

Evernight Publishing

DORIS O'CONNOR

UNDER THE
Alpha's
PROTECTION

Evernight Publishing

DORIS O'CONNOR

UNDER THE
Alpha's
PROTECTION



Evernight Publishing

www.evernightpublishing.com

Copyright© 2013 Doris O'Connor

ISBN: 978-1-77130-593-8

Cover Artist: Sour Cherry Designs

Editor: Karyn White

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

WARNING: The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. No part of this book may be used or reproduced electronically or in print without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in reviews.

This is a work of fiction. All names, characters, and places are fictitious. Any

resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

DEDICATION

This is for you, Sir. Thank you for allowing me to use so much of 'us' in this story.

UNDER THE ALPHA'S PROTECTION

Doris O'Connor

Copyright © 2013

Chapter One

The scent of blood registered seconds before his sensitive hearing picked up the sound of her tears and the desperate knocks on his door. Raoul yanked the headphones out of his ears

and jumped off the treadmill.

The sobs were louder now they were not obscured by the beat of heavy metal, and his beast roared his anguish. He yanked the door to his apartment open, and Nikita fell into his arms. Covered in blood, mud, and with the unmistakable scent of many shifters clinging to her skin, she was a mess. Her shredded top exposed her lacy bra, and Raoul averted his eyes. This was Nikita, his friend, and she needed his help and protection, not to have his baser instincts rise to the forefront.

The blood froze in his veins at the thought of what must have happened to her to get her in this state, and he cradled her against his chest and kicked

the door shut. His apartment was bathed in moonlight, and she clung to him even more when she seemed to realize this. Her terrified brown eyes appeared to not register where she was.

"Easy, I've got you. You're safe, squirt."

He tightened his hold on her and nuzzled into her neck, repeating those words over and over, but it wasn't until he clicked the light switch on with his elbow that she ceased her struggles.

A shudder went through her, and he noticed that her tears had cut zig-zag paths through the mud stains on her face. Tears that had left corresponding patterns of misery on the vest top he'd slipped on to exercise.

"I'm sorry. I got you all wet and dirty, and ... I didn't know ... I'm sorry." Again she struggled to get down, and this time he let her. Her curvy little frame slid down his length with agonizing slowness, and he gritted his teeth and willed his beast to stand down. The last thing she needed right now was to notice the effect she always had on him. He slipped an arm 'round her waist when she stumbled, and it took every ounce of self-control he possessed to not let his agitation show. Nikita's back was covered in claw marks, as though she had been mauled by a giant animal, and this close to her he recognized the scent for what it was. Wolves, and something else, dry and ancient, that made his hair

stand on end.

The moon still shining through his open window mocked him with the intensity of its glare, and he shut his eyes against the knowledge cutting a path of pain through his heart.

"I didn't know where else to go." The heartfelt whisper reached deep down into his soul, and his own wolf whimpered in answer. He knew just how his beast felt.

Raoul sat down, cradling her once again in his arms, relieved beyond measure when she accepted the comfort he was offering after only a moment's hesitation.

"Tell me what happened?" He pitched his voice as gently as he could,

but she shook her head and started crying again. Big heaving sobs that had his imagination go into overdrive. If she didn't need him to be here right now, he'd shift and go after the bastards in an instant. But this wasn't about his feelings. This was all about her.

"Okay, you don't have to tell me, but let's get you cleaned up. Are you okay to sit here for a minute whilst I run you a bath?"

"Ye-es." She hiccupped between tears, and he dropped a kiss on her tangled hair and stood up with her still in his arms.

"I'll only be in the next room, okay?" He searched her gaze, and when her red-rimmed eyes connected with his,

she nodded. Raoul smiled at her and dropped another kiss, on her forehead, this time, half expecting her to recoil. Her fingers tightened in his vest, and she cried harder, but she didn't push him away, and he breathed a sigh of relief and gently deposited her on his battered old leather couch.

Nikita's sobs tore at his soul, and he had the bath run for her in record time. She put up no resistance when he picked her up and deposited her in the warm water, clothes and all. He didn't trust himself to remove her shredded garments. Nikita did it for him, hesitantly at first, and then with desperate clumsy moves that made the water slosh over the sides, until she sat just in her

underwear. Raoul left her to soak for a while, just a quiet presence by her side, until she pulled her knees up and yanked at her bra in an unspoken request.

His fingers shook as he undid the clasp and pulled it away, and his dick hardened to the point of pain at the glimpse of her heavy globes. Unmarred by the attack, they called him. Her nipples were perfect little nubs set in wide areolae, which had his wolf salivating with need, before she hugged her knees again and hid them.

Wordlessly he took the showerhead and rinsed her body off, the murky evidence of her attack swirling down the plughole. If only he could shut off the vivid images imprinted on his

eyelids as easily as the water tap.

She had finally stopped crying. The wrenching sobs that had shaken her body had subsided, and he managed to coax her out of the bath. With her body free of the mud and dirt it was just her hair that needed cleaning.

He massaged her silken tresses as gently as he could, forcing his breathing to stay even, to not give away his own anxiety. She'd been so upset, so devastated, that he hadn't managed to bring himself to ask her the one question that was burning on his soul.

Judging by the knickers she still wore, perhaps she had managed to get away before anything worse could have happened? Surely she would not lean

back into his hands if the bastards had done more than scare her silly?

His own beast roared and clawed to be set free, to seek revenge for the trespass on his territory, his woman. She was his, had been from the moment he'd spotted her across the crowded common room.

Raoul's jaws ached with the need to brand, to claim what was his, but that was not what she needed right now. He would stay her friend if it killed him.

With the last of the soapsuds rinsed out of her hair, he wrapped a towel around her head. Slowly and carefully he ran his fingers down her tense arms until he reached her hands wrapped around her thighs in a white

knuckled grip. As tense as a bow string, she shivered under his touch, and he swallowed a curse.

He stepped away and took his bath robe off the back of the door, averting his eyes when she uncurled her limbs and stepped into it.

Made for his much bigger frame, it dwarfed her, and she managed a weak smile when he cinched the belt tight around her waist.

"Can you walk, squirt?" he asked, and she nodded and took a hesitant step toward him.

"Good, go have a seat in the living room, while I grab a quick shower, and get rid of the mess."

Her eyes widened and filled

with fresh tears, and he called himself a goddamn fool for reminding her of her ordeal. Eyes darting around the room she looked terrified again, and he couldn't stop his wolf's growl this time.

She dashed away from him and banged the bathroom door shut, and he thumped his head against the wall.

Nikita curled into a ball on Raoul's couch and listened to the sounds of the shower. He had been the first person she'd thought of after she managed to get away from the creatures. Creatures too terrifying to comprehend. Walking back through the park after her late night shift at the café, the man had suddenly appeared in front of her. Tall,

intimidating, with a wicked scar slashed across his cheek, he had been impossible to get around. When she'd tried a pack of wolves had surrounded them. Teeth bared, heads down, they'd snarled at her, and frozen to the spot, she'd had no defense left against the man bearing down on her with glowing eyes.

"Such a pretty little bitch in heat, just for us boys. Has your momma never told you to stay inside at full moon?"

He'd smirked at the frantic shake of her head, and she'd watched in morbid fascination as his hand had formed into claws, and he had run one of those wicked looking claws along her cheek bones and down to the hollow of her throat. His other hand had grabbed

her shoulder, his claws slicing through her skin, the pain so acute that she had felt sick.

"What shall we do with her, boys? She would make a good snack, after we indulged in her body."

"No!" She'd found her mace spray in her bag and had somehow managed to get him right in the face when he bent down to kiss her.

His angry growl had trembled through her, not unlike Raoul's had back in the bathroom just then, but he had let go, and she'd run. Faster than she'd ever run, wolves on her heels, until they'd recoiled at his snarled command to let her go.

"You can run little bitch, but

we'll get you. You're marked."

Nikita had no idea what that meant, and she swallowed the rising bile of sheer panic and willed her breathing to slow down. She was here with Raoul, and she was safe. He'd said so, and he always kept her safe. Raoul, who she had connected with from the first look across the room, when he'd smiled at her and taken her under his wing. In his final year then he'd taken her freshman self and shown her the ropes.

She, Nikita, the geeky girl, who never attracted male attention had the most eligible male on campus at her beck and call. He'd made that first year special, and even once he'd left they'd stayed in touch. He had been her friend,

her cheerleader, the strong shoulder she cried on when one of her disastrous attempts at dating had gone wrong. Raoul, always on her side, the big brother she'd never had. Only he wasn't her brother, and lately she had looked at him in an entirely different light. Not that she would ever tell him that. Their friendship was too important to her, and besides he had never given her any indication that he was interested in her sexually. Not until tonight that is.

Nikita closed her eyes and recalled the sensation of Raoul's calloused hands sliding across her skin, erasing the memories of the other claws breaking her skin. The other man's putrid smell invading her nostrils was replaced

with Raoul's earthy essence. She couldn't recall him ever having smelled that good, but then she had never seen him in such intimate settings.

When he'd yanked the door open, she had been so relieved to find him in, she had literally fallen into his arms, and with typical Raoul fashion he'd taken charge and taken care of her.

The water shut off in the bathroom, and the door opened moments later. Wearing nothing but a low slung towel, Raoul was every woman's wet dream, and despite the situation, or maybe because of it, Nikita's insides clenched in need. Every feminine cell in her body sat up to take notice of the image of male perfection strolling

toward her in that long-limbed gait of his. His inherent grace had always been such a stark contrast to her own dorky self, and Nikita wished with all her might she hadn't lost her glasses in her struggle, so that she could better appreciate every dip and peak of the muscled perfection that were his abs. Droplets of water still clung to his skin, the dark trail of hair disappearing into the knot like a come and get me beacon to her libido.

It had to have been the danger she had been in, making her act so out of character, that she wanted to run across and jump her best friend's bones. Did they not say that? Something about sex being life affirming? Yes, that had to be

the only reason why her pussy practically salivated at the sight of Raoul's broad shouldered stance and her nipples did their best to poke through the soft fabric of her bath robe.

Piercing blue eyes regarded her from under heavy set lashes. His ever-present stubble graced a firm jaw and lips that should be too full on a man. On him however, they just added to his masculinity, and her gaze followed his hands as they adjusted the knot on his towel. A towel she desperately wanted him to get rid of. A towel that did little to hide his hardening dick.

"Let me get some clothes on and then we'll talk." There was a hoarseness to his deep voice that she had never

heard before, and her fingers itched to trace the firm contours of his ass, as he turned round and walked into his bedroom. He had shoulders to die for, enhanced by the intricate tattoo running down over one side and covering his left bicep. Broad and perfectly proportioned his shoulders tapered down to his lean hips and strong, hair-roughened thighs. Even his feet turned her on. Strong and capable they padded away, making barely a sound on the hard wood floor.

Jesus, what is wrong with you, girl?

Nikita clutched one of the cushions scattered along the couch. Cushions she had bought for him at his last birthday and she smiled through her

renewed tears, remembering that conversation.

"You bought me girly cushions?" There had been laughter in his eyes, even though he'd run his hands through his black hair in seeming desperation. It had caused it all to stand up, and she had reached across to straighten it out for him. There had been an odd look in his eyes when she'd done so, a rush of emotion and heat so fleeting that she later thought she must have imagined it. Now she wasn't so sure.

Then she had laughed to cover up her burgeoning awareness of him and thrown one of the cushions at his head.

"You need some feminine touches in this place. It's too male."

He'd snorted and mumbled, "That's the fucking point." The pillow fight that had followed had left them both breathless and grinning like fools, their easy camaraderie back in place.

Nikita jumped when the door to his bedroom opened and Raoul stepped through. Before he could say anything the howl of a wolf broke through the quiet room, and Nikita screamed.

Chapter Two

The wolf's howl echoed through the room, and Nikita's terrified scream rang in Raoul's ears. Clutching one of those silly cushions she'd bought him, she'd gone as white as a sheet, and his own wolf snarled, itching to be set free and shred the asshole intent on playing mind games with *his* girl. Something was very wrong here. Raoul's territory was off limits, so whoever was after Nikita was either a fucking fool or a dangerous rogue. His pack knew he'd staked his claim, even without his mark on her, so this threat was an outsider—one who had already left, if the

disappearing scent in the air was to be believed. Raoul ruthlessly squashed his need to comfort the terrified girl and opened the window instead.

He glared at his second in command sniffing at the ground, where moments before the intruder must have stood, and Darius bowed his head in submission.

"How was this allowed to happen?"

"I don't know, boss. I'm on it."

Darius's thoughts projected loud and clear as did several of Raoul's other pack members. All were as outraged and intent on revenge as Raoul was. Not only had their territory been invaded, but their Alpha's protection had been

breached. Little did Nikita know that his pack had watched over her from the minute she had accepted Raoul's offer of friendship. Of course a poor dumb ass job they had done of that tonight.

"See to it that you do, or heads will roll."

"Don't worry, boss. Just keep your mate with you, until we find out what the fuck is going on."

Raoul snarled at Darius, and the insolent pup had the audacity to grin a wolfish smirk up at him, before he bounded over the hedge. Not a minute too soon, because Nikita stepped up to the window.

"Is it gone?"

Raoul cursed inwardly at the

terror in those few words. If he ever needed any proof that he had been right to not show his true self to Nikita then this was it. Regardless of what his wolf had screamed at him from the minute he'd scented her five years ago, now, he could never make her his mate. Nikita didn't believe in anything that went bump in the night, and confronted with the very evidence of supernatural beings, like she had been tonight, she would no doubt already be scrambling her pretty little brain for a logical explanation.

"Is what gone, squirt?"

"The wolf, thing, whatever it is that chased me. Whatever you saw down there right now."

"I didn't see anything." The lie

settled in his gut like lead, and he jerked back in surprise when Nikita punched his shoulder with enough force to hurt.

"Do *not* take me for a fool. You had the same expression on your face that you have when you meet your rugby team." This was news to him, and he turned fully better to see her face.

Some of the color had returned to her pixie like features, and he suppressed a smile at the way her eyes went a bit cross eyed as she tried to focus on him. Without her glasses, Nikita had the most adorable squint, and her little nose was screwed up in concentration trying to see clearly.

"Where are your glasses, squirt?"

She stomped her foot and shrugged her shoulders.

"They fell off when ... I mean—"

"When you were attacked?" He said the words for her, and she nodded, wrapping her arms around her middle. The action pushed her breasts up, and his mouth went dry, as the robe slipped off her shoulder. She didn't seem to notice, and he stuck his hands in the pockets of the jeans he had changed into after his shower, to discreetly adjust his hard-on.

Her gaze flipped to his groin, and heat rose in her cheeks before she hastily brought her eyes back up to gaze at his mouth. Her little tongue darted out to lick her lips, and Raoul groaned.

"Nikita."

That blush of hers deepened and spread right into her cleavage. On anyone else he would have thought she would be doing that on purpose, but Nikita's responses were untutored and unpracticed. Her heart-rate sped up, and her scent increased. The wetness he sensed between her legs called him to taste, his wolf never closer to the surface than right now. Raoul needed to defuse this situation and fast, before he did something they would both regret in the morning.

"About the attack." He growled the words, and Nikita shuddered. She took a step back and yanked her robe back up over her shoulder.

"What about it? I was a fool I know. I should have taken a taxi home, but it's a nice night out, so I thought I'd walk."

Nikita jumped when he couldn't stop his wolf's very animalistic growl in response, and she threw him a worried glance.

"You did what? Are you insane?"

She took another step away from him and another until her back hit the wall, and it took all his willpower to not crowd her against the wall, and demand she promise never to do that again. Instead he punched one of those useless cushions and threw it across the room. What he really wanted to do was take

her by the shoulders and shake some sense into her, or failing that kiss her until she sagged against him and he could fuck her six ways from this Tuesday. His wolf panted his agreement with those thought processes, and he told the damn animal to *shut the fuck up*.

"There's no need to talk to me like that." The words were barely above a whisper, but his little squirt frowned at him, and he had to laugh. "And I fail to see what's so funny."

She pouted, and he slumped against the back of his couch.

"Lord, woman, you'll be the death of me. Promise me you won't do that again. Call me if you can't get hold of a taxi. I don't want you wandering the

streets at night. In fact, I don't want you working in that café at all. I told you before I'll lend you the extra money you need to subsidize your student loan. You don't have to work—"

Nikita's growl in response would have done any she-wolf proud, and her eyes flashed fire as she rounded on him.

"And if I told you once, I told you a hundred times, I do not *want* your money."

"It would be a loan, squirt, that's all."

"No, goddammit. *No!* Get it into your male chauvinistic head that I do not need your help."

He raised an eyebrow, and she bit her lips and colored again. An

endearing blush that turned her cheeks scarlet and made him want to kiss her so badly he'd taken two steps toward her before he'd even noticed.

"Male, I give you, but chauvinistic? Since when is wanting to protect the woman I lo ... like, being chauvinistic." He'd caught himself just in time. *Fuck*, this whole evening was messing with his brain. She didn't seem to have noticed his slip of the tongue. Instead she winced and pulled away from the wall in such an awkward manner that all his protective instincts kicked in at lightning speed.

Argument forgotten he stepped closer and pulled her up against him.

"What hurts, baby?" He winced

at the endearment he hadn't meant to utter, and she inhaled sharply when he cupped her shoulder. "Your scratches?" he asked. "Let me see."

Raoul turned her around, pulled her robe off one creamy shoulder, and whistled through his teeth. Angry and red the claw marks he had noticed earlier were weeping fluid, and she tensed when he gently pressed on the surrounding tissue.

"This looks as though it's in danger of getting infected. Come and sit down. I have some ointment that will help. I'm sorry, squirt. I should have done that earlier."

A ball of misery and fear sat in

Nikita's belly, and she let herself be led back to the couch. They looked infected he'd said. Did that mean she was infected with whatever that man ... thing was that had attacked her? *Don't be so stupid, girl. He was just a man.*

Yes, she had been watching too many horror films lately, that was all. She wasn't marked or maimed or would turn into some sort of freak at the next full moon. That was nonsense used to scare small children and bored housewives who got their kick out of reading paranormal smut. Not that there was anything wrong with reading smut. Nikita rather liked her smut if it involved actual people, not freaks sprouting fangs and baying at the moon.

Stuff and nonsense, that's what it was, and that full moon she could see through the open window did not just seem to wink at her.

And Raoul might have the most delicious growl when he got angry and his eyes seemed to glow in the dim light, but that was just her poor vision playing tricks on her. She jumped anew when his incredibly warm hand brushed her hair off her neck.

"Jesus, don't creep like that. You could give a woman a heart attack."

She glared at him, and he grinned, not the least bit apologetic in her view.

"Sorry, squirt, didn't mean to startle you. And I do *not* creep. I simply

walk without stomping about like a herd of elephants."

"You do, too, creep."

She stuck her tongue out at him, and he laughed. This was an old and frequent argument between them, and one she never won. For a man as tall and well-built as he was he moved with an uncanny grace and a quiet stealth. He sobered now, his fingertips tracing the top of her shoulder, and she couldn't help her wince when he inadvertently touched one of the gouges on her back.

"I'm sorry, squirt. I'll be as gentle as I can, but this will hurt when I put the ointment on. And I need you to slip your robe off your shoulders, so I can see your whole back. Don't worry. I'll keep

my eyes closed until you're covered again."

His voice took on that husky quality again, and Nikita clenched her thighs together to relieve the throbbing between her legs. This was insane. He was her friend, and he had already seen her naked when he helped her in and out of the bath, so why did her stupid hormones have to decide to act up now?

"If you keep your eyes closed then how the hell will you put that stuff on? Besides, I'm fully aware that I'm not God's gift to mankind, so I'm sure you'll be able to control yourself."

Her attempt at lightening the mood fell completely flat when her voice came out like a seedy porn star

impression of her usual cadence. She rolled her eyes and held her breath when Raoul's fingers dug into her shoulders briefly before he released her and cleared his throat several times.

"We will have to have a conversation about this warped self-image of yours soon, but now is not the time or the place. You're a beautiful woman, Nikita, and anyone saying otherwise will have me to answer to. Now drop the robe and stop stalling, before I have to drag you to the hospital to get these properly checked over."

Nikita tensed at the mention of the hospital, and he chuckled.

"I'm not going to any fucking hospital. You can't make me." She glared

at him over her shoulder, and he quirked an eyebrow at her in that irritatingly superior way of his that always turned her insides aflutter. She dropped her gaze to his throat instead and immediately wished she hadn't. This close she could see him swallow, the movement of his Adam's apple strangely erotic, and her fingers itched to trace the veins down to the thatch of dark hair she could just about see in the V of his polo shirt. A shirt that clung to his muscular frame and only served to outline the bulging biceps, as he raised an arm to brush his dark hair out of his eyes. He was in need of a haircut, his hair longer than she had ever seen it, the perfect length to grab hold and...

Nikita bit her lip and shut her eyes for a second at the wayward direction her thoughts were taking.

"You know I hate hospitals. I don't ever want to go back there."

Hospitals meant death and grief, and she had sworn on her mother's death bed that she would never set foot in that place again, if she could help it.

Unbidden, the tears fell as they always did when she thought of her mum, her grief still as fresh and raw as it had been two years ago.

Raoul made a rough sound in the back of his throat, and then his hands were cupping her face, his thumbs wiping away her tears.

"I'm sorry, squirt. That was

thoughtless of me," he said.

She forced her eyes open, and the quiet compassion she saw in his azure gaze made her cry harder.

"No, I'm sorry. It's been two years. You'd think I wouldn't go into fucking meltdown mode every time the hospital is even mentioned. Whoever said time is a great healer is a fucking liar, and I'm such a goddamn watering pot. Dammit, I'm sorry. That's the second time today I got you all wet."

Raoul laughed—a deep belly rumble that trembled through her until she had no choice but to smile back at him. He always managed to do that to her. One of the many reasons why she loved him.

Her heart clenched painfully, as the truth dawned on her. She did love him, and sometime over the last five years, that love had blossomed and deepened, until she couldn't imagine her life without him in it. Nikita wanted more, so much more, but he was her friend and only saw her as the little squirt he always pulled out of one scrap after the other.

"Don't you worry about me, squirt. Now drop that robe and hold still while I see to these."

Nikita did so, and a tense silence fell between them, only interspersed by their combined breathing. She winced a few times, as his nimble fingers smeared the ointment over her wounds, and he

murmured his husky apologies. His hot breath skittered across her slick flesh, and Nikita swallowed her groan.

"What's in that stuff?" she finally asked to break the tension and to distract herself from the tingles of awareness his touch created.

"Oh, this and that. It's an old family recipe. It aids the healing process and staves off infection. Works better than any of that new fandangled mumbo jumbo as my grandfather would have said."

She heard the wistful note in his voice and turned slightly to see his expression. The action exposed her breasts, and she made a hasty grab for the robe to pull it up over her front.

Again, Raoul's hands on her tightened and then released. He hastily wrenched his eyes up to her face and sat back on his haunches, before straightening up. She hadn't realized that he had been kneeling on the floor behind her, and the thought of this big strong man on his knees for her made her feel quite light-headed.

Raoul wiped his hands on the hand towel and then screwed the lid back on the old-fashioned jam jar that held the family ointment.

"We'll have to reapply that several times more overnight, for maximum effect, so I'm afraid you're stuck here with me for the foreseeable future."

"I don't want to impose on you, if ____"

"Don't be an idiot." He cut off her protest with a wave of his large hand. "If you think for one minute that I would let you walk out of here, after what almost happened to you tonight, then you're insane. You're staying right here with me. You can take the bed, and I'll sleep on the couch."

"You can't sleep on the couch." The thought of his six foot five frame sandwiched on this couch was ridiculous. "You're far too big. I'll take the couch. I can't turf you out of your own bed."

"And you can't sleep on the couch. Your back needs tender care. It's

not up for discussion. You're on my bed."

He crossed his arms and clenched his jaw, but Nikita was in no mood to back down from this. She could be just as stubborn if she had to be.

"Fine, then you'll sleep in there with me. I'm sure a man with your reputation has a nice big bed, and I won't take up much room at all." Her voice wavered slightly as his face grew murderous, but she plowed on regardless. "So that's sorted then."

"This is far from sorted." Raoul was growling again, and Nikita thanked the universe she was still seated, as she very much doubted her legs would have been able to carry her right now. He

bent, putting his hands either side of her on the back of the couch, until she had to lean backwards to escape him.

"What reputation, squirt?"

Chapter Three

Raoul ground his teeth and reined his wolf back with some effort. This close to her, her scent drove his beast wild. Fear and arousal mixed in with the faint smell of roses that was uniquely hers, and meant he could not go past a rose bush without thinking about her. It clung to her skin, and it called him home. Her eyes widened, her breathing grew labored, and her heart beat a frantic thud in his ears.

"Answer me, *girl*." He dropped his voice further and pinned her with the gaze that had any submissive he'd ever played with blanch. Raoul expected her to bolt, to push against him, but instead,

she dropped her gaze further and bowed her head in an unconscious act of submission that had his dick trying to punch a hole through the denim of his jeans.

Her scent increased, and he didn't miss her thigh muscles flex as though to increase the pressure she must be feeling.

Fuck!

"What reputation?" he asked again.

She flinched, and his hands itched to put her over his knee to get the answers he needed, but this was Nikita, his friend, damn it, and the last woman he'd have ever thought would submit to anyone. Yet here, right now, there was

no misreading the signals she was giving out, and his dominant side rose to the forefront.

Acting on them was out of the question, however. It had to have been the stress of almost being attacked that made Nikita act so out character. Yes, that was it—a natural reaction to being scared—to seek out the strongest male around to protect her. It was an instinct as old as time, and come morning and with a bit of perspective she would be back to her normal self.

Raoul hooked one finger under her chin to make her look at him, and the vulnerability in her gaze made him want to wrap up and protect her. From the world at large, and especially from his

baser instincts.

He smiled at her, and she relaxed slightly.

"Well, you know..."

The most delightful blush stained her cheeks.

"If I knew, I wouldn't be asking, now, would I, squirt?"

She worried her plump bottom lip with her teeth, and Raoul bit back a frustrated groan. He wasn't entirely successful, however, if the shudder that went through her little frame was anything to go by.

"Fine, have it your way. They say you like to tie your women up, that you need to be in charge in the bedroom."

That blush had deepened to a bright scarlet now, and every pore of her body quivered in seeming embarrassment, and God help him, arousal. She also tried her utmost to not look at him, but at a spot far over his left shoulder.

"An interesting choice of words you use. Most folks would call me a perverted bastard."

She flinched and jerked her gaze back to his.

"You're not a pervert, and you're not a bastard. I should know. I met your parents!"

He laughed at her attempt at humor, and she frowned at him.

"I mean it. No one has the right to

judge you. They don't know you like I do."

"You think you know me, squirt?" He pulled away from her and stepped back, not trusting himself to not crush her to him, and show her exactly what perverted things his mind was right now conjuring up. He turned his back on her before continuing.

"What if I told you that all those rumors were true?" he asked. "What if I told you that I like nothing more than to have complete control over my sexual partner, and that any misdemeanor will be severely punished. That I enjoy seeing how far I can push my submissive out of her comfort zone. That I like nothing more to see her beg for my cock,

and to withhold her orgasms until I see it fit to grant her one."

Fuck. Judging by her galloping heartbeat and choppy breaths, this plan of his was completely backfiring. He turned around slowly, the need to see her, to drink in her reaction overriding all common sense.

Sat on the edge of his couch, Nikita hung to his every word, and that blasted robe had slipped off her shoulder again, exposing milky white flesh that he would just love to mark with his hands, claws, and teeth. A fine sheen of perspiration covered her flesh, and he had no doubt that she would be wet for him. Nikita's eyes had lost their focus again, and he stepped closer so

that she could see him. Her gaze snared on his crotch, and she moaned. That feminine sound of need was so erotic he had taken another step towards her before he even realized, and she had to look up to see him.

Raoul almost didn't hear her whispered reply over the rush of blood in his ears. He was surprised he had any left up there and it hadn't all just shot straight to his dick.

"If you weren't my friend I'd think that sounds hot."

Shit, shit, shit, and fuck, and bollocks.

Had she really just said that out loud? It seemed so, because Raoul

groaned and ran his hand through his hair. The other one was a white knuckled ball clenched at his hip, and she forced herself to release the death grip she still had on the cushion.

"If you weren't my friend, I'd test that theory with you, Nikita." The words came out strained, and they washed over her like an embrace. To know that he seemed as affected as her made this whole situation marginally less embarrassing.

Wordlessly he held out his hand, and she took it. Raoul pulled her up with effortless ease and turned her around to face his bedroom.

"We'll discuss this in the morning. Right now, you need sleep. Go

make yourself comfortable. I'll be in soon."

"Promise?" she asked.

A flash of the old Raoul showed in his eyes, as he pulled the sign of the cross.

"Cross my heart and hope to die, squirt." His smile didn't reach his eyes, however, and Nikita could have sworn his intent gaze burned across her ass cheeks as she walked away.

Nikita woke to bright sunlight streaming into her room, the delicious smell of coffee, and the low rumble of male voices. She stretched and winced at the pain searing across her back. Not as intense as it had been last night, but it

was still there, a sobering reminder of yesterday's attack.

With that thought memories came flooding back. Memories of having her back tended to several times during the course of the night by Raoul. His strong, yet oh so careful fingers, had stroked across her wounds, lifting her slightly so that he could reach all of her, his comforting presence lulling her back to sleep, even though she had been hyperaware of his every move. She hadn't thought she would manage to sleep with him being this close by, and sure enough she hadn't to start with, until Raoul had sworn, tucked her up against him, dropped a kiss in her hair and had ordered her to sleep.

His strained voice had held that edge of command she'd heard him use with his team, and the tension coiling her insides had evaporated. That voice called to a part deep inside of her, and she simply allowed herself to let go, happy in the knowledge that Raoul would take care of everything. Here, in his arms, in his bed, she did not need to be strong, to show the world at large that she could do things on her own. He knew her inside out, had seen her at her worst, and he was still here, still her friend, the one man she could always rely on.

And if the way his erection had dug into her ass the entire night was anything to go by he would soon be much

more than simply her friend. If last night's attack had shown her anything, it was that life could change at the drop of a hat. She would seize the moment and seduce him. The only problem was, Nikita had no idea how to seduce any man, let alone a Dom like Raoul so clearly was.

Her stomach rumbled, and Nikita drew a face at her rambling thoughts. The urgent demands of her bladder taken care of, she padded back into the bedroom in search of something to wear. Raoul's robe left at the bottom of her bed was out of the question. Blood stains marked the back, and her stomach roiled at the visible reminder. She didn't really want to intrude on his privacy by

rummaging through his wardrobe, so the only other option was one of his worn shirts. Carelessly flung into a corner it held his scent, and Nikita lifted it to her nose and inhaled deeply.

Instantly her heaving stomach settled, and a sense of well-being invaded her. His shirt smelled like home, and she shrugged it on without a moment's hesitation. He was so much taller than she that it hung to mid-thigh, and by the time she'd rolled the sleeves up and buttoned it up, she was adequately covered, as long as she didn't bend over.

With one last grimace at her reflection in the bathroom mirror, she followed that enticing trail of coffee and

frying bacon.

"Are you sure he's gone?"

"Absolutely, boss. There is no trace of our intruder. It's as though nothing ever happened. Of course the rain we had early this morning hasn't helped. Whatever tracks there were left over disappeared down the fucking drain."

Raoul frowned at his beta and bit back a curse. Darius shrugged his shoulders and took another swig of the just brewed coffee.

"I don't understand it either. They shouldn't have been able to breach our territory lines. After the recent troubles our neighboring packs reported, we

stepped up security patrols as you'd ordered. It's like these guys were ghosts or something."

Raoul flipped the omelet he was making for Nikita, and nodded grimly.

"Do you think the attacks elsewhere and this one are linked?"

Darius paused, and his expression grew as murderous as Raoul felt on the inside.

"If they are, then the devil has just come to pay us a visit, and your mate is fucked and not in a good way."

Raoul's wolf growled his annoyance, and Darius bowed his head in submission to the Alpha.

"Watch your language when you're talking about Nikita."

"Sorry, boss, I mean no offence. We all like the kid, but she's your weak link. If this is the hybrid he'll come for her to force your hand. It would certainly explain how he managed to breach our defenses. Things like him are a fucking abomination, and there's nothing we can do, 'cause he carries the pack's genes. There is only one way to protect her, and that's a slim one at that. Mark her, and make her one of us."

Raoul laughed and turned the hob off.

"That's never going to happen. She'd run a fucking mile, and there is no way I'll force this on her. No fucking way."

His wolf's happy panting alerted

him to the fact that they were not on their own anymore. Darius's wolf whistle of male appreciation made his blood boil, and he spun around ready to take the man's head off, verbally at least, when the sight of a deliciously rumpled looking Nikita took his breath away. All his blood shot south, and he groaned under his breath.

Dressed in nothing but one of his old work shirts, the sun was behind her, rendering the fine fabric completely transparent, and every one of her luscious curves was there for him to see.

Darius had the good sense to avert his eyes, but Raoul didn't miss the smirk on the other man's face.

"Watch it, pup."

"Sorry, boss, but she is fucking hot, and yours for the taking, if you ask me."

"I didn't fucking ask you, did I? Now get the hell out of my flat, and let me know of any more developments."

"Sure thing, boss."

Darius's laughter echoed in his brain, as his beta smiled at Nikita.

"Someone had a good night, I see." He ducked the punch Raoul aimed at his midriff and sauntered away chuckling. "Nice to meet you again, Nikita."

She blinked twice and stepped out of his way.

"I swear I'm going to kill that boy one day."

That brought an uncertain smile on her pale features, and she shook her head.

"And lose your best rugby player? I don't think so, Raoul. Besides, prison orange is not your color I reckon."

He laughed, his worries lifting slightly. She was safe, and she was here. He would just concentrate on that for now, not the imminent threat to his leadership, or what that might mean to Nikita.

"Please tell me you have a coffee cup with my name on it, and that omelet I can smell is ready to eat. I'm starving."

"Sure thing, squirt. Take a seat and I'll bring it right over." He handed

her a mug of steaming coffee, and he smiled at the way she eagerly wrapped her hands around it, and inhaled the fragrant brew. Nikita was like a bear with a sore head without her caffeine hit first thing. Sure enough she mewled like a newborn kitten—a sound that made his cock so hard it hurt—closed her eyes and took several long swallows. Raoul shifted to relieve the discomfort in his groin, but he couldn't tear his gaze away from the subtle movement of her neck as she swallowed. It was all too easy to imagine her lips wrapped around his cock as he fucked her mouth and she swallowed down his cum.

He turned abruptly to get his raging body under control, as she slid on

one of the high bar stools at his breakfast bar. The action exposed far too much creamy white skin for his sanity, and her scent hit him square in the face. His wolf practically rolled over, salivating in his need for this woman, and he put his hands to good use cutting the omelet in half instead.

Raoul joined her at the bar and slid a plate of food across to her, mindful not to touch her. He was sure his wolf would lose it completely if he did. Already it was far too close to the surface, and he kept his eyes downcast in case his animal showed. He didn't want to scare her away. Nikita needed to stay close to him, to keep her safe.

The sound of her appreciative

moans made his head shoot up. Eyes closed she licked her fork with such a look of bliss on her face, you'd have thought he'd served her some delicacy instead of a simple omelet. Raoul groaned under his breath, and her eyes fluttered open and connected with his. Neither one of them said anything for the space of several anxious heartbeats, and then she smiled. A shy, utterly adorable smile that pulled him in and under her spell. If he hadn't already been in love with her, right now would have been the moment he'd have tumbled headlong into oblivion.

He had to clear his throat several times before he could get his voice to work, and her eyes widened a fraction.

Her pupils dilated, and she put the fork back down on her now half empty plate with a far too loud clang.

"You do wonders for a man's ego, you know," he finally said and inwardly rolled his eyes at the inane comment.

A giggle escaped her, and the little minx did roll her eyes.

"I hardly think your ego needs any more stroking."

Raoul raised an eyebrow at that, and rocked back on the legs of his chair.

"What is that supposed to mean, squirt?"

"Well, you know." She dropped her gaze and pushed the leftover food around her plate, until he dropped the

chair back down, and put his hand on her fingers, stilling the frantic movement. A surge of heat and electricity shot up his arm, and Nikita inhaled sharply and tried to pull her hand away. When he wouldn't let her, she bit her lip, and his wolf snarled.

"Don't do that. The only marks I want to see on your body are the ones I put there."

Now, why the fuck had he said that? Instead of continuing to pull away, his little human smiled, and finally looked at him again.

"Don't say things like that unless you mean them. I'm not one of your Barbie doll girlfriends, you know. You've never shown the slightest bit of

interest in me. So don't think that I'm an easy lay, just because I've fallen in your lap, so to speak."

"When exactly did I give the impression that you would be an easy lay, squirt?" His annoyance at her assumption made his voice gruffer than he intended it to be, and she flinched.

"You didn't. I'm sorry." Her answer was barely above a whisper and tugged at his heart strings.

"Come here."

He let go off her hand and opened his arms wide, in the age old offer of comfort, and like a frightened foal she complied. She burrowed into him as though her life depended on it, and he pulled her close and simply held

her, his wolf for once content at having his mate in his arms.

"What's this all about, squirt?"

Chapter Four

Surrounded by Raoul, his thundering heart beat under her ear, the world narrowed to just this moment in his arms, and her worries flew away. He stroked lazy circles over her back, careful to not to touch the areas marked by the claws, and she tensed.

"Will I have scars?"

He stilled his movement, and his deep sigh reverberated through her. Wordlessly he picked her up and carried her back into the bedroom, and she blinked when he deposited her in front of the full length mirror he had set up in one corner. From this angle she had a clear view of the bed behind them, and

heat rose in her cheeks when it dawned on her why he had that mirror there. He wasn't a vain man, so she'd wondered why it was there. He cupped her chin and raised her head up until her gaze connected with his in the mirror.

"What do you see when you look into the mirror, *girl*?"

The way he said *girl* sent moisture seeping past her pussy lips, and his nostrils flared, as though he could smell how wet she was.

His fingers dug into her skin with just enough force to focus her on him.

"Well, answer me. I want to know why you have such a goddamn low opinion of yourself. What. Do. You. See?"

"I-I..." Nikita flinched when his grip grew painful, and he slid his hand down to her throat, and squeezed. She pulled back in a desperate attempt to draw air into her lungs, panic clouding her brain for that terrifying second until she realized that she could indeed breathe, as long as she stayed pinned to him.

He raised an eyebrow and cocked his head waiting for her answer, and he released his hold on her slightly when she swallowed hard.

"I see me. Just little old me. I'm nothing special."

Raoul waited and simply continued to look at her, holding her captive with his eyes alone, until every

nerve ending tingled, and she squeezed her thighs together to relieve the insistent throbbing in her clit.

"Don't even think about it, *girl*. Trust me, my fingers are itching to put you over my knee, and to spank that perfect ass until it's red raw."

Heaven help her, those words should not turn her on so much that her juices were now trickling down her inner thigh. He was bound to notice, and she screwed her eyes shut so she wouldn't have to witness it in the mirror. Instantly he moved. One hand wrapped in her hair he pulled her head up with an almost feral growl, and kicked her legs apart with his foot.

"I said, look at yourself in the

mirror and tell me what you see."

Her scalp stung, and the sharp pain brought tears to her eyes.

"Please, Raoul..."

The slap to her outer thigh hurt, and she flinched. He rubbed the sting away and ran his stubble roughened jaw across the sensitive skin of her neck. Her knees would have buckled, had he not wrapped an arm around her waist to hold her up, and pushed his knee between her legs to support her.

"Trust me, squirt, you don't want to get me angry. I asked you something. I expect an answer." His voice was firm, but his features had gentled, and she lost herself in the tender feelings she saw in his eyes. He really had the most

beautiful eyes. As though he read her thoughts, he smiled and dropped a kiss on the spot on her neck where her heart seemed intent to be beating itself out of her body.

"Shall I tell you what I see?" he asked.

Nikita swallowed nervously and nodded.

"Use your words, baby."

She blinked at the unexpected endearment, and he focused her attention back on the mirror with a gentle tug to her hair.

"Ye-es, please, Sir." She bit her lip, when he grew tense at the salutation offered to him. Had she gotten this wrong, too? Did he not want the title?

According to her books that's what a Dom ought to be called. It was a sign of respect, and she had no doubt in her mind that right now Raoul was in full Dom mode.

She breathed a sigh of relief when he relaxed slightly.

"Do not call me that, unless you mean it and you're ready for the consequences, squirt." His deep baritone was the lowest she had ever heard it, and gooseflesh broke out over her body.

"And if I do mean it?"

Raoul's wolf howled his joy, and he shut his eyes, and took a deep breath to help him rein in his beast. Nonetheless he knew his beast was

showing in his eyes when he looked at her. Nikita's breath hitched, and she blinked rapidly as though to clear her vision, but he didn't sense any fear from her. Just full blown feminine arousal and need that matched his own.

Fuck it.

One kiss. There could be no harm in just one kiss. Before he could change his mind, he claimed her mouth, and he knew instantly that one kiss would never be enough. He ran his tongue along the seam of her mouth, coaxing her to open for him, and when she did so on a little whimper of need he tasted heaven. She tasted of strawberries and chocolate and the coffee she'd drunk earlier, and that indefinable something

that was all Nikita. Without breaking the kiss he turned her around in his arms and lifted her up against the mirror. She gasped into his mouth and then wrapped her legs around his waist. All that hot wetness next to his over-eager cock sent his wolf over the edge, and she winced when his claws ran out and pricked her skin.

He deepened the kiss further, grinding his erection into her sodden pussy, until she flexed against him of her own accord. He ought to stop her, but this felt way too good, and he could tell by her increased scent and her choppy breaths how close she was to her release. Faster and faster he thrust against her, the movement sweet agony

on his dick, and he fucked her mouth with his tongue in tandem to the thrusts of his hips.

Her breaths grew choppy still, and he wrenched his lips off hers to be able to see her fall apart. When she did, it almost sent him over the edge, too. Head thrown back, her mouth open in a silent “O” her whole body tensed and flushed. Beads of perspiration dotted her adorable little nose, and then she came apart with the cutest little mewls of completion.

He continued thrusting against her until he'd rung every last tremor from her, and her eyes fluttered open again.

Her passion clouded gaze sought his, and he released his hold on her

slowly. The descent down his body was pure torture, and she gasped when he turned her around again, and took a step back so she could see herself in the mirror again.

"I see a beautiful woman with curves I want to fuck every inch of. A woman whose scent drives me crazy. I love how wet you are for me, how you ride my crotch in your pursuit of passion. The little sounds you make as you fall apart, the way my jeans are soaked through with your need for me. I love every inch of your curves, and I don't give a flying fuck if your back will carry scars. I'll lick every inch of them and then eat out your pussy until you scream my name, until you know I own

you, body, soul, and mind."

He paused to see what effect his words were having on her, mindful of the fact that he was half shifted. Never in his life had he had such trouble keeping his wolf under control. His eyes had bled to yellow, his claws had run out, and his fangs pricked the side of his lips, yet she hadn't seemed to notice. Or if she had, it didn't send her cowering away from him. Quite the opposite, in fact. She pushed her ass into his groin, and she brought her arms up, and grabbed hold of his hair, pulling his head down to her level. The tentative kiss she dropped on his jaw had him clench every muscle in his body with the effort it took not to howl in joy.

"Do you really mean it? You want me?"

Instead of answering her, the world tilted and all the air left her lungs in a big *whoosh*, when Raoul threw her over his shoulder. In a few long legged strides he'd crossed the distance to his bed, and before she could blink she was lying face down over his lap with his shirt pulled up and falling over her head. Thus robbed off her vision she could only feel, and a shiver of anticipation went through her, when he massaged the globes of her ass with his hands. He grabbed full handfuls and squeezed. By rights she should have been mortified that he could do that so easily, but his

appreciative murmurs, and the way he ran his fingers through her soaking wet slit robbed her off any ability to think. All she could do was feel.

"I want you to count these spansks, squirt. I'll only use my hands *this time*." He chuckled at the shiver that went through her body. "Ah, I see, my little naughty girl likes that idea. You'll take as many of these as you can. If it gets too much, your safe word is red. Are we clear?"

"Yes."

He yanked her hair, and she flinched.

"Yes, Sir," she hastily added.

"Good girl, now count."

The first slap took her breath

away with the sheer intensity behind it. This wasn't a playful swat on the backside. No, this was a no holds barred smack that echoed around the room and left her ass on fire.

"One." She panted the word, and another smack followed on the other cheek this time.

"Two."

Slap.

"Three."

Slap.

"Four."

Tears streamed down her face, as the blows continued to fall. Raoul hit a different spot every time until her butt and upper thighs were a hot stinging mess of pain that morphed into arousal

so intense Nikita could barely stand it. Higher and higher she climbed until with one last exhale she counted twenty-five, and he stopped.

Curiously bereft, her empty pussy clenched in desperate need, but Raoul sat her up, and pulled her into a hug. With an audible rip his shirt fell off her body, and he wrapped a soft blanket around her shoulders. Her hair was tucked behind her ears, and cool liquid touched her parched lips.

"Drink, squirt."

Nikita didn't even think to argue, so enthralling was his deep voice, and she drank the cool liquid eagerly, until he took the water bottle away and his hot, firm lips touched hers. Her barely

banked down arousal flared into an inferno again, and she moaned when he broke the kiss and licked along her jaw. His curiously rough tongue reminded her of her cat at home, and created exquisite friction along her sweat slicked skin.

"Get on the bed for me and lie down on your front." The whispered words into her ear galvanized her into action, and he murmured his approval.

"Good girl. I'm going to restrain you now, my sweet girl. Just your arms to start with, and then I'm going to fuck you."

She couldn't stop her moan at those words, and he laughed, the sound so low and sexy, Nikita was sure she could come from listening to his voice

alone. He ran a hand down her spine until he reached her butt, and then he scraped his nails along the tender flesh. The burn was pain and bliss all wrapped into one, and she jumped when he parted her ass cheeks.

He dropped a kiss on her anus and slipped a finger into her pussy causing her to pant, and her internal muscles pulled tight, and tried to draw the digit inside. Raoul laughed softly and slipped another finger into her desperately clenching cunt at the same time as his tongue pushed through the tight ring of her muscle that had never been breached before. Warmth spread through her as that tongue probed in tune with his fingers in her pussy. He took her

right to the edge and then withdrew.

"Nooooo." The high-pitched wail leaving her mouth didn't sound like her voice at all. Raoul paid no heed to her whimpering. Instead he grasped one of her arms and pulled it upwards, and then there was the sound of Velcro and something soft and thick wrapped around her wrist.

He ran his finger underneath the restraint, and then his face appeared in her blurry vision. Unlike earlier when her mind had played tricks on her, this time round all she saw was Raoul in all his ruggedly handsome glory. Her mouth went dry at the sight of his bare chest. He must have somehow got undressed when she wasn't paying attention, too

caught up in the myriad of sensations he'd already coaxed from her body.

If this was what kinky sex did, then Nikita couldn't understand why more people didn't embrace this lifestyle. Never in her life had she been this turned on. Raoul repeated the process to her other arm until she was tied and couldn't move.

"What's your safe word, squirt?"

"Red, but I don't need it. Please don't stop."

"Good girl."

The approval in his voice washed over her senses, and Nikita was close to tears, so overwhelmed was she by the intensity of the moment.

With her breasts squashed into

the bed, her nipples chafed against the cover, and she bucked when he slid his hands under her and pinched each nipple in turn. With his naked chest pressed against her back, exerting pressure on the left-over soreness there, Nikita felt owned, and used, and she reveled in that feeling, as he rolled each hard nub between his fingertips and pulled. Darts of arousal shot through her body to her clit, and she couldn't help her breathless moan.

"Oh, that feels so good."

He kissed her shoulder and withdrew again. Tiny stings to her back made her gasp. Each sting was soothed by soft lips.

"Turn your head and look at us in

the mirror. I want you to see me fuck you. I want you to see my cock plundering your sweet cunt, so that you'll know who owns you."

Instead of appalling her, those words excited her further, and she dutifully turned to look. Even though her vision was hazy she could see him towering over her, his body so big and dark compared to her, and every fiber of her being tensed when she caught the first glimpse of his cock. Thick and long, it rose from its thatch of dark hair, his heavy balls swinging underneath as he moved. Raoul took himself in hand and stroked his dick from head to root with slow measured moves that had her mewling anew.

"Beg me for my cock, *girl*. Tell me you want it. Tell me you're mine."

"Yes, anything, please. I need you I need your cock ... Sir."

The tagged on address made him growl, and Nikita closed her eyes when he placed several cushions under her hips until her ass was elevated.

"So wet, so beautiful. Who owns this pussy, squirt?"

"You do, Sir."

"Damn fucking right, I do."

He slid the thick head of his erection through her pussy lips, and Nikita held her breath as his heat branded her. He repeated that process over and over until Nikita wanted to scream and her nerve endings were

strung so tight, she could barely breathe. She yanked on her restraints, but it was useless. When he finally breached her hole it was with agonizing slowness that awakened every one of her vaginal nerves, and she grit her teeth at the sensation of being filled and stretched to capacity.

"Fuck, you're so tight. Your cunt is squeezing my cock. Relax for me, baby. Let me in."

She knew when he encountered the barrier of her innocence because he froze. Arms locked either side of her, he just stayed there, his hot breath huffing along her spine.

"Nikita?" She could hear the strain in his voice, and she made the

decision for him, by pushing her hips up until he slid all the way in.

The sharp pain took her breath away, and he swore, and tried to pull out, but she clenched around him.

"Please, Raoul, don't stop. I want this. I want you."

The litany of swear words erupting from him made her ears burn hot, but he did as she asked, and the sharp burn eased as her body adjusted to his invasion. The familiar tingles returned, and when he started to thrust in and out, her body's needs took over.

"Yes, God yes. Again, harder, please, Sir ... Oh ... oh..."

Nikita didn't even know what she was saying anymore as every slide of his

hard flesh inside her filled her more. Her womb clenched in rhythmic waves, and Raoul lost his restraint. His fingers dug into her hips as her first orgasm hit, and he thrust harder, sending her tumbling into multiple orgasms so intense that she could only bite into the cushion to muffle her screams. Nikita was dimly aware of him tensing and then pulling out of her. The hot jets of his cum hit her back, branding her, and she burst into tears of happiness.

Chapter Five

Raoul ran out of swear words in his head, even as his wolf grinned in happiness. He rolled off her and frowned at the visible evidence of her virginity staining his sheet. He had been so damn rough on her, and guilt pricked his conscience, even though tiny aftershocks still wracked Nikita's body. She had come hard and fast, squeezing his cock, until he too had climaxed. How he'd managed to pull out just in time was beyond him, as was the fact that he'd risked her like that.

Nikita moaned and yanked on her restraints, and he made short work of releasing her. Massaging each arm in

turn, he murmured nonsense to keep her in her languid post-orgasmic haze for as long as possible, before she realized how sore she was.

And she would be sore. Her back had only just healed; her ass and legs were red from her earlier spanking, and she carried the tiny pinpricks on her hips where his claws had dug in. Bite marks trailed along her spine, where his wolf had marked his ownership, and his beast positively strutted in satisfaction. The man, however, was appalled at how much his wolf had taken over in the heat of the moment. As hot as it was seeing his cum drying on her bountiful curves, and her pale skin carrying the marks of his possession, he couldn't help but

worry that he had gone too far.

With infinite care he rolled her over, and her wince of pain as her back and ass hit the sheets speared his heart.

"I'm sorry, squirt." His voice sounded strained even to his own ears. Nikita frowned, and her eyes fluttered open. He braced himself for the condemnation and disgust he was bound to see, but instead she went cross-eyed trying to focus on him.

"There's two of you."

Raoul laughed, and she tentatively raised her hand and touched his cheek.

"That's better. Stay still, you're making me dizzy," she said on a long exhale. She blinked several times in a

seeming effort to get her eyes to focus, and then she smiled at him. It was the same shy, heart-wrenching smile she'd given him earlier, the one that made his wolf roll over in submission, and brought the man to his knees.

"Nikita, I—"

"No, don't. Please don't. I don't want to hear that you're sorry. Let me just lie here and pretend for a minute. I'll be out of your hair soon." Her eyes widened at his frustrated growl in response, and she let her hand drop.

"What the fuck are you talking about, squirt?"

Heat climbed into her cheeks, and she didn't look at him. She just worried her bottom lip with her little

teeth, until he pulled her chin down, freeing her lip.

"Don't do that. I told you before the only one marking you is me."

"But, you said you're sorry. I assumed..."

"Dammit, Nikita!" He released her and ran a hand through his hair in an effort to keep himself from touching her, because heaven help him, he'd put her over his knee again. His dick hardened at the thought, and she gasped when she noticed.

"I said I'm sorry, because I should have been much gentler on you. This was your first time. You deserved flowers, and chocolate, and sweet seduction, not a hard, perverted fuck."

She flinched at the words, and he gentled his tone and hooked his finger under her chin to make her look at him. "Why didn't you tell me, squirt? You should have told me."

"And what would you have done, had I told you? You'd have treated me differently. Damn you, Raoul, I don't want nice. I never did. I just wanted you, all of you, and I wanted you to treat me like you treat all the other girls you've been with. I'm tired of being your friend."

She clamped her mouth shut as though she'd said too much, and he rubbed his thumb across her lips. They were still swollen from his earlier kisses, and her delicate skin showed the

burn from his stubble.

"Baby, we left being friends behind when I put you over my knee, and I have the urge to do that again, to stop those inane thoughts swirling around in your head." Her breath hitched at that, and he didn't need his shifter senses to smell the sweet musk of her arousal. "You'd like that, wouldn't you, squirt?"

She didn't answer, but that blush of hers deepened, and she shifted her legs restlessly. Giving in to instinct, he straddled her legs and pinned her arms above her head.

"That's better. I can't have you wriggling around when I'm trying to have a conversation here."

She giggled at that, and just like

that the old Nikita was back. She stuck her tongue out at him, and the niggling worries he'd carried around with him lifted off his shoulders. He grinned down at her, and then he sobered.

"Seriously, squirt. I wish you'd told me. You'll be sore for days after what we did, and for the record, I would never treat you like those plentiful other women you seem to think I have. They were just a fuck, a play mate, a roll in the hay, whatever euphemism you want to come up with. I would never treat you like that. You're..."

He ran out of words, not ready to spill his love for her. She still didn't know who he truly was, and he couldn't tell her. Thanks to her poor eyesight she

clearly hadn't noticed his wolf shining through, and he couldn't shake the uneasy feeling that his wolf would be one step too far. The Nikita he knew did not believe in anything even remotely paranormal, and he was too afraid of spoiling what they had now. If she ran from him, then how would he protect her from the very real threat looming over them? No, she was better off not knowing, until he had to tell her. It was safer that way for all concerned.

His wolf grumbled his annoyance at his thought processes, but he was back in full charge of him, and he ignored his beast.

"I'm what, Raoul?" she asked.

"You're too important to me,

that's what you are. And this ... this relationship we're now finding ourselves in, I want to explore that fully, if you'll let me."

Nikita pursed her lips and gave him the full once-over, the cheeky minx.

"Well, I suppose you'll do, but if you think you can pull any of that Dom stuff on me outside the bedroom, then you can think again."

Raoul laughed, a deep belly laugh that he couldn't seem to stop, and she pouted at him in the most adorable way.

"I mean it! I fail to see what's so funny about this. You're overbearing enough without me giving you permission to boss me about 24/7."

"Squirt, I have no intention of lording over you full time. The mere thought exhausts me, and I know it's not what you're looking for. I want a submissive in my bedroom, for sure, but I also want a strong woman who knows her own mind and can stand on her own two feet. I want her to be bratty at times, so that I can think of delicious ways to bring her back in line. In other words, my sweet girl, I want *you*."

Nikita looked all set to argue again, but he fixed her with his silent stare and she clamped her lips shut. He could tell by the fire sparking in her eyes how much it cost her to keep her opinion to herself, and he prayed his thanks to all the powers that be, that the attack on her

had only temporarily shaken her confidence. She was indeed back to her normal self this morning, just like he had predicted, but, by some miracle she was under him as his sub.

"Talking of being bratty, you've earned yourself another punishment." He released her arms, and ran his hands slowly down her arms and over her shoulders, until he reached her breasts. He cupped the heavy globes, and a shudder went through her. Raoul flicked the nipples with his thumbs, and they hardened under his touch.

"Hands up and out of my way, *girl*, or I'll restrain you again." He smiled to himself when Nikita grabbed fistfuls of the sheet in a white knuckled

grip. Raoul dipped his head and laved one rosy bud with his tongue whilst pinching the other between his thumb and forefinger, and Nikita arched her back to thrust her tits into his face. He suckled hard, all too aware of her little needy moans and the way her whole body tensed under his. Releasing his precious mouthful with a pop, he grinned up at her. Her whole body was flushed in the rosy sheen of arousal, and perspiration trickled down through the valley of her breasts. He followed that path with his tongue, her salty taste exploding in his mouth, and he inhaled deeply to satisfy his beast. He twirled his tongue around her belly button and then kissed a path along the gentle slope

of her quivering abdomen. Her skin was so soft, he couldn't help but linger for a while. Nikita gasped when he flung her legs over his shoulder.

"No coming unless I say so."

Raoul waited for her to nod, and then delved into the delicious bounty waiting for him. Like the sweetest aphrodisiac her cream flowed into his mouth, and he lapped at her pussy. Her thighs tensed around his head, and he chuckled into her sweet cunt, as he used his tongue to delve deep inside her swollen vagina. A renewed gush of her juices was his reward, and he clamped his hands on her hips to hold her still. Even then the tiny, involuntary jerks she couldn't stop drove him on to push her

further. The keening sound she made and the way her clit swelled and quivered told him how close she was, and he pulled back a bit.

"Raoul ... please."

He bit down hard on that little bundle of nerves, and Nikita screamed. Her desperate hands yanked at the sheet, pulling it half off the bed, in her struggle to follow his orders.

"Please, Sir ... I need to ... Oh God ... I'm so close..."

Pushing back, he watched her struggle to stave off her impending orgasm, whilst he stroked his rock hard cock. This *punishment* was turning into torture for him, too. He was hard enough to pound concrete, but he didn't want to

hurt her anymore that he had done already. Her vaginal tissues would be too sensitive to take his cock again, and he was too big to fuck her ass, without stretching her first with his set of butt plugs. Raoul grinned at the thought, and her eyes locked with his as he reached across her to the handful of toys he kept handy in his bedside cabinet. She paled when he pulled out the bullet and turned it on, the faint buzzing sound barely audible over their combined heavy breathing.

He rolled the bullet across her nipples watching them harden even further and then slowly and carefully drew a path down her body, until it touched the top of her slit. Nikita's hips

bucked upwards, and he smirked as she screwed her eyes shut, and her breathing grew shallow.

"Remember who your orgasms belong to, *girl*."

She swore under her breath, every line of her body clenching in need with the circles he drew around her little nub. Around and around he circled her, watching that clit swell even more as more and more blood rushed to that bundle of nerves, and her body quivered in need.

"Hold it, baby, trust me. This will be so much better if you hold on."

Nikita breathed an audible sigh of relief when he turned the little bullet off and then groaned long and hard when

he pushed the toy into her vagina, until it rested on her g-spot.

She frantically shook her head when he picked up the remote and set the vibration to low. Her eyes went cross eyed, and she bit her lip hard enough to draw blood.

"Breathe, baby, just breathe. You can do this. And open your pretty mouth. I have other uses for it this morning. Breathe through your nose."

She complied with his wishes immediately, and pride filled his chest at the way she was trying to follow orders. He hadn't ever pushed any new sub as much or as quickly as he'd pushed Nikita, but then he knew everything there was to know about her. They had long

since established the trust needed for this to work, and even now, as she fought her body's responses to the sweet torture he put her under, the trusting way she looked at him blew him away.

Those expressive eyes of hers eyes widened, and she panted her agreement when he took his dick in hand again, and aligned it with her mouth.

He tapped her bottom lip with his thick head already slick with pre-cum, and she licked that moisture away with a husky murmur that had his balls contract. Raoul wrapped his hands in her hair and thrust into the soft haven of her mouth. She hollowed out her cheeks, and sucked hard, and he saw stars.

"Fuck, baby, yeah ... just like

that. Suck me off. Milk me. Take my cock. That's my girl."

Already he could feel the pressure build at the base of his spine, and he fucked her mouth harder until every inward stroke hit the back of her throat. Nikita gagged once, and he wrapped one hand round the bottom of his shaft to stop himself from pushing in too deep, even though he wanted nothing more than for her to deep-throat him. The feel of her tongue swallowing around his cock, the needy little moans, and the way her fingernails dug into his thighs now, all served to send him flying.

"I'm coming, baby ... ready?"

The warning was almost too late,

and Nikita swallowed greedily as jet after jet of his cum shot out of his dick in waves of pure bliss. He released his cock, and lodged himself all the way in her throat, cutting off her air supply, as he reached for the remote, and her nails dug in further, as her throat contracted around him.

He pulled back to let her breathe at the same time as he flicked the remote on full, and Nikita froze. Tears streamed down her face, and he pulled his cock out her mouth mindful of the fact that she might clench her jaws together in her need to come.

"Noooo..." Her high pitched wail was music to his ears, and he buried his hands in her hair again, and

whispered straight into her ear.

"Now, baby, come for me."

Nikita flew on his command, and he held her as her body shook in the grip of a seemingly never ending orgasm that had her scream his name until she passed out in his arms.

Nikita opened her eyes to the steamy surrounding of the bathroom, and her arms and legs jerked. Instantly Raoul gathered her close, and the rising panic receded. She was safely installed in the warmth of his bath, propped up between Raoul's legs, with her back resting against his chest. He used a large sponge to wash her arms, and her breathing hitched when he ran that sponge over her

oversensitive nipples.

"Relax, baby, and let your body soak. It will help ease your sore muscles." She sank into the deep tender tones of his voice and let him pamper her. Her eyes drifted shut again of their own accord, and she was only vaguely aware of the sensation of being lifted, and wrapped into a towel.

When she next became aware she was lying on Raoul's bed, with his hands massaging her skin. He covered every inch of her body with slow, firm moves, designed to soothe rather than arouse, and Nikita drifted off again. Every time she stirred, Raoul was there, lulling her back to sleep, and when she finally woke up properly the sun was setting,

and she was on her own in the huge bed.

"Shit, shit, shit."

She was gonna be late for work.

Nikita threw the cover off and noted briefly that he'd changed them. There was no handy shirt for her to throw on this time, so she dashed to the en-suite, hastily used the toilet, and splashed water on her face to dispel the last remnants of sleep, and she then used one of the fluffy towels to wrap herself into.

The post it note on the mirror made her smile, once she'd managed to squint at it long enough to decipher it.

The toothbrush is new and just for you. Use it, squirt, and then come and find me. And stop panicking. I

phoned your work and told them you're not well, so you're off the hook.

Damn the blasted man! So much for him not interfering in her life outside of the bedroom. She had slept with him just once, technically speaking. She didn't think oral counted as full blown sex, but then what did she know? Not a lot, clearly.

Her limbs still felt heavy, and there was a faint ache between her legs that made walking difficult, and her mind was filled with images of the deliciously wicked things he'd done to her. Nikita's stomach flip-flopped wildly at the mere thought of what else he might introduce her to. Her pussy clenched, and her breasts ached, imagining his large hands

on her, his hypnotic voice whispering dirty things to her, and she grabbed the sink for support, as her wayward hormones betrayed her once more.

You're annoyed with him, remember, girl. You do not want to fuck him.

She shook her head and forced herself to use the toothbrush, before she went in search of him. She found him looking out onto the sculpted gardens surrounding the block of flats he lived in. The last rays of the sun bathed his form in an ethereal glow. It enhanced every contour of those broad shoulders, and her finger itched to trace the intricate tattoo gracing his biceps. Deliciously hairy in all the right places

with his low slung jeans the only item of clothing hindering her impromptu ogling of the man candy session, Nikita could feel herself growing wet for him, and her anger disappeared.

She took several steps toward him, and when he didn't stop her, she wrapped her arms around his waist, and pressed her body into his hot back. She had never noticed how incredibly warm he was before. It was almost as though he was running a fever, but he was altogether too virile and alive to be sick. In fact, she couldn't recall him ever having had a cold even.

She used to tease him about that, saying he must be some sort of a mutant.

"Hey, squirt." His deep voice,

and the way he linked his hands with hers pulled her out of her musings. "I was beginning to think you would sleep through 'til morning."

He pulled her around until she was stood in front of him, and his pupils dilated when the towel slipped. She tried to make a dash for it, but he would not let go of her hands, so the blasted piece of material slid off her in slow motion, and pooled around her bare feet.

"You're so beautiful, my sweet girl." He dipped his head and brushed his lips across hers in such a tender way that she couldn't help but lean into him and open her mouth to his gently probing tongue.

Unlike earlier this was a sweet

and tender kiss, a meeting of souls as their tongues parried and thrust against each other. Their breaths mingled, and their hearts' beats synchronized. Time stood still as Raoul made love to her mouth, and she loved him right back.

When he finally pulled back they were both breathing heavily, and he rested his forehead against hers.

"Whatever will I do with you, my sweet?"

Chapter Six

The doorbell rang right on time, and Nikita rolled her eyes in amusement. Despite Raoul being out of town on business, her escort arrived without fail.

Since that fateful night of her attack her life had changed beyond recognition. Raoul had basically kept her hostage in his flat for three passionate days and nights of sex, interspersed with long talks, where the two of them had not only connected on every level possible, but they had also negotiated every one of her limits, and had set out the terms of their D/s relationship.

Nikita checked her reflection one

last time in the mirror, and smiled at the wide eyed woman staring back at her.

"Who'd have thunk it, eh, girl?"

She winked at herself, and then burst into laughter for no other reason than that she was deliriously happy with him. At first she had chafed at the escorts appointed by Raoul. He'd done his utmost to convince her not to return to her shift at the café, but true to his word, he had not pressed the issue.

He had insisted on ensuring that she never walked on her own, though, especially on her late night shifts. Deep down inside that scared place she'd been in ever since that fateful night, she had been beyond grateful at his continued protection. On the rare occasion she

wasn't sleeping in his arms, memories of that night turned into terrifying nightmares. Nightmares that had increased in intensity and gory detail the closer they'd come to the next full moon, which was a preposterous notion. In her dreams, however, those wolves had changed into men, and the one whose claws had sliced through her back, had sprouted fangs and fur like some sort of mutant hybrid.

Raoul's absence the last few days had not helped her mental state. She missed him terribly despite their daily phone calls and the incredibly naughty texts he'd sent her. It still amazed her how much she followed his instructions, explicit or otherwise, and how good she

felt when he praised her. A psychologist would probably have a field day with that one, but Raoul had just wrapped her up in a hug, kissed her, and explained it thus.

"Baby, you're submissive. It's just the way it works. It's not something you can help, and I'm honored that you have chosen me to give your submission to. I vow that I will never abuse the trust you've placed in me, and nothing makes me happier as your Dom to witness the peace your submission brings you. It brings me peace, too, this connection we share."

He'd grown thoughtful and slightly tense as though there was more he'd wanted to say. Nikita found him

doing that often, and a small part of her did wonder what he was hiding from her, and then he'd smile and she'd push that thought away.

She trusted him implicitly, and if she'd learned one thing, then it was that he would share whatever was bothering him in his own time.

There was certainly nothing else he held back from her. Free from her daily Uni life due to the summer break, she'd tagged along to his Rugby training sessions, and had made firm friends of the wives and girlfriends of his team or “pack” as they referred to themselves.

It was fitting she supposed, as their mascot was a wolf cub. There had to be some sort of irony to the fact that

she seemed to be surrounded by wolves everywhere nowadays.

The doorbell rang again, rather more insistently this time, and Nikita grabbed her house keys with a shouted, "Okay. Keep your hair on, Darius. I'm coming."

A quick look through her spy-hole confirmed that it was indeed Darius. He was in the process of reaching for her doorbell again, when she yanked the door open with a smile.

"Seriously, what got into you today? You've got a face like a wet weekend."

He flinched and grabbed her arm with enough force to hurt, and her eyes widened when he bent down and

growled in her ear.

"Forgive me, Nikita. They've got Lou."

Before she could ask him what his pregnant girlfriend had to do with anything, something heavy hit the back of her head, and the world went black.

Nikita blinked in the murky, damp, dark cellar she came to in. The stench of wet dog invaded her senses, overlaid with the nauseating smell of blood, and sweat. Something trickled into her left eye, obscuring her vision further, and when she went to swipe it away, chains tightened, their clanging too loud in the still air.

Adrenaline shot through her

system when she realized she was restrained. Arms and leg shackles cut into her tender flesh. The shackles were connected to heavy duty chains suspended from the walls. She shook her head to try to clear her vision and immediately wished she hadn't, as the dull ache in the back of her head erupted into intense stabs of pain radiating down her neck into her spine, and all over her body.

Of course, whoever had kidnapped her, had hit her over the head with something heavy. Her stomach heaved when she realized what the dark liquid was that trickled down the side of her face and into the cleavage of her work uniform. It was blood, her blood,

and it explained why she felt so weak and disoriented. Something shifted next to her in the obscure darkness, and a puff of hot air hit her bare thigh. She flinched and tried to get away, but the chains held her fast. Whoever those slow and intermittent breaths belonged to, was also restrained, as there was more rattling of chains, and then a half human, half animal groan, that sent ice through her veins.

"Who's there? Anyone?"

Approaching footsteps had her wishing she'd kept her mouth shut, as a door swung open with an ominous creak, and Nikita blinked in the bright shaft of light that entered the cellar.

"Tell Draco Raoul's bitch is

awake."

Her heart stopped at the mention of Raoul, and then turned into a jackhammer. Harsh, fluorescent overhead lights came on with a ping, obliterating the darkness and blinding her in the process. All she could see was the broad shouldered shadow of a hulk of a man towering over as he approached. Rough fingers dug into her cheeks and turned her head this way and that, while his cold hearted, yellow eyed stare turned the blood in her veins to ice. The stench of this man, thing, whatever the fuck he was, hit her square in the gut, and she heaved.

He released her and slapped her face with enough force to spin her head

around. Stars exploded behind her closed eyelids, and a renewed intense wave of pain shot through her nerve endings. From the top of her head right through to her toenails, she hurt, and she desperately tried to get her breathing under control in the way Raoul had shown her.

"In, out, in through your nose, and blow it out through your mouth, baby. Puff that pain away, and let the pleasure follow."

Tears filled her eyes, remembering that scene, the first time he'd pushed her too far out of her comfort zone. The most intense pleasure had indeed followed that erotic pain he'd inflicted, but here right now, only misery

followed.

God, Raoul, I need you.

Her heartfelt plea went unanswered, of course. Where was Raoul, and what had all this to do with him? She wasn't going to give the man smirking down on her now the satisfaction of letting him know how scared she was, and how much he hurt her, so she straightened her spine as best she could, and glared at him.

"Who the fuck are you? I demand that you let me go immediately."

Her captor just laughed and turned his back on her. She froze when she spotted the large syringe in his hand, but it seemed that wasn't for her. No, it was for the wolf, lying chained on the

ground next to her.

A wolf?

Nikita bit back the scream bubbling on the back of her throat at this discovery. That explained the wet dog smell at least. The hulking beefcake of a man holding the syringe pulled the wolf's head up by the scruff of his neck, and Nikita did screech when she looked into Darius's pain-clouded eyes.

Set on the body of a wolf it was Darius's bloodstained face she saw. He offered her a weak smile, and their captor just laughed.

"Cutting your next dose fine, aren't we, wolf boy? We can't have you shifting now and telling all our secrets to your Alpha's bitch."

Darius flinched when the other man pushed the syringe into his neck, and Nikita watched in horror as the wolf's body contorted. Darius growled, and in front of her eyes, his face contorted from barely human into the fur covered snout of a wolf. His eyes were the last thing to change, and Nikita threw up.

The kick to her ribs hurt like hell.

"Fuck it, bitch, you chucked up all over my shoes. Damn human bitches, can't take the fucking heat."

Through the pain and the misery another voice registered. The cruel, perfect diction tones of that educated voice was a throw-back to the night

she'd been attacked.

"Stop damaging the merchandise, Otto. Raoul won't have anything worth risking his life for at this rate, though what he sees in that fat little lump of human is beyond me right now."

Perfectly polished loafers appeared in her view, and a cold hand grabbed her chin and forced her head up.

She winced at the intense pain that followed, and the man pursed his lips. With an audible click his fangs ran out like in some ancient gothic B-movie, and he ran his fingers through the trail of blood seeping along her neck, lifted them up to his mouth, and licked the blood off.

Her stomach roiled again, but

she had nothing left to give. White encroached on the edges of her vision, and the pain reduced to a dull ache. Nikita heard his voice from far, far away.

"Dammit, she's losing too much blood. Her heart is going to fail at this rate. She must have some internal injuries. Stupid incompetent wolves."

There was a whoosh of air, and an anguished howl before something heavy hit the cellar wall. Nikita's lips were prized open, and warm thick liquid invaded her mouth and made her gag. Ice cold pressure on her throat forced her to swallow until she slipped into blessed darkness.

Something was wrong. Raoul could feel it in his bones. The unease he'd felt ever since Nikita hadn't answered his phone call returned tenfold. His wolf itched to be free, to run to his mate, and to reassure himself that she was okay. Sharp pain sliced through his heart, followed by ice, and every hair on his body stood on end. Raoul slammed on the brakes and abandoned his car at the roadside. The traffic report was for heavy congestion heading into London, and he would be faster as his wolf. He shed his clothes the minute he hit the relative shelter of the copse of trees, and shifted. The cool earth under his paws grounded him even as the worried voices of his pack filtered

through loud and clear. Darius's intended came through the loudest. In the throes of labor she cried out for her mate, and received no answer.

Raoul howled his distress into the humid summer air and gave his wolf full reign. There was only one reason why Darius would not be by his mate's side at a time like this, and that meant Nikita was without protection.

Faster and faster he ran, the surroundings a blur of speed. Raoul was all too aware of the astonished humans he ran past. Tonight's news reports would be full of the huge wolf seen sprinting through the streets of London unrestrained. Mass hysteria might well follow placing all the packs sharing the

space of the metropolis in danger, but right now his only focus was on Nikita.

By the time he finally reached her block of flats, strange scents were everywhere.

"Boss, I'm sorry, they got her."

"We tried to track them, but we lost the trail."

"Boss, we can't reach Darius."

"Boss... Boss..."

Raoul shifted with a feral growl shutting his mind off to the agitated voices of his pack, and he took the stairs three at a time. Fortunately, none of her neighbors were there to witness him running about naked. Nikita would never forgive him for embarrassing her like

that, and besides most of her neighbors were elderly and would probably have a heart attack.

The leftover scent of her fear hit him straight in the face the minute he reached her floor. Her front door was ajar, and there was no sign of a struggle, save for her broken glasses on the floor, but the scent of the intruders overlaid everything else.

Wolf mixed in with ancient blood. The hybrid. The most dangerous enemy a shifter could face was a rogue wolf high on vamp blood. Raoul had only encountered one a long time ago when he was still finding his feet, but he would recognize that scent everywhere. This hybrid had once been part of their

pack. It meant his mutated genes made it nigh on impossible for mere shifters from the same pack to defeat him, *and* he had Nikita. A ball of dread landed in Raoul's gut.

He slammed the front door shut and picked up Nikita's phone. His dad answered on the second ring.

"Dad, I need your help. He's back, and he's got my girl."

The furious curse reverberating down the phone echoed the one bouncing around his brain.

"I'll call the council together. Stay where you are, until we know what he wants. I was afraid that demon spawn was behind the recent attacks on the packs, but he never left enough of a trail

to be sure. Are you certain this is Draco?"

"I'm positive, Dad. And what's more he's turning wolves. He's got my beta, too."

"*Shit*, this is even worse than I first thought. We can't let him win, son."

Raoul shut his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose to not let rip at his father.

"Don't you think I know that, but, shit, Dad, I can't just sit here until the council decides what to do. If they had acted in the first place, we wouldn't be in this fucking mess. He's got Nikita, Dad."

There was an ominous pause at the end of the line.

"I thought you said he's got your girl. I assumed you meant your latest sub. Nikita is human, and she is your friend. What the hell haven't you told me, son? Have you bonded with her? Is she wolf now?"

Raoul laughed, a short almost hysterical laugh for sure.

"No, Dad, she doesn't even know I'm a wolf. It seemed safer to keep her out of it. I didn't want her to be a pawn in the power struggles that I thought this was."

A deep felt sigh came through the phone line.

"And your wolf, what has he got to say about this?"

"She's our mate, Dad. I know I

fucked up."

"Big time, son, big time. Let's hope we can get her back before it's too late." Raoul grabbed the phone receiver so hard it creaked. "You know the council will sacrifice her in a heartbeat if it means defeating Draco, and if he's turned her, you've lost her, son."

Chapter Seven

A crushing weight sat on her chest, pinning her in place, and she couldn't breathe. *God, why can't I breathe? What's happening to me?*

Pain rolled through her, sharp and thick. It flowed through her veins like molten lava, yet she was so cold she shivered. Tears seeped from her closed eyelids, and her heart missed its beat. Was she dying? Was this it? Her life snatched away just as she found Raoul. The pain centered in her heart, and she wanted to scream and rail at the injustice of it all. For Raoul was not the man she knew. If Darius was a wolf, then it stood to reason that Raoul was, too. She was

here, wherever here was because of that.

More tears fell. They stung her cold skin like acid, and anger coiled itself in her belly like a poisonous snake, ready to bite. It lay in wait until it struck with a burst of speed and light, and Nikita sat up in the bed she lay on, and drew a huge gasp of air into her lungs.

"Welcome back, princess."

The voice sent a cold clamp of dread around her body. Like a vise it squeezed until she struggled to breathe again.

"Oh, no you don't. I didn't go through all this trouble for you to shuffle off this mortal coil now." The man gave an evil chuckle that caused goose-bumps to break out all over her skin. "Though

strictly speaking you've already done that." Cold fingers dug into her skin and forced her to look up at him.

It was the man in her nightmares, the same one who'd attacked her a month ago, the same one who'd come upon her in that god-awful basement. She jerked away from him, and he smiled, showing a set of lethal looking fangs. Her gaze zeroed in on them, and his smile deepened.

"You'll grow your own soon enough, princess, as soon as this transition phase is over."

"What did you do to me?" she whispered, afraid to hear the answer.

"Such worry, princess. I'd expect a little gratitude at least. You'd have

bled out like a pig in my dungeon, had I not intervened."

He hooked his clawed finger under her chin, giving her no choice but to look at him. Bile rose in her throat when he wrapped a hand in her hair and pulled her close enough to inhale against her neck.

"The stench of that blasted wolf still clings to you, but we'll soon get rid of him. This is not what I had planned, but it will work so much better."

He ran his fangs along her neck and then bit down. Nikita tensed, but instead of pain there was only pleasure, blinding pleasure that took her breath away. Like an avalanche it overtook her being and centered in her clit,

threatening to pitch her into an overpowering, mind-blowing release. Her fingers curled in the other man's fine silk shirt, crushing the delicate fabric, and he groaned into her neck.

With every draw of her blood from those fangs buried in her skin her head felt lighter as though he was taking away her memories away with it. It would be so easy to just allow herself to fall into the abyss, to take what he offered. Already her body felt stronger, her vision cleared to such a degree that even without her glasses she could make out the intricate detail of the rose petals on the embossed wallpaper on the opposite wall.

Raoul had lied to her. He hadn't

told her who he really was. It was his fault that she was in this mess, that she had this intoxicating stranger pawing her as though she was a piece of meat.

She bit back a groan when Draco's hand slid to her breast and his claws dug into her skin. He released his hold on her neck and licked the pinpricks of pain left behind.

"Hmm, I think I'm beginning to understand what Raoul saw in you. All that extra weight does give you beautiful tits just right for the plucking."

In a blur of air he pushed her flat on her back, and he latched onto her breast. His fangs sank in, and Nikita's world tilted. Closer and closer the stimulation pushed her to blissful

release. Her breath came in short agonized pants, and her womb clenched with the first tremors of an orgasm she didn't want.

She pushed against the vampire's shoulders, desperate to get him off her, to stop this insanity, but he simply laughed. The fist came from nowhere, and black closed in on her again, just as he yanked her thighs open.

"No, no..." In her head she was shouting the words, but she didn't seem able to project the words with any authority. The slam of the door saved her.

"Draco."

"What the fuck? Can't you see I'm busy here?"

"They're here, Draco."

She was close, and it drove his wolf insane. The scent of her fear, her pain, her confusion drove him on. When a half dead Darius had arrived back on pack territory, all hell had broken loose. Raoul knew it was a trap, but he could no more not pursue the trail Darius had left behind than he could stop breathing. Nikita needed him. Darius's halting admission at what he'd witnessed meant there was no time to lose. If he got to her in time, his bite would drive out the vamp's poison. If he didn't and Draco managed to complete the turn, then she'd be lost to him forever. Driven by blood lust, she would only look on him as

food, and his pack would be honor-bound to destroy her.

This was war, right here, right now. He hadn't been entirely surprised when his pack rose as one to go into battle with him. What had surprised him were the other packs joining him. Their numbers grew the closer they came to the country mansion Draco seemed to have set up home in.

The limited resistance they encountered on entering his grounds reeked of the trap it was, but Raoul was past caring. His wolf had scented his mate, and there would be no stopping him now. He'd save her or die trying.

With the silent efficiency that wolves were known for everyone fanned

out to skirt the perimeter. The Alphas of their respective packs nodded to him, and teeth bared, Raoul charged.

The battle being fought outside the ball room sounded intense, yet Draco just sat and peeled an orange as though this was an everyday occurrence for him.

He threw her the peeled fruit, and she caught the thing without even thinking about it. For two whole days the battle had raged. Wave after wave of wolves descended upon the mansion, whilst Draco held court with an irritating air of nonchalance that turned Nikita's fragile stomach. Nothing tasted right anymore, and Draco simply grinned

at her and waved the glasses of blood he was drinking under her nose.

A part of her, that was growing by the day, a part that scared her silly, wanted nothing more than to drink that blood, but Nikita wasn't stupid. She'd received a crash course in Paranormal 101, since her kidnapping, and once she'd recovered from the shock of knowing that every childhood monster under her bed did indeed exist, she'd made good use of the extensive library of Draco's base of operation.

She knew her only hope of holding onto what was left of her humanity was to refuse to drink the blood. To do so would complete her transformation to full vamp, and she'd

rather die a slow, painful death than turn into a monster like Draco.

Fortunately, he hadn't tried to force himself on her again, since they'd been interrupted by the arrival of the wolves.

The thought that Raoul might be out there right now, fighting for his life made her heart ache with unshed tears, and it took every ounce of willpower she possessed to not try to stake Draco where he sat.

Not that it would do any good at all.

They had been surrounded by intruding wolves when they'd been interrupted, and Nikita had watched in abject misery and horror as one by one

they had been gutted by Draco's claws, their own valiant attempts at breaking his skin proving to be completely useless.

Nikita knew why. She had stood behind the plate glass window, when it shattered all over her. Several of Draco's wolf bodyguards had been gored by the razor sharp slivers of glass, but they had simply bounced off her skin without leaving a mark. It seemed with the vamp blood came the ability to withstand injury to such a degree that normal measures would not work.

"That's my girl." Draco's voice had shown almost paternal pride when he'd noticed, and he'd laughed out loud when he'd made a grab for her and she'd

dodged him easily.

Since then her reactions had become even faster, and it scared her senseless.

Draco laughed again as something hard and heavy hit the double oak doors from the outside with enough force to rattle the frame.

"Why are you doing this? What can you possibly hope to gain from this? You're outnumbered. They will win."

Draco simply smiled and cocked his head to one side.

"Ah, it's simple really. I've come to claim what's rightfully mine. What your lover boy and his family stole from me."

The doors burst open, and three

huge and beautiful wolves burst into the ball room. Nikita forgot to breathe completely when the largest of them locked eyes with her. Her entire body tensed, and she fought the urge to run to him and bury her hands in his fur. Raoul was breathtaking in his wolf form, and when he shifted in a blur of movement, the wolves with him shifted, too. She recognized Raoul's father straight away. An older, greyer version of his son, he was familiar and safe, even as the cold hard look he threw in her direction made her want to heave. Raoul's blue eyes, too, lacked their usual warmth, and she hastily put her hand over the telltale pinpricks in her neck that refused to heal.

Draco's chilling drawl brought her attention back to him, and she fought his pull on her. Like a narrowing corridor her attention focused on him, and she took several steps in his direction before she even realized what she was doing.

"Squirt, don't. You can fight this, I know you can."

Raoul's anguished tones shook her out of the hypnotic hold Draco had on her, and she wrapped her arms around her middle, and stopped dead.

Draco frowned and beckoned her over, but she fought his pull with every ounce of her being.

"Give it up, Draco. You've lost this war." Raoul's father's deep voice

held a hint of wonder, but he still watched her warily, and Nikita didn't miss the way his clawed hand curled around Raoul's biceps to stop him from moving.

"That's what you think, brother dear," Draco snarled.

Nikita gasped and Raoul bared his fangs and growled low in his throat.

"Your little bitch here asked me earlier what I was to gain by this coup. Your entrance interrupted us before I could explain it to her. By the way, she tastes divine, like chocolate and strawberries, quite addictive."

Raoul shifted in a blur of furious growling and charged, before his father could stop him. Draco moved at

lightning speed, and the huge black wolf overshot his mark and skidded into the wall instead. A crack appeared, and his yelp of pain had Nikita shoot across to him in a flying leap she would never have thought herself capable of.

Raoul recoiled from her touch, before he seemed to think better of it, and he tentatively licked her outstretched hand.

"Ah, young love, warms the cockles of my soul, it does. Too bad the bitch is marked and you can't kill her. By my reckoning it'll be moments before the transformation is complete, and then she's all mine."

"Not if we kill you first."

Raoul's father's voice sounded

strained, and he looked every minute of his advanced years. Raoul whined his distress, and Lupe bowed his head.

"Your beef is with me, Draco. Why take this out on my son?"

"Because he is your son, the son that should have been mine. You turned Felicia away from me, with your tales of monsters. I couldn't help being bitten by a vamp, to turn into this monster, the hybrid we're told to fear from knee high. Do you think I fucking wanted this? You were my older brother, the one who should have stopped me from walking into that trap, and instead you abandoned me to that nest of vipers, and saved your own skin."

Moisture glistened in Lupe's eyes

and Nikita's eyes, too, filled with tears. Raoul's fur trembled in outrage, and she burrowed closer into his comforting warmth. She was getting so dreadfully cold her teeth were beginning to chatter. Fur changed to skin and hard muscle under her hands, and Raoul scooped her up in his arms and cradled her in his arms. Nikita closed her eyes and listened to the reassuring *thu-thud, thu-thud, thu-thud* of his beating heart.

"Stay with me, baby, please. I love you. You can fight this. I know you can." Nikita latched onto that deep voice calling to her soul. He loved her. Raoul loved her, and she would die without ever having said it back to him.

"I had no choice, Draco, you

know that. I had to act in the best interest of the pack." Lupe's voice sounded from far away, and Draco's inhuman snarl in response raised the beast in her. Her canines lengthened, and Raoul's heartbeat changed from comforting to the sound of prey. She threw her head back and roared, and jumped out of Raoul's arms, claws bared.

He took a step away from her and shook his head.

"That's it, Princess, let it come. How fitting that her first meal should be your son, don't you think? Too bad she won't have the control to just turn him. Wouldn't that be a fitting judgment? Would you throw your son into exile as easily as you sold out your brother, I

wonder. Would you rob him of his pack like you robbed mine of me and took my mate in the process?"

"The council made the decision for me, Lupe, I didn't—"

"Bullshit. Admit the truth on your death bed at least, brother dear."

"No, Dad." With a growl Raoul shifted, seemingly intent on killing Draco.

Silly little wolves. Look at them, princess. They think they're a match for us. You and me, we'll take over, and unite the packs. We'll live forever, and we'll have the whole of London as our play area. You'd like that, Princess, wouldn't you?

The trembles started from deep

inside her womb and traveled outwards in ever widening circles. Her senses heightened, and her blood boiled as Draco continued to talk to her in her mind.

"No. *No!* Never."

The hysterical shriek coming out of her mouth hurt her own ears, and the wolves now piling in through the busted doors all yelped and cowered on the floor. Nikita saw red, and she leapt through the air and crashed into an astonished looking Draco. He never knew what hit him as her clawed hand broke through his sternum and she fisted his heart and pulled.

Like a hot knife through butter her fist slid through his already

disintegrating body, and she held his now still heart in her hands, and squeezed. The leftover ashes fluttered through the air like macabre confetti, and her own heart slowed and stopped.

The last conscious thought Nikita had was an overwhelming feeling of regret, before the incredible pain in her neck made her black out.

Chapter Eight

Nikita had died and was burning in hell. That was the only explanation for the fire in her veins and the amount of pain she was in. Her throat hurt as though she'd swallowed razorblades, her stomach heaved, and for the umpteenth time she emptied out the entire contents of her stomach. A cool washcloth placed on her clammy forehead was heaven sent, and Raoul's beloved voice brought a ghost of a smile to her face, until she remembered that she ought to be cross at him.

"Mama, let me do that."

"No, you'll be off with you. Trust me when she's well enough to care about

these things she'll thank you for the fact that you didn't see her at her worst. Besides, she doesn't need a man right now. This is women's work. Go do manly things with your father. I've got this."

Raoul's furious growl seemed to shake the whole room, and there was the slam of a door, but his mother just laughed softly, and continued to stroke the blessedly cool cloth over Nikita's skin.

Maybe she wasn't in hell then. Felicia Saint Germain was altogether too kind to ever end up in hell.

"No, you're certainly not dead, my dear, though I wager you feel like death warmed up." Felicia's answer had

Nikita's eyes flutter open, and the older woman's lined face lit up in a kind smile. She had Raoul's eyes, and a little pang of regret jolted through Nikita at the thought. There was so much unfinished business between her and Raoul.

"This stage is always the hardest, and after everything your body has been through, it will take you some time to regain your strength."

She pulled Nikita up gently when she tried to lift her head, and fluffed the pillows behind her head.

"It's a miracle you're still carrying, my dear, but then you've beaten the odds at every turn. Here, sip this. It will help settle your stomach and give

you some energy. I know my son is busting at the seams to see you up and about. He doesn't seem to believe me when I tell him that this is all normal, and will pass. It's only to be expected in your condition."

Felicia pushed a spoon of tepid liquid into her mouth, and Nikita dutifully swallowed. Her stomach roiled, but the slightly bitter brew stayed down, and Felicia urged several more spoonfuls down her, before Nikita put her hands up, and waved surrender.

"Good girl, that's a start."

"What did you mean in my condition? What the fuck have I turned into now?"

She clamped a hand on her mouth

when Felicia's eyebrows rose.

"There's no need for that sort of language, my dear, not in my house. I'll forgive you this once, but don't think I won't make you eat the washing up liquid."

Her face softened when Nikita burst into tears, and she pulled her in for a hug, which just made her cry harder.

"There, there now it's okay. Just let it all out, that's it."

Nikita eventually managed to stop sniffing and blew her nose on the tissues Felicia pushed into her hands.

"I'm sorry, it's just my mum always used to say that to me, and I miss her."

Felicia nodded in understanding,

and patted her hand.

"I understand, my dear. A woman needs her mother at this time in her life, or at least her female friends. That's why I insisted that the big lump of my son brought you back here to the old pack house. I swear he may be the Alpha, and I know he loves you to distraction, but he's thick as two planks at times."

Nikita gave her a watery smile and latched onto those few words.

"He loves me? Are you sure? Even after what I let Draco do to me?" Nikita hated how small and desperate her voice sounded, and Felicia rolled her eyes.

"Of course he does. We all do, in fact. You're something of a hero in the

pack's eyes. You defeated Draco and lived to tell the tale. That is some kick-ass stuff, right there, girl. You single-handedly saved this pack, the neighboring ones, and no doubt countless clueless and defenseless humans."

"Clueless humans like me, you mean. You all must have had a laugh at silly little Nikita, making moon eyes at Raoul, when all this time there was this whole other world, I never knew existed."

Felicia's deep sigh raised the ends of her sodden fringe, and she dropped a kiss on Nikita's forehead.

"You're overwrought, my dear, which is understandable, and you're blowing this all out of proportion."

Nikita pushed away from her and pulled her knees to her chest.

"Am I? Tell me you didn't think that deep down. Tell me you didn't want Raoul to settle down with some nice she-wolf and raise an army of cute little cuddly cubs."

A curious smile appeared on Felicia's face at that comment, and she stood to leave.

"I won't deny that there was some concern among the pack, and especially the council at the thought of Raoul mating with a human. One never knows how these things will go, but you're wrong, if you think for one minute that I regret Raoul's choices. All I ever wanted was for my son to find a woman

who makes him happy. Who can meet all his needs and still be the strong Alpha female he needs to take this pack forward." She paused and ironed out the creases on her skirt with a swipe of her hands. "You've proven to all of us how strong you are by defeating Draco and saving the pack. It remains to be seen whether you can make my son happy."

The inherent criticism stung, and Nikita barely resisted the childish urge to stick her tongue out at Felicia.

"Has it ever occurred to you that he might not make me happy? He lied to me after all, and it's because of him that I almost died how many freaking times already?" Felicia flinched, and Nikita regretted her words almost immediately.

Felicia had shown nothing but kindness to her whenever they'd met in the past, and she was in the woman's house now, and she'd been nurse-maiding her for God only knew how long. Nikita had long since lost any track of time, and she had no clue what day of the week it was or how long she'd lain in the bed recuperating. In fact she had no recollection of anything after Draco's heart disintegrated in her hands and her own stopped beating at the same time. By rights she shouldn't even be alive, so none of this made sense.

"I'm sorry. I don't mean to be rude." She whispered the apology, and Felicia smiled.

"Like I said, my dear, you're

overwrought. I understand, and for the record, yes, Raoul should have told you from the outset, what and who he is, but tell me this. Would you have stayed? Would you even have believed him?"

Her crystal blue gaze, so like Raoul's, held Nikita spellbound, and she didn't even dare breathe until Felicia spoke again.

"My son has his faults. He is a man after all, but I know that he's loved you for years, has watched over you from the first moment he saw you. It's killed him seeing you go on dates that never worked out. It was his shoulder you cried on, always just his friend, and he never crossed that line, not once. So, yes, he made a wrong choice in not

telling you his heritage, but he did that for the right reasons. He was afraid of losing you. He still is. I know my son. Behind all that bluster and for all his dominant ways he is still scared shitless that you'll reject him." She paused and smiled with a faraway look in her eyes. "His father was just the same. Which is how I ended up with Draco. He had no qualms about biting me against my will, of forcing a bond between us that I didn't want and yet I couldn't fight against, until he was turned by that vampire, and Lupe finally stepped up and saved me."

She straightened her shoulders and smiled at Nikita.

"So, you see, you're already far stronger than I ever was. You fought

Draco and won. The only thing now is will you fight for my son, or will you break his heart?"

Raoul paced the living room floor with ever increasing speed, until his father growled at him to sit down.

"Rein in your wolf, son. Your mother will have your pelt, if you ruin her new oak flooring with your claws, and I'll have your head. I'm too old to lay this shit down again. Nikita won't come down any faster, and you're making us all dizzy."

Lupe tempered his command with a smile and a nod of understanding.

"It will be all right, son, you'll see."

Raoul balled his hands into fists, and slumped back against the floral settee. If only he could believe that. His brave little Nikita had saved them all, and it had been a long painful recovery for her. By rights she should be either dead or vamp, but Mother Nature had one last trick up its sleeve, it would appear.

Nikita was carrying his baby, and it seemed that the fetus's stem cells crossing over into Nikita's bloodstream had saved her from the full turn. That and sheer bloody-mindedness on behalf of his girl. Raoul had been too worried about her to give that tiny cluster of cells nestling in her womb too much thought, but when he'd entered her room earlier,

he'd scented his son or daughter as clearly as though he'd seen them on an ultrasound. Their child's heartbeat was strong and steady, and the pack's physician had decreed that there should be no reason for Nikita to not carry a healthy baby to term.

No reason at all, but Raoul's deep-seated fear that she may not want *his* baby. Not once in the weeks she'd lain up in his old room at his parents' place had she called for him, and surely if she loved him she would have done so.

His mother and father simply said it was to be expected. She didn't know where she was, or who she was, and her body was struggling to accept

the changes, changes brought onto her by his bite. A bite she hadn't given permission for either, which in Raoul's eyes made him as much as a bastard as Draco had been.

His whole relationship with Nikita was based on trust, and he had lied to her, albeit by omission, but he knew how much she despised liars. He'd lied again by not telling her about the baby. They had all decreed to keep that bit of information to themselves for now, until she was strong enough to be told.

That day was supposed to be today, but she still hadn't made it downstairs, and the fucking wait was killing him.

The creak of the door alerted him

to her presence as surely as his wolf jumping to attention. Her scent called him, and he forced himself to open his eyes slowly.

"There you are, my dear. I must say that emerald top suits you. You've even got some color in your cheeks, which is lovely. I told you the brew would work."

Nikita pulled a face, and then smiled, and his wolf whined. He knew she'd heard him because she now had a shifter's sensitive hearing. Her body shifted in his direction, before she caught herself, and turned her back on him.

It was the equivalent of a slap in the face, and his hands itched to just grab

her, take her somewhere private, and spank her luscious ass into submission. His wolf smirked his agreement with this plan, and his cock, too, signaled its readiness with the raging hard-on he was sporting, and he pulled one of his mother's frilly cushions onto his lap.

What was it with women and their need for scatter cushions?

"No idea, son, but your mother loves them."

His father's amused reply chuckled in his brain, and his mother's glare reduced him right back to a quivering five-year-old afraid of her wrath. Amazing how she could do that with just one look. No doubt Nikita would perfect that look for their

offspring, too. His heart turned over and shriveled at the thought that this might never happen. He had no idea how she felt about babies. Other than a discussion about her being on the pill, following on from that first night when he hadn't used a condom, kids hadn't entered into the equation.

He knew she hadn't fallen then. The physician's best guess had been that she'd fallen shortly before business had taken Raoul away. She'd come down with food poisoning the week before, which must have been when her contraceptive proved ineffective.

"Well, I dread to think what's in that concoction, but yes, I do feel better, thank you. In fact, I need to be out of

your hair soon. I hope to be able to get my job back, and I've got things to sort for the start of term, and—"

"Like hell you will." Raoul's growl stopped her, and she froze.

Lupe shook his head and his mother fixed him with another glare, but he couldn't just sit here and not say something.

"Dammit, Nikita, stop ignoring me, and if you're gonna chew me out, then let's get this over with. Fuck knows I deserve it, but there's no way on this earth, that you'll just walk out of here, as though nothing's happened. There's the ... fuck it."

He'd almost blurted the news out in anger, and that's not how he wanted

her to find out.

His mother came to the rescue, like she always did.

"May I suggest a little turnabout in the garden? You've been cooped up in doors for far too long, and Raoul and you can chat in private. Plus if you kill him his blood won't stain my new flooring."

That brought a weak smile to Nikita's lips, and she nodded her confirmation.

"You mess this up, son, and you'll have me to deal with. That girl loves you with all her heart. No woman fights like she did, unless she's in love. Now swallow that stupid male pride, stop thinking with your dick, and sort

it."

His mother's reprimand rang in his ears, and he stepped up to Nikita and held out his hand.

"Let me explain all this, please, squirt." He willed her to take his hand, but she just stood there, ramrod straight, and for once her usually so expressive face did not portray her emotions. Only her eyes showed such depths of pain and hope, it brought him to his metaphorical knees. He reached out, and cupped her face, and her breathing hitched. Electricity arched up his fingertips, and seared his heart as the bond his bite created worked its sexual spell on them both.

The air heated between them,

and time stood still as he waited with bated breath, until she slid her little hand in his, and the world righted itself again.

"You better make this good ...

Sir."

The whispered add on had his wolf howl in joy, and his cock tried to punch itself out of the rigid denim of his jeans, but now was not the time for sex.

He coiled his fingers around her hand and tugged, so that she tumbled into him, and he fisted his other hand in her hair, and inhaled deeply. Nikita trembled in his arms, and then sank against him, her little nipples hard bullet points against his chest, and they both groaned.

How they had made it out of that living room and into the relative privacy of the garden Nikita had no idea. From the minute Raoul had touched her, her anger fled. Whether this was just due to some of that mated mumbo jumbo bond thing they now seemed to have going between them, she had no idea. All she did know, was that she wanted to sink to her knees in front of him, audience be damned, and let him take care of everything. She was tired of fighting, tired of being scared, and she'd missed him so damn much.

Every step he pulled her along was one step too many, and she breathed a sigh of relief when they came across a gazebo. Raoul pulled her inside and

urged her to sit down on the stone bench. It was a beautiful spot, the air heavy with the sweet fragrance of the rose garden they had walked through. Nikita had always loved this garden. Parts of it were left overgrown and bordered on the forest—to encourage local wildlife—or so she had assumed. She knew better now. This was the perfect place to frolic and to let their wolf form roam free without fear of human discovery.

"What does it feel like, when you shift?"

Raoul looked surprised at her question, and in truth so was she. With all the things she could ask him, this is what she thought of first?

"I mean, does it hurt? It looks as

though it should hurt. At least it looked that way when Darius did it." She clamped her hand on her mouth when another thought occurred to her. "Oh my goodness, Darius. Is he okay? Is his girlfriend okay? He said they had her. Please, tell me he's okay."

Raoul's brilliant smile lit up his features, and some of her panic subsided. He picked up her hand again, turned it over, and kissed her palm. Tingles of warmth spread up her arm, and she couldn't help her answering smile as his quiet assured calmness transferred to her.

"Have I told you how much I love you, squirt?" Her eyes widened at the hoarseness of his deep voice and the

suspicious moisture she saw lurking in his eyes. "After all you've been through your first question is about someone else, someone who was honor-bound to protect you and didn't, I might add." His voice firmed on the last word, and his expression grew murderous.

"He couldn't help it, I'm sure. You haven't done something to him, have you?"

"No, squirt, I haven't. He missed the birth of his son. That was punishment in itself."

"He has a son? So he's okay and Lou too?" she asked.

Raoul got down on his haunches in front of her, and the heated emotion in his dark blue eyes took her breath away.

"Yes, they're fine and very happy together, thanks to you. My whole pack are, and we'll never be able to repay you for what you did for us—never."

Nikita smiled and took a deep breath. It was now or never really. She had to tell him.

"I-I didn't do it for the pack. I did it for you." His hold on her tightened, and he slid his hands into her hair and tugged her close. Every cell in her body contracted with need at this subtle shift signaling his dominance, and she blinked back tears. He kissed them away and then slid his lips down to the bite mark on her exposed shoulder. He licked the spot and murmured against her skin.

"Is that so, my sweet girl?"

"Yes, because I love you."

Raoul growled low in his throat, and her heart turned into a jackhammer when she felt his fangs graze her skin.

"I've already bitten you here once, though I doubt you remember, but I'd like to do this properly. Will you become my mate, the mother of my children, my sub, my everything?"

He pulled away so that she could see him, and Nikita stared into the eyes of his wolf. Raoul's fangs showed in his smile, and her stomach flip-flopped in excitement, only to suffuse with warmth when he cupped her belly. "After all we've already made a start on the children part."

Nikita couldn't have heard him

right, but when she searched his face she could see nothing but sincerity shine back at her. Love, lust, hope, and that hint of uncertainty, as though he was still afraid she would run out on him.

"I'm pregnant, really? And the baby is going to be okay?" Nikita could scarce believe it. She was going to be a mother. It was like all her secret dreams having come to life.

"Yes, squirt, the baby is fine. Our pack physician checked you over, but I don't need him to tell me that. I can hear our baby's heartbeat. It's strong, just like its mother."

Tears clouded her vision as the truth dawned on her. She could have it all. The man she loved, and their baby.

"So, does that mean, I'm now like you? Do I turn into a wolf?"

Raoul rubbed his thumb over her lips and smiled.

"Yes, you'll have inherited our shifter senses. One reason why you don't need your glasses anymore, though I will kinda miss that cute little squint you had whenever you didn't wear them."

Nikita punched his shoulder, and he laughed.

"You'll live longer, just like we do, and you'll be immune to most human diseases now, but you cannot shift. Only born shifters, or those with shifter blood in their ancestry somewhere can shift. Our baby will shift and probably scare the bejeesus out of you the first time he

does it, but it doesn't usually happen until they can walk, so we'll have some reprieve, before all hell breaks loose."

He winked at her, and Nikita giggled as a cloud of happiness descended upon her at the thought of having to chase after a cute wolf cub with Raoul's eyes.

"I never thought ... I mean ... there is this whole other world out there, I never knew existed."

Raoul simply nodded, and then she forgot to think all together when their lips met. He took charge of the kiss like only Raoul could, and her heart burst into tiny little slivers of happiness each carrying his name.

By the time he broke the kiss,

and slid his fangs to her neck they were both panting in need.

"Mine," he growled and then bit down hard. Pleasure coursed through her veins, and the world tilted, and Nikita knew it would never be the same again.

What's more she didn't want it to be—ever.

The End

www.dorisoconnor.com

Other Books by Doris O'Connor:

www.evernightpublishing.com/pages/DoO%27Connor.html

**If you enjoyed this book, you may also
like:**

Bared for Her Bear by Jenika Snow

Under the Harvest Moon by Kerri M.
Patterson

Black Desire by Karyn Gerrard



Evernight Publishing

www.evernightpublishing.com