

ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



Quench
J. HALI STEELE

Quench

J. Hali Steele

Sequel to Hard Case.

Alek is cursed. A tiger and lion mix, he also feels vampyre bloodlust. Finding a mate will require finding someone to sate that bloodlust and it has become increasingly clear that the two cats who live beneath his skin are outrageously, unbelievably picky. Then he meets Viviana, the one woman who ignites a fierce fire in his soul.

Viviana, a vampyre warrior, is shocked to come face-to-face with the

one creature who can turn her cool blood into a molten river. Her powers stolen, she has to count on the cat for everything—blood, even her life and when they're together she becomes a wildcat in his arms. Viv wants Alek as her own, and no one, not even Alek himself, will stand in her way.

Inside Scoop: Alek and Viviana share many erotic likings, including enjoying the occasional voyeuristic adventure as well as exhibitionist sex, when the desire strikes them.

*A Romantica® paranormal erotic
romance from Ellora's Cave*

QUENCH

J. Hali Steele

Dedication

To Nikita Isaac—without you most of my stories would still be in my head! Thank you for always being there.

Chapter One

Warriors, leather-clad fighting machines with arsenals of weapons deftly hidden beneath their coats. They were gladiators who fought to the death and belonged in an arena.

Not striding through a hotel lobby in Amish Country.

That's where Alek Foress had found himself twenty-odd years ago protecting Nikolaus, the Kind prince. In fucking Lancaster County.

All these years later, back in the California high desert, he was still addicted to the bastard's blood and there

were times he swore he smelled like a stinking lion.

“Damn you’re in a nasty mood.” His friend’s laughter rang out in the little corner of the club Alek had chosen to hide in. The sound scraped his already raw nerves. “You striped beasts always smelled worse than us.”

“Case, I don’t need any shit from you.” From the corner of his eye Alek saw Tres heading their way. He took in her green hair and curvy body before facing Case. The man grinned widely as his mate approached, a grin that reminded Alek he’d done the right thing by hiring Tres to handle Case’s club. Initially his friend had objected to his

swanky voyeur club being run by a snow leopard shifter with green hair. But the spunky little cat had won the white lion's heart and soul.

“You both stink and have fleas.” Tres had read her mate's mind. “Damn warm cats.”

“Hey, baby.” Case's large hands encircled Tres' waist.

Alek slouched deeper into the chair as he watched Case pull his mate into his lap. These two were one of the happiest couples he knew. They were also part of the reason for his frame of mind.

Alek would never have a mate or know the kind of happiness they shared.

Case nibbled on Tres' neck and lifted her up. "Can you see to things for a bit? I need to talk to Alek."

She leaned in and kissed Case on the lips. "I'm famished and unless you want me biting a customer, don't be too long."

"Greedy wench. I'll take care of you later."

Alek watched her disappear down the hallway of the Looking Glass. He spun on Case and cut him down before he started.

"Here's where you tell me so what if I have lion's blood running through my veins and you're going to give me the bullshit about being lucky I have a tie to the royal family." He lifted his glass,

downed the Wild Turkey and fixed Case with a deadly stare. “How would you feel walking around for twenty damn years with a hard-on for a fucking male cat?” Lips drawn into a grimace, he ground the words between clenched teeth, “We don’t screw males.” Standing, he leaned and banged both hands flat down on the table. Alek lowered himself until he was eye to eye with his friend. “And now would not be the time to tell me to ‘relax, it’s the vampyre blood’ or ‘it’s no big deal’.” He straightened up, planning to leave.

His head flew back with a snap and his body was flung down into the chair. It tipped back precariously on two legs.

“I haven’t said anything yet.” Case glared at him with gleaming red eyes. “But someone needs to so you can get on with your life and stop this bullshit.”

“What the hell was that?” Alek rubbed his jaw.

“That was a white lion full of vampyre piss and vinegar trying to save his best friend from a life of loneliness.”

He sat back and studied Case Tangara. He’d known he had strength but hadn’t suspected anything like this. For now, his only option was to listen.

Alek and Case were both part of the Kind species of big cats infected with blood of the undead. Both served as Sovereign warriors, known as the Reign,

to protect the weaker of their brethren—the Sovereign Kind cats who refused to accept the vampyre way of life by ingesting human blood. They were animals and it was what they wanted to remain.

Case continued, “We are what we are. Embrace your vamp powers and deal with it.”

Alek’s mind wandered as Case babbled on about it being okay if a man wanted to make love to another man.

A thousand years ago the undead had invaded the lions’ ancestral caves in the Balkan Mountains and the sons of bitches had contaminated the cats with their vile blood curse. Unfortunately the

lions carried the thirst across continents to a multitude of animals. He used to lead the Reign. Stripped of his status, he didn't give a shit anymore. His downfall came from spending too much time *in* women. Literally. He pined away even now, his cock throbbing in anticipation of the wet pleasure found between a willing set of shapely legs. Furry or not, he'd change to suit the situation.

Leading the warriors hadn't been his idea anyway. He'd assumed the position to stay near the prince.

“So you wanted to stay near your blood source. Big fucking deal. You've had the benefit of the strongest blood of our kind and you've piddled it away

fucking around. I love you, man but it's time to grow up." Case leveled somber green eyes in his direction. "Are you that worried about traveling to meet the prince?"

Zeroing in on Case, Alek hissed. "Stay the hell out of my head. You want to know something, ask." He could have motioned to the waitress for a drink but what the hell, there were some vamp powers worth embracing. He pulled a glass of alcohol out of thin air and took a big gulp. "Don't ever restrain me again."

"Don't act like an asshole and it won't be necessary."

Setting his drink down, Alek sighed heavily and settled back into the chair.

“No, I’m not worried about the royal family. Hell, his wife is half-human and will always do crazy shit.” Air whistled through his lips. “You don’t know what it’s like.”

“I know what a vamp’s lust feels like. I enjoy it and so should you. It’s part of what we are.”

“Male cats don’t go panting after each other. It’s-it’s not normal.”

Case laughed so loudly a few of the club’s patrons turned to stare. “We aren’t normal in any sense of the word.”

The addiction to the prince’s blood pulled at Alek, shattered his control again and again. It pushed him into the arms of any available woman just so he

could prove his manhood. The weakness would never allow him to take a mate. He was unwilling to divulge his dark secret—his desire to take a man, namely the prince. Have him in every way.

Alek had seen mated male cats take sustenance often. They always went for men and then they'd go home to feed their mates. How did they deal with it, fight the carnal urges that damn near drew him over the edge? What made him different? This wasn't part of the beast's nature. His craving came from his blood-lusting relatives. *Goddamn vampyres.*

“On that thought, I need to feed my mate. Let me say this. Tres understands

my sexual urges and accepts them. You'll find the right mate one day and she'll accept all that you are, Alek."

"I'd never let her know."

"Then you'll never have happiness. If that's how you choose to live, so be it. I've done all I can." His friend sniffed loudly, wrinkling his nose. "And you do smell like a lion today. You need a bath, my friend."

"Fuck you."

Case left him sitting where he'd found him—alone in a corner.

He decided to leave tomorrow to himself. Tonight, he wanted to relax. The prince was off somewhere chasing his mate but he'd fed Alek well before he

left.

His cock was full and he'd bed the first female who showed up ready, willing and able.

Alek sniffed the air while his eyes roamed the room in search of a candidate to take to one of the back rooms of the voyeur club. A few couples languished in softly lit booths while jazz quietly wafted from hidden speakers. He wondered which of them would end up in one of the many two-way mirrored rooms tonight watching others being pleased and giving pleasure.

A familiar scent filled his nostrils.

Law and Dace were here. He'd been told to expect them. They'd all been

summoned to join the prince in his search.

The prince's brothers spent most of their lives in Europe and were considered master vamps. They lived totally on blood, ignoring their beasts completely. They were adept at hiding in plain sight. This close to home they must not be concerned or he would have never smelled them.

He decided to follow the trail, which led to one of the back rooms. Hell, he'd surprise them and maybe they could grab something to eat together. He hadn't hunted in the vampyre way in a long time. Too long.

The hallway he traveled was empty.

Alek stopped in front of the room housing Law, Dace, a few humans and a full vampyre whose scent he didn't know. Strange. Masking his odor, he vanished to materialize on the other side of the door.

Before he could move the stranger had him at knifepoint from behind. The lights were dim but he could see two human couples lounging sleepily on the sofa. Dace glared from a small bar in the back.

Law was the first to speak. "You're living dangerously tonight."

"We flashed by you and thought we'd stop later and catch up." Dace's low laugh was sinister as he eyed the

humans. “We were grabbing a feed first.”

Alek remained motionless with the knife pressed into the skin of his throat. A cold trickle of blood slid down his neck as the stranger used one hand to pat him down as if it were a cheap stickup. When the hand came around and grabbed his cock, he made his move.

Lightning fast, he reached over his shoulder and grasped the stranger by his head and flipped him onto the floor. The tip of Alek’s knife now pierced the other’s neck and drew blood.

“Unless you want what you just had to be your last meal, I suggest you don’t put your hand on my balls again.”

“Get your ass off me and I’ll be glad to oblige. Fuck, never mind, your cock feels pretty damn good right where it is.” A slender body pushed up against him.

The voice stilled him and he inhaled deeply. Alek’s breath caught in his throat. Truth assaulted his nostrils and he wondered how the hell he’d missed it. Delicious female scent wafted over him. *Shit!* A freaking woman had held him at knifepoint and she smelled full-out vamp. Pulling his blade back, he released her and stood while she came to her feet with a lithe move that impressed him. Close to his height, taut muscles twitched with readiness as her weapon flipped back and forth through

nimble fingers.

“What the fuck did you think you were doing?” Alek asked.

“What in hell were *you* doing trying to sneak up on us? You ever hear of knocking? I thought you Kind had a thing about privacy.” She peered at Law. “Who the hell is this guy?”

“Trust me, Viv, he’s not a cat you want to mess with, understand? Put the knife away.”

Dace’s snicker filtered through the room.

“Don’t call me Viv, no one here knows me that well. I’m Viviana. If anyone gives a shit about a last name, too bad.”

The vamp amazed and flustered Alek at the same time.

Her feminine chin jutted toward him. “Who’s Mr. Got-a-helluva-package?”

Law choked. “That’s Alek.”

“Ahh, your lofty Reign leader. How you doing? Nice cock you got there.” She motioned to the couples on the sofa. “Help yourself to a bite.” Viviana laughed in his face when his jaw dropped. “You cats need to stop being so damn finicky.”

Surprised by her boldness, he snapped his mouth closed. He’d never met a woman like her in his life. She had the foulest mouth he’d ever heard, no modesty at all and she felt like a wet

dream about to pop.

Alek's dick was hard as a stick of dynamite and it felt ready to blow any damn minute. *Christ!* What was up with this female? And what the fuck was up with him?

Her moonlit blue eyes pierced him before she vanished.

He wasn't hungry anymore. Not for food anyway.

Before he sheathed his knife he ran the tip of it over his tongue. The vamp's blood tingled there, sending another hot stab of desire right to his crotch. The taste of her called so loudly to him he followed Viviana right through the door. The last thing he heard was the brothers

laughing.

Alek blatantly checked out her backside, pleased by the sight of her tight ass swinging in front of him. Platinum-blond hair hung down her back in a severe plait. Black leather hugged her lithe body like a second skin and her long legs ate the hallway up. She was tall, damn near reaching his six foot four inches in her stiletto boots. Oh he could work her for a long time. The package she'd fondled earlier was still hard.

His hands itched to touch the walnut-brown skin he knew would feel like satin. And her smell drove him nuts. *Damn!* Could one drop of blood have...

Hell, maybe *he* was in heat.

Strictly a cat man, he couldn't believe how much the bloodsucker turned him on.

“You're a bloodsucker too and no matter what you cats believe, you're no better than we are.” She pushed at his mind, had entered his thoughts.

Alek jumped at the echoing sound of her voice.

Concentrate. Keeping her out wouldn't be impossible but it required him being more aware if she intended to hang around. Locking his shields tight, Alek slid his tongue over lips that still held her exotic taste.

He did something he wouldn't

normally do out of respect for another's privacy. Alek eased past her mental barrier and invaded her mind. It was too easy. Viviana wanted him there. What he saw had his cock leaking like a faucet. She wanted to handle him, stroke and hold his cock, guide it inside her.

Oh yeah, he was willing to be handled by her for a couple hours before sunrise.

Suited him fine.

She continued into the main area of the club with him on her heels. He continued to pick around in her head and found she couldn't read Law or Dace either. Unaware of the lion's pure royal blood pumping through his veins,

Viviana made the mistake of thinking he was just a Kind tiger.

Alek stopped dead in his tracks. What was he doing?

A woman like her, a vamp, wouldn't understand his weakness. His thoughts turned to his beasts. For some odd reason his lion lay still, quietly purring. His ever-vigilant tiger stood at peace. Neither animal displayed agitation or cried out for blood.

His cock was still hard, and Alek knew there would be no satisfaction with anyone else tonight. In a fog of anguish, he started to walk again. Viviana's eyes followed him from where she sat at the bar. He went

straight through the club and out the door.

How fucked-up his life was.

When he reached the parking lot, he raised his head and roared into the night, not caring who heard or saw him.

Pain too great to hold inside poured from his body into the air. The thunderous sound battered against tree limbs, sending some crashing to the ground.

Chapter Two

Viviana smiled as she made her way down the long hallway. The Reign leader followed her and his spicy scent filled her nostrils. She liked how he'd felt sprawled on top of her with his emerald-green eyes glittering. If his hair hadn't been a dead giveaway she would have known he was tiger from his smell. The Sovereign warriors had a reputation for being badass and if this one was like the brothers, she wouldn't mind knowing him better or getting her hands buried in his ruff.

Her blade burned hot in her hand. Unaware she still held it, Viv stared at a

drop of blood glistening under the soft lights. Sweet Jesus, she wanted to lick it, taste it, and she did. Her nipples hardened immediately and her vagina clenched, sending moisture sliding from her core into the seat of her pants. *What in hell was that?*

Careful or he'll smell my desire.

Pushing at his mind, she caught only a glimpse before banging into a steel wall. Viv couldn't get in. The brothers carried strong royal blood in their veins and it had always caused trouble when she tried to read them. They were direct descendants of the original beasts turned by her ancestors. This was different. She'd never felt anything like it.

Alek, a Siberian tiger, had the same mental print as a lion.

Viv hadn't counted on the excitement that fluttered in her stomach. To restrain her out-of-control body she reminded herself of his nasty thought about her species. It had pissed her off and she'd berated him for thinking of her as a bloodsucker. The Kind were no better.

“Goddamn fur balls.”

Confused by her emotions, she wanted to fuck with him. Allowing him access to one part of her mind, she let him have a thought that should keep him swollen and painfully erect. *I wouldn't mind handling a nice piece of ass like yours before sunrise.*

Viv's aroma quickly filled the small space and she knew her scent would snare the beast in him. The effort to close her mind weakened her tremendously. Stronger shields would definitely be called for if she planned to hang around him. What if she wasn't able to keep him out while they trekked after the prince?

She continued down the hall and into the bar, taking a seat. Her eyes followed Alek.

Viv visibly shuddered when he gazed her way, sending an icy chill down her back.

The cat walked through the room and out the front door.

“Shit.” She’d looked forward to knowing the cat better.

“Are you prepared for what will happen if you cage that tiger?”

Viv knew very little about Case other than that he owned the Looking Glass. His long pale blond hair gave away the fact he was a white lion and the scent of fresh human blood coursing through his body told her something else—this cat was powerful. Case had no problem with his vampyre side and he had no problem breaking through her barriers to enter her mind.

“Case, we don’t know each other well enough for you to screw around in my head. Don’t do it again.” No sooner

had the words left her mouth than the ferocious cry of a wild beast lanced through the club. The doors and walls were unable to hold out the sound of pain. Viv's heart wrenched. Fear pounded through her veins, matching pace with her cold blood.

“*Now* do you understand why I asked?” Case made no pretense as he waved his hand, stealing the previous minute from the mind of every human in the room.

His power should have frightened her. Hanging with Law and Dace, Viv was well aware of the Sovereign Kind who sustained their lives with human blood. They became strong vampyres

and, aided with the senses and abilities of their animal, they were deadly creatures to be reckoned with.

“Fuck you.” Viv stood and walked back the way she’d come to collect the brothers. “Let’s get out of here,” she snarled.

Viv and the brothers arrived at the royal mansion and rested on the balcony above the practice arena. Law and Dace regaled her with stories about their life in Europe while Viv told of her own rogue battles. It had been decided back at the club to wait until nightfall so she could travel with them to join the prince to help sort out whatever his quarrel was

with his mate. Reign warriors were impervious to sunlight but the strong desert rays would harm the oldest of vampyres, even at sunset.

The Kind possessed all her ancestors' traits. What made her people dislike and fear them was their ability to walk in daylight in the guise of their beast—or as the undead. No one understood exactly why the mixture of both bloods caused this phenomenon.

Alek had arrived before them and remained seated in a dark corner of the office. His emerald eyes bored into her. Somehow he'd managed to slip past her normal blocks and Viv had felt him a few times but she hadn't been able to get

in his head again. This trip to find the prince and his woman was not going to be an easy one. Not if Alek kept digging in her mind and glaring at her as if she'd done something unthinkable. *Fucking cats*. She should have stayed in Europe.

Law flashed from the seat and his head jerked toward Dace. "Goddamn it." Viv turned in his direction. The amount of energy emanating from him meant he'd been in mental contact with the prince. "Phoenix is pissed."

Viv knew the name well. The Siberian tiger was legend even among vampyres.

"For Chrissakes." Dace's teeth ground together, trapping a low growl.

“Seems we need to join our little brother sooner than expected,” Law said.

“What are you *not* telling us?” Viv rubbed up and down her arms as her body shuddered. Her eyes peered into the dark room to see Alek’s reaction. His eyes glowed red.

A shaft of lightning ripped through the silence. Fire lit on a practice form at the far end of the arena. The flames cast shadows around the walls as hurricane-force gusts blasted through the courtyard and blew up into the room with vengeance. Dust swirled through the study, followed by the strong scent of anger.

Shit. Now Viv understood everyone's anxiety.

Phoenix wasn't the devil but he probably knew him well.

Alek glared out at the small group on the balcony. "What Law didn't tell you is that Phoenix will be traveling with us."

* * * * *

Alek knew the instant the cat materialized in human form that he was going to take the brunt of his anger.

"You're all jackasses." Phoenix's silver-gray hair billowed around his shoulders. He glared at Alek.

Fuck. He didn't need this bullshit now.

“What in hell, Alek, you're the leader.”

Alek felt all eyes on him. “I was stripped of the Reign leader title.”

“I'll kill your ass if anything happens to a hair on Karra's head. Understand?”

Could it get any worse? He'd spent half the night glaring at a vampyre who had him and his crotch tied in knots, a woman he could never make understand all that was happening in his life. And now this shit.

“Her mother ran off for God knows what reason and the prince, *your prince*, sent Karra as a warrior to protect her.

None of that's my business." Karra was the daughter of the prince. She was not only a Reign warrior, she was wild and willful. "What did you expect me to do, Phoenix?"

Alek turned to Viv. Her mind was wide open. *Shit, please tell me she is not going to interrupt Phoenix.* Her discomfort pierced him like a knife.

Viv shook her head and before he could stop her, she spoke. "You guys really need to lighten up and get your asses moving."

"Who the hell is she?" Phoenix didn't deign to make eye contact with her yet.

His eyes pierced Alek with a deadly

look as he waved Viv away like a nuisance. *Did he smile?* A blue arc of light left Phoenix's finger and shot her way. It ignited a flash of anger in Alek's gut. His teeth gritted together, holding in the hiss.

Finally, Phoenix turned to face Viv. "I smelled you a mile away. Vampyres. You reek of death."

His fists clenched into tight balls. He had to sidetrack Phoenix before Viv said more. Alek, a Siberian tiger himself, was no match for the bigger cat or the man. No cat or vampyre was. Hell, nothing in this realm could touch him. Alek didn't want her to tangle with the creature. An odd sensation slipped over

his body at the thought of any one touching her. He shuddered in an effort to shake the feeling off.

“Like it or not...”

Before Phoenix could reply Alek put his hand up to stop him. “Let me finish. She’s the daughter of our prince, she goes where she wants. Karra chose to traipse off after her mother.” His eyes narrowed to slits. “You act like she’s mated to you.”

The temperature elevated in the room until it reached an unbearable level.

Alek’s hair lifted as electric energy blossomed into a mushroom cloud of dust, sending out shock waves of particles. Law and Dace retreated to a

corner. Viv trembled but held her ground.

He had known the princess since she was a bare-assed babe. He'd trained her from a cub and Alek knew firsthand Karra had refused to give in to the Siberian tiger because he wanted her to step down as a Reign warrior.

Phoenix's eyes flashed a red glow around the room that subsided slowly. He burst into laughter and the dust settled. Law and Dace chuckled in the corner. Phoenix grunted, "Yeah, it is a wonder we survived." Long gray hair whipped around when he turned to the two men smirking in the corner. "Let's bring your brother and his family back

home?”

Alek's head dropped. Just as Phoenix had, he'd read Viv's scorching thoughts wondering how the sorry-assed cats had ever managed to feed and stay alive. She didn't believe they were the smartest night creatures alive.

The woman had a serious death wish.

Trying once again to distract Phoenix, Alek flashed out to the balcony. “Who's putting the fire out?” Flames crackled out of control and leaped around the arena, leaving a blackened path in their wake. He swiveled around to meet Phoenix's steely glare. A smile lingered on his lips.

Fresh cold wind swooped down from the mountains, lifting desert sand into the air. It carried sheets of icy rain with it. That was going to make a hell of a news item for the front page tomorrow: *High desert hit with unexplainable sleet and rain.* Alek stifled the laughter the thought conjured up.

“You needn’t worry about who may or may not be my mate.” Green eyes pierced him with fire. “Think about your predicament and see if you can keep your eye on this woman.” Phoenix and the prince’s brothers disappeared in a shower of white light.

He turned toward Viv, who shook with silent fury.

“The bastard stripped me of my power to vanish. Who the fuck... *What* the fuck is he, Alek?”

Avoiding the question, he glanced back over the balcony and stared across the desert. *Christ*. Because of Phoenix she was unable to leave the palace and Alek was left behind to look after her. “No one knows who or what the fuck he really is. Vamp, cat or the devil. And, Viv, right now I don’t give a shit.” His cats hadn’t budged inside his body. No prowling, no snarling between them—their normal reaction if he even thought about not having sustenance from the prince for more than a day or two. In fact, his beasts were so at peace together

he couldn't believe it.

Something had changed.

He thought about the vamp stuck here with him and decided he wasn't letting her out of his sight. Jesus, what was happening to him? It's not like he'd ever have a mate but if he could, she would top his list. A very, very short list since he'd tasted her blood, it now only held one name. Viviana—a brown-skinned, foul-mouthed, kick-ass vamp. Not the sweet little Bengal tiger Alek had thought to settle down with. What a mess.

A deep sigh slipped past his lips.

No way would he get involved with anyone but since she was there a little

taste of her charms, more of her life's blood...she was damn sweet. His cock grew into a sizeable erection and pressed painfully into his zipper. *Maybe I can keep her from knowing about my feelings and the tie to the prince.* There was no way she'd find out about his desire for another man if he kept his shields in place. He wouldn't share his blood with her. His mouth watered as he thought about enjoying her body, tasting her some more.

Damn, he was hungry.

Not for blood.

Alek turned his attention back to Viv.

Only a couple hours before sunrise.

Viv watched his strong, broad frame stand on the balcony. Multihued hair blew around him in the desert breeze. His tight ass and long muscled thighs tugged at her. Her body fought with her mind as moisture slowly gathered outside her channel, warm in the folds between her thighs. She throbbed with desire. Her fingers itched to run through his hair, her hands ached to slide down his back. Having and holding him wrapped in her arms overrode every other thought. Viv wanted to see him naked and stroke every part of his body. His cock would be big and hard. She'd already felt it, had intimate knowledge of it. Her tongue darted out to wet her

lips and damn, she still tasted his blood.

This was bad.

He hadn't answered her and she'd felt the lion patterns in his mind again when she attempted to probe there for information. That wasn't possible. She'd picked up stories in her travels about Kind mixing blood, having the ability to be two cats. It drew her back to the fabled tales about Phoenix. Were they true?

Viv wasn't going to hang around and find out. Cat had her number and she didn't like it. She intended to put some space between them and fast. The strongest, purest blood in Europe ran through her veins. *I'll be damn if I hang*

around here and let some upstart Kind rattle around in my head. Again, using all her strength, she tried to leave.

“You can’t go.” He spoke softly and continued to stare off into the distance.

“Look, I don’t know what the hell is going on but I’m leaving.”

He shifted his body and faced her head-on. “I tried to protect you.” His chest puffed out as he sucked in air. “Your power will eventually return but I don’t care about that—I don’t want you to leave. I want you to stay here.” His eyes gleamed with lust and he never looked away. “Be with me.”

“What?” *Shit!* No punches pulled here. She had the same feeling, the same

need.

“You want me, I can smell it. And I’ve never wanted a woman, beast or vampyre the way I want you right now.” Two steps and he stood before her. He moved his hand to her neck and caressed it. His fingers slid up, feathered across her cheek, and she leaned into them. Strong hands.

“I want you to come in, see what I want from you.” His eyes blasted her with heat.

She fell into his mind like sliding down a slippery slope, tumbling headlong into his memories. One dark corner stood closed and shrouded in shadows. Hidden away from her.

Bastard. He did not intend to let her all the way in.

“Why do you hide part of yourself from me?”

“I’m letting you see all you need to know.”

“Go to hell.”

His arms enfolded her, snatched her tight into his hardness. His cock bulged between them as his mouth crushed into hers. She wouldn’t open for him and Alek didn’t force her. He peppered her face with warm, sweet kisses. Licked her lips, nibbled on the lower one until it bled. Sucking on it, he groaned.

Viv couldn’t help herself when her mouth opened and accepted his tongue.

His hands captured her breasts and kneaded them into wanton peaks. He tweaked and played with her nipples through the material of her shirt, his thumb and fingers drew slow, lazy circles around the nubs. Moving his hands lower, he slipped beneath her top. Her clothes instantly vanished.

Alek chuckled at her haste. “Some of your magic remains.” She bit his lip hard and her knees buckled at the exotic taste that flowed into her mouth.

He caught her up in his arms and naked skin pressed to hers.

“The sun...”

“Shh, you will never be safer.” They vanished to a cool room that held no

windows. Candles blinked to life, revealing walls of murals showing rainforests beneath blue skies filled with birds of every color. A bed much larger than king-size was covered in a jewel-colored quilt that looked so inviting. Deep, soft carpeting silenced each step. Fragrant lilies of every color filled vases placed on polished tables with intricately carved legs. “The prince keeps this room beneath the mansion for his vampyre friends. Nothing, no one, will harm you here.”

He sat her on the bed. Stepping back, he let his eyes devour her while she took in every inch of his body. *Damn, what a cock.* Viv liked what she saw, wanted to

taste it. Her tongue flitted out and again laughter poured from him.

“You have a foul mouth and no modesty at all.”

Clamping her mind shut, she aimed a hard slap at his face. He caught her hand in a steel grip and held her firm. “And I like it. You make me hotter than hell.” He moved her hand to his mouth and planted a warm kiss on the underside of her wrist. His tongue swept across the palm to the tips of her fingers, where he nibbled playfully.

Alek sucked on each finger, sending tremors through her body.

She wanted him badly. A moan climbed from her throat and she

mumbled, “Now.”

“Now, what? Tell me what you want.”

“Fuck me. Hard and fast.” Viv wanted to come.

“No.”

“Damn you, Alek, damn you to hell.”

“Soft and slow. I’ll make you beg for it. Let me in.”

I’ll never beg. Viv couldn’t hold him out any longer.

That’s my tough-ass baby girl.

He caressed her breasts, her stomach. Alek pushed her flat on the bed and kneeled on the mattress between her outstretched legs. His large hands

touched and lingered on every exposed part of her.

They moved over her face and he stuck his thumb through her open lips. “Take it.”

She did. Viv pulled it in and sucked on it like a lollipop.

Leaning over, he used one hand to hold himself up while the other was pushed between her legs. His fingers traced a scalding path along the inside of her thighs. Moving up, he let them dance lightly across the shimmering platinum hair that dusted her pussy.

“Beautiful.”

She whimpered and that was all it took.

He reached down and pulled her legs high, hooking them over his shoulders until her ass rested against his belly with her nether lips exposed to him. She opened her body, her mind to him, holding nothing back. She slid her hands up and down his arms, marveling at their warmth. For an instant Viv saw his soul shining through his emerald eyes and the look touched her in a place she'd never let anyone explore. Her cold, dead heart grew warm and she was sure it was Alek's blood that pulsed through the chambers. She'd had such a small taste, wanted so much more. Then he leaned over, blew warm air across her already wet, swollen clit. His arms hooked

around her thighs and brought her pussy up to his mouth. When his tongue touched her, she screamed. He licked the drops of moisture gathered in every fold. Long sure strokes set her on fire and she bucked up against his face shamelessly. Right now, in this moment, he owned her, could do anything he wanted and she'd love it.

Tell me what you want.

Grabbing a handful of his long striped hair, Viv ground into his mouth, tried to get his tongue deeper into her core. One hand continued to hold her in place while with the fingers of the other he plucked and tugged at her nipples until she cried out again. His hand

massaged her breasts, cupping one after the other. Thumb and finger rolled the hard nubs until she was riddled with delicious pain.

His tongue continued to prod at her pussy and lap at the folds until her body was a mass of tremors. Each sweep through the creases left her breathless and weak.

Viv took everything he dished out. Until he bit her clit.

The animal roughness of his tongue ripped juices from her and then he licked her dry.

Alek raised his eyes and gazed at her. "I've never tasted anything this good."

“Oh my God, Alek, please. I need your cock inside me. Please.”

Whatever you want.

Releasing his hold on her thighs, he let her ass slide down his bent legs and onto the bed. Spreading them wider, he played in her cunt, stroking his fingers back and forth through the wetness there. When he flicked her blood-engorged folds and circled her nub with his thumb, Viv thought she'd die.

You are dead, baby.

So are you. Now please, fuck me.

I will.

He drove two fingers deep into her channel again and again. She quaked

beneath his ministrations, never wanting it to stop but needing it to stop. Her body bounced off the bed to meet his plunging fingers.

“Oh please...”

Told you you'd beg for it.

Damn you. Just as the words left her mind she felt him nudge the thick head of his penis against the entrance to her core. One hard push and he entered all the way to the hilt. His balls bumped her ass.

Yes! Now fuck me.

“I’ll love you,” he spoke aloud. “Just for tonight, I’ll love you.”

He slammed into her and pulled out. Over and over.

Her vagina convulsed around him and she shuddered as he sank deeper with each stroke. Rising up to meet him, she took every inch he delivered. Viv dug her heels into the bed to prevent his hard thrusts from pushing her away. Gripping his butt, she dug long nails into his ass.

Their bodies slapped together as she inched toward a shattering climax. Alek slowed his pace and eased one hand between them. He thrummed and pinched her clit some more.

He asked for everything she had and gave as much as he took.

Air whooshed from her body when he pulled out, lay atop her breathing

hard.

Not yet, not yet. I need more of you.

His lips covered her eyes with tiny kisses. Would she ever grow used to the animal warmth that emanated from his body and touched every inch of her? When his mouth captured hers in a searing kiss, she pushed her tongue past his lips, savoring the taste and warmth of his mouth. Viv suddenly wondered if she felt cold to him.

Never, never. You're so damn hot I can't wait to be inside you again. Rising above her, he used his knee to spread her thighs again. *Touch me, handle me just like you wanted to.*

He knew! No wonder he thought she

had no morals. She did want to handle his cock, touch it, fill her pussy with it. Reaching between them, she grasped his shaft and stroked it. Viv tugged the skin back and forth, eliciting a harsh groan of excitement.

Yes! Oh yes, Viv.

Silky cream slipped from the slit when she cupped the tip of his cock. Unable to bear the smells, the clenching of her pussy, Viv quickly guided Alek's shaft to the moist opening between her legs. Finding his rhythm once more, he jammed in and out of her pussy, going deep and hard, pulling out, moving back inside her with short, slow strokes. He took her out of herself. Viv felt like she

floated on air with Alek still fucking her so sweetly.

“God, Alek, please, please...”

“Come for me, baby. Come all over my dick.”

And she did.

Cream flowed from her and his shaft cut through it with each push in and every pull out.

Alek shuddered over her. He was on the verge of coming. His cock slammed into her quicker, harder, his pace maniacal. His hips were wedged between her legs as he jammed in and out of her pussy.

Air hissed from his lips as he slowed to short, jerky strokes. His ass tightened

in her hands and he drove deep with one final thrust.

Throwing his head back, he growled in pleasure as his cock erupted, sending a jet stream of cum deep inside her.

Viv squeezed her pussy tight and, clenching around his throbbing hardness, she stripped him of every drop.

“Oh. Hell. Yes. Christ, don’t stop doing that.” He pushed into her a few more times and emptied his balls.

Alek pulled away and shocked the hell out of her.

He moved off the bed and kneeled on the floor. “I’m not done.” Spreading her legs so wide they hurt, he dipped his head between them. His tongue swept up

and down the insides of both of her thighs while his fingers disappeared into her core.

A gasp escaped her throat and she shivered in delight when his fangs bit into her vein. Moving her fingers through his thick hair, she caressed him, held him tight to her thigh. Her mind was a shambles. Should she have stopped him from taking so much of her blood? Alek would now have access to her whole mind. She reveled in the feelings he brought to her, cherished how his mouth felt tasting, licking her. His tongue was rough, electric against her clit, yet he was so gentle, so soft and it caused her to whimper with joy. He stroked her cunt

with his fingers and an unexpected orgasm slipped violently from her, sending a flood of liquid from her core into his hand.

He licked and closed the punctures then moved his mouth back to her canal. His tongue delved into her pussy and his mouth captured the last drops of cum slipping from her. Never had she been so thoroughly...wonderfully... What had he said, 'Just for tonight I'll love you'. And he had.

Finished, he rose to sit beside her. "Now I'm done."

Speechless, with no explanation for the emotions swirling through her, she stared at his back.

Viv's heart fluttered with life at the awe and surprise tingeing his soft voice when he whispered—

“You quench my thirst.” Then he vanished.

Chapter Three

Alek sat on the balcony and watched the sun climb into the sky over the arena.

Quenched!

His chest rose and fell rapidly with the deep draughts of air he drew into his lungs. Never had he stayed in bed all night with a woman or beast. But he hadn't wanted to leave Viv. She was vampyre through and through and would be sleeping the sleep of the dead by now. He would have been alone anyway. Damn, he wanted to lie there, touch her and smell her heavenly scent all day.

Quenched! Is it possible?

No way could he let her find out about...about what? Technically nothing had ever happened between him and the prince. Sure, at times he had wanted to go there, at times they touched and mentally fondled each other. That was all. They'd both drawn back in surprise and fear of their out-of-control lust. Hell, he didn't care about men loving each other, he'd just always been attracted to women. Plain and simple. This thing with the prince... Well, he couldn't explain it. He knew wolf males often cavorted together, lay with each other and that didn't cause him to think any less about them as people or men.

Finding love, no matter where, should be a beautiful thing. Cats just didn't *do* it that way.

It was the blood, the vampyre elixir of life that made him hunger for his friend.

She quenches my thirst. If only I could be sure. Unable to get the thought of his words to her out of his mind, Alek shook his head in amazement.

Soon he'd be thirsting for the prince's blood. But his body exhibited none of the telltale signs yet. No needy sweating, no anxiousness.

The lion, his tiger, both preened and stretched inside him, quietly alert and waiting. For what?

It was weird.

Suddenly the tiger began to prowl, clawed and pushed at the lion, moved him aside. The only cat that ever emerged was his striped beast. Would he ever see tan fur running down his body, wear the black mane of the cave lion with its enormous paws? Shit, did he want to?

Nikol was a formidable sight when he changed. Not what the present day's small lions looked like in zoos or on the African savannas. Today's tigers were much larger than the fawn-colored cats. But they'd be no match in size to the close to eight hundred pounds of muscle and sinew the prince became.

His heart rattled an erratic beat. Something wasn't right.

Alek's striped hair lifted from his neck in a breeze blowing across the balcony, spraying around his face, weaving a peculiar odor through the air. Nostrils flared at the unknown scent and now the lion pranced about inside him.

When both cats displayed nervousness, the pain was unbearable as they fought for supremacy. "Fuck, what now?"

Don't be afraid of what you are.

"Who in hell..." The voice in his mind was strong, a power he'd never felt before.

His body lifted from the chair he'd

sprawled in, floated over the arena. Alek had no control of his extremities. His beasts growled and ripped at his insides, both crying for release.

Become what you should be.

“Goddamn it.” Landing softly in a heap on the sandy ground, Alek curled into the fetal position, sure he was about to die.

See what you can be.

Pictures flashed through his mind. A tiger and lion gamboled together on a grassy knoll. Alek sensed he knew them, felt they were one.

Clothes vanished as his body bowed from the ground. A keening sound wrenched from his throat followed by a

growl that shook the earth beneath him. “Let...me...go.” His pleading words slipped through parched lips stretched in a grimace. Alek’s eyes watered, tears flowed into the hair at his temples. Pain raged violently as he lurched to a kneeling position.

Changing will end the anguish.

“I...can’t.”

Do it now!

Remembering his first change to a tiger, he envisioned both animals coming together. In his mind the cats reared on their hind legs and joined in a weird circuslike parody of a dance.

“God help me,” he whispered. Pulling his body to an upright position

from the sandy earth, he doubled over.

Alek watched tan fur cover his legs, race up his hips and across his chest. No stripes. Where the hell were his tiger's stripes? Looking closer, he saw faded lines faintly mixed in the fawn color of tough hide parading down his arms to his fingertips. Claws emerged, hooked and deadly. Longer than ever before.

Pain subsided into a jumble of mixed emotions and feelings as the odd scent vanished.

This is what you are. The presence drifted away, carrying with it the strange odor that had swirled about his head.

He stood on all fours, alone in the middle of the warriors' arena.

No longer in anguish and not afraid of what he'd become, Alek slumped down, his beast's belly hitting the ground hard. Huge paws sat before him with a barely visible mixture of lines.

The animal's tongue emerged and swept across his much larger mouth. The essence was him but different. His scent was the same but different.

What the fuck?

His eyesight adjusted to the added inches as he stood on shaky legs. He turned his much heavier head and took in the fuller girth of his animal. No longer a tiger, not quite a lion. *I am one huge motherfucker!*

Darting from the arena, he wanted to

feel his new body, test its strength, agility and speed. He covered the distance to the ravine in record time and wasn't even breathing hard. Alek skidded to a stop at the very edge and peered at the other side. His tiger had never been able to make the big leap across the way a lion could.

His new beast backed up a short distance. Pushing off with his muscular back legs, he charged the ledge and bounded over the gully with ease. He continued running and ended up at the lake on the compound. Plopping down at the water's edge, he drank.

Tigers loved to swim, would his improved ubercat mind the water? He

waded in and struck out for the other side. *Hell yes, this is sweet.* Surfacing, he walked to a strip of grass and sat on his haunches.

Nose in the air, he caught the alluring scent of three tigers. Bengal. His balls tightened but not in the way they used to. The aroma was heady but the urge to take one was absent.

The group moved out of the grove of trees and came to a stop with their mouths open, tasting the air and sniffing. Agitated, the felines seemed unsure of what to do next. Normally they preened, danced around his striped cat, seeking attention.

Not this time.

There was a difference in him. He smelled funny to himself.

First one then another female fell to the ground with her tail tucked between her legs in a submissive position. Recognition dawned in their eyes and they huffed out air and growled softly.

Alek didn't want them anymore.

His mind drifted to the vamp lying in the safe room. His blood heated up and the scent of arousal wafted in the air. The three females made guttural sounds and rolled about the ground.

Nothing here for him.

Standing, he turned, plunged back into the cool lake and swam to the other side. The felines' disappointed roars

followed him. He came out of the water running at full speed back to the mansion.

It would be hours before the sun set and Viv rose.

His beast disappeared back into his body as soon as he entered the arena. The man's body strode naked toward the house. Warm sandy soil sifted between his toes with each step. Normally he'd have clothed himself and bounded to the balcony but he wanted the sun on his skin, wanted to feel the breeze caress his body. He felt so freaking alive.

You've gone nuts.

Alek's steps slowed. There was still the problem of needing royal sustenance

yet gnawing thirst remained absent from his belly—and it scared the shit out of him. Another need blazed inside. Unlike the front of the mansion, the back door on the first floor of the house leading from the arena to the gym area always remained unlocked. His cock had risen like a barometer and pointed to the doorway he'd been heading to when suddenly the door flew open with a bang.

Torn from his reverie, he jerked to a stop. Jesus, he needed to pay more attention to his surroundings and less to getting his dick wet.

Warriors stomped through the opening and came to a sudden halt, noses

in the air.

“Uh, you okay, man?” one asked, taking an involuntary step back.

“Don’t I look okay?”

“You...smell sort of funny. Damn near like a lion.”

“Well, it’s me. And why are your asses late?” Should have clothed himself. He wouldn’t be feeling so stupid and vulnerable. Damn if he intended to do it now and skulk away.

The Reign shuffled from foot to foot, unsure of what to make of him standing there, cock flying in the air. His growl cut short a snicker from one in the back.

“You got something to say, boy, spit it out.”

“No sir.”

“I can’t hear you.” Alek was having a little fun. They were afraid of him. Not the kind of fear you have for your ex-leader. Their fear lay in not knowing exactly what he was. *Fanfuckingtastic*. “Get your asses out there. I see any slacking in practice, you’ll answer to me. Go,” he bellowed. His new sense of power overflowed and infected each of them as they scuttled by.

Yeah, he was different.

Alek felt like the king of beasts.

* * * * *

She sat up in the strange bed, the

smell of sex surrounding her.

Alek was gone.

She was pissed off and her mind veered in every direction. She cleaned and clothed herself using her people's magic. Searching far and wide around the grounds, she couldn't feel the bastard.

Hell, she'd been with men both dead and alive. Alek was different. Hunger clawed and twisted her insides. Viv's veins contracted, screamed for blood—his blood. "Lord, don't do this to me." She'd heard about this feeling.

No way the weirdass cat could be her mate.

Unable to dematerialize, she paced

the floor and waited. When she got her hands on him she'd...

“What? You’ll do what?” Alek’s voice shook her to the core. It was as if warm honey drizzled over her cold, dead limbs.

He strode across the room from where she stood. “I like your hair out.”

Something was different, an air of superiority even worse than before shone from his eyes.

Viv’s nostrils flared at his new scent. Lion...and tiger. Both were so distinct she leaned into him sniffing loudly. Wonder replaced anger. He smelled like a goddamn lion. Shit, the stories were true. A Kind abomination already, a new

mixture of monster stood before her. Three of the world's most dreaded creatures rolled into one.

Tiger, lion and vampyre!

And the crazy fucker could walk in daylight.

“Get me the hell out of here.” Fear, claustrophobia, whatever, Viv needed the night air in her lungs. Her heart fluttered against her rib cage. “I’ll kill Phoenix when I see him.”

Alek chuckled at her discomfort.

“Bastard, get me out of here. Now!”

“Easy, baby. You’re safe with me, nothing, no one, will ever harm you.” Alek enclosed her in his arms. “But don’t make me go up against Phoenix. I

won't win. Now, let's get out of here."

Wrapped tight in his arms, before Viv had time to blink she sucked the cool night breeze through her lips.

"Tell me what the hell is going on?"

"Your power to vanish has been, well, the best way to describe it—stolen. For now. I'm sure it'll be returned."

"You know that's not what I meant." Pulling away from him, she walked to lean against the nearest tree. "What are you, Alek?"

He looked at the ground, rolled a stone with the tip of his boot. Brief glimpses in his mind were no help. Viv needed to see more but was unable to

grasp anything. An audible gasp heaved from her throat at the turmoil in his head.

Finally he gazed at her and moved to her side. Alek pressed his body into hers, forced her against the hard bark. Raising his wrist, he said, "Feed." Thirst for sustenance beat at her. Desire for his blood and only his drew her parched mouth to the vein in his arm. Her fangs lengthened. Biting into his flesh, deep to the artery, Viv gulped at his life force.

Pictures flashed through her mind. Two cats on their hind legs dancing, clinging to each other in the sun. Lion and tiger, neither fighting nor giving in to the other. Balanced on large padded feet,

they clung together.

Never fear me, baby. This is what I am.

Jerked back to reality by the voice in her head, she stopped drinking.

Releasing her hold on his wrist, she licked her lips and savored the last drop. Her tongue swept across the wound, closing it. Viv melted against the tree holding her up.

Alek's mouth touched hers so softly she wasn't sure it was real until his tongue prodded her lips for entry and she opened up to him like a flower. His taste fresh in her mouth, she kissed him back.

A dark corner in his mind remained shuttered with steel and she couldn't

break the barrier.

Let me in.

You're inside every part of me.
Damn, I want you. His hands moved down her hips, one inched between her thighs.

What are you hiding from me? She had to know. Clutching his fingers in a viselike grip, she stopped his progress.

Viv caught herself from falling when he pulled away.

“Come on, I’m taking you out. We can both use food.” He smiled at her brightly. “Who knows what else we can get into? Relax and have fun with me tonight.”

For now, she let it go. “We

walking?”

He glanced down at her stiletto boots. “Why don’t women wear sensible shoes? They do look good on you though.” His wide grin annoyed the hell out of her.

“These are much better to kick your ass with if I have to.” Viv couldn’t keep the smile from curling her lips.

He leaned back into her. “I know how to wipe that look from your face. I much prefer the smoldering, sexy one you had a few minutes ago.”

“So what do you plan to do about it?”

His mouth smashed into hers and his incisors nipped her bottom lip. After

kissing her deeply, he collected the spot of blood with his tongue.

“You taste good.” He straightened his shirt and appeared to fondle his balls a minute longer than necessary when he situated his swollen cock in his pants.

It was her turn to chuckle.

The breath left her body in a whoosh when he carried her quickly into the night sky.

“Drop me, bastard, I’ll kill you.”

“Viv, we’re both already dead.”

She joined in his infectious laughter.

Exhilaration lifted her spirits, made her forget she had momentarily lost the ability to fly. Alek winged her through

the night sky so fast her voice disappeared on the wind and her thick hair whipped against her cheeks. *Should have plaited it.*

I like it loose.

Why had that simple statement made her so happy? *I've never traveled like this before.*

I'll have to carry your ass around more often.

Don't get cocky, I'm not always going to be at a disadvantage.

Hang on, honey, enjoy the ride. He sped up and in moments dropped down in a secluded part of a brightly lit parking lot.

“Welcome back to the Looking

Glass. This time I'll make sure you see everything.”

Finding seats at the bar, Alek arranged with the bartender to get a private room. Finishing their drinks, they went back to wait on dinner. Human food held no appeal for vamps. But tonight Viv was starving. A bloody steak danced around in her head like visions of the fucking plum fairy.

When the door of the private room opened hair bristled on the back of her neck. A pretty blonde carried the tray over and set it on the table. Snow leopard shifter.

“Hey, Alek, it's been a while.”

“Hol, this is Viv. Viv, Holly is the

manager here.”

Going to stand by the open door, Viv said, “Thanks for the food, see ya.” *Whoa, where did that come from?* Not rude, never mean unless she had to be, the harsh words she spat out surprised the shit out of her.

“Honey, you won’t have a problem with me.” The shifter smiled and left a tad quicker than she entered. Viv wanted to bump her in the ass with the door. *Bitch.*

“Didn’t take you for the jealous type?”

Her cheeks grew hot with embarrassment at seeing Alek’s brow slant up in disbelief. Unable to resist the

warm smell of fresh blood emanating from the meat, she was drawn to the table.

“Yeah, well, neither did I but we’ll see how you do when you meet one of my exes.”

“Hol and I weren’t a couple, Viv.”

“I don’t care.” Yanking off a piece of steak, she chewed it thoughtfully and licked her fingers dry. Delicious. Processing the new feeling, she was unsure of what to say or do next. Viv wasn’t used to eating real food. Must be the cat’s blood because damn, she wanted more. And was she jealous? *Hell yes.* She turned back to face Alek, who still stared at her. “Don’t ever touch

her again. I'll drain your striped ass."

Snagging another large piece of meat, she swallowed it whole. Grabbing her neck, she sputtered and coughed until his hand thumped her on the back, causing the chunk to dislodge and fly from her mouth.

"I'll have to show you how to eat. It's something even a cub knows." He shook open a napkin and wiped her mouth before he planted a kiss there.

Viviana choked again. Not on meat this time but the implication of his words. She'd heard about mating with the Kind. No way was she going to be a goddamn hairy-assed cat. No way.

"Alek, everything going on here," her

arms motioned in the air, “I hope you’re not thinking we’re *draga* or something? We’re not mates.” Shoving hands through her hair, she wished it was braided so she could feel more like the killer she was. She tried to calm herself. “Shit, I’m not cut out to run on all fours.”

“Relax, we’re having fun tonight. Okay? I don’t expect anything from you.”

“Yeah, well, just thought I’d mention it.” She rubbed her sweating palms down her thighs. Not a normal vampyre reaction either. The warmth and flushes she’d started to feel, now sweating, these weren’t things her people did. It just didn’t happen. Cats went into heat, not vamps. They were coldhearted,

dead, damn it.

“No one will make you do something you don’t want to do.” His eyes became vampyrelike and narrowed to red slits. “My true mate, my *draga moja*, will want to be what I am.” His eyes burned into her. “No need to worry that description fits you, huh?”

Her sore throat wheezed on the air she breathed. “Look, don’t take offense or anything but I’m not exactly sure what that means. Yesterday I liked what we did. But it was sex, pure and simple.” Her shoulders flinched in reaction to the bead of sweat trickling down her spine.

“Hey, you’re sweating. I’ll ask Hol to turn up the air.” He spun on his heels

and headed toward the door.

“I’ll scratch her eyes out if she comes back in this room.” *Christ, I did not say that.*

“Yes, you did.” Alek rubbed his hands together before pushing one through his striped mane. He prowled back across the room, stood toe-to-toe with her. “Pull the claws in, honey. Makes you look like a wild cat and that turns me on.” Grasping her shoulders, he lowered his head to her neck, where he licked and nibbled on her pulse. Set her freezing-cold blood on fire.

“Alek, don’t, please,” she begged, fear gnawing at her insides. Her pussy clenched and sent cream sliding to the

seat of her already wet panties. Normally commando, after what happened last night, she thanked God she'd fabricated a pair. Hands shaking, Viv was suddenly more afraid of what would happen if he stopped.

“I’ll never stop. I want you,” he murmured softly against her neck. “Whether you choose to have claws or not doesn’t matter to me.” His head came up and their eyes clashed. The vampyre red gone, lust flared in his emerald depths. “I smell your desire.”

Too late to stop but she tried once more. “Aww, hell, please—”

He cut her off.

“Yeah, *please* take me. I’m yours

tonight, Viv, pure and simple.”

Chapter Four

Alek scoured her face intently as she made up her mind. Force wasn't something he'd use and he would put to death any male who mistreated a woman. It was hard to watch hesitation play across her features. Thoughts skittered in every direction around her mind and he couldn't grasp a single one.

He waited as each drop of sweat forming on her delectable body sent her aroma floating through the room. She smelled like heaven.

“I can give you everything you need.”

It killed him to see her pink tongue

peek out and move across her lips, kissable lips that beckoned to his. He hunched his shoulders to loosen the kink that had settled there while he waited.

He'd never force her but neither would he let her go. Viv owned him and she didn't know it yet but she was his. Never intending to let things go this far, Alek was unsure of his next move.

“Viv, let me make love to you. Just once more.” Her need slammed into him like a sledgehammer. That's all it took. He moved his arms around her waist, pulled her tight in his embrace and whispered, “I'm thirsty, honey.” Could she, *had she* quenched his thirst for the prince's blood? Alek hadn't thought

about him for hours. All he thought of was having this woman in his arms and making her...happy. Giving her what she wanted, what she needed. The idea of being with her always, keeping her to himself, made his heart soar. With Viv in his arms, for the first time in years Alek felt free.

Her head lolled to the side, baring her jugular. His fangs lengthened, ready to take what she offered. His tongue ran along her shoulder, lapped at the base of her neck until she trembled.

“Do it, taste me.”

His teeth sank slowly into her sweet flesh, punctured the vein and he drank. Her life force flowed into him, rushed to

every depleted cell in his body. The cats purred, stretched and preened. Each getting what they wanted—blood, Viv’s blood.

Alek clutched her ass, brought her hard against the bulge in his slacks. Not ready to remove them yet, he enjoyed the feel of her mound pressed to him.

Finished, he licked the pinpricks closed. “You’re so sweet.” His lips touched spots from her collarbone to the vee at the front of her leather vest. His tongue tasted and teased behind her ear and back down the vein he’d just fed from.

Her hands pushed between them and nudged his shirt up.

No, not yet. Let me hold and feel you against me just like this.

“How is it you slip so easily into my thoughts?” she asked.

Because you're mine. When she stiffened he said aloud, “For as long as you want to be.”

Her hands had reached his nipples and she pulled them roughly.

“You want to play rough?” He lifted one of his hands from her butt and returned it. *Thwack.* Her pelvis lurched forward, molding into his dick. “Ahh, you liked that, huh?”

“Think I might like anything you do to me.” She ground into him, sending shivers down his spine. “Let's see if I

can find something *you* like.” Viv bowed back and pulled his shirt up and over his head. Lowering her mouth to his pebbled nipple, she sucked it.

“Damn, I’d say that’s something.”

She wasn’t done. She bit down hard, drew blood and her tongue circled the tender peak. “Did I find anything else you like?”

“Oh yeah.” He walked backward and pressed her back to the glass, Alek pushed the button to raise the privacy screen. “Look.” He spun her around and pressed her tight against the glass. Was she a kindred spirit? He could have ventured deep into her psyche, seen what she liked but Alek needed to feel her

sensation firsthand. Watching someone touch another person intimately was stimulating and it fed his animalistic side. Viv had a wild streak, a dormant beast waiting to be let out. Alek wanted to be the one to release those emotions, bring them to the surface. “You like what you see?”

The couple in the performers’ room was deep in their act. Viv hissed her delight.

On her knees in the bed, the woman took all the man’s shaft in her cunt. With a good side view Alek and Viv watched it push in and pull out. The man had one hand on the small of the female’s back, one buried in her dark hair. Her head

craned back and turned to face them. A look of pure bliss danced on her face.

Watching turns you on.

It wasn't a question. He'd felt her heartbeat kick up a notch.

Yes.

She poked her ass against his cock and a drop of cum slipped from his dick. Alek struggled to refrain from taking his clothes off with magic. He wanted Viv to do it for him. Piece by piece.

Pulling her away from the glass, he reached around and began to undo the low-cut black leather vest. Reaching its last snap, he took it off. He turned her to face him and started with her pants. Once undone, he eased them over her

hips and inch by inch down her long, shapely legs.

“I’m developing a dislike for spiked boots.” He chuckled as he bent to take one then the other off. She leaned back on the glass. Alek tossed the boots across the room. Pants followed and landed in a nearby chair. Standing, he gazed at her naked except for a lacy red pair of panties. “Fucking beautiful.” He reached into her underwear and pushed his fingers through her moist folds. “And, damn, you’re wet.”

“Ooh, Alek, don’t tease me.” Viv jerked on his fingers. Arching back, she took them in her channel.

He used his other hand to work and

pinch her nipples into hard peaks. “Am I teasing you?”

“Yes.” Her fingers fumbled with the button at the top of his pants. Finally opening them, she reached in and grabbed his dick. “But not for long.”

Air whooshed from his lungs when her cool fingers captured his length.

Enough.

The rest of their clothes were gone in an instant.

“Cheater,” she murmured.

“Didn’t want you to have to tangle with my boots.” He whipped her back around just in time to see the man shoot a string of cum on his partner’s ass. “Baby, we missed the show. Guess

we'll have to have our own.”

Flipping her back to face him, he told her, “I want you, Viv.”

“Show me how much.”

Alek grasped her behind in his hands and lifted her. “Wrap your legs around my waist.” His painfully engorged cock slipped right into her wet canal. “God yes.” His knees flexed as he started to stroke in and out of her pussy. Back to the glass, there was nowhere for her to move. Her arms wound around his neck. Eyes closed, she began to pump her body up and down on his shaft. In minutes she had him ready to pop. No way would he come without satisfying her first. “Viv, open your eyes, look at

me.”

Midnight-blue eyes flashed open, her pink tongued darted out, wet her lips. She spoke softly, “Show me all of you.”

Alek stopped moving but still held her tight, kept his cock buried deep in her pussy. There was nothing he wanted more than to show her everything. How would she react? No. She’d already said she didn’t want to be his mate, already told him what she gave was only for now. But would that be enough?

“You want only tonight, that’s what I’ll give you.” Bending his head, he lapped at a peaked nipple, circled it with his tongue until he sucked the bud into his mouth. *Sweet*. “If you want me to

stop I will.” He released the nub and moved to the other side. He nipped it with his teeth, teased it with his tongue. “Tonight’s all you want, it’s all I’m offering.”

Arching her back, she ground her pelvis into his crotch. “I want you!”

“You got me, baby girl.” Slowly he pulled his cock out, just as slowly he eased back in her pussy. Again and again. Slow. Tonight he’d give her all she desired. Tomorrow, if Viv wasn’t there it would be just another godforsaken day and he’d live with it like he had all the other days. “You’re so fucking hot, so good.” His lips covering hers in a long, passionate kiss,

he nipped her.

Pushing deep, thrusting hard, this time Alek didn't let up. Sweating, she slipped up and down the glass surface each time he entered her.

Come for me. Come with me, honey.

Now...oooh Alek. She keened in his mind as her pussy throbbed around his thickness.

Give it to me.

She did. Cream slipped past his cock as she squeezed and milked him every time he surged in and pulled out. Unable to hold it any longer, his orgasm slid from his tight nuts through his cock and poured into her pussy. His head dropped to her shoulder, air puffed from him in

short gasps, sending strands of her platinum hair back and forth across his cheek.

Had he been human his knees would have buckled. Holding Viv, his cock still in her, was a dream come true, something Alek had thought he would never have. He wanted to hold her always. Keep her breasts pressed to his chest, her nipples glued to him.

“I’m not thirsty for him when I’m with you,” he whispered.

Realizing too late what he’d said, he shielded his mind but Alek couldn’t take the words back.

Son. Of. A. Bitch.

What had come over her? Viv had never been jealous a day in her life. Vampyres didn't have that bone in their body. Unless... No, she refused to entertain the idea. No. No. No.

Yes, her soul screamed back at her.

Shit.

Draga. Dragana. Either word, she knew what it meant. Mate. Vamps had life mates too.

I will not be part of a pride of freaking cats!

Had it not been for Phoenix Viv would have transported herself so far from the cat in front of her she'd forget him.

That was a lie. Viviana would never forget Alek.

Her head pounded as she struggled to keep him from her thoughts. *Think*. All she had to do was think rationally.

He had stood before her, waited so patiently for her to make up her mind. If she'd said no what would he have done?

It had been all over when he'd asked to make love to her—just once more. Her need to mate with him overrode everything. And boy had he made love to her.

Pressed against the cool glass, Viv clung to him, her legs wrapped around his waist, his cock still in her satisfied pussy. She stroked his back and pushed

her hands into his thick multicolored hair. His breath came in rapid gasps against her shoulder as he gathered himself.

This is my mate.

Thoughts ran rampant in her head and she missed the words he whispered, hadn't been able to read them. Something about being thirsty?

“Umm, babe, no offense but my mind was still on what you did to me so I missed what you said.”

“What?”

One sharp word. *Damn, why is he pissed?* “Did you say you were thirsty?”

“Uhh, yeah, I could use a glass of wine.”

“You’ll have to put me down first.”

His brow quirked up. “Right.”

He carried her to the bed and they both fell in and stretched out. Viviana looked around the room. It resembled the one she’d used with the brothers the night before except there was no sofa, only a bed, and an ornate cabinet that held towels, some lotion and oils. A highly polished wooden table stood in one corner with a few chairs. This was a voyeurs room and depending on what turned you on you could watch or be watched through the two-way mirror with the push of a button.

A bubble of happiness floated through her—he liked to watch too. She

had pegged him as a performer. The urge to put on a show for the couple in the other room had sneaked from his mind to hers while they watched.

“You wanted wine?”

“I’m fine. We should get back. Sun rises in a few hours.” He turned on his side and gazed at her. His fingers traced a heated path down her belly. “I love your brown skin and don’t want to see it burned.” His eyes followed his hand but he seemed distracted.

“Are you okay?”

“I’m fine, Viv.” He pulled his hand back. “Let’s get out of here.”

Dressed instantly, they left the room and walked through the bar. She peered

around for the manager, who was nowhere in sight. *Good.*

Stepping into the cool desert night, Alek stopped. “Wait here, I’ll be right back.”

Jealousy flared in her chest and she worked hard to tamp it down. Nothing she could do if he wanted to see the manager. Deep in thought, she ignored the sound of the door opening.

Viv leaned against the wall, unable to do anything other than wait. Of course, she could walk back to the mansion.

“Need to get somewhere?”

Goddamn it. Usually vigilant, she had allowed the creature to sneak up on

her. Not good. She sniffed and tried to search his mind to no avail. Viv did get one thing—the rank odor of transgressor, one who had recently slipped over the edge. Pumped up on human blood, he held his vampyre form well.

The Kind species had their own rogues and somehow this one had slipped unnoticed into the club. Alek, in his preoccupation with whatever he had to do, had missed the vile scent of the gaunt being. Any strong warrior would have picked up on it immediately.

“Fresh blood.” His smile twisted into a grimace. “Always makes us stronger.”

Transgressors were dangerous,

unpredictable street vermin who roamed at night. Known to drain man or beast of blood, they would assume their beastly form and gorge on the flesh. The more blood and flesh they consumed, the more uncontrollable they became, and eventually they lost their ability to change from their beast. Pursued endlessly by Reign warriors, the creatures died painfully in the form of whatever animal they were.

Handsome as hell, the diseased cat would be a formidable opponent. The hair coloring told her cheetah or jaguar. Making note of the thin, whipcord-hard body beneath a cotton t-shirt, Viv confirmed cheetah. As cat or a man they

were wiry and fast as hell. This one possessed strong vampyre abilities. She'd failed to keep her shields in place and he'd read her mind.

Standing straight, she faced him. If all her abilities had been present she would have had the choice of vanishing. Not tonight.

Viv decided she could handle this, no need to bother Alek. "I'm good."

"Bet you are." Fangs lengthened and the man's eyes swirled red.

She'd have to fight because he wasn't going anywhere. He'd already transgressed and his sick mind wouldn't allow him to walk away from what he saw as his next meal. Had he been

weaker there would have been a chance Viv could mentally send him on his way.

“You sure you want to do this?”

“I’d love to dance with you before I suck you dry. Bet you’re a tasty bitch.” Spittle wet his lips, glistened from his incisors.

“Let’s go.” Viv whipped out her knife and took a fighter’s stance, her knees flexed. On the balls of her feet, she was ready to move in any direction.

The creature lunged and she spun to the side, slashing him across the cheek.

“Whore! You’ll die for that.”

He feinted left, slid right and grasped her knife arm. *Shit*. Snatching her forward with inhuman strength, he

twisted her body and yanked her arm behind her.

Pulling her close, he whispered, “You’ll taste good.”

She almost fainted when she felt his fangs rip her jugular and tear a piece of her shoulder away. When he let her slip to the ground, irrationally, her only thought was of killing the Siberian tiger who had stolen her powers and left her vulnerable. Before her body hit the pavement glass broke somewhere and a vicious growl split the night air.

Alek.

Viviana refused to pass out. Rolling to her back, she watched the fight ensue as blood streamed from her body.

She saw the diseased being lifted from its feet by the neck and the cracking sound when his head slammed to the pavement made her cringe.

“Change or I’ll rip your heart out as you lie and you will die in disgrace.”

“Screw you, warrior.” A spurt of blood from its torn throat landed on Alek’s hand.

Honorable Reign never killed a transgressor in disgrace. The unfortunate creatures had often fought bravely beside those who had to hunt them. They had once been warriors who protected Kind and humans alike.

Those transgressors who succumbed to their bloodlust were given the

opportunity to die as the animal they were before being cursed. It was no different than her own species, who were given the opportunity to walk into the light rather than be killed by another vampyre.

“As you wish.”

The creature had a change of mind, wishing to fight and die with honor as a cheetah. Spotted fur sprouted on its heaving chest, covering the torso and running over the limbs. Red tears stained the beautiful thick fur as they coursed down the beast's face. The cheetah wheezed, unable to move.

Air hissed through Viv's lips as Alek's clothes disappeared and faintly

striped tan fur raced up his arms, down his legs and across his torso. The largest cat she'd ever seen smashed down on all fours, causing the ground to tremble. *Holy Christ!*

What stood there wasn't lion or tiger but a strange variation of both. The tiger's lines were faint on the fawn-colored lion's fur. Muscles rippled down his side and his flank quivered before he reared up and roared.

The solemn sound echoed off the side of the building.

Large paws landed on either side of the tiny spotted cat. Lowering his head, Alek opened his mouth and, baring huge fangs, bit into the belly of the

transgressor. Yanking back, he disemboweled the animal.

Alek had honored the cat by allowing him to die as the creature he'd been born.

The foul odor that filled the night air made her retch.

Weak and in extreme pain, Viv attempted to sit up. Blood continued to pour from the gaping wound in her shoulder and she had no strength to start the healing process. The pure scent of lion drifted over her. No, it was vampyre. Damn, the injury had destroyed her senses, trapped her even more.

Put her at Alek's mercy.

“Oh God, honey, I'm sorry. I

shouldn't have left you alone.”

The smell of vampyre grew stronger and she heard Case say, “Go, I'll clean this up. Feed her quickly and I'll get there as fast as I can.”

“Alek, I've lost too much blood to heal.” Tears glistened in his eyes. She murmured, “Blood, strong blood.”

“Mine is strong.”

“Vampyre blood,” she whispered. “Don't let me die.”

“Never.” He swept her up and moved into the fading black sky.

Her mind grew weaker as they headed toward the horizon, where dark was turning pink with light. Twirling with her in his arms, he vanished into a

tornadolike vortex to protect her from the early sun's rays.

He settled her in the dark room beneath the mansion's main floor and Case soon joined them, carrying a bottle. "This will replace the champagne you dropped."

Why did Alec want champagne? Confused and too weak to enter his mind, she listened to him talk quietly with Case, who suggested Alek feed her before he dematerialized.

"Viv, can you hear me?"

"No...cat...blood. Vampyre."

"You'll die if we wait. You're already weak from the sun's rising."

Dried tears stained his cheeks red. He'd give his life for her simply because they were mates. Alek was stronger than many of the Kind she'd met. He had the same vampyre abilities the royal brothers had. But he wasn't royalty.

“Alek, don't change me, I can't be what you are,” she whispered. “Vampyre, or at least royal blood. Law or Dace, they can sustain me until I heal.”

Anger reddened his face. “*Mine* is as royal as you're gonna get.” He slid into the bed and lifted her effortlessly onto his lap.

She struggled to hold her eyes open. His blood would take too long to heal

her, she'd die anyway, or he'd have to change her. Not an option. Viv was undead, not a cat, and she needed stronger sustenance than his blood.

Did Alek plan to make her his mate against her will? Why would he lie to her?

“I've fed from the prince for many years.” Pain, anger, infused his words. “I will not make you what you don't want to be.”

Don't...trust you.

His eyes became hooded and she winced at the anguish her words had caused as they raged through his mind.

He lowered his head, opened his wrist and pushed it against her lips.

Unable to move her head, Viviana had no choice as Alek's blood poured freely from the punctures. His life force filled her mouth and she swallowed.

Something else happened—the dark place in his mind opened.

Memories, pained and raw, assaulted her thoughts. A kaleidoscope of pictures with him and Nikolaus flashed before her like a movie. His love, his guilt at loving a man, dripped into her heart. His need, his desire and lust for the prince boiled through her veins.

Her eyes closed as she let it wash over her. All his years of fighting feelings for his best friend streamed alongside his new and wondrous need

for her. His vampyre side understood and could accept loving a man, the cat never would. Tigers were solitary creatures, searching out females only when the need arose. Male lions had a pride of lionesses, another male would not be accepted.

Alek pulled his arm away, her head lolled back against his shoulder. Still too weak to think or utter a single word, she opened her eyes and gazed at him.

“Now do you believe me? Do you understand why I can never have a mate?”

He lifted her gently into the bed and, using her ancestors' magic, he removed her blood-soaked clothes and cleansed

her body.

“Rest. I’ll return at dusk to feed you again.”

She watched weakly as he walked to the door. Turning, he leveled cold red eyes on her. “Do you trust me now?”

Love she had felt all along lanced through Viv. The words lodged in her throat, producing only a whimper. Alek didn’t vanish but before she could force the words out he had opened the door and walked out. When it clicked shut, the syllables slipped from her mouth.

“*Draga moja.*” she whispered.

Alek was gone and he’d locked her from his mind.

Chapter Five

Alek had pulled his wrist from her before she took too much. He'd given her just enough to start her healing. Nowhere near the amount she'd need to become what he was.

“I've never seen you accept defeat so easily. Where's that Big-Man-On-Compound attitude?”

Sitting just inside the doorway leading to the balcony, distracted by sunrise and the variety of sounds that accompanied daylight, he hadn't heard or felt Case's approach. Alek whipped around. “Not right now, man.”

“I remembered uttering those same words not long ago. Didn’t stop you.”

“Go to hell, Case. Where’s Tres?”
He stood and walked out on the balcony.

“The Looking Glass, catching up with Holly. What’s up with the lady below?” Case came out and stood beside him.

“She’ll live. If Phoenix hadn’t been pissed at her and zapped her ability to vanish I wouldn’t be stuck with the fallout.”

“A man doesn’t buy the vintage champagne you did to share with someone he considers fallout.”

“What can I say, weak moment.”

“Let me see. A few things come to mind. Hanging out the out-of-business sign is one. The great, the mighty BMOC has gone down. Shit like that.”

“Screw you.”

“Yeah I think I used those words too.” Shrugging, Case said, “It’s not bad, you know. I like having a mate.”

They stood in silence looking over the arena.

Alek turned and rested his hip against the railing. “Don’t think she’s keen on having me as a mate. Her exact words to me were—’I’m not cut out to run on all fours’.”

“Convince her otherwise. Show her the joy and freedom of being both. Took

us a while to get there ourselves so give her some time.”

“Why do the Fates fuck with us? We didn’t ask for this.”

“No one asks for trouble, man, but it comes sometimes. Meet it head-on.”

Walking back inside, Alek fell heavily into the overstuffed chair by the desk.

“Case, she knows about Nikol. I can’t be with her because Viv deserves a whole man, not the half-assed man I’ve become.”

“What are you talking about?”

“She needed strong blood to start the healing process. Royal blood. I gave it to her and it sort of aired my dirty

laundry. She knows how I feel about him.” Leaning back in the chair, he rubbed his hands over his face.

“Alek, she’s a goddamn vampyre. Hell, she’s not going to give a crap about who you screwed, male or female.” Case chuckled. “If she’s your *draga*, and she is because her smell is seeping from your pores, I’d only worry about the *next* female or male you touch.”

“Her name’s Viviana.” Alek glared up at his longtime friend. “Talk about her like that again, I’ll rip your guts out.”

“Good. I made my point. Look, I have to go. Why don’t you bring her to the club tonight, have dinner with me and

Tres?”

“No way, you’re not getting me to perform for you so you can get your jollies with your old lady.”

“Don’t call her old, I can still kick your ass. Though you do smell more and more like a... Wait, hold on.” Case leaned down and sniffed until Alek swatted him away. “Shit, man, you’re both cats now. I’ll be damned.”

“Something weird pulled it out of me yesterday morning. My life is a mess right now.”

“Smell better if you ask me.”

“Case, get out.” Alek sent a wave of energy that helped blast the other man into the atmosphere.

Son of a bitch. Now you think you're the king of beasts.

Go to hell.

The warrior's laughter lingered long after he disappeared.

Alek settled back in the chair. Could his friend be right? Vamps were different, a carnal group if ever there was one. Cats would do any female, hairy or not, but bloodsuckers would do anything, man or woman, when they were horny.

“Lord, maybe she's been with other women.”

Blood heated and burned a path through his body. What *would* happen if he met one of her ex-lovers? If any

bastard looked at her sideways he'd rip the heart right from his chest and shove it up his...

Oh hell, she was his *draga*. For sure.

He stood and paced, wearing a path across the floor.

Okay, how to convince her hairy was good? Think, Alek. How do you show her the beauty of being a cat?

The sun sat high in the sky and that meant she'd be dead to the world. Plus the injury weakened her. Being close, knowing Viv was okay, would help him think clearly.

He should check on her.

Alek dematerialized to where she rested. Slipping into bed beside her, he

wondered if she'd feel his presence. He kept his t-shirt and slacks on just in case.

Lying on his side, he gently pushed the wild platinum hair from her face and enjoyed the silky feel of her cool brown skin. She'd been too weak to redo the plait she loved. He decided against using magic. He could do it. Shifting her slightly, he began to braid Viv's hair. Done, it looked loose and crooked but at least she wouldn't wake up with hair in her face.

He sat against the headboard and considered his predicament.

If she was what he was, she could be with him now, running in the sun, frolicking in the lake—

That's it!

At some point in her life she'd been alive. Viv *must* miss the sun. He'd show her all the wonderful things she could do in daylight and still be a vampyre. Seeing the sky light up in the morning, watching the sunset—it made up for the fear of transgressing.

Shit, as a vamp she could turn rogue. They both had their demons to fight, one no worse than the other, right? Wrong. For every rogue, ten transgressors roamed. The beasts hadn't learned yet to fight the bloodlust as well as vamps had.

She wouldn't have to fear the hunters like the cats did until they mastered behaving like men and could blend in.

Vampyres already had that part down to a science.

Sure she wouldn't wake up, he lifted her onto his lap. Drawing her tight in his arms, he sniffed at the sweet scent that was pure Viviana.

Closing his eyes, he dozed off holding her next to his heart.

Alek woke with his arm cramped around her. When she moved slightly he realized hours had passed. The sun would be sliding toward the western horizon.

He glanced down, waiting for her eyes to open, and for the first time he noticed the pink streaks dried on her

cheeks. He'd cleansed every trace of blood after he fed her. She had cried before she fell asleep. Why? Did she dislike his species that much?

She moved again and murmured something. He lowered his ear to her mouth.

“Don't go.”

She had not wanted his blood, didn't want to be a cat—who the fuck was she thinking about? Alek's thoughts crashed around his mind. He locked his shields tight, careful to keep her out. He'd find out sooner or later who she thought about. Better later.

“Wake up, Viv.” He eased from under her. “You need to feed.”

She stretched, flinching in pain when she raised the wounded shoulder. “Damn that hurt.”

“You’ll be fine.” He opened his wrist and placed it in front of her.

“I could have done it myself.” She moved her lips to cover the tiny holes and started to drink. This time he didn’t have to stop her, she had more strength and, taking only what she needed to heal, Viv stopped herself.

“I thought you’d trust me now.” He stood from the bed. “I have no designs on changing you to something you find objectionable.” Not wanting to remember where her mouth had been, Alek fabricated a long-sleeved shirt. His

cock jerked against his pants at the idea of places he'd like to feel her lips. *Get a grip.*

Viv made it very plain she didn't want him or anyone like him.

He grated the words out, "Dress, I need to feed too. We're going to have dinner with Case and his mate tonight."

"Not sure I want to try another piece of steak."

"Whatever you want, the Looking Glass serves it. I'll leave you to get ready. I have to check on a few things." Grabbing the doorknob, he stopped. "Do you want to do this? We can stay here."

"I'm fine, give me time to think." She glared at him, angry color dotting her

cheeks. “I’ll let you know.”

Great, she’s mad.

“Don’t take too long. I’m hungry.”

Good job, asshole. Piss her off more.

She definitely wasn’t the type to take any shit from him. Not quietly anyway.

“The sooner you get out, the faster I’m ready.”

Yanking the door behind him, Alek jumped when it slammed in the frame.

“Should have just vanished, dickhead,” he said aloud, cursing himself and his stupid temper as he stomped down the hall.

Bastard. What bug crawled up his

ass and died? *Wish it had bit the hell out of him.* “No you don’t,” she said. Stretching the kinks out, Viv touched her wound and it ached a little. “Strong blood,” she murmured. *Great, now I’m talking to myself.*

Walking to the table, she spied the bottle of Dom 1998. Couldn’t get any better. That’s what Alek had gone back to get. Champagne. She’d been distracted, missed the transgressor because she’d thought he went back to talk to the manager.

Damn.

She shoved her hand into her hair and it stuck where a plait started. Too weak this morning to do anything but

drink his blood, she hadn't done this. Pulling it over her shoulder, she looked at the crooked braid.

Tears sprang from her eyes and slid down her cheeks.

Alek. She drew the hair under her nose, breathed in his scent. He'd come back and fixed her hair.

“God help me, I'm in love with him.” Saving her life, sharing his blood and his innermost thoughts had already chipped at the wall she thought she'd built around her heart. Imagining his strong fingers doing something so simple as braiding her hair sent the weak façade of bricks crashing away. “Now what?”

It wasn't just a mating call anymore.

Her heart wanted him as much as her mind and body. This man, beast, whatever he was—Alek—*was* the rest of her life.

Viviana didn't want to be without him.

Wiping away the tears and cleansing her body, she magically redid her hair. Viv left it loose because he liked it that way. Tonight, no leather. She donned a short, fitted peach-colored dress in silk. It complemented her brown skin and showed off her legs. She flashed on a pair of spiked heels in the same color.

Feeling like a girly-girl, she said aloud, "I do *not* want to be a hairy-assed cat, damn it."

The mantel over the fireplace held a bunch of candles and, finding some matches there, she lit the candles and spaced them out around the room.

Minus the ability to dematerialize, Viv still had some magic at her disposal. She snatched two champagne glasses from thin air and placed them on the table beside the bottle then sat in a big leather chair facing the door with her slender legs crossed.

She waited.

Hearing his steps in the hall, she was glad he hadn't used powers. Viv wanted to watch his face when he walked in, see his eyes light with the desire she'd smelled on him before he left. Her heart

beat so hard, pumping the new blood around, she felt like it would jump out of her chest.

The doorknob turned slowly and he walked in. Stopping dead in his tracks, he stared at her. “Jesus.”

The pleading note in his voice shook her to the core. *Maybe he doesn't want me.* Pushing the thought from her mind, she rose from the chair and slowly pivoted on her heels toward the table where the champagne sat with the glasses. Filling both, she spun around and, as sexily as a lithe warrior could walk, she carried one to him.

“You take my breath away.”

His hand brushed hers as he took the

glass, sending a spark of lust right between her legs. She'd decided to go braless and the thin, cool silk rubbed her nipples each time she breathed.

Viv needed to do something so she tipped the glass up and swallowed it all.

She swished back to the table and sat the flute down. Twisting around, she rested her butt against the edge and gripped the wood for balance.

“Thank you for saving my life.”

“Viv, I—”

She cut him off. “Come here.” She noticed his outfit for the first time. He'd chosen to forego the normal leather too. He wore a white vee-neck shirt highlighting the dark hair on his chest.

His charcoal slacks hung perfectly from narrow hips.

He reached her and she leaned into him, planting a light kiss on his mouth. Her tongue caressed the sparkling flavor left there. The wood her hands had latched on to kept her knees from buckling. Alek had a powerful effect on her senses. Having him, tasting all of him was what she needed.

His mouth held no more secrets. She knew every sweet corner and explored them all. Letting go of the table with one hand, Viv reached for the front of his slacks.

Alek groaned and his cock sprang to life under her hand as she peppered his

face with kisses then moved her lips down his corded neck.

“You don’t owe me anything.”

“I want this,” she said. Raising her head, she stared at him. “I’ve never done anything *I* didn’t want to.” It was her turn to laugh. “Right now I want to do you. *You owe me.*”

Viv intended to take payment in full as she lifted the shirt over his head and tossed it into the chair. No magic, no rushing. Slow. She tweaked his nipples, teased them into hard nubs. His moans reverberated around the room as her lips captured one then the other.

“Give me a break.”

“I’m not done yet.” Another throaty

chuckle slipped through her lips. “Not by a long shot.”

Unbuckling the only strap of leather on him, she undid his belt, slid the button through its hole and unzipped his pants. Reaching in, she grasped his heavy cock and nudged the tight skin up and down, letting her fingernails scrape over his sac.

Viv had him right where she wanted him—in the palm of her hand.

“Christ almighty,” he growled through clenched teeth.

“I want to taste you.” She shoved his slacks down until they dropped around his ankles. Viv stooped in front of him and rested her back against the table.

“All of you.”

“Goddamn, baby.”

Her tongue darted out, touched the tip of his penis. *So good.* She needed more.

Squeezing his buttocks in her hands, she encompassed the wet tip with her lips and sucked hard. Pulling back, she blew warm air across the head and watched a drop of cum slip from the tiny slit peeping at her. *That's* what she wanted, a taste of Alek, his essence. Lord, he was sweet.

Using her hand, Viv pushed his cock up into his belly, ran her tongue down the tender underside and nibbled on his balls. Pulling one then the other in her mouth, she sucked until she was

satisfied. She was so tempted to take a nip out of him, draw blood, *really* taste all of him.

One hand tugged his hips forward, bringing his thickness back to her lips. She took just the head in her mouth. Working the skin back and forth with her fingers, she used her tongue skillfully, wrapping it around his cock. She took him as far down her throat as she could. Slow and deep. Over and over.

“Please,” he whispered as his hands tangled in her hair.

Her tongue played along his shaft. “Please what?”

“Let me make love to you.”

“I’m not done yet.”

Taking him back in her mouth, Viv laved up and down his length, swallowing more of his cock each time. She used one hand to control how deep he went, the other still clutched his butt. Gripping her by the hair, Alek found his rhythm and began to pump in and out of her mouth. She gently scraped her teeth across the crown each time it reached her lips.

“Aww, hell... I’m gonna come.” He went up on his toes, squeezed his ass cheeks together hard as he pushed deep in her mouth. She worked faster, sucked more, waiting for his orgasm, waiting for him to fill her mouth. “Harder, baby, suck it harder,” he yelled.

Viv did and each time he pulled out she used the hand on his butt to bring him back in. Her tongue stroked the underside and her lips smacked against her other hand, circling the base of his cock. She pulled and sucked as hard as she could.

“It’s yours, honey,” he bellowed, shortening his jabs between her lips. “Now, Viv, oh sweet Jesus.” He spurted a stream of warm cum into her mouth, down her throat.

She suckled until he settled back on his heels then she lapped furiously at the tip, cleaning and taking every drop.

Finished, she grabbed his slacks and, pulling them up, stood on wobbly legs.

She straightened her short dress and walked to the chair to retrieve his shirt. Returning, she drew it over his head while he leaned against the table, breathing hard. She tucked it back in his pants, zipped them up, pushed the button through the hole and buckled his belt.

“Now I’m done. And I’m starved.” Planting a tiny kiss on his lips, she twirled around and walked out the door he’d left open.

“Shit.” He scrambled to catch her.

She sashayed down the hall. “Keep up, cat, or I’ll leave you here.”

Chapter Six

Had Case been right? Viv said nothing about what she had read in his mind. Her injury had been bad, perhaps she'd forgotten.

Alek didn't believe that for one second.

Following her down the long hallway was pure torture. His cock was swollen again and damn he wanted to be inside her pussy. She swung her ass in front of him without a care in the world. Maybe...

“Are we traveling the same way? My dress might blow up.” She giggled, a

tinkling, happy sound that reached right into his chest, ripped his heart out and dashed it against the wall.

He had to know if she could love him, damaged as he was.

“I can handle dematerializing with someone as tiny as you.”

She came to a dead stop. It was his turn to chuckle.

“I am *not* tiny. I’m big enough to kick your ass. Don’t let the pretty outfit and shoes fool you.”

They reached the front door and he grabbed her by the arm. “Viv, about last night, I can explain.”

“Hey, you went back in to get champagne. I should have paid attention

to my surroundings and not worried about you picking up where you left off with your ex.”

“I told you, Hol and I were not in a relationship, damn it. We were both single and we were there for each other. It’s different now.”

Her eyes pierced him. “What’s changed, Alek?”

“I did.” *Here it comes.* She’d want to know about his future relationship with Nikol. He couldn’t guarantee her anything when the prince got home. He’d be drawn right back into their web of desire.

“Why did you walk out on me last night?”

“You didn’t want me there.” Uneasy, he turned away from her. “I’m a hairy-assed cat. I walk on all fours and I like it, Viv.”

“I...I’m hungry. Can we just go?”

“At your service.” Alek was glad to drop it. He wouldn’t know what to say if she asked the hard question anyway. Besides, he was hungry too.

He’d fed at Big Bear before Case dropped by but it took a lot out of him to feed her. Human blood worked so much better than an animal kill. The skier had recovered quickly and he’d escorted the man home safely after he thought he’d bumped his head in a fall.

Reign never killed humans.

He snatched her against his body and disappeared to the Looking Glass. The lot was full of cars but no one was outside. Those still here had settled at the bar or in private rooms for the night. They'd all be looking for a good time.

Entering the club with Viv on his arm, he sniffed Case out immediately. He nodded at Alek from where he sat chatting up a wolf shifter. Alek peered around the room and found Tres. She glanced up and came right over.

“Damn it’s good to see you,” she said, throwing her arms around him. “Wow, Case said you had yourself a foxy-ass lady.” She reached her hand out to Viv. “I’m Tres. Alek and I go way

back.”

He sure as hell hoped Viv wouldn't start any shit. Tres was *really* tiny but with Case's blood in her veins she was far from easy to handle.

“I'm Viviana, call me Viv.”

Well, shit, that was too easy.

“Alek, visit with your friend, I'll sit with Tres and get to know her better.”

“Sure you're okay?”

“I'm fine but I could eat something. I'll have another run at a very rare steak. You can show me how to chew it.” Her broad smile sat his blood racing and his cock reared its big head. This vamp had his number. And if he looked in a mirror he'd find hers tattooed on his forehead.

“I’ll take care of it.”

As long as Holly stayed out of the way, the night could only get better.

“We gave her some time off. We decided to stay, hoping you guys would drop by.”

“Stay out of my mind, damn it.” He laughed and sat beside Case, who had been a lifesaver last night and today. “Thanks for stopping by this morning.”

“You know I love you, bro. Couldn’t stand to see you hurt. How are things?”

“She hasn’t mentioned anything. We haven’t talked much since she got up. The champagne was a hit,” Alek said.

“Hmm, I bet it was.”

“Being mated could be good I guess. We’ll see how it plays out.”

“She’ll come round. They give us a merry chase, don’t they? Like being on the hunt in the old days.”

“I don’t remember chasing water buffalo being so hard.”

He glanced back at the table where Viv and Tres seemed to be hitting it off. They shared a laugh over something.

“How long did it take for Tres to learn to keep you out of her mind?”

“You’re safe until you change her. Viv’s got old blood in her veins, though, I can barely read her.” He winked at Alek. “You may as well give up, it’ll wear you out.”

“Damn.”

“Come on, I’ll show you the new room we had done this week.” Case peered at him. “Does she know you’re a performer and that you like to be watched having sex?”

“We haven’t gotten that far in our relationship yet. Shit, now I know how you felt with Tres watching me. If I smelled you getting hot for her I’d claw your heart out.”

Case laughed so loud in the quiet hallway Alek was sure everyone heard him.

“Tres would beat you to it. Not a woman in the world gets my blood running like my little snow cat and it’ll

be like that until we die. You'll see. Still, I like to watch. We both do so it's no big deal." He pushed in a code and threw open the door to a room three times larger than any other on the premises.

A king-size bed sat against one of the four mirrored walls.

Alek asked, "No two-ways?"

"This is for patrons who like to be up close and personal. It's only for those who can handle that kind of action."

"Nice. In the old days I'd have loved a space like this."

In the far corner was a fully stocked bar and a dining table with four comfortable chairs. An oversized sofa

sat in the middle of the floor facing the bed.

Looking around the walls, he saw what he searched for. One mirror had a small glass button. Alek pushed it and a panel swished open. The spacious pale-blue bathroom held a sunken hot tub and was stocked with plush navy-blue towels, oils and anything else an adventurous couple would need.

“Nice. This will bring in big bucks.”

“I hope. Push the same button, the door closes.”

“I need to go order a couple steaks, you guys joining us?” Alek asked.

“Taken care of and should be here any moment.” Alek’s mouth opened but

Case raised his hand to stop him. “A meal with friends, man. You know better than that. It’s a private room where we can talk and catch up without being disturbed. No one does anything they don’t want to in my clubs.”

Alek’s lips compressed in a stern line. Suppose he couldn’t perform anymore? Would he be okay with that? Hell, there was too much to think about with this mating crap. What if he freaked when somebody watched her? He spun around at the chuckling behind him.

“I’m sorry, it’s just funny to see a cat, you in particular, go through the same thing I did. Things have a way of working out, Alek.”

“She doesn’t even want to be a cat, no way am I asking her if she likes to perform. This is going to take some time.”

A tray rattled in the hall and he looked up to see Tres pushing a trolley loaded with steaming rare steaks and all the trimmings into the room. Viv, on her heels, closed the door.

“Dinner is served. Don’t look for this treatment all the time, Case.”

“Babe, you never have to lift a finger if you don’t want to. Wait, sometimes you do.”

Alek watched closely as his friend kissed his mate on the back of her neck. Would he ever have an easygoing

relationship like theirs?

Viv silently came up behind him and her arms slipped around his waist. “I’m hungry, lover.”

Viv was glad she’d taken the time to talk with Tres. She had liked her immediately and could tell she loved her mate, Case, fiercely.

“Why are you cats afraid of sexuality?”

“You carry his scent and that’s the only reason I’ll answer the question you’re trying to ask. You want to know why Alek is afraid to take a mate.”

That was the other thing she liked about the snow leopard. Tres respected

her friendship with Alek, protected his privacy. The tiny cat valued her friends and would be a hell of an opponent if someone tried to hurt one.

“Vampyres are sexual creatures. We enjoy our carnal senses.”

“Cats are different,” Tres said. “In the wild most of us live solitary lives, only looking for sexual release a few times a year to procreate.” She peered into her drink as if she were reading tea leaves. “God, the Fates, screwed us up. I’m snow leopard and no cat is more elusive—except the tiger.” She glared across the table, her eyes bright. “I’m a shifter, well, I was a shifter. The Kind have vampyre blood like Case and Alek

but the natural instincts of the cat stays intact. Alek deals with more than the rest of us. Vampyre-infected blood runs in his veins, he has the genes of a solitary tiger and the spirit of the most social of felines—a lion, who is used to a pride full of females.” Tres’ face lit in a smile. “I’m mated to a lion so I know. I’m his only woman and he protects me as if I’m the whole pride.” Her smile disappeared quickly. “No other male would ever encroach on his female or set up camp in his space and certainly none would ever try to be *his* lover. Cats just aren’t built like that.”

Viviana understood. “Because of my ancestors’ blood curse cats are now

overridden with our baser desires.”

“You’re a very perceptive woman and you understand how this need and addiction to the blood of his best friend, his prince, affects him. And Alek’s definitely an alpha male.”

“What the hell have I gotten myself into?”

“Alek will never see you hurt and he’ll never let you go.” Tres reached across the table and took her hand. “Can you understand his pain at knowing if he completed the mating with you he’ll have to leave you regularly to take the blood of a man because yours will not satisfy him? What he’s most afraid of is his love and sexual desire for Nikol.”

“Thanks for telling me. How do I make him know I don’t give a shit? Not as long as he comes back to my bed each night.”

“Ah, you’ve thought of completing the mating.”

“I can’t have him any other way, and I will have him.”

“If you change will your cat, whichever it will be, let him go to a man so easily?”

“He’s both cats now.”

“Shit, it’s true then?”

“How did you know about him?”

“Case, he can’t keep me out of his head.” Tres chortled. “He doesn’t even

try anymore.”

Viv had only met Tres tonight and didn't want to get too personal but she wondered how she and Case handled the private rooms. What she really wanted to know was if she'd be able to really enjoy being with Alek, or would he balk at someone watching her. “We watched a couple last night but Alek's a performer.”

“How did *you* know?”

“He can't hide every thought from me.” It was Viv's turn to grin. “I like showing off my sexual prowess too. We tend to spot it in others.”

“Oh girl, we're going to have a ball. Come on, let's go feed the beasts.”

After they'd all finished their meal Viv poured a glass of wine and moved to sit on the edge of the bed. Tonight she wanted to perform and she had no problem with Alek's friends watching. Vampyres were many things but they weren't bashful about their bodies.

Alek's long legs stretched out in front of him as he talked with Case at the table. Tres stood behind her man, massaging his shoulders.

Viv fluffed her hair and watched him. When his eyes turned to her she smiled and wet her lips with her tongue. A bulge sat in the front of his slacks and God, she could still taste him on her

lips. The steak was filling and good but it couldn't hide the musky, sweet taste of Alek's cock.

Case moved with Tres to the sofa.

She nudged Alek's mind and rejoiced at finding it open to her.

You sure you want this? His emerald eyes held the red glow of a vamp.

I want you.

He stood and his clothes vanished. His big cock bobbed up and down as he crossed the room. It waved in front of her and the aroma drew a rivulet of cream from her. When her clothes disappeared, another spurt of liquid escaped. Alek wasted no time.

“Feel it, honey.”

Viv raised her hand and ran a fingernail across the moist tip. Her nipples hardened and tremors flashed through her pussy when he hissed.

She rubbed her finger over her lips and into her mouth. Viv’s tongue lapped his essence from the tip. “Fuck me, Alek, don’t make love to me. Not tonight,” she whispered, looking up at him.

I can only love you.

I know. She felt the same way.

He shoved her back across the bed, spread her thighs wide and looked at her nether lips.

You’re beautiful all over. He

reached down and stroked through the wet creases. Alek penetrated her with one then two fingers. They moved deep inside her. Touched places no one else ever had.

Raising her hips, she strained to get more.

He pulled his fingers out and stooped between her outstretched legs. When his tongue brushed her clit Viv bowed from the bed.

She could hear the other couple's bodies slapping together and she lifted her head to see Case driving into Tres from behind. Her channel convulsed.

“Alek, give me more.”

His tongue rolled and rubbed her clit

before he took it in his mouth. Sucked it hard. He pushed his tongue through her folds and thrust into her canal over and over with long, sure strokes. Grasping her hips, Alek raised her legs higher.

I want to have you in every way I can. His quiet voice rasped across her nerve endings, sending shivers down her spine.

“Then have me,” Viv cried out. “Have whatever you want.” If it meant Alek would have Nikol too, she’d deal with that when the time came.

Keeping her legs wide, Alek rose up and climbed onto the bed. He pushed his cock through the crevice of her pussy, wetting it in her cream. When his broad

head stood at her entrance, she lurched up to capture it.

He drove all the way in and she screamed in his mind. *Yes!*

Take my cock, Viv. Every inch of it.

He slammed his shaft inside her, ground into her pelvis. Easing his cock out, he thrust back in—again and again. The muscles in his arms quivered on each side of her. Viv wanted to feel his arms around her, have them hold her always.

Case grunted somewhere behind them and Tres yelled, “I’m coming, baby.”

Their voices spurred Viv on, helped to drive her into Alek. Like an airplane

gathered speed to rise in the sky, her orgasm lifted, reached a pinnacle and spiraled down and out. Tears of joy and love slipped into her hair. Arching up, she said, “Never let me go.”

Never.

“Come,” she murmured, trapped beneath him. She melted each time his hard body hit against hers, each time his cock plunged in and out of her wet pussy. “Come for me, Alek.”

Her heels pushed into the bed, she leveraged herself up, taking more with each stroke he delivered. Another orgasm whirled to life, on the verge of erupting, but he stopped.

“Come here, honey.” Pulling her into

a sitting position, he flipped her around and pushed her onto the bed on her knees. “I want to fuck you right.”

His hands swept the length of her back and he ran one finger dead center down her spine. Viv arched up in reaction. It felt as if he'd touched every nerve in her body with one stroke of his finger. Alek slammed his cock deep into her pussy.

“Unhh yes. More,” she crooned.

Reaching between her legs, she slid her fingers over her clit and let her fingernails scratch his penis each time he pulled from her canal.

“Harder, babe. You can't hurt me enough.”

Reaching farther, she gripped his balls and squeezed tight, scraping them with her nails.

“Oh yeah, that’s it.”

His hands had a grip on her hips and each time he pushed in he dragged her back to meet his onslaught. Alek pummeled her pussy until she couldn’t stand it.

Her vagina convulsed around his thickness as she neared the point of no return. Liquid tumbled down like a landslide, crashing from her pussy, drenching his already wet cock.

Alek, she slashed into his mind, I’m yours.

He jammed his length quicker,

farther with each shove until his hips jerked hard and ground against her ass. He tensed, his back arched and he grunted, spurting cum deep inside her.

Viv shuddered under him when she felt the turmoil and anguish bounding through his thoughts.

“I can’t keep you,” he growled. Collapsing over her back, he buried his face in her hair. “I’m so sorry.”

The anguish in his voice cut through Viv like a knife. Everything in the room stopped. No noise, no voices, just his heavy breathing. Turning her head to look for the others, she found they were alone.

“It’s too late. I won’t let you go.”

He rolled off her and lay on his back, his arm across his eyes. “You don’t understand.”

She lay on her side and glared at him. “Understand what? That you desire a man? I don’t give a shit, Alek. You wanted me, you got me and I’m not letting you go.”

He turned to make eye contact. How could he explain it? “You don’t know what you’re saying. You’ve been in my mind, you know I can’t stay away from him.”

“We’ll deal with that when and if the time comes.”

“This thing with Nikol, I don’t

understand it so I don't know how to make you." Looking away from her, he mumbled, "I can't live without his blood."

After a short while he rose from the bed and dressed. "Come on, I'll take you home."

Viv threw her legs over the side and, standing, she dressed in leather. Her hair slid into a neat braid down her back. Disappointment settled over him seeing her lovely thick mane pulled severely behind her in a plait. Gone was the pretty dress that showed her delicious thighs.

She stared at him and said, "I'm ready."

Pulling her against him, he dematerialized, taking her back to the basement of the mansion.

Leaving her by the bed, he strode to the door and she stopped him.

“Don’t go, Alek.” Her blue eyes shimmered with tears.

Goddamn it. Those were the words she’d said when he laid with her while she healed. It *was* him she thought about.

He loped back across the room, took her in his arms and held her tight. Moving his hands over her shoulders, stroking her back, her ass, Alek engraved the feel of her, the scent of her, in his memory. Stepping back, he ran his fingertips down her face and, using his

thumbs, he wiped her tears away and brought them to his lips. He sucked each one, savored her flavor.

“Honey, there’s only one person in this world I’d change for if I could. You.” Leaving her hurt him to the bone but that’s how it had to be. “I *can’t* change what I feel, Viv.”

He envisioned a vise wrapped around his heart and he closed it.

Alek turned and walked away.

Why lead her on when nothing could come of it? His steps were heavy as he climbed to the second floor. Snatching the door open, he went into the office. He ended up on the balcony staring across the arena into the desert. The

moon was slipping over the horizon. Sunrise wasn't far off.

Both cats clawed mercilessly at his insides. At least they weren't battling each other and that was worth something.

His nails dug into the railing, leaving fresh gouges. How would he feel when she left? With her gone his life would go back to the hell it had been, or be even worse.

His heart would go with her.

“You know, you're more of a jackass than your prince is, chasing around the countryside like a maniac looking for his mate.”

Alek jumped so high he damn near

tipped headfirst over the rail.

“What the fuck are you doing back here?”

Phoenix sat behind the desk.
“Waiting for you.”

“You are one sick fuck. You stripped her of the ability to vanish and leave her here for me to deal with. Why?”

“With both of you polluting the air with mating scent I couldn’t breathe. I thought it’d be good to leave you alone for a while.”

“What did you say?”

“Boy, she’s your mate.” Phoenix rose from the chair and came out on the balcony. He leaned on the wall in the far corner. “What is it with you?”

“You ever stop to think maybe you’re the jackass? I *cannot* have a mate.” Alek faced back to the desert and hills beyond.

“How you like having your cats all buddy-buddy?”

Alek whipped around. “Christ, it was you in my head?”

“Shit, I had to nudge you along. You would have been an old-ass man by the time you got around to bringing them together.” Phoenix sucked at the breeze that blew across the desert. “They will still live separately in you but they are one on the outside. You’ll get used to it.”

He should have known. This cat could probably read God’s mind.

“Yeah, you should have known and no, I’m not *that* good. Alek, you’re special, embrace it.” He looked toward the door. “Your woman’s coming.”

“She’s *not* my woman.”

“Good God, am I going to have to change her for you?”

Growling, Alek bristled, his hands clenched into fists. If he’d been in his cat his hackles would be up. “Don’t ever touch her again.” Aww hell, this was not a battle he wanted.

Viv stepped through the door. The sight of her had him gulping air. Damn he wanted her. Forever.

Phoenix’s green eyes nailed him to the railing. “When is the last time you

thirsted for Nikol's blood?"

Alek's mouth opened and closed, opened again but no sound came out. How long had it been? He'd drunk from the prince early in the morning the day he met Viv. That night was when he first tasted her blood. Three nights ago. He'd never gone so long.

"Three days, almost four." There had been no sexual urges for Nikol, no desire rode his back like a monkey except the desire to have the woman standing in front of him.

Viv's head moved back and forth, finally resting on Phoenix.

"What are you saying?" she asked.

"You're his mate, the answer to his

prayers. His only thirst is for you.” Phoenix spun past her and stepped in the door. “First and foremost we are cats but we’re also vampyres, so we lust for whatever feeds us. Nothing says we gotta fuck it unless we want to.” He grinned wide. “You guys can handle it from here, right?”

“Hey!” Viv yelled as Phoenix flickered out of sight. “What about my powers?”

His form shimmered back into the room. “The ping in the arm was a booster shot to speed up the mating that would have happened anyway. Your power to dematerialize is fine.” He smiled at them both. “She didn’t want to

leave so she couldn't. You didn't want her to go so she couldn't." Phoenix vanished in a shower of white light.

"Goddamn him," Alek said. "Maybe he is the fucking devil."

You're getting closer but don't push it, boy. I don't like you that much.
Laughter surrounded the arena.

Thanks, man.

My pleasure.

"Alek, what the hell just happened?"

He couldn't wrap his arms around her fast enough. His mouth slammed into hers so hard, he drew blood. Running his tongue over her lips, he moaned.

"What happened is now you're mine,

baby.”

“That works both ways,” she purred. “I’ve been yours since the day I touched this.” She ran her nails up the front of his pants. “And I still like how it feels Mr. Got-a-helluva-package.”

His cock throbbed under her hand.

“Viv, there’s so much I need to tell you. I don’t care if you walk on all fours or wear fur ever. Law and Dace hardly ever change, you can be like them if that’s what you want.” He lifted her chin up to gaze into her sparkling blue eyes. “Don’t you want to see the sun again?”

“Yes. I want to see everything the way you do, I want to run with you, play with you in the desert sun.” Her fingers

brushed his cheek and stopped on his lips. He sucked one into his mouth and wrapped his tongue around it. She looked at him with so much love in her eyes. “I want to be with you all the way no matter what it means.” She peered at him. “Are you okay with the Nikol thing? I don’t care one way or another.”

“As my true mate you would but trust me, all I need is you, honey. Since the day I first tasted you.” Now he knew it was true, he understood why he hadn’t thirsted for Nikol’s blood, which was what caused his overriding desire to be with him carnally. Phoenix had been right—it was his choice.

Alek lifted her in his arms and

twirled around the small space. Taking her to the railing, he placed her ass on it and stood nestled between her legs. The sun began to peek over the horizon and his beasts settled down quietly inside him.

Waiting for Alek to create their mate.

Vanishing with Viv in his arms, they tumbled into the bed in the room below the mansion. He still needed to protect her from the sun until she decided if she really wanted to be what he was.

“I want you so bad right now. But there’s something I need.”

She nibbled on his earlobe. “What?”

“Quench my thirst.”

The End

About J. Hali Steele

J. Hali Steele wishes she could grow fur, wings or fangs so she can stay warm, fly or just plain bite the crap out of... Well, since she can't, she would much rather roam where her fictional big cats live—in the high desert of California. She enjoys spending time with her sisters and friends who willingly listen to her ramblings about the paranormal world and anything else that goes bump in the night. They're a captive audience, but she promises to untie them soon!

A multi-published author and a member of RWA (PAN), when J. Hali's

not writing, she can be found snuggled in front of the TV with a good book, a cat in her lap and a cup of coffee.

Hali welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

Tell Us What You Think

We appreciate hearing reader opinions about our books. You can email the author directly or you can email us at Service@ellorascave.com (when contacting Customer Service, be sure to state the book title and author).

Also by J. Hali Steele

Ace of Spades

Hard Case

Hope in Love

Rhythm of Love

Print books by J. Hali Steele

Dance of Desire

Hope in Love

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorasave.com

Quench

ISBN 9781419931543

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Quench Copyright © 2014 J. Hali Steele

Edited by Ann Leveille
Cover art by Dar Albert

Electronic book publication May 2014

The terms Romantica® and Quickies® are registered trademarks of Ellora's Cave Publishing.

With the exception of quotes used in reviews, this book may not be reproduced or used in whole or in part by any means existing without written permission from the publisher, Ellora's Cave Publishing, Inc.® 1056 Home Avenue, Akron OH 44310-3502.

Warning: The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. No part of this book may be scanned, uploaded or distributed via the Internet or any other means, electronic or print, without the publisher's permission. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000. (<http://www.fbi.gov/ipr/>). Please purchase only

authorized electronic or print editions and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted material. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

This book is a work of fiction and any resemblance to persons, living or dead, or places, events or locales is purely coincidental. The characters are productions of the author's imagination and used fictitiously.



Discover for yourself why readers can't get enough of the multiple award-

winning publisher Ellora's Cave. Be sure to visit EC on the web at www.ellorascave.com to find erotic reading experiences that will leave you breathless. You can also find our books at all the major e-tailers (Barnes & Noble, Amazon Kindle, Sony, Kobo, Google, Apple iBookstore, All Romance eBooks, and others).

www.ellorascave.com