was just beginning.

Regan tugged at his hand. "Let's get away from here."

He looked from the body of his father to the wolves. He knew the custom; the old leader would be devoured by the pack and somehow it seemed fitting. Ethan would have approved. That didn't mean he wanted to see it.

A scuffle at the edge of the circle drew his attention. Two wolves were surrounded by a score of others. Even in their wolf form, he recognized his father's seconds, the two who had murdered Kelly and Jason. The pack was about to dispense its own justice. Caleb turned his back.

As he strode away with Regan, a howl rose up from the wolves, then a scream of pain. He ignored the sound, stepping into the darkness of the surrounding trees. He kept walking until the sound diminished to a quiet roar, then turned around and dragged her into his arms.

Chapter 19

Caleb's whole body thrummed with power, but Regan could get no sense of what he was feeling. Did he regret his father's death? Was he relieved it was now over?

But then it wasn't over. It was only beginning.

Whether he realized it or not, Caleb now had a duty to the pack. He had killed their leader. Granted, Ethan had been totally crap in the leader business, but even so, he'd done a job, and someone had to take over. And for all his denial of his heritage, she knew Caleb would make a great alpha.

She'd remained silent as he pulled her after him into the dark forest. He turned her in his arms, and she opened her mouth to speak. Then shut it again.

His eyes were hot and filled with a burning hunger. She was suddenly very aware that he was naked, while she was dressed in nothing but his white shirt. He pushed her back against the tree trunk behind her, and the rough bark scraped her skin through the thin silk. Then his body pressed against hers, the hardness of his erection pushed against her belly. He raised his hands and framed her face, staring down into her eyes.

"I need you," he ground out, almost against his will.

She had no thought to deny him. Instead, she pushed back into him, rubbing her hips against his hardness until he groaned. His hands moved between them, ripping the shirt open, devouring her breasts with his hungry eyes. He cupped one in his large hand, then lowered his mouth to her. Regan held her breath as she waited for his

touch. He took one swollen nipple into his mouth and suckled hard, sending darts of pleasure through her body to ignite a fire low in her belly. He bit down and her sex flooded with hot, wet heat. Raising his head, he stared into her eyes, his nostrils flaring as though he could scent her arousal.

He captured her gaze with his own as one hand slid down the curve of her waist, across the flat plane of her belly. Excitement held her rigid as he trailed his fingers through the curls at the base, then lower to cup her in his palm. He leaned toward her so his forehead rested against her shoulder, and she breathed in the scent of him, sweat and musk.

For a minute, he remained immobile, but she could sense his tension in the labored breaths, the thud of his heartbeat. When she could bear the anticipation no longer, she shifted slightly, raising one leg to allow him more access, and he sighed against her skin. He raised his head and kissed her as he massaged his palm against her sex. His tongue thrust between her lips as his fingers pushed inside her. His mouth slid from hers to her cheek, then down to nuzzle her throat and all the time his clever fingers played with her, dipping inside then stroking lightly over her swollen nub until she was writhing against him.

“I need you.” She repeated his words, and they were true. If she didn’t have him inside her soon, she would shatter.

His hands shifted to cup her bottom, and he lifted her until her shoulders pressed up against the tree. She leaned back for balance as Caleb held her poised. His erection nudged at the entrance to her body, then he pushed inside and filled her with one fluid move of his hips. Regan wrapped her legs around his waist, her hands gripped tight on to his shoulders.

His fingers dug into the flesh of her bottom, holding her in place as he moved her on him. He flexed, pulled out of her, and then slowly thrust back with a roll of his

powerful hips. She closed her eyes and gave herself up to the feeling as he deepened his movement, grinding his body against hers with each stroke.

Finally, he sheathed himself fully, rotating his hips in slow teasing circles so the pressure mounted higher, concentrated on that one small point between her thighs. He tensed as her inner muscles clamped tight, and she exploded against him. He thrust harder and faster until he was slamming into her, and the world ceased to exist except for his big, hard body. She opened her eyes as her climax built a second time, wanting to watch him come. The pleasure amplified until it was almost unbearable, and she threw back her head and screamed into the night as he spilled himself inside her. His head went back, and his voice joined hers. He was still moving inside her as though he couldn't bear to stop, and she leaned forward, tangled her hands into his hair, brought his face to hers, and kissed him.

At last, his body went still, and he fell to his knees with Regan clasped in his arms. He rolled as he fell, so he hit the ground beneath her, and she ended up on top, straddling his hips with him lodged firmly inside her.

She lowered her head so it rested against his chest, closed her eyes, concentrated on her breathing and the sound of his heartbeats as they gradually returned to normal.

Raising her head, she stared down at him. Caleb's eyes were closed, his mouth relaxed, and she could tell nothing from his expression. She looked lower. There was a wicked wound in his shoulder where Ethan had gotten that first bite, but the bleeding had stopped. She leaned forward and kissed it. Still he didn't move, and she looked at him suspiciously.

"Are you asleep?" she asked.

"No," he murmured. "Just recovering."

She was unsure whether he meant from the fight, from the death of his father, or from making love. Probably all three. She stroked the hard lines of his face, over his cheekbones to the shadowed hollows beneath, trailed them over the sensuous lower lip, delving inside as his mouth opened for her, loving the feel of his hot tongue lapping at her fingertips.

He gazed up at her, his eyes as blue as the summer sky in the dim, shadowy light. They were peaceful, and some of the tension drained out of her.

“You recovered now?” she asked, shifting her hips and feeling his cock swell inside her.

He smiled and nodded, thrusting up into her. Still sensitive, her muscles clenched around him, and he groaned low in his throat. Raising his hands to her waist, he held her as he turned them both so she lay beneath him. Leaning down, he kissed her, and she opened her mouth to the slow, erotic thrust of his tongue.

This time their lovemaking was languid and sweet, and they came together in an explosion of pleasure that left Regan limp and boneless. Caleb collapsed on top of her, then rolled them both so they lay arms and legs entwined on the forest floor.

???

Caleb did not want to think, and he did not want to move. Regan’s legs wrapped tightly around his waist, while her arms wound about his neck, her face burrowed against his throat. Her long hair tickled his nose, and he breathed in her scent, like wild flowers.

He’d needed her as an affirmation of life. Because his father was dead.

He had killed his own father. Wasn’t there supposed to be a corner of hell reserved

for people like him? But he knew it wasn't guilt he was experiencing. Ethan had deserved to die, had needed to die.

Regan shifted beside him. She loosened her grip on his neck and inched away, resting her chin on her hand and staring into his face.

"I can almost hear your brain working," she said.

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He frowned. “Ethan is dead, and I thought I would feel nothing, but—”

“But?”

“I hated him, but he loved me.”

“He tortured you. You have nothing to be guilty about.”

“I don’t feel guilty. I just wish it could have been different between us.”

“Do you believe he was telling the truth about your mother?”

Caleb had been avoiding thinking about that one. It was inconceivable that his mother had been alive all these years. In some ways, it was yet another betrayal. One more person who had walked away from him.

“I don’t know,” he said. “There was no reason for him to lie. And does it matter? If she is alive, she obviously wants nothing to do with me.” He could hear the bitterness in his own voice.

“Perhaps that’s not her fault,” Regan said gently. “You heard what Kael said—she’d been a prisoner for so long. Can you even begin to imagine what that would be like, what she went through? Gina told me they almost broke Raven, and they only had her for seven years.”

Caleb closed his eyes. She was right—he couldn’t imagine it. He did know how his father’s treatment of him had twisted his whole character. What would it be like to

suffer torture year after year, knowing that there might never be an end to it? Could he blame her?

“We’ll find her,” Regan said. “If she’s alive, then we’ll find her. Kael will search to the ends of the earth.”

“My father told me she was broken,” Caleb said. He shook his head. “Maybe she doesn’t want to be found.”

Was she even still alive? Or had she gone away on her own and died somewhere alone? He hoped she’d found peace wherever she was.

Regan leaned down and kissed him briefly. “Then once we know she is safe, she can be alone again.”

They were silent for a few minutes. Caleb rolled onto his back and stared at the tree canopy above them and beyond it to the star strewn sky. Then he remembered something.

“By the way,” he said, “you ever do that magic shit on me again, and I’ll—”

She grinned. “You’ll what?”

“I’ll be really pissed off.”

“I definitely won’t do it then.” She pulled away from him and sat up. She still wore his white silk shirt, but the buttons were gone, and it hung open at the front. She glanced down as she caught him staring, then back at his face and smiled, a slow, seductive smile that caused the blood to thicken in his veins.

“We should get back,” she murmured.

He didn't want to go back, but he knew she was right. There was the pack to sort out and—

“Oh, God,” he said. “Your sister, Catrin. We left her with all those wolves.”

“She'll be okay,” Regan replied. “She could do with a little excitement in her life.”

“They've probably eaten her.”

“Don't be silly—she's a witch. But we should still get back.”

There had been no sound from the clearing for a while, but at that moment, a howl went up from the wolves. Caleb scrambled to his feet.

“What the hell's that?”

“I think maybe the cavalry has arrived.”

“The cavalry?”

“The Council. I told Catrin to tell them what was going on. That was when I thought she might need the help, before I realized she would completely go against my wishes and bring you along.”

Caleb remembered Kael's words about how the wolves would pay for what had happened to his sister, and a sense of urgency filled him. No way was the Council touching his people. They would have to go through Caleb first.

Reaching down a hand to Regan, he pulled her to her feet. “Come on. Let's go.”

Chapter 20

They came to a halt at the edge of the tree line, and it took Regan a few seconds to make sense of the scene. The place was teeming with people. Although “people” was probably the wrong word.

At this side of the clearing, the pack milled, still in wolf form, and every few seconds, one would throw back its head and howl. Regan could sense their nervousness, but beneath that, they were ready for a fight. They had tasted blood and were eager for more.

The Council faced them from the far side of the clearing. Kael stood at their center, Darius to one side, with at least twenty others ranged around them. She looked closer and realized that most of them were vampires. She shivered in the cool night air, pulling the shirt around her. They’d obviously come in force, and she appreciated that they had taken her request seriously, but she wished they were not quite so blatantly antagonistic.

Between the two groups, and apparently all that separated them, stood the slender figure of her sister, Catrin. A massive hellhound flanked her on either side, but it was Catrin that kept them apart. Even from this distance, Regan could see that her sister bristled with hostility.

Caleb strode forward, pulling her along with him. She wondered whether he realized that he was naked and she was near enough. If he did, it wasn’t slowing him down. She thought about magicing up some clothes, but then it was too late—all eyes in the clearing turned to them.

Caleb dragged her to a halt beside Catrin. Her sister turned from where she confronted Kael, her eyes widening as they looked from Caleb to Regan. Regan's hand tightened on the shirt where she held it closed at her front, and Catrin's eyes narrowed, a look of disgust flashing across her small, expressive face.

Regan opened her mouth to speak, but Catrin beat her to it. "I cannot believe you two disappeared off into the wood for a quick shag at a time like this."

"I— "

"Don't try and deny it," Catrin shouted. She took a deep breath, and her eyes flashed brighter. "I can smell it on you."

Regan glanced around her. Everyone in the clearing had gone silent while they listened to the conversation. Kael looked amused, Darius was grinning, and Regan realized with a start of surprise that she felt embarrassed. It wasn't something she could remember feeling before.

"Catrin, shut up," she muttered.

"No, I won't shut up! I came to rescue you, at great personal inconvenience, and you left me with a pack of hungry wolves."

"They're not hungry," Regan replied, trying to calm her sister.

"That's only because they just ate three people. Whole. In front of me. But I'm sure they could have found room for one more."

Annoyance pricked at Regan. "What?" she snapped. "Now you're helpless?"

Catrin took a deep breath. "I just think you could have waited."

“You were the one that told me I needed to get a man.”

“So, you’ve got one. There’s no need to flaunt him quite so much.”

Catrin was jealous; it came to Regan in a flash of insight. Her little sister was mad with jealousy. Regan glanced at Caleb, who stood beside her, holding her hand, quite unconcerned by the fact that he was naked, and his sex life was being discussed. She let her eyes wander over him—he was definitely worth looking at, big and powerful. Her eyes dropped lower.

“Stop looking at him like that,” Catrin ground out. “And tell him to put some clothes on.”

“Tell him yourself,” Regan said.

Caleb pulled away from her and crossed the clearing to where his clothes lay in a pile. He pulled on his pants and came back to them but wisely remained quiet. Regan didn’t know what to make of her sister in this mood.

“Better?” Regan asked.

Catrin nodded sullenly.

“So, what’s going on here?” Regan asked.

“He,” Catrin said, pointing toward Kael, “wants to take them,” she turned and gestured to the wolves, “into custody for questioning.”

Caleb swung round to face Kael, his eyes narrowing. “Leave them alone,” he growled.

“I was trying to tell him that,” Catrin replied. “But I could have done with a bit more help.”

Behind them, the wolves settled. Regan turned to look at them. They were all focused on Caleb. Some even lay down on the ground and watched with their heads resting on their paws. They obviously trusted him to look after them, and she smiled. It looked as if—whether he liked it or not—Caleb was now pack leader.

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He stepped up to Kael, stood facing the other man. They were the same height, Kael blond while Caleb was dark, but there were similarities in the underlying bone structure when you knew to look.

Someone came to stand beside her, and she glanced around at Darius. His eyes made a slow perusal of her body, down over her long bare legs and back to her face.

“Catrin’s right,” he murmured.

“What about?” she asked suspiciously.

He breathed in deeply. “You reek of sex.” He nodded toward Caleb. “Is your boyfriend going to cooperate?”

“I suppose it depends what you want him to cooperate with,” she said. “Why don’t you listen and find out.”

“Aren’t you supposed to be feeling all mellow?” he asked, and she scowled and turned away.

“My father is dead,” Caleb said.

Kael looked around the clearing. “Where’s the body?”

“It was disposed of according to pack law.”

Beside her, Darius grinned again. “They ate him, didn’t they?”

Regan ignored the comment.

Something flashed across Kael's face, and Regan got the distinct impression that he would have liked to see a body.

"It's true," Catrin spoke up. "They ate him. I saw it. Close up."

Regan rolled her eyes and turned back to listen to Caleb.

"The rest of the pack has nothing to do with you," he said. "They're mine. Leave them alone."

Kael nodded. "Okay."

Caleb looked a little nonplussed at the easy answer. He frowned.

"I'll leave it up to you," Kael said, "but I want to know everything they knew about my sister."

Caleb glanced back at Regan before answering, and she nodded slightly.

"She may be alive," he said.

Shock flashed across Kael's face. "What?"

"Before he died, my father told me that my mother might be alive."

"Might?" Kael's brows drew together in a frown, but a flicker of hope showed in his eyes.

"After I was born, he let her go. He said she was wearing some sort of spell that kept

her trapped. He made a deal—give him a son, and he would destroy the spell and release her.”

“You believe him?”

“There was no reason to lie—he was dying.”

“So where is she? Why didn’t she come back to me?”

Caleb was silent for a minute, and Regan knew he must be thinking how much to tell Kael.

“My father said she was broken. Perhaps she wanted it all to end. Maybe she’s dead after all.”

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Kael's fists clenched at his side. "No," he growled. "She wouldn't kill herself."

"You can't know that for sure." Caleb sighed. "The pack would never speak to me of her, but now Ethan's dead, I'll find out what they know. Where she was last seen. It will give us a starting point."

"I never felt her," Kael said. He rubbed a hand over his forehead. "Why would I not sense her presence?"

Caleb shrugged. "Maybe she didn't want you to."

Kael turned away. He strode to the edge of the clearing and stood staring into the darkness. After a few minutes, the tension drained from him, and he turned back.

"We'll find her, if she's alive." His eyes looked beyond Caleb to where the pack waited. "We want you to join the Council," he said.

"What? Why?"

"We decided it's not good to leave the wolves outside the supernatural community. We still don't know exactly what your father was involved in, but whatever it is we don't want it to happen again."

Caleb stared at him, eyes narrowed. "I'll think about it."

Kael smiled slightly at the answer. "Good. Now what was going on here tonight?"

Regan stepped forward. Kael's eyes dropped to her near naked body. She scowled, then whispered a word and was fully dressed in black pants, boots, and a black sweater. She held Kael's shirt, and she handed it to him; he was too distracting half naked.

She thought for a moment, getting the facts ordered in her mind. "Ethan was working with someone. I think he must have been working with them for a long time, at least before Caleb was born."

"He was given your sister as payment for his loyalty," Caleb said.

"So, whoever it is must have some connection with the fire-demons, as we know Kyla was taken by Sorien," Kael said. "But you don't have any idea who it could be?"

Caleb turned to Regan, one eyebrow raised. She ignored the look. "No, we don't know who he was working with."

"Don't you?" Caleb asked, and she swung round to stare at him.

The truth was—she couldn't know for sure, and until she did, she wasn't saying anything.

She glanced across the clearing at the pyre. A bonfire on Samhain night to call someone from another world. Who would come through if she lit that fire tonight? She looked back to find them all watching her.

"No, I don't know," she replied.

Caleb shook his head but didn't say anything further. Kael looked at her, then shrugged.

“Okay. We’ll head back to the Council and go over everything in detail. We’ll find something.”

Catrin came to stand beside her. “Do you want to know that spell now?”

“What spell?” Regan asked absently.

Catrin sighed loudly; she clearly hadn’t forgiven her yet. “The spell to reverse the werewolf bite.”

Regan glanced up and saw Caleb watching her. “You’re going to reverse the bite?” he asked.

He sounded shocked, and she frowned. “I told you Catrin was looking for a spell.”

Something close to betrayal flickered in his eyes, and a jolt of guilt stabbed her. But she couldn’t think about this now. Caleb turned away, and Regan swallowed down the words to call him back, to apologize for something she hadn’t even done yet. She’d never lied to him about looking for the spell. He knew all along that she had no intention of remaining a wolf. Still, the guilt filled her mind as she watched him walk away toward his pack.

“I take it you don’t want the spell right now,” Catrin said following her gaze.

“Later,” she muttered.

Regan wandered away from Catrin toward the bonfire. She couldn’t shake free of the idea that had planted itself in her brain. She needed to know for certain. How could they fight someone if they had no clue who or what they were fighting?

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Glancing down, she spotted Ethan's lighter where it lay among the pine needles on the forest floor. She bent and picked it up, flicked it on, then off, ran her fingers through the blue flame.

She looked up to find Catrin watching her.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"I need to know," she said. "This thing is not going away. If he doesn't come through tonight, then he'll find another way."

"Then let him."

She shook her head. "Once I know, then I can work out how to fight this thing."

She looked across the clearing and Caleb caught her eye. He looked from her to the bonfire and then came on over.

"What's going on?" he asked, coming to stand beside them.

"We'll never have a better chance to finish this," she said. "We have a hoard of vampires and a pack of wolves at our back."

Regan took a step toward the pyre, and Caleb reached out and grabbed her arm. He stared down into her eyes, searched her face, and then nodded.

She flicked on the lighter and touched it to the wood. The flames flared to immediate

life.

They both stood back and watched as the fire took hold. Soon, a roaring conflagration reached up to the night sky. The scent of burning resin filled the air, and the heat of the fire warmed her face. For a minute, it appeared as though nothing further would happen. Then, in the heart of the fire, the flames darkened to deep crimson.

They gave out no heat now, and the night grew cold around them. Regan shivered, hugged her arms around herself, and inched closer to Caleb. His arm came around her, and he pulled her back against the warmth of his bare chest.

“Come away,” he whispered in her ear.

But she stood transfixed. As she watched, the crimson turned to midnight blue, darkening until she stared into a pit of blackness. Regan couldn’t look away, her eyes fixed on the shape that slowly materialized out of the flames.

A man on a huge, black horse leapt from the fire, a stream of hounds following, until the clearing appeared full of the wildly baying creatures.

Caleb forced her backward, and the horse tossed its head and pranced beneath its rider, while the pack of hellhounds swarmed about its hooves. The rider raised a hand and they fell silent.

Regan took a deep breath, forced her gaze upward, and her heart stopped beating.

For years, she’d dreamed of him, and in her dreams, he’d looked just like this. Golden skin, glossy black hair that fell to his shoulders, eyes a pale green flecked with gold and pupils slanted like a cat’s. He smiled down at her, and a sharp pain stabbed through her heart.

The horse danced beneath him, but he held it with ease, almost seeming at one with the wild creature.

“Regan,” he murmured, and his rich voice was filled with warmth. Then his eyes narrowed on her before shifting to Caleb, who stood behind her, his arms wrapped around her waist. The smile slid from his face, replaced by a cold, cruel mask of loathing. Regan fought the urge to pull free. Instead, she pressed herself back against Caleb, and as she felt him along the length of her body, a measure of calm returned.

“Sardi,” she said, “I thought you were dead.”

“Obviously not.” He glanced around the clearing, then back at Regan. “Where is Ethan Stone?”

“Now he’s definitely dead,” she replied.

He raised an eyebrow. “You killed him?”

“I did.” Caleb dropped his arm from her waist and stepped forward.

Sardi studied him. “Who are you?”

“Caleb Stone.”

His eyes widened. “You killed your own father.”

Caleb nodded.

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“And now you think to steal my woman.”

“I am not your woman,” Regan ground out.

“And are you his? Think about this—you could very well be signing his death warrant.”

“I’m not anybody’s,” she snapped.

“You’ve changed,” he said, a frown playing across his features.

Regan rolled her eyes. “Well it has been two thousand years. Did you think I’d stay the same naïve girl?”

“You were sweet.”

“Well, I’m not sweet any longer.”

“No, I can vouch for that,” Caleb murmured from beside her.

Sardi frowned. His gaze left her and roamed around the clearing, obviously taking in the vampires and the wolves. His hands tightened on the reins, and the horse moved restlessly beneath him. He looked back at Regan.

“I loved you. I still love you. We could be together again as we were meant to be.”

She stared at him in amazement. That he could try and pretend he still possessed

feelings for her—if he'd ever had feelings in the first place—was almost beyond comprehension. “You ordered a goddamn werewolf to bite me.”

“I merely wished to ensure that you would listen to me.”

She shook her head. “Well, here I am, and I'm listening. So, what would you like me to do for you this time? Let me guess—open the gates to Hell, perhaps? Same as last time.”

“And why not? What happened before was due to your mother's interference. I know you would never have acted that way alone.”

“You're so wrong.” Regan looked around her to give herself some time to think. While she'd been focused on Sardi, the others had moved until the wolves formed a half circle behind her and Caleb. The vampires and other Council members had done the same in front of them, so she, Caleb, and Catrin stood facing Sardi in the center of a circle.

She looked back at Sardi, sitting his horse, and he smiled, a warm, seductive smile, and held out a hand to her. “Come with me, Regan. Remember how we were together, how good it was. It can be that way again.”

At the sight of that smile, something relaxed inside her, a tension she hadn't even been aware existed. It came to her then—all this time, ever since she'd first suspected that Sardi might be involved—she'd been harboring the secret fear that she was still in love with him. That when she came face to face with him, all the old feelings would resurface.

She was aware Sardi believed she loved him, despite her having tried to destroy him all those years ago. That's why Ethan warned Caleb that her loyalty might be in question. Besides, she could see it in the cocky confidence Sardi now displayed.

The truth was she felt nothing for him. Not even hatred. She was free.

She looked him in the eye, and his smile faltered. "I'll never go with you," she said. "I'll never do what you ask. I'll die first."

The smile slid from his face, replaced by a look of fury.

"No," Sardi replied. "You won't die first. Perhaps your wolf will." He looked around him, his eyes settling on Catrin's small figure. "And maybe your sister. That would be a fitting punishment for your meddling mother as well. By the way, don't expect her to be helping you this time."

The horse lunged forward, straight at Regan. She tensed, her muscles ready to leap away, but at the last moment, someone shoved her hard in the side, and she crashed to the ground. She rolled onto all fours and looked up to see Catrin standing where she'd been just a moment ago.

"Catrin, move," she screamed.

Caleb leapt toward her, but Regan was between them, and Sardi leaned down, scooped Catrin up, and slung her across his horse's withers. Drawing a dagger from the sheath at his waist, he held it to Catrin's throat.

"No one move, or I'll slice her open." He turned to Regan, and his lips curved into a malicious smile. "Oh, I think you'll come to me, Regan. If you want your sister back alive." He looked down at Catrin. "Say good-bye," he murmured.

Catrin bit her lip. "I'm sorry, Regan. I just wanted to help."

Regan opened her mouth to throw out a spell, but Sardi pressed the knife to Catrin's throat, so a single drop of crimson welled up beneath the blade.

“Don’t,” he said, and the warning was clear.

She closed her lips tight then struggled to her knees. “Sardi—”

But he turned away before she could finish.

Regan had a last brief glimpse of her sister’s wide, staring eyes as the horse swung around. No one moved as it reared up once, and then leaped over the surrounding circle, galloped down the hill into the forest, leaving the sound of Sardi’s mocking laughter echoing in Regan’s ears. The circle broke and the hounds streamed after him. Regan watched in numb silence, hardly able to believe that Catrin was gone.

“Sardi!” she screamed out his name, but the sound was swallowed by the darkness.

Chapter 21

Regan stared at the gap in the forest where Sardi and Catrin had vanished. The sound of hoofbeats faded, but she could still hear the faint baying of the hounds in the distance. She bit her lip.

How could she have let this happen?

Caleb put his hand on her shoulder and squeezed. “We’ll get her back.”

“Will we? But at what price?” She shook her head. “This is my fault. I was so arrogant, believing I could control the situation. Why did he take her? He could have taken me; I would have gone instead. Why Catrin?”

“To cause you pain.”

Beside them, the bonfire dwindled, and she turned away from the forest to gaze into the glowing embers. “I should never have lit the fire.”

“You did what you thought was right.”

“It wasn’t right,” she said. “But then, I always think I know best.”

“Maybe that’s because most of the time you do.”

“Not this time, and now Catrin is paying for that.” She glanced up as Darius and Kael stepped back into the clearing.

“They’re long gone,” Darius said. He turned to Regan. “So I take it you know this guy?”

She nodded. “I did, a long time ago.”

“And you and he had a thing.”

“A thing?”

“You know, an exchange-of-bodily-fluids thing.”

Regan stared at him, eyes narrowed. “Have I ever mentioned the fact that I dislike you intensely?”

Darius grinned. “Once or twice.”

Kael shook his head. “I suggest we get back to the Council and decide exactly how we’re going to go after this man.”

Something cold and wet pushed against Regan’s hand. She jumped then looked down. Diablo pressed his nose against her. She stroked his huge head as something occurred to her.

“They must have been gifts from Sardi,” she said, looking at the two hellhounds. “I thought they were from my mother, but she would never admit it. Sardi must have sent them.”

“A gift from an old lover,” Darius murmured. “How sweet.”

She opened her mouth to say something then decided—what was the point? She turned to Caleb.

“Are you coming back to the Council?”

“Yes, he is.” Kael answered for him.

Caleb scowled but nodded. “Just give me a few minutes. I need to sort my wolves out, and then we’re out of here.”

Regan glanced around and realized that most of the wolves had returned to their human form. They were pulling on clothes while casting suspicious glances toward the Council. Regan was unsurprised; they’d probably never seen vampires before, and many of those vampires were eying the werewolves with hungry looks. She hoped Darius and Kael could control their people, or this had the potential to descend into a bloodbath.

Kael must have been thinking the same thing. “I take it you’ll travel back with the wolf,” he said, and Regan could tell from his words that he was far from accepting Caleb yet.

She nodded.

“We’ll see you back at the Council then.” He turned and melted into the forest. Darius gave her one last grin and followed him, the rest of the vampires falling in behind until only the wolves remained.

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Caleb was talking to a tall woman with shoulder-length blond hair. Regan wandered over.

He turned to her. “This is Sophie. She’s the highest-ranking of the wolves that are left.”

Sophie didn’t look particularly pleased at the introduction. She’d been gazing at Caleb with adoration clear in her eyes. When she turned to Regan, the adoration slipped away, and her cold, blue eyes issued a challenge. Regan sighed. If the woman thought that being the highest-ranking wolf gave her some sort of claim on the new pack leader then she needed to rethink her ideas, and fast. If Sophie laid so much as a finger on Caleb, she’d get it bitten off.

Still, Regan had no wish to turn this into some sort of wolf pissing contest. She so didn’t need that right now. What she needed was to get back to the Council and start the search for Catrin. She stared at Sophie, reached inside herself, allowed wolf to peek out through her eyes and a growl to trickle from her throat. Sophie’s eyes widened, and her gaze dropped away. She took a step back.

Good.

Sophie might be high ranking among Ethan’s pack, but Regan’s wolf was way higher, and they both knew it. Hopefully, Sophie would inform the rest, and this little power play wouldn’t have to be repeated.

Regan forced a smile and held out her hand—who said she couldn’t be gracious when the situation called for it? Sophie took it with a frown of surprise. Then she turned

back to Caleb.

“I’ll tell the rest of the pack,” she said. “We’ll see you for the ceremony tomorrow night.” She turned and joined the others, spoke with them briefly, and one by one they slipped away into the night until Regan was standing alone with Caleb.

“Ceremony?” she asked.

“To introduce me to the pack as their new leader. Give anyone who wants to a chance to object.”

“Is that likely?”

He lifted a shoulder. “It doesn’t matter—there’s no one strong enough to be a threat.”

“Good.” She looked at him in the dim light. “Have you slept with her?”

He glanced at her, his eyes widening in surprise. “Who?”

“Your little blond wolf.”

He grinned. “Jealous?”

“Maybe.”

He seemed surprised at her answer, then he shrugged. “I haven’t seen Sophie since I left the pack over twenty years ago.”

The tension drained out of her, and then she realized something. “You didn’t answer the question,” she said, staring at him suspiciously.

He was naked from the waist up, his shirt clenched in his fist. Now he shrugged into it, and she got the distinct impression he was giving himself time to think of an answer. He couldn't fasten the shirt as he'd ripped the buttons off earlier, and he stood with it hanging open, his hands thrust into his pockets, looking decidedly shifty. Regan fought the urge to go to him, run her hands over his bare chest

"She's nothing to me," he said.

"But?"

"We had a thing."

God, that word again. "A thing?"

"When I was sixteen. Just before I left the pack for good. It was nothing."

"She obviously doesn't see it as nothing."

"My God, you are jealous."

This time she gave in to the urge, stepped toward him, and pressed her palm against his naked chest. His skin was hot and smooth under her hand. She trailed her fingers down over the lean muscles of his belly, slipped them inside the waistband of his pants, and pulled him closer.

"My wolf didn't like it," she said.

His lips curled at the corners. "Your wolf made that very clear."

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“Blondie needed to know who was boss.”

She reached up and kissed him. For a minute, he was with her all the way, and she melted against him, forgetting her problems. Then he pulled back. He cupped her chin with one large hand, tilted her face so he could look down into her eyes, searching for something.

“And are you the boss?” he asked. “I got the impression you were just waiting for the right moment, you’d do your clever little spell, and your whole nasty werewolf problem would disappear.”

She pulled free of his grip and stepped back. She’d forgotten about Catrin’s spell and what it might mean, but she couldn’t think straight right now. Besides, without Catrin to tell her the spell, the whole thing was academic anyway. She looked at Caleb and frowned. “Leave it, Caleb. I can’t think about this while Catrin’s missing.”

“And then what?”

“I don’t know.” She shook her head. “That’s the truth. Right now I can’t see past stopping Sardi because that is not going to be easy.”

“Who is he?”

“Wait till we get to the Council,” she replied. “I don’t want to tell this more than once.”

“Then tell me one thing—do you still love him?”

“No. If nothing else good has come out of this night, then at least that has.”

“So, you weren’t sure?”

“It was a long time ago. I was young, and it all ended so badly that he wasn’t someone I could easily forget. But seeing him again”—she shrugged—“I felt nothing. Not love. Not hatred. Until he took Catrin. Now I’ll hunt him down, and I’ll finish what I failed to do all those years ago.”

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They drove back to the city in silence. There was a faint red glow in the east and Caleb realized that dawn was not far away. He concentrated on the road ahead and tried to keep his mind clear, but thoughts kept intruding.

So much had happened that night.

His father was dead.

He felt no sadness, only regret for what might have been. He’d never been the son his father wanted. Would his life have been different if Ethan had known more? If he’d known what Caleb’s mother was, that Caleb would not turn until he was older? Then the torture would never have happened. Would Caleb have been happy to stay with the pack, not gone his own way? Would he have dreamed of a life among humans if he’d known he had not a single drop of human blood in his veins?

Ignorance had caused this, and from now on Caleb determined that he would not be guilty of that as his father was. From now on, his wolves would not be shunned and kept as outcasts. Caleb would take a place on the Council, and he would make sure they knew everything there was to know about this whole supernatural world.

In the past, he'd forced himself not to think of what went on in that world. Now he felt a stirring of excitement at the thought of discovering the secrets. He'd learned so much since Regan had come into his life.

He glanced sideways at her. She was staring out of the window, but it was obvious she saw nothing. Her teeth worried at her lower lip, and her hands clenched together on her lap. He had a flashback to those lips and hands on his body when they'd made love earlier that night, and heat pooled at his groin.

He knew he had accepted this new life, but he also realized that part of that was because he wanted Regan at his side. A stab of pain ripped through him when he thought of the idea that she might turn her back on him. Simply speak a spell and walk away from their chance of a life together. He pushed the thought away, but maybe she sensed his reaction because she turned to him.

"I can't help thinking about Catrin," she said. "Where she is. What Sardi has done to her."

He frowned. "You think he'll harm her?"

"I don't know."

He could hear the tremor of fear in her voice. "You fell in love with this guy—how bad can he be?"

She forced a faint smile. "Maybe I have appalling taste in men. How can I know what he'll do? He kept his real self hidden from me. Even when I found out what he was, I didn't believe he was truly evil. Then I found out he was working with the fire-demons." She turned to look back out of the window. "It's almost morning," she said. "At least we won't have to put up with any vampires."

She was changing the subject and Caleb let her. He would find out soon enough. They reverted to silence and eventually pulled up into the underground garage beneath the Council.

This time they didn't wait for a welcoming committee. Caleb followed Regan deeper into the building, back to the same conference room where they had met before.

Regan pushed open the door and they both entered. Caleb stepped to the side as Gina launched herself at her sister. For a moment, Regan buried herself in her sister's arms, then she pulled free and stepped back.

"I can't believe he took Catrin," Gina said.

“We’ll get her back,” Regan replied.

Her tone was confident, and Caleb could hear no trace of the doubts that had plagued her earlier.

“At least Lola is safe.”

“Where is she?” he asked. He hadn’t seen Lola since that first time he had visited Regan’s home.

“We sent her up to Scotland to stay with friends of Darius,” Gina replied.

“Vampires?”

His surprise must have shown in his voice because Gina narrowed her eyes in his direction. “And what’s wrong with vampires?”

“Er...nothing.” Well, apart from the blood-sucking-monster bit. But he presumed they wouldn’t have sent Lola unless it was safe.

He glanced around the room. With the exception of Catrin, it was the same group as before. Kael and Darius sat at the table. Raven stood behind her husband, one hand on his shoulder. She smiled at Caleb, flashing her small white fangs, and a wave of heat washed through him at the memory of them piercing his skin. He looked away quickly, then stepped toward the table and took a seat opposite Kael. He glanced around for Regan. She was staring at Darius, a look of resignation on her face.

She scowled. “Shouldn’t you be tucked up in your coffin or something?”

“And miss this?” he drawled. “You’ve got to be kidding.”

Regan ignored him and sat down next to Caleb. She fidgeted in her seat, and Caleb realized she didn’t want to talk about Sardi. How could he blame her?

“So,” Kael said. “Who is this man?”

“His name is Sardi,” she said. “He’s one of the Lords of the Underworld.”

“And you knew him.”

She nodded but remained silent, seemingly lost in thought.

“Come on, Regan.” Kael’s voice held an edge of impatience. “You have to give us more than that.”

Caleb reached under the table and touched her thigh. She glanced at him, surprise showing in her expression, then she slipped her hand into his and squeezed.

Then she took a deep breath. “I met Sardi over two thousand years ago,” she began. “I was eighteen, and I was on my own for the first time. Up until then, I’d stayed with my mother. She obviously thought eighteen years was quite long enough and pushed me out into the world.”

“So, what did he want?”

“I believe he targeted me because I have the power to open the gates between the worlds. He wanted to bring his people through. He was in league with the fire-demons, and they’ve always had plans to take over this world. Of course, I didn’t

know that at the time. I thought..." She paused then shrugged her shoulders. "It doesn't matter what I thought."

"He was working with the fire-demons?" Kael asked. "You know this for sure?"

She nodded. "My mother returned. She knew Sardi from the past. She told me what he was. I faced him with what she'd told me, and he didn't deny it. In fact, he boasted how he and the fire-demons would take over the world of men. He said I could reign at his side." Her expression hardened. "He thought by then that my feelings were so involved I would do anything for him."

"Obviously, he didn't know you too well," Darius murmured from across the table, and Caleb flashed him a look of dislike.

She'd been eighteen, and this guy Sardi had obviously traded on that. He was responsible for the woman she was today. She was strong enough to come through it, but it was clear now that it had dented her confidence, her trust. But he realized it was more than that. Regan had loved this man. Even when she knew what he was and how he planned to use her. She'd probably loved him right to the moment she used her considerable powers to destroy him. What would that have done to her?

It wasn't so much her faith in men that was smashed—it was her faith in herself. For two thousand years, she hadn't risked falling in love again, and Caleb wasn't sure that she would risk it now. Somehow, he needed to find a way to overcome that.

"He's powerful." Regan was speaking faster now, as though she wanted this over with. "Most of our magic won't work against him. Without my mother's help, I would never have defeated him."

"How did you do it?"

“Together, we wove a spell of destruction. It should have destroyed him, but he must be even stronger than we believed.” She bit her lip, a small frown forming on her face. “My mother told me he was gone. Maybe she lied.”

“Why would she do that?” Darius asked.

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She shrugged. “You’ve met my mother. Who knows why she does anything? Anyway, Sardi was obviously weakened. He must have gone back to where he came from but has slowly regained his strength until he was able to return.”

“And what do you think he wants?”

“The same as he wanted back then. He’s always had access to this world, but his followers can’t come through without a portal.”

“So there’s only so much damage he can do here without a gate being opened. What about your sister, Catrin?”

Caleb felt her stiffen beside him. “What about her?”

“Can she open a gate?”

“She can, but she won’t.”

“You don’t think he can force her? Use torture?”

Caleb glanced at her face; the color had drained from her skin, and he knew she was blaming herself again, but there was nothing he could say to make it better. She needed to face the truth.

“I don’t know.”

Gina got to her feet and came around the table. She sat next to Regan and took her

other hand. Regan looked into her sister's face, and Caleb saw some message pass between the two of them.

"I keep telling myself that Sardi won't hurt her," Regan said. "I loved him once. I couldn't love a man who would do something like that."

"But he's not a man," Darius said. "He's a demon."

They were all silent for a while. Then Kael turned to Caleb. "Tell me what your father told you about Kyla."

Caleb recounted his father's words. Kael winced when he said that Ethan had described his sister as broken, but otherwise he remained emotionless throughout the story. At the end, he frowned. "And he never saw her again?"

"He said not, but he also said that at times he felt as though he was being watched and could never find who it was."

"Why didn't she come back?" Kael rubbed at his temples. "If she was free, why didn't she come and find me?"

"Maybe she needed time alone," Raven said from beside him. "Perhaps she didn't want you to see her like that. She'd been a prisoner for a long time. Who knows what she went through."

"We have to find her," Kael said.

"Even if she doesn't want to be found?" Caleb asked.

Thoughts of his mother had been going through his mind since his father's dying words. He didn't know what to think or what to do. He'd always wanted to know

about her, but then again, he'd always accepted the fact of her death. He'd always believed she hadn't left him voluntarily, that she had died.

Now he needed to get his head around the idea that she was alive. That she was just one more person who had abandoned him to his father's tender care. It was hard to take in, and he knew he was being unfair, but the bitterness wouldn't leave him. Regan squeezed his hand, but he didn't return the gesture.

After all, here was another woman who would turn her back on him as soon as she was able. He pulled his hand free, and confusion flickered across her face.

"Yes." Kael answered his question. "Even if she doesn't want to be found. She's not well, we can help her."

Caleb nodded. "I'll take you to my father's house. It would be the last place she was seen. We can go from there."

"We?"

Caleb released his tight hold on the bitterness inside him. "She may be your sister, but she's also my mother."

"Okay, we go together. First, we need to find this Sardi. Send him back to where he came from. Where would he go?"

Regan shrugged. "I don't know. His allies here are dead. We need to know more about him. We need my bloody mother. She knows him."

"Can't you get hold of her?"

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“No,” Regan snapped. “She’s not answering my prayers.”

“Maybe you need to pray harder,” Darius said.

“Or perhaps you could have a go,” Regan replied sweetly. “As she seemed to take a liking to you.”

Caleb saw a shudder of unease ripple across the vampire’s expression. It made him wonder what Regan’s mother was like. Then Regan sighed.

“What is it?” Caleb asked.

“I was remembering something Sardi said. He told me not to expect any help from my mother this time. I can’t help thinking there might be a reason she’s not answering.”

“Could he have done something to her?”

“I don’t know.” She shook her head. “I’ll try and contact her. But don’t hold your breath.”

???

Regan cast a sideways glance at Caleb. He had drawn away from her both mentally and physically. And who could blame him? This whole mess was her fault.

His face was closed, expressionless, but his body was tense. It was obvious that he

regretted their closeness earlier, and a wave of longing washed over her. She longed to be alone with him, find somewhere they could release their wolves, run together until they fell from exhaustion, and then make love until they forgot everything. Wolf stirred at the thought. Caleb must have felt her. He flicked her a look of surprise, and for a brief flash, she saw his own wolf peek out from his eyes. Then he shut down.

She released a sigh of regret. She'd always known it could never work between them. She had loved once in her life and look how that ended. But at least it had ended. One of the reasons she refused resolutely to believe that Sardi could be alive was she was terrified that her feelings hadn't died. That she would have to relive the whole scenario of destroying the one thing she loved. She wasn't sure she could survive that a second time.

She looked again at Caleb. Tonight, for the first time, he had come to terms with what he was. He was strong. If he survived this whole Sardi fiasco, he would make a great leader. He was a man worthy of her love, but was she worthy of his? Could she ever bring anything but pain and destruction? Would she destroy him in the end as she had destroyed Sardi?

But Caleb wasn't Sardi.

She realized that while she had survived Sardi, she would not want to survive if anything happened to Caleb. She'd seen how Sardi had looked at him. She needed to find a way to keep them apart.

But her first priority was to get Catrin away and safe. Unfortunately, she had no clue how to start.

Where was her goddamn mother?

She pushed back her chair and rose to her feet. Gina still held her hand, and Regan

pulled free.

“I’m going to see if I can’t get hold of our dear mama,” she muttered.

Gina bit her lip but nodded. “Good luck.”

“Yeah, I’ll need it.”

She glanced again at Caleb; hoping he would say something, offer to come with her. Of course she would turn him down, but she needed some sign that he cared. Instead, he looked away.

She sighed and headed for the door. Caleb spoke as she was about to leave the room.

“Will you be at the pack ceremony tomorrow night?” His voice was toneless; she could get nothing of his thoughts. Did he want her there?

“I’ll be there.”

She made her way up to the roof of the building. Not that it would make any difference, but she liked to be outside to pray. The sun was fully risen now, but low in the sky. She stood and listened to the sounds of the city, muted up here but ever-present, the air filled with the scent of too many people, living too close together. She longed to be home.

With Caleb at her side.

She wanted to run with him in the ancient forest, show him the sacred places, sleep with him under the moon and stars. She wandered to the edge of the rooftop and leaned over the wall. Below her, traffic crawled by as humans went about their short lives. She’d never been part of that. Caleb had. How did it feel? Was he regretting the

end of it? Would he try to maintain a place among men?

If he survived.

Oh God.

She sank to her knees and prayed.

Chapter 22

Regan stepped out of the portal, flanked by Satan and Diablo. The two hounds had been incredibly needy since they'd returned the previous evening and refused to be left behind. She wasn't sure how they would deal with a pack of werewolves, but she was about to find out.

The long day had been spent praying and brooding, worrying about Catrin, searching the library at the Council for anything about Sardi, and trying to think what his next move would be. She'd had seen the way he looked at Caleb and suspected he would somehow make her choose between Caleb and Catrin.

She'd thought about staying away tonight. Maybe if she distanced herself enough, then she could keep Caleb out of the inevitable showdown with her old boyfriend. But deep in her heart, she knew it was too late for that. Knew that Caleb was tied to this, and they had to play it out. Besides, she wanted to be here, her wolf wanted to be here, to see Caleb take his proper place in the pack.

The house loomed in front of her, huge and shadowed but empty, and she knew the wolves would be in the dark forest, waiting.

A waning moon hung in the clear sky, and the night hummed with magic. In the distance, a wolf howled, and she followed the sound. She paused at the edge of the forest and breathed in deeply, her nostrils filling with the musky scent of wolves. Among the many scents, she caught Caleb's, and her heart lifted. Wolf woke within her and howled joyously at the thought she would soon be free.

If they were to die, then let them have this one night.

She stepped under the canopy of trees and made her way to where she could hear the noise of many people. Her hounds pressed close, whining softly, and she ran her hands over their heads, soothing them.

The forest opened into a wide clearing. Torches hung from the branches all around, casting a flickering orange light. A few wolves milled around, but most of the pack were still in human form. She recognized a number of them from the night before, but there were many more, close to a hundred. She hadn't realized there were so many.

Her gaze was drawn across the clearing to where Caleb stood alone. His eyes lifted to meet hers, and she saw something close to relief in his expression, followed by a bright flare of joy.

Obviously, despite the fact that she'd promised, he hadn't expected her to come. He didn't trust her, and why should he? Still, this was his night; she would do nothing to spoil that. Their problems could wait. She walked across the clearing toward him, her eyes never leaving his.

He was dressed in black pants and a black button-down shirt. He was beautiful, his dark hair brushed back from his face; his skin pale with shadows beneath his eyes and in the hollows of his cheekbones. She had an urge to stroke away the shadows, tell him everything would be all right, but how could she when she didn't believe it herself? She pushed the thought away.

She came to a halt in front of him. The relief was gone from his eyes—they were guarded once more, and she gave in to the need to touch him. Lifting her hand, she stroked along the line of his cheekbone. His skin was hot, and the faint rasp of whiskers scraped beneath her fingertips. She cupped his jaw in her palm, stood up on tiptoes, and placed her lips against his.

For a brief moment, he stood motionless, then his arms came around her, and he pulled her to him and deepened the kiss. It felt like coming home, and Regan allowed herself to melt into him. She opened her mouth, and the warm, wet velvet of his tongue slid against her own. One hand slipped into the silky hair at the nape of his neck, the other gripped his shoulder, her nails biting into the hard muscle, and she pressed herself to the long line of his body as though they could somehow become one.

He kissed her for endless minutes, then his mouth left hers, and they stood, foreheads touching.

Caleb took a step back, and Regan glanced up and around the clearing. The pack surrounded them. She caught sight of the blond werewolf, Sophie, watching them through narrowed eyes, and inside her wolf growled softly.

Under the watchful gaze of the pack, Regan pulled Caleb to her and kissed him again.

When he raised his head, his expression was rueful. “Staking your claim?”

That was exactly what she was doing. She nodded, and Caleb smiled.

“I think you’ve made your point,” he said.

“Well then,” she murmured, “this one is just for me.” She leaned up and kissed him quickly on the lips.

As she stepped back, he was watching her cautiously. “I wasn’t sure you would turn up.”

She shrugged. “I told you I would. Now let’s get on with this. What’s supposed to happen at a new pack leader meeting?”

“Actually, I’ve never been to one before. Neither, for that matter, has anyone else here.” He gestured to the surrounding pack. “My father murdered everyone who existed before he became pack leader. Tom was the last.”

“So what do we do?”

“They must swear an oath to the new leader. Anyone who doesn’t want to has the right to demand combat.”

“You have to fight?”

“Or I can let my mate fight in my stead.”

She raised an eyebrow. “Your mate?”

“Is that not what you just staked claim to?” He looked at her long and hard. “Are you willing to fight for me, Regan?”

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She glanced around the circle of watchers; she held each gaze, and one by one, they fell before her. She came last to Sophie. The blond woman stared back for longer than most, before she nodded and lowered her head, breaking the contact.

“Yes,” Regan said, “I’d fight for you, but I don’t think it’s going to be necessary.”

“So, you’ll fight for me now—what about tomorrow.”

“I don’t know about tomorrow.”

She knew what he wanted, and she wasn’t going to promise him forever. Even if she had been willing to commit herself, how could she when tomorrow they might all be dead. She pushed the thought aside. “I can’t give you any more right now. Not until we have Sardi sorted out.”

“And after that.”

Anger flashed through her. “It’s probably not going to be an issue as we’re all going to be dead. Or worse.”

For a moment, she thought he was going to push it. Then he grinned. “Or worse?”

“You don’t want to know,” she said darkly.

“No, probably not. Then we’d better make sure it’s dead then.” He gave her one last long look, and then sighed. He held out a hand to her. “Let’s do this.”

One by one, his people came to stand before Caleb. They spoke an oath of allegiance and then stripped and transformed until a circle of wolves surrounded them. When the last wolf had made her vows, Caleb stepped forward still holding onto Regan's hand. He raised it up.

"Our lives for yours!"

The wolves howled in unison, and Regan felt the pride rise up inside her.

"Shall we give them a show," she murmured.

He glanced at her a startled expression in his eyes. "What?"

She whispered a word and their clothing vanished. A ripple of awed sighs ran through the pack. For a brief moment, they stood naked, then they were gone, and it was the time of their wolves.

Caleb threw back his head and howled, and Regan joined him as all around them the pack took up the song. He leaped forward into the forest and she followed as the pack streamed after them.

The sky was showing the first faint signs of dawn when Regan awoke. To the east, the darkness was fading. She stretched, then pressed back against the solid length of Caleb behind her, curling into the curve of his body. His cock rose and stiffened against her, and she moved, rubbing her bottom against his hardening erection. His hand came up to cup her breast, and she pushed into it. Then he went motionless, and his hand fell away.

She lay still, waiting for him to move. When nothing happened, she rolled over to face him. Stubble darkened his jaw, but the shadows were gone from beneath his eyes, the tiredness vanished. He looked vital, gorgeous and ... something else.

She frowned and peered into the darkness of his eyes. Identified the something else—he looked pissed off. She leant over to kiss him, but he pulled away, and sat up so he was facing her.

“No,” he said.

Uncertainty washed through her. “No?”

“You’re using me.” His eyes met hers briefly, then slid away. “And I don’t like it.”

Irritation flicked at her nerves. “Using you? In what goddamn way am I using you?”

“Have you realized we only ever make love after the change?” His eyes ran over her, coming to rest on her face, and she could almost see the thoughts turning in his mind. “You think that way, you can blame your wolf. That as long as you only make love after we run, then it’s nothing to do with you or me, just some sort of animal urge.”

“I don’t think—”

“Don’t lie. You’ve made no secret of the fact that for you this is only a short term.”

“No, I—” she made to interrupt, but then fell silent. The truth was she had always intended to reverse the effect of the werewolf bite. But things had changed.

Hadn’t they?

She forced herself to think about it, to acknowledge the thoughts that had been lying in the back of her mind. He was wrong. She wanted him—not just wolf—the man as well, but the feelings were too strong, and she was scared of how vulnerable they made her feel. She was starting to realize that life without Caleb was not an option, but how could she endure it if she allowed herself to love him, and then she lost him

or, worse, was responsible for his destruction as she had been with Sardi.

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She'd been subconsciously reasoning that if she was no longer a wolf, perhaps she could keep her feelings under control, keep him at some sort of distance. She could still have some part of Caleb, but when the end came, as it inevitably must, she could survive it.

She looked up to find him watching her, waiting. She needed to say something, anything. "Maybe we'll never get Catrin back." She forced the words out. "Maybe I'll never find the spell myself."

"We'll get her back, and besides—do you think I want you under those conditions? You're so goddamn arrogant. You think I'll take you on any terms, any little part of you I can get." He took a deep breath. "I've been rejected by just about everyone that mattered to me in this life, and I've come through it. I'll come through this."

Regan swallowed and blinked back the tears that pricked her eyes. She thought about all those people who had turned their backs on him when he needed them. She couldn't bear him to think the same of her. "It's not arrogance." She bit her lip, then made herself go on. "I'm scared."

Shock flared in his eyes.

"I've never been scared before—not even with Sardi. I was hurt, furious, but never scared. Now I think about losing Catrin and"—she broke off, then looked into his eyes, allowing him to see her fear—"losing you, and it locks up my mind, so I can't think. And I need to be able to think. So maybe I was trying to keep a little distance, but wolf won't let me do that. She makes me forget what I need to remember."

He searched her face, and then reached out his hand. She took it in hers and he pulled her to him.

“I’m scared too,” he murmured against her hair. “But we’ll save Catrin”—he paused—“or we’ll die trying. As you said, there are worse things than death.”

With his words, a measure of peace stole over her. She relaxed into him as his fingers combed through the tangle of her long hair.

He went still against her, tension radiating through his body. She raised her head, his eyes were fixed on something behind her, and she turned to look over her shoulder.

The air shimmered, and as she watched, a portal formed, and Gina stepped out. Regan pulled out of Caleb’s arms and turned to face her sister, saw the lines of strain etched on her face.

Gina’s gaze wandered over their naked forms, and she raised an eyebrow. “Sorry for the interruption,” she said, “but we’ve had a message from Sardi.”

Fear shot through Regan, and she held her breath waiting for the bad news.

“I can’t stay,” Gina said, glancing up at the eastern sky where the sun was almost peeking over the horizon. “Catrin is alive, but you must get back to the Council as soon as you can.” She turned to go then glanced back, forcing a weak smile. “You might put some clothes on first though.”

Then she was gone.

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Caleb stared at the spot where Regan’s sister had vanished. Regan’s vampire sister.

Would he ever get used to this new world? He really hoped he was going to be given the chance to try.

Beside him, Regan scrambled to her feet. She whispered her magic and their clothes appeared in a pile beside him. He rose and pulled them on, glanced across as he was tucking his shirt into his pants to find her watching him, a hungry expression in her eyes.

“I wish it could be different,” she said. “For the first time in my life, I wish I was normal, that we were normal and could have a normal life together.”

He searched her face. Her eyes were filled with pain and the beginnings of despair.

“And for the first time in my life, I don’t wish for a normal life,” he said. “Don’t give up. There’s always hope.”

She shook her head. “You don’t know Sardi. He’s strong. If I couldn’t defeat him with my mother’s help, what hope do I have alone?”

A flash of anger burned through him at her words. “You’re not alone,” he said.

Her eyes widened at his tone. She stared into his face, and some of the darkness lifted from her expression. Her lips curled into the faint semblance of a smile, and she held out her hand.

“Thank you.”

He took it and squeezed her fingers. “So, how do we get back? Can you do one of those things, like your sister?”

“A portal? You sound like you’d like to try,” Regan replied. “I thought you wanted

nothing to do with magic.”

“It’s a little late for that.”

“I’m glad, and when this is over I’ll take you on a trip around the world, but not today. Today, I need to conserve my strength.”

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“So you only have so much—then what? It runs out?”

“Something like that. The spell of destruction we did on Sardi drained me, and that was with my mother’s support. The price was high.”

“The price?”

“I told you, there are two types of magic. The simple tricks and glamours, like fetching things”—she gestured to their clothes—“or making things appear different from how they are.” She whispered a word and she vanished to be replaced by an extremely ugly toad. Caleb smiled, despite the situation, and then she was back. “They aren’t real,” she said, “and cost little. Then there is the earth magic. Earth magic changes things. With the earth magic, we can open a portal anywhere in the world, we can even open them between worlds. With the earth magic we have the power to stop the earth turning and the sun rising.”

Caleb sensed she was telling the truth, and a sense of awe rose up inside him. “Have you ever done that?” he asked.

Regan smiled. “Ask Gina to tell you the story of how she became a vampire,” she said. “The price for such magic is high. Sometimes the price is even a life. So I will save what strength I have and hope it is enough.”

“You’re right,” Caleb replied. “We’ll drive.”

Chapter 23

Kael met them as they came out of the elevator and led them to a large, comfortable office.

“Sit down,” he said.

Regan did as she was told, which showed Caleb just how shaky she was feeling. Caleb sank down onto the black leather sofa next to her and took her hand.

“Tell me,” Regan said when Kael remained silent.

He shrugged and strode over to his desk. He picked up a small, wooden box and carried it over to them.

“Sardi sent this,” he said and handed the box to Regan.

All the color fled from her face. She bit down hard on her lip, and tears welled up in her eyes. She blinked, and they rolled down her cheek. More followed.

She didn’t move, just sat staring at the contents of the box. Caleb didn’t want to look, but he knew he had to. He held out his free hand. Regan glanced at it. She straightened her shoulders, gave one last look at the box, then placed it on his palm.

Nestled on a bed of white silk lay a severed finger.

Shock raced through him. For an age, his brain refused to accept what he was seeing.

He released his breath and forced himself to think.

“Is it definitely hers?” he asked.

Regan nodded. Her expression had been haunted; now, the hatred rose up in her eyes.

“This time he dies,” she snarled.

She pulled free of his hand. Caleb didn’t try to hold her, sensing she needed to move. She leapt to her feet and paced the room, came to a halt and slammed her fist into the wall.

Caleb winced but remained silent. Catrin was her sister. He had seen how much they cared for each other, and he could only imagine what she was experiencing now. If it had been Regan’s finger lying in that box...

After a minute’s silence she turned to Kael.

“How did it get here?” she asked.

“It was left, with a note. Nobody saw who brought it.”

She held out her hand. Kael handed her a piece of paper. She read it, then came over to Caleb. She took the box from him and gave him the note. He scanned it quickly. It was brief and to the point.

“He’ll release Catrin if we meet with him tonight.”

“Or he’ll send her back in pieces.”

“So, we meet with him then.”

Regan looked at him. The hatred was still there seething beneath the surface. “I don’t want you going anywhere near him,” she said.

She still didn’t believe he could help her. Caleb stifled his disappointment. She was hurting right now, not thinking straight. He remembered back to the forest and Regan admitting she was scared—such an admission must have cost her dearly. He needed to give her space, but there was no way she was meeting Sardi alone.

“I don’t think that’s an option,” he replied. “He’s pretty specific. He won’t release her without the two of us.”

Regan opened her mouth to answer, but Kael cut in. “Why would he want the two of you?” he asked. “I can see why he wants Regan, but why you as well?”

“He wants me for the same old reason—to open the portal. He wants Caleb along because he’s a sadistic bastard.”

“And maybe as some sort of hostage for your cooperation?”

She shrugged. “I guess so.”

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“What are you going to do?”

Regan was silent, and Caleb answered. “We go of course. We get Catrin out of there, and then we kill the bastard.”

“Or we die trying,” Regan repeated his words from earlier that morning.

“Let the Council help you,” Kael said.

Regan shook her head. “We can’t—he’ll kill Catrin. Or worse—he’ll take her back to where he came from, and we’ll never see her again. Never know whether she’s alive or dead.” She stared Kael in the eyes. “You lived through that with your sister. I won’t let it happen to mine.”

Kael’s gaze narrowed. Then he nodded. “So, what is the plan? Can you beat this guy?”

“I don’t know.”

Kael crossed the room and poured out three glasses of amber liquid. “It’s early in the day, but I think we need this.” He brought the drinks across and handed one to Caleb and the other to Regan. She sank onto the sofa beside him, the box clutched in her free hand.

Caleb swallowed the drink in one gulp. The warmth of the liquid flowed down his throat and settled in his stomach. Regan did the same. She glanced at her empty glass, then his, whispered a word and they were full again.

“You know,” Kael said, “we’ll help in any way we can, but this thing is bigger than your sister. He needs to be stopped. We can’t risk the chance that he’ll make you cooperate.”

“He won’t.”

“That’s not enough. We need some proof.”

Caleb looked him in the eyes, eyes so like his own. “Our word is enough. Regan will never do what he asks. We’ll die first.”

“But will she stand by and watch you tortured? Or her own sister?”

“I know my duty,” Regan said coldly.

Caleb glanced at her, watched as she stroked her finger along the smooth wood of the box. “I loved Sardi once, but that didn’t stop me from trying to destroy him for what he was.”

Kael stared at her for long minutes, and then nodded.

“Okay. You need time to think about all this, but I’ll speak to you later today. Hopefully you’ll have more of a plan.”

He stood up and walked to the door. At the last second, he turned. “Caleb?”

Caleb had been watching Regan; now he turned to face Kael. “Yes?”

“We should talk,” Kael said. “Before tonight.”

Caleb searched the other man’s face. So far, there were no signs of the enmity Kael

had shown that first time they met. But he also sensed that things would never be truly easy between them, and he was surprised by the sadness that thought brought. Maybe his mother was alive, but if not, this man was now his only living relative. All his life he'd longed to find his mother's family. Of course, back then he'd believed her to be human, not some immortal shapeshifter.

What was an immortal shapeshifter anyway?

Suddenly, he wanted to know.

If he was going to die, then he wanted to know what he was first. He wanted to know what his mother had been, what she was like.

He possessed no illusions. From the sound of it, there was a good chance they would not survive the night. He was reconciled to that. Well, maybe not reconciled. He'd finally found someone he wanted to spend his life with, at the point when his life was, in all likelihood, just about over. He wanted Regan, but if that wasn't to be, then as long as he took that bastard Sardi with him, he could die content.

He also needed to make sure that if he didn't survive the night then the Council would look after his wolves. Ensure that the pack was no longer on the outside of the supernatural world but part of it.

Now Caleb looked at Kael, standing at the open door. "I'll see you later," he said.

"Good. Any of the guards will know where to find me." He turned to Regan. "I'm sorry about your sister." Then he was gone.

As soon as the door shut behind Kael, Regan turned to him and buried her face in his chest. Her drink spilled, soaking his shirt, and the scent of brandy saturated the air.

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Her whole body trembled. She was crying silently, and he held her close and stroked her hair. After a while, she pulled herself up and wiped a hand across her face. Her expression hardened.

“I’ll kill him for this,” she said. “Whatever else happens tonight—Sardi will die.”

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Regan pushed open the door and slipped into the room. The two men didn’t even notice her, and she sank to the floor and sat cross-legged, watching them. Despite the different coloring, they were curiously similar. Both tall, broad-shouldered and lean-hipped. Tension radiated from them, but she was pleased to notice there was no sense of animosity between them.

“You need to let go of your issues. They’re clouding your ability to think straight.” Kael’s tone was exasperated, but he sounded friendly enough. “Free your mind.”

“I would,” Caleb replied. “But unfortunately, there’s rather a lot going on in there at the moment. Ask me tomorrow, and I’ll give you my undivided attention.”

“Tomorrow, in all likelihood, you’re going to be dead,” Regan called out, and both men turned to look at her.

“Thanks,” Caleb muttered. “Just the sort of comment I needed to focus my mind.” He stalked across the room and crouched down in front of her. “How are you?”

“Angry. Furious.” She thought about it. “Guilty that I lit that bloody bonfire.”

“You needed to know.”

“No, actually I wanted to know, so I did it, and as usual someone else is paying the price.”

“We’ll get her back.”

“Maybe. Now you’d better get back to your lesson.”

Caleb glanced over his shoulder to where Kael stood, tapping his foot impatiently on the wooden floor.

“He’s trying to teach me to shift into something other than a wolf.”

Regan shrugged. “Could come in useful. When the going gets tough, you could shift into an amoeba and nobody would even see you.”

“I was thinking something bigger and scarier,” Caleb said. “But it seems to be irrelevant anyway. Maybe as a half-breed, I’m just not capable.”

“Caleb,” Kael called to him.

Caleb reached out a hand and stroked her cheek. “I’ve got to go.”

She nodded. “Is it okay if I stay and watch?”

“Of course. I can’t promise anything worth watching though.”

Regan leaned her back against the wall and made herself as comfortable as possible. She’d gone to pray again, then to the Council library to look for anything she could on Sardi. And found plenty. If she’d done that a long time ago, she would have

realized that while his human form could be killed here, he would re-manifest in his own dimension. Weakened, but still very much in existence. Her mother hadn't mentioned that bit.

Why?

Was it to make Regan feel safe? The truth was, she didn't know, and until her mother deigned to put in an appearance, she wouldn't find out. So they needed to destroy his mortal body, which would at least put him out of action for another thousand years or so.

But how?

He was far stronger than her, or even Caleb.

In the end, she needed the comfort of being in Caleb's presence, so she had come in search of him and found him here.

"It's easy," Kael was saying. "Watch."

He vanished and in his place was a small blue bird. It flew once around the room, alighted briefly on Regan's shoulder, then flew back to Caleb. It landed on the floor and shifted back to human form.

"Now, you," Kael said.

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Caleb started to unbutton his shirt. Regan watched him, holding her breath.

“You don’t need to do that,” Kael said. “Shifters don’t lose their clothes like werewolves.”

“Spoilsport,” Regan murmured.

Caleb shrugged, but dropped his arms to his side.

“Now, change,” Kael said.

“What should I change into?”

“Anything but a wolf.”

Caleb stood for a moment, then he vanished, and in his place stood a tall, black ...wolf. It turned its head, looked along the line of its body, and snorted in disgust.

Regan laughed softly. A moment later, Caleb was back, and he was naked. She stopped laughing and stared. He was quite the most beautiful thing she had ever seen. Her eyes moved from his body to his face.

He scowled. “Well, that went well.”

“Looks pretty good to me,” Regan said, and Caleb turned to her. He held her eyes for long moments, then turned back to Kael with obvious reluctance.

“Try again,” Kael instructed. “And concentrate on what you’re doing, not on the witch.”

Again, and again, Caleb shifted, but each time it was his wolf who answered the call. After the fifth time, he swore, loudly. He ran both hands through his short hair so it stuck on end, stared at the ceiling, then looked back at Kael. “Maybe you’re going to have to accept that I can’t shift. I’m half-werewolf, and maybe wolf is all you get.”

“You can do it,” Kael growled. “You’re just being stubborn.

“Is that something I get from being half-shifter or half-wolf?” Caleb growled back.

Kael shook his head, but the rigid line of his body relaxed. “Okay, enough for today.” He shrugged. “I thought it might come in useful when you face Sardi, but it will have to wait for another time.”

Caleb appeared entirely at ease in his naked state. Regan wasn’t so comfortable; she whispered a word and gave him a pair of pants. Black, drawstring linen pants that hung low on his lean hips but left his impressive chest bare. He turned to look at her, one eyebrow raised in query.

“I was finding the view distracting.”

His lips curled up into a sexy smile.

“So what’s the plan?” Kael asked.

“We don’t really know until we see what the situation is,” Caleb replied. “We’re going to have to play it by ear. The main priority is to get Catrin out—”

“No,” Kael interrupted. “The main priority is to kill Sardi.”

“That’s not possible,” Regan said.

Both men swung around to look at her, and she scrambled to her feet, brushing her clothes down, to give herself time to think.

“What do you mean—not possible?” Caleb asked.

“I’ve been reading about it. That’s why he didn’t die the last time. He can’t be killed here on earth. His human body dies, but he reappears in his own world. But we do that, and he’ll be weakened. For a long time.”

“And you only found this out now?” It was Kael who asked, and Regan had to force down her urge to snap right back. She was at fault here; she should have known. Instead of answering Kael, she turned to Caleb.

“I thought I loved him, and I thought I’d killed him. I wanted to forget.”

He nodded once, and she knew he understood.

“Then we’ll get Catrin out, and we’ll send him back to where he came from,” Caleb said.

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Kael sighed. “It will have to be enough. Now, I have something for you.”

He reached under his shirt and tugged out a chain. A silver ring hung on the end. He pulled it over his head and handed it to Caleb. “This belonged to your mother,” he said.

Caleb stared at the ring where it lay it on his palm, as though he wasn’t quite sure what to do. Regan reached across, picked up the chain, and lifted it over his head so the ring nestled in the dark hair of his chest.

“There,” she said.

Caleb’s hand came up to touch the ring. He turned it in his fingers.

“What was she like?” he asked Kael.

“She was strong and brave. Strong enough to come through this. If she’s alive, we will find her.”

Caleb nodded.

“Now,” Kael said. “You should get ready to leave.” He turned to go.

“Kael,” Regan called out.

He looked back. “Yes?”

“If we don’t come back tonight—you’ll finish this?”

“I’ll hunt him down and kill him.”

Chapter 24

Caleb switched off the engine, and they both sat, staring out into the darkness, neither wanting to make the first move.

Regan took a deep breath and forced her gaze to the small wooden box on the dashboard of the truck. She let the fury rise within her once again. That fury was all that kept her going. All that kept the despair at bay.

She climbed down from the cab and went around the back to release Satan and Diablo. The hounds sniffed around, small yipping sounds emerging from their throats as they picked up the scent. But then they fell silent as they made their way through the forest, back to the clearing where Caleb had fought his father. It was only two nights ago but seemed like a lifetime.

How long must it have seemed to Catrin?

They found Sardi seated on a rock at the far side of the clearing. He stood as they emerged from the cover of the trees. Regan gave him one quick glance, then looked around for her sister. Catrin was at the center of the pack of hellhounds, kneeling on the forest floor, head bowed, her arms wrapped around herself. Regan looked her sister over carefully, and some of her tension drained away—Catrin appeared unharmed apart from the bloody bandage on her left hand.

She raised her head. As she met Regan's gaze, a faint frown flickered across her features, and she glanced down. Regan followed the look; around her neck, Catrin wore a chain with a silver star at the end. It was similar to the charm Ethan had

placed around Regan's neck that night so long ago. She nodded once to show she understood, and then turned back to Sardi.

"You'd better not have touched her," Regan said.

He smiled a cruel curl of his full lips. "I have to admit, I thought about it. It seemed a fitting punishment for you. After all"—he glanced at Caleb, and his expression turned icy—"you've given yourself to another. Why shouldn't I?" Then he shrugged. "But while she's a sweet little thing, I like more fire in my women."

Relief washed through her. She'd been trying not to even contemplate the idea that Sardi might rape her sister. She hadn't believed the man she'd once loved was capable of such a thing, but the doubt lingered, festering in her mind. Still, Sardi had hurt Catrin, and for that he would pay. Her fury rose again, and she allowed it to show in her eyes.

"You cut off her fucking finger, you bastard," she said.

He shrugged again. "You needed to know I mean business. From our past association, you might be inclined to believe I'm not serious. But I am. Very."

Caleb shifted beside her, and she could sense his impatience.

"Cut the crap," he snapped, "and tell us what you want."

Sardi ignored the question but cast Caleb a look of intense dislike. "What do you see in this dog, Regan? I thought you had better taste."

"Obviously not, but he's right. What do you want?"

"You in your rightful place—at my side. Loving me as you once did."

Regan rolled her eyes. “Never going to happen.”

“In which case, I shall have to settle for my second option.”

“Christ, you never said he was a complete bag of wind,” Caleb muttered. “Tell him to get on with it.”

“Are you so eager to die?” Sardi asked.

“Yeah,” Caleb snarled. “It’s got to be better than listening to this boring shit.”

Sardi stepped closer, his face tightening, his fists clenching at his side. Regan stepped between them. “Enough,” she said. “Sardi, tell us what you want.”

He stared at Caleb for a minute longer then turned his gaze to her. “I want you to open the portal to Hell and release my people.”

“And then what?”

“And then we take our rightful place in this world.” He smiled. His old smile—the one she had fallen in love with two thousand years ago. It did absolutely nothing for her.

“Come on, Regan,” he murmured, his voice soft, enticing, “you have no love of mankind. How can you have?”

Regan didn’t bother answering. There was no point with someone like Sardi. He saw humans as nothing and would never understand a different viewpoint. She tried another tack. “The Council will never let you get away with it.”

“The Council will be no match for me once I have my people here.”

She didn't know if he was strong enough to take on the Council or not, and she didn't want to find out. She took a deep breath. Time to move this on.

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“Let Catrin go, and we’ll talk about it.”

“Not until you do the spell.”

She gritted her teeth. “You said if we came alone, you would release her.”

“I lied.” He shrugged. “But believe me—I have no wish to harm her.”

“Further,” Regan muttered.

“Further,” he agreed.

“If you lied about this, how do I know you’re not lying now? How do I know you’ll let her go once I’ve opened the portal?”

“I will swear an oath. You know such things are not lightly broken.”

“And what about us?” She indicated herself and Caleb. “Will you let us go free as well?”

“I swear to you, open the portal, and I will let the three of you go free.”

Regan wished it was an option. She wanted so much to go free. For the first time in so long, the future held a sense of excitement and anticipation. She wanted a life with Caleb more than anything she’d ever wanted before. She could almost taste it.

But it wasn’t going to happen. No way would she open the portal to Hell, but she

couldn't let Sardi see that. They needed time to work out how to free Catrin. She didn't see how—she was closely guarded—but perhaps Caleb would have an idea.

“I need time to think about this,” she said.

“What's there to think about? You all live, or you all die. It's that simple.”

“Nothing is that simple. I do this, and I'll be an outcast. The Council will hunt me down. And Caleb will be tied to me; they'll kill him on sight. We need to talk. He needs to agree to this.”

She stepped toward Sardi and put her hand on his arm, stifling her sense of revulsion. She spoke in a low voice as though for Sardi's ears alone. “I can make him cooperate, just give me an hour with him alone.”

Sardi looked from her to Caleb, then back to her. “Half an hour.”

She fought to keep her relief from showing as she turned away to speak to Caleb.

“Regan!” Sardi called her back. “Take longer than half an hour, and I will order my hounds to rip your sister into little pieces.”

She studied his face, searching for some vestige of the man she had fallen in love with. He was so handsome; she could understand how she had fallen for him, but the pretty exterior hid the heart and conscience of a demon.

A thought occurred to her then—it wasn't his fault. He was a demon. He would always be a demon. And with that thought came another. Secretly, she'd always believed that what had happened between them was because of something bad in her character. Like called to like, but that wasn't really the case. She'd been young, impressionable, experiencing her first real freedom, and Sardi had set out to make her

fall in love with him, hiding his true nature.

She'd made a terrible mistake, but afterward she'd done what she could to put it right, and then spent the rest of her long life making up for it. Now, it was time to forgive herself, and deep inside her, two thousand years' worth of guilt unraveled.

She turned to Caleb—she needed to tell him something. “Let's go.”

They walked from the clearing in silence, not touching. At the tree line, Regan glanced back toward her sister. Catrin watched them, her eyes wide, and Regan tried for a reassuring smile. She was pretty sure she failed, but Catrin smiled back, and Regan's resolve hardened. She could see no way out of this for them, and she had almost accepted that—could only hope that she and Caleb would meet again in another life—but Catrin was going to come out of this alive and well. Anything else was unacceptable.

They walked until they could no longer hear the growling of the hellhounds, then Caleb turned to her. Without speaking, he took her in his arms, backed her against the trunk of a huge oak tree, and kissed her.

They made love without words, slowly, erotically, until the last moments, when pleasure pulsated through her body. She framed his face with her hands and looked deep into eyes darkened by passion.

“I love you,” she said.

“I know.”

“You'd be better off if I didn't. You'd be better off if you'd never met me.”

“Way better off.” He kissed her forehead, then her cheek and the corner of her mouth.

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“Love doesn’t work out well for me, and I never intended to fall in love again.”

“I wouldn’t have missed it for the world,” he murmured. “Unlike you, I’ve never loved, never thought I was capable of feeling that much emotion. You’ve shown me different. I love you, and whatever happens next, it was worth the price.”

Something relaxed inside her at his words. She’d lived a long life, but death came to everyone in the end, even the immortal races. What was important was making that death matter as you strove to make your life matter. She sighed, then slid her hands into his thick hair and tugged him toward her for one last kiss. A kiss that held everything they would never have together. After long seconds, he raised his head.

“We have to go.”

“I know.”

She stepped away from him and reached down to pick up her discarded clothes.

“So, how do we do this?” she asked.

“You distract Sardi, I’ll get Catrin out.”

“You can’t take on a whole pack of hellhounds.”

“I can hold them long enough to get Catrin away.”

“They’ll kill you.”

He shrugged but didn't answer. What was the point?

They walked back hand in hand, Satan and Diablo padding silently behind them. Caleb squeezed her fingers then dropped her hand as they stepped back into the clearing.

Regan strode toward Sardi. Out of the corner of her eye, she could see Caleb moving closer to where Catrin still knelt surrounded by the snarling pack of hellhounds. She forced herself to focus on Sardi, coming to a halt only a foot from where he stood. "So how do we do this?"

Sardi looked at her with narrowed eyes. He leaned close and breathed in deeply. "You reek of sex," he said.

Regan shrugged and allowed a small smile to play across her lips. "I had to persuade him I was worth a life in exile."

His gaze wandered down over her body. "And are you?"

She lowered her eyes, and then looked up at him through her lashes. "What do you think? I've learned a lot in two thousand years."

Heat flared in his eyes until they glowed golden. His tongue flicked along his full lower lip.

"Do you remember how good it was between us?" he murmured. "Do you think of me when you lie with your dog?"

She moistened her own lips, saw his eyes follow the movement. "I've tried to forget but seeing you again has brought it all back."

She thought she might have gone too far as his eyes narrowed on her. Then she heard the sound she'd been waiting for, the roar of an enraged animal, and the rush of air as a huge black wolf leapt into the midst of the hellhound pack, followed by Satan and Diablo.

She kept her attention fixed on Sardi. His gaze swung from her, and his eyes widened as he took in the attack. Regan lashed out, kicking his legs from under him. He lost his balance, and she leapt for him. She knew she couldn't take him, but she had to give Caleb a few extra seconds to free Catrin. She landed across his hard body. For a moment, he lay still, and she glanced up to see what was happening.

The circle of hounds was broken, but Catrin still knelt in the middle.

"Catrin, run," she screamed.

Catrin shook her head as if coming out of a daze. She stared, wild eyed, at the chaos surrounding her, then she scrambled to her feet, ran a few steps and turned back to look at where the wolf fought furiously against the hellhounds.

"Run," Regan screamed again.

This time Catrin took off, disappearing into the forest without a backwards glance.

Beneath her, Sardi shifted. He was immensely strong, wrenching himself free of her grip with ease. She whispered a word of magic, but he held up his hand, and the spell bounced harmlessly from his palm.

"Bitch," he snarled, and flung her from him.

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She slammed into the ground hard, the breath rushing from her lungs. For a moment, she lay winded, then she rolled over and struggled onto all fours, shaking her head to clear the stars and trying to take in the scene around her.

Satan and Diablo were down, still and lifeless, but they had fought hard. At least six of Sardi's hounds lay dead around them. There were plenty more, and the black wolf fought on almost hidden beneath his attackers. The air filled with the snarling snapping of the hounds.

Then Sardi roared, the hounds fell back, and Regan's heart stopped beating. The black wolf lay motionless. Then it was gone, and Caleb lay in its place, his naked body streaked with blood. A howl built up inside her, then his eyes flickered open.

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Caleb blinked, trying to clear the red film from his eyes. Pain swamped every nerve ending, and blood seeped from a score of wounds. He struggled to raise his head. What had stopped the fight? It had been nearly over anyway, he'd been about to die.

He looked around him, his eyes fixing on Regan. She stood to one side, arms wrapped around her as though her ribs hurt, but she was alive. His eyes met hers, huge, haunted. The knowledge that this was the end clear in their silver depths. There was a deep sadness, but no regret.

Reluctantly, he dragged his gaze past her. Catrin was nowhere in sight, and some of the tension inside him eased. They'd done what they'd set out to do. Catrin was free.

His eyes finally settled on the demon. Sardi's face was stamped with an inhuman fury, and for the first time, Caleb prayed that he still had genuine feelings for Regan. The bastard could do what he liked to Caleb, just so long as he didn't make Regan suffer.

"So," Sardi said, "this is your answer?"

Regan nodded. "This is our answer. We'll die before we free your people into this world."

"Your lover will die now," Sardi said, and he drew a long knife from the scabbard at his back, "but I think I might keep you alive for a while. See just what you have learned in two thousand years."

Fury rose inside Caleb. "Touch her and I'll—"

"You'll what?" Sardi sneered. "Nothing. Perhaps I'll let you watch before you die. The last thing you will ever see is Regan in my arms." He gestured toward Regan. "Come to me, Regan, and I will give him a swift death."

Regan glanced from him to Sardi. Caleb could almost see her mind working. "Don't go near him," he ground out. "I can take anything he can dish out."

Sardi came closer, the knife at the ready.

Caleb struggled to his knees, then to his feet, locking the muscles of his legs to hold him steady. He was naked except for something around his neck. Looking down, he saw the ring Kael had given him. His mother's ring.

In the past when he'd changed, he had lost everything. So why had the ring remained? Maybe he did have shapeshifter powers after all. He concentrated on the

ring, focusing his mind, clearing it. Sardi was almost on him now. He stood before Caleb, a half-smile, half-sneer on his face. He raised the knife.

Concentrate!

In his mind, he saw the image of a creature. He focused everything he had on that picture, and his world shifted

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Regan cried out as Caleb vanished.

In his place, a huge, winged serpent slowly uncoiled its long body. Beside her, Sardi stood transfixed, his eyes stretched wide in horror as the black wings unfurled. They spread wide, blocking out the moonlight so they stood motionless in its shadow. The wings beat languidly, and it rose without effort into the air to hover above them. Its jaws opened, revealing the inky blackness inside and the bright white of razor-sharp fangs. The yellow, slitted eyes never left Sardi as its long, sinuous body undulated from side to side.

Sardi shook himself, then before her eyes, he transformed—grew taller, broader, his skin darkening. Curved horns sprouted from his forehead, black leathery wings sprang from his shoulder blades, and the knife in his hand became a flaming sword. Only his eyes remained the same. This was how he would appear in his own realm, and Regan's breath caught in her throat.

He raised the sword toward the hovering serpent.

Regan hardly caught the movement as it struck. It dove down toward Sardi, and they clashed with a scream of fury. The force of the collision sent the sword spinning from Sardi's hand. They grappled, but the serpent's long body coiled around him, its

vicious claws dug deep into the flesh of his shoulders, and they rose into the air entwined as lovers.

The serpent turned its massive head to Regan, the eyes held hers, and in their inhuman depths, she caught a glimpse of Caleb. Suddenly, she knew what she had to do.

This time Sardi wasn't coming back.

She summoned up her magic, let the power build within her, and whispered the words. The air shimmered, and the portal opened before her.

Sardi came alive as he saw the gateway. Understanding filled his eyes, followed swiftly by horror. He tried to struggle, but it was too late as, with a beat of wings, the serpent rose through the air and swooped toward the portal. Regan made to step back, but at the last minute, Sardi reached out a hand, clasped his fist in her long hair, and dragged Regan through the gateway into Hell.

They tumbled through darkness, the icy air rushing past her, until she heard the beating of wings, and their freefall slowed. Down and down they went, until they finally crashed onto a bare rock floor, Sardi's hand still locked tightly in her hair.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 8:45 pm

Dark figures melted away into the rocks surrounding them, only to loiter, red eyes watching from the shadows. Regan tore free of Sardi's grip and crawled backward, staring around her. They were in some sort of deep gorge between steep cliffs and, above them, a sullen moon hung crimson in a black starless sky. The air held a bitter coldness, and she hugged her jacket around her.

Sardi lay unmoving in the serpent's claws. For a moment, she thought he was already dead. Then his head rolled to the side, his eyes opened, and he looked straight at Regan. His lips parted as if to speak, but the words never came. The serpent's head reared back, and it struck, the fangs sinking deep into Sardi's throat. He lifted his hands trying to tear free, but the jaws locked in place. Finally, it released its hold and drew back. Sardi swayed, toppled to his knees, then to his back, and he lay still.

For a minute neither moved. The serpent looked straight into Regan's eyes, and then Caleb was back.

He stepped closer and nudged the body with his toe.

"Is he dead?"

Sardi's eyes flew open, and his whole body convulsed, his back arching from the rock floor as he clawed at the open wound on his throat. Regan stared in fascination, unable to look away as the white foam frothed from his mouth and nostrils.

Within minutes, he was motionless, his face a rigid mask of agony as the light of life faded from his eyes.

“He is now,” Regan said.

She stared at the dead demon. It was over. The knowledge was fizzing in her blood. She crossed quickly to Caleb, wrapped her arms around his waist, and burrowed her face against the soft hair of his chest, breathing in the scent of him.

She raised her head. “You did good.”

He grinned. “I did, didn’t I?” He looked around them. “Where are we?”

“Hell, of course.”

“Hmm. It’s not as warm as I expected. Can you get us out of here?”

She stepped back, nodded and closed her eyes. Her magic was almost drained, but she dredged up enough power and spoke a word. The air shimmered, and the portal formed. They passed through back into the clearing.

Caleb’s wounds were healed, the blood cleaned from his body. He was perfect. She couldn’t believe it. They were alive and Sardi was dead. A wave of joy washed through her.

She looked around, and her joy dampened; the surviving hellhounds had vanished into the forest; only the bodies remained. She moved across the clearing and crouched down beside Diablo. The huge body was already cold and stiff, and she stroked her hand over the coarse fur of his muzzle, blinking back the tears.

“They died fighting,” Caleb murmured from beside her. “It was a good way to go.”

She nodded, straightening and rubbing her hand over her eyes. Then a movement at the edge of the forest made her turn. It was Catrin. She walked toward them, arms

wrapped around her middle.

She came to a halt beside Caleb and gestured to the pendant that circled her throat. “Please,” she mouthed the word.

Caleb lifted the necklace over her head, and Catrin sagged with relief. “Thank you,” she whispered.

He dropped the pendant to the ground, and Regan crushed it with her boot. Turning to Catrin, she regarded her sister through narrowed eyes. “Why aren’t you still running?”

Catrin managed a weak smile. “I thought I would come back and help. Is Sardi dead?”

Regan nodded. “For good, this time.” She glanced around. “I suppose we’d better call the Council, get them to come and clear this mess up and round up the rest of the hellhounds.”

“Then can we go home?” Catrin said.

It sounded wonderful. “Definitely.”

“So,” Catrin asked. “Do you want that spell now? Just in case I get kidnapped again before I get a chance to tell you.”

Regan frowned. “Which spell?”

Catrin rolled her eyes. “The one to reverse the werewolf bite.”

Regan glanced up at Caleb. His whole body had frozen at Catrin’s words. Now he

caught Regan's gaze, held it, a question in his eyes. Regan smiled at him and shook her head.

"No," she said. "You know, I think I quite like being a werewolf after all."

Caleb stepped toward her, wrapped her in his arms, and pulled her against him. It was like coming home and, inside her, wolf awoke and howled her approval.

Caleb tightened his hold. "Quite like?" he growled in her ear.

"Okay, I love being a werewolf."

And he kissed her.

Epilogue

They'd been married that morning, in front of the Council and Caleb's wolves. There was much work for them to do. Caleb had joined the Council, and tomorrow he would go with Kael to start the search for his mother. But for this day, they were together. They had run through the dark forest and made love beneath the trees. Now they lay, bodies entwined before the altar to The Morrigan.

A shadow passed across the sun. Regan glanced up as a crow landed on the stone slab beside them. It cawed once, and then her mother stood before them.

For some reason, Regan wasn't surprised. She rose slowly to her feet, pulling Caleb beside her. She flicked him a quick glance. He appeared reasonably calm for a man about to meet his mother-in-law. Especially considering he was naked and the mother-in-law also happened to be the goddess of war and pestilence. Still, he might feel a little more relaxed if he had some clothes on. She whispered a word, and they were both dressed.

"So, is this the bridegroom? Are you going to introduce me?"

"Mother, this is Caleb." Regan tugged Caleb forward. "Caleb, my mother."

The Morrigan looked him up and down, a small smile playing across her full lips. "Nice," she said. "Very nice indeed. For a wolf." She shook her head. "A vampire, now a werewolf. I don't know where my children get their taste in men."

"Half werewolf," Caleb replied.

“Hmm, I know. Which is one of the reasons I’m here. Sorry I missed the wedding. That bastard Sardi had me all tied up. I was freed when you killed him—good job, by the way—but I had a few things to do first. Anyway, I’m here now, and I’ve brought you both presents.”

She reached inside her tunic, pulled out a wriggling little body, and handed it to Regan.

“It’s a puppy,” she said. “To replace your hounds,” she added when Regan remained silent.

Regan studied the thing in her hands. Tiny and white, with a pink bow on the top of its head, and small, beady black eyes that stared right back.

“It’s a poodle,” she said, not even attempting to keep the horror from her voice. Caleb snorted, and she turned to him with narrowed eyes, daring him to make a comment.

“Yes, well,” her mother replied, “I thought about replacing the hellhounds, but I saw this and—”

“Thought of me—wow, thanks.” The puppy swiped a warm wet tongue over her fingers, and Regan drew it close against her breast. It was really quite sweet.

“Have you got one for Caleb as well?” she asked.

“No. I have something else for him.”

She turned and gestured toward the forest. At first, Regan saw nothing, then a small, brown bird flew down from a low branch and settled on the ground at the edge of the trees. Regan raised an eyebrow. She opened her mouth to speak, then closed it again as the bird vanished, and a woman stood in its place. Tall and slender, with silver-blond hair hanging down to her waist, and sky-blue eyes. The same eyes as her son.

Next to her, Caleb's whole body went rigid, his hand tightened in hers, and she glanced away from the woman to look at him. He was staring, a hungry, hopeful look in his eyes.

She squeezed his hand once, then tugged free. Placing her palm in the small of his back, she pushed gently.

"Go," she whispered.

Caleb took a tentative step forward, then another until he was running toward the woman.

Regan glanced at her mother, who was standing, a small, self-satisfied smile curling her lips. "How did you find her?" Regan asked.

The Morrigan shrugged. "She was never lost. She just needed time to heal."

Regan turned back to watch as Caleb came to an abrupt halt in front of the woman. Tension radiated from every cell of his body. Slowly he stretched out a hand, and Regan held her breath. Please.

And finally, his mother smiled and took his hand.

-The End-