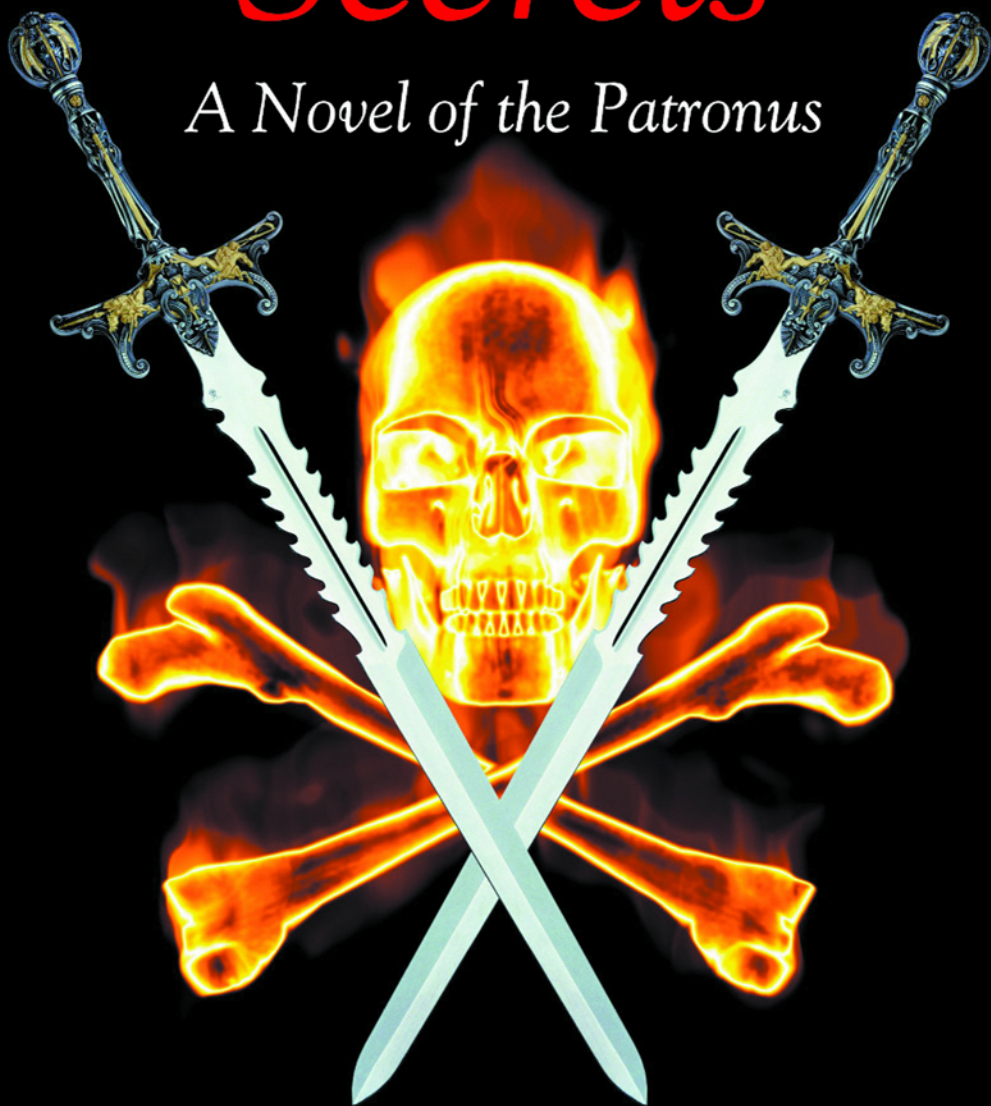


Twin Secrets

A Novel of the Patronus



Lisa Doster

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by
Lisa Doster



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Dedication

To my girls, Cindy, Amanda, and Jenny, who supported me every step of the way. Thank you for being my sounding board and having patience with me when my topics of conversation were limited to the book. And to my husband Mitch and two sons, Trey and Tyler, thank you for stepping up and helping out around the house, allowing me the time to take this journey. Love you all.

Terms

- Ad Ipsum*: where Patronus assassins drop their gear and leathers to be cleaned on the compound
- Addonexus*: means “bringer of death.” The act of turning a human into a malum
- Affectus Temptatur*: the gift to feel and view emotions of others.
- Animo Incedentes*: A broad term for all gifts of mind walking
- Anseres/Sodalis*: Mate
- Custos*: an appointed bodyguard of a Royal
- Dimidium*: a half breed, born of a breeding between a Mortalis and one of the Sanguine Gentes. Example: Mortalis dad/Lamia dad
- Exsul*: outcast among the Sanguine Gentes
- Gemina*: Patronus twins and the most feared of all the races
- Hibrida*: a hybrid, born of mixed breeding between any of the three non-human races. Example: Lamia mom/Lycaon dad
- Lamia*: Vampire
- Lycaon*: Werewolf
- Magus*: Magic
- Malum*: a dead human reanimated with blood from the Lycaon or Lamia
- Medicus*: one with the gift to heal
- Moi petit démon*: French for “my little demon”
- Mortalis*: Humans
- Munera*: a Sanguine Gentes gift
- Obitus*: the dead realm
- Patronus*: a genetically engineered mix of Mortalis, Lycaon and Lamia

LISA DOSTER

Purus Sanguis: a pure blood, born from a breeding of parents of the same race

Sanguine Gentes: the three blood races: Patronus, Lycaon, Lamia

Scholarum: Schools for the Sanguine Gentes

Somnium Ambulans: dream walking

Tactus Animus: the gift of mind persuasion

Vento: tracker

Verum: the living realm

Vinculum Sanguinis: a practice among the Sanguine Gentes between mates. Each drinks blood from the other to seal the mating, allowing their heartbeats to become entwined.

Chapter 1

Some are born cursed. They are born under a bad sign, or a full moon, or they are sometimes cursed as punishment for atrocities they will one day commit. Alisa had yet to decide which of these held her fate. At present, she hadn't killed anyone. Only entertained the idea once or twice, and only for the most dire of circumstances. Even then it was only a fleeting thought, born of jealous insecurities.

Colin, her boyfriend of the last five years, was insanely hot. Women flocked to him like bees to honey. He was extremely loyal and faithful, but a notorious flirt. He loved the attention. And Alisa would be lying to claim it didn't bother her, especially since she was far from being beautiful.

If asked to describe herself, she would say "average" fit her best. She wasn't plain by any means; ask anyone who knew her. She had an eccentric style, a combo of Emo/preppy, and she liked to experiment with bold colors of makeup. Her face was pretty enough, with high cheekbones and symmetrical features, and thanks to a regimented workout schedule her body was toned. On the whole, she could live with average. Short of plastic surgery, she didn't have a choice.

The only thing Alisa would change if she could was the curse she carried. Moonbeam, her superstitious hippie mother, scoffed at the very idea she was cursed and insisted the timing of her birth was perfect, having checked all the calendars, star charts, and even a natal chart done after her birth.

Her mother liked to say she was blessed. That *Fatum*, the giver of all life according to her mother, had bestowed upon her

LISA DOSTER

a precious gift. One she should be thankful for. Alisa didn't buy it; mothers were supposed to say those sorts of things to make you feel good about yourself.

But gifts didn't make you the laughingstock of the entire first grade, or haunt you for the rest of your life thereafter. Alisa had been shunned by her peers for as long as she could remember. Pointed and laughed at for something she couldn't control. Something others weren't entirely aware of, because she never offered explanation for her odd behavior.

In the middle of the courtyard on college campus Alisa stood frozen, struggling to push back her odd curse and bring her vision back into focus before anyone noticed her freakish behavior. *Crap*, she didn't have time for the curse right now. She was running late.

Alas, such was her life. Late or not, from experience she knew the curse would abate when it dang well pleased. Nothing could stop the curse of her Emo TV once it started.

Accepting defeat, she sighed, waiting for the blur of emotions that clouded her vision to pass. Nothing new, just another day in the cursed life of Alisa Reese; she tried hard not to be bitter about it.

At the tender age of two, Alisa discovered she was different from the other kids. And despite the cursed part it was a funny story, one she and her adopted brother still laughed at to this day. Only in private, though; no one but Paul and her mother knew of her curse.

That particular day, like all little girls do, she was holding a wedding for Barbie, and had stolen one of Paul's GI Joe action figures to marry her Barbie. She did that often. GI Joe had been seeing Barbie behind Ken's back and Paul's for quite some time. GI Joe was exciting, a bit of a bad boy, while Ken was a dull accountant.

Paul caught her before the nuptials could be exchanged and before he could yell at her, or tell their mother, she'd seen his anger in her vision. Had felt it.

“I sorry, me give it back,” she’d said in a tiny little voice.

Paul had cocked his head to the side, only two himself, but wiser in years back then than he was now. He understood what she was too young to explain. The two of them shared an eerie connection that followed them to this day; without words, they could communicate. Nothing as strange as telepathy, they simply understood each other.

Paul had jerked the outstretched GI Joe from her hand and replied. “No see me, Liss, and GI Joe no marry.”

Like Paul understood her, she understood he was telling her to stay out of his head.

At two she knew, thanks to brotherly love, that she was abnormal. No one else could see emotions or feel them the way she could. Granted, at the time she didn’t realize the full impact the curse would have on her life; she’d been too young to look that far ahead and understand. Now, years later, she fully understood, and cringed every time a picture came to her.

Recently it had become more controlling, happening more frequently. Until a year ago her curse only surfaced if she looked at a person too long, or if she tried to concentrate on what they were feeling. Now she got mass floods of feelings from everywhere, regardless of if she wanted to feel them or not.

Emo TV, as she often referred to it, blinded her, and filled her vision with other’s emotions. It was like watching TV too close to the screen. The guy walking towards her was jacked about a keg party later that night. The girl to her left was scared she might be pregnant, and stoners somewhere close were getting high.

Oddly, that one made her hungry.

Effectively, Emo TV disabled her. Movement was out of the question unless she wanted to walk headlong into a tree, or worse, in front of a car.

Inhaling deeply to calm her mind, Alisa blocked as much as she could while she waited for it to pass. Trying to give the appearance of deep thought, not just weirdly all of a sudden blind and rooted to one spot.

LISA DOSTER

Paul and her mother were unaware the curse was getting worse. She hadn't found the nerve to tell them yet; it freaked her out to think they might stare at her with the same sardonic glares she received from others. To her knowledge, nobody else had abilities such as hers. It just wasn't normal. And, while she knew they loved her unconditionally, the thought of explaining what a freak she truly was becoming when she didn't fully understand it herself was impossible.

Maybe stress made the curse worse.

She was, after all, a college student with a full course load and a part-time job, plus a hot boyfriend to worry about. Except college was almost over, the hard stuff behind her, and she was rather happy.

Mental illness?

Could be, but she would be the first in her family. Their ancestral history was spotless, only overachievers and eccentrics. Besides, true crazies rarely questioned their sanity, and she questioned hers on a daily basis.

Alisa's vision gradually started to clear, and the haze of emotions started to subside. She took a few more calming gulps of air, letting the concern for her sanity dissipate along with the curse.

Racing past the other students who milled about the courtyard, she ignored the stares that always seemed to follow her. In general, others seemed to recognize she was different even if they weren't sure why. Instead, she concentrated on the beautiful buildings she passed.

Briggstown University, home of the fighting eagles (or as she affectionately referred to it, Hicksville U), was a good school with an equally beautiful campus. She only called it Hicksville because it was out in farm country, with very little surrounding it except acres and acres of tobacco plants and cattle.

The buildings were old, beautifully historic, and kept in tip-top shape; the grounds and courtyards were perfectly manicured. Most importantly, though, it had an excellent fitness program and was affordable. She paid for college on her own, working part

time to cover expenses, and her hard work was finally paying off, with graduation day only months away.

Alisa walked through the door of the tiny apartment she shared with Paul and Colin, dropping her books on the kitchen table as she passed it, and headed for her own bedroom. “Hi, honey, I’m home.”

“Very funny,” Paul called from his bedroom. “You’re late. You better move your ass!”

Paul was not only her brother, but also her best friend. She’d known him her entire life, clear back to when they were in utero. Their mothers were best friends, and the four of them their own family. Not a typical traditional family with a mom, dad, and two kids; theirs was self-made. Like any other family they lived in the same house, and Carrie and Moonbeam shared the responsibility of raising her and Paul. Or they had, that is, until Carrie, Paul’s mom, passed away from cancer when they were ten years old. With no other family to look after him, Paul had continued to live with her and Moonbeam.

A quick peek in the bathroom mirror confirmed her makeup was holding up, decently anyway, and she decided to only change clothes. The bouts of excessive emotions always left her physically and mentally drained. She didn’t feel like getting dolled up for dinner.

From the back of her closet she pulled out a pretty white sundress, threw it on with some platform sandals, and was ready before Paul.

Paul emerged from his bedroom in ripped Abercrombie jeans and a bright blue polo shirt that matched his bright blue eyes perfectly. He smelled like a fragrance counter in a department store, though, way too overpowering.

“Have you ever heard less is more?” She waved a hand in front of her nose to keep from sneezing.

“What, you think this is too much?” Paul questioned in shocked disbelief, taking a sniff of his shirt.

“I guess not. If you’re nasally deficient, that is,” she muttered under her breath.

Paul had the classic good looks of a movie star. His blond hair was shaved close to his head and he kept his body sculpted with cut muscles that the vintage polos he was so fond of wearing showed off to perfection. And, with an ego to match, he’d gone through almost every woman at the college.

Paul’s motto: sharing is caring.

“It wouldn’t be fair not to share all this charm and smoking hot body with as many women as possible,” Paul often said, fond of feeding his own ego.

But even with an ego the size of a Goodyear blimp, it was hard not to be charmed by him. She was the only woman alive immune to his charms.

“You put a lot of effort into looking mackable, not to mention wasted half a bottle of cologne just to have dinner with Colin and me. Who knew you wanted to impress me this bad?”

Paul winked at her with a sneaky grin on his face. “Let’s roll, little sis.”

Paul was up to something; she knew that look. And she was only his “little sis” because she was tiny compared to his larger frame. They were born hours apart, and she had come first.

She and Paul walked the three blocks to The Villa, a local restaurant they liked to frequent, where Colin waited for them.

Alisa had met Colin her freshman year of high school, when Colin transferred in from a private school in Charleston. Colin had joined the football team that summer, where he met Paul, and the two hit it off instantly, becoming best friends.

Paul was quarterback for their small high school football team and Colin played running back, and in no time the duo earned the nickname “no defense needed.” Paul had a laser-guided rocket arm that always threw to Colin, who never missed a catch. And once Colin started running, nobody on the field

could catch him. That dynamic between them was what earned them both full-ride scholarships to Briggstown U.

Honestly, Alisa couldn't care less about football, but she never missed a game. Even she had to admit they were electrifying to watch on the field.

She and Colin hadn't hit it off at first like he and Paul had. Colin was cocky and full of himself, not to mention he was stealing her best friend. But over time he grew on her; she didn't have a choice, really, seeing he was with Paul twenty-four/seven. And six months after Colin's arrival in Rock Hill they'd begun dating and had been together ever since. The three of them did everything together.

Her life was planned and charted on course: graduate, start a gym, become a huge success, marry Colin, and move Paul to an apartment over the garage at the house she and Colin would buy. The three of them would live happily ever after, because that's how all great fairy tale romances ended. And she and Colin were epic.

Outside, in front of The Villa, Paul held open the door for her and gestured for her to walk inside. "I'll see you tomorrow, Shorty."

"What, I thought we were having dinner?"

Paul's mouth twitched into a mischievous grin; now she knew for sure he was up to something.

"I didn't get mackable for you and Colin; I have a date. This is Colin's surprise for you. I was just supposed to get you here at the right time."

She propped her hands on her hips and eyed him suspiciously. "Why? It's not an anniversary or my birthday." She refused to walk inside the restaurant until Paul gave her some real answers. As sweet a gesture as it was, it was out of the ordinary.

Paul sighed, exasperated. Sometimes his sister was a royal pain in the ass. "I don't know; really, he wouldn't say. All I know is, Colin is in there waiting on you, and for some reason he loves

you very much, even though you're being a big pain in my ass right now." He waited for her to finish searching his emotions for a lie, which irked him to no end. He hated having his emotions probed, but he was used to it and she wouldn't find a lie.

After a few minutes when she still hadn't moved, he added, "He went through a lot of trouble to put this together tonight."

Instinct set off all kinds of alarms, warning Alisa to be wary of impromptu sweet gestures. Usually, such acts meant a man was up to no good or had done something he needed to apologize for.

So help me God, she thought, if Colin has cheated with one of those slutty cheerleaders who always paw at him, I'll choke the life right out of him.

Possibly, she overreacted a bit; she was slightly paranoid and a tad prone to dramatics. Colin had never betrayed her— there was no reason to assume he would start now. Yet good sense told her to beware, and that good sense was never wrong. Although the strain from the overload of feelings earlier could be playing havoc with her internal bullshit meter. Sometimes she felt off for days after an attack like today.

When Alisa still hadn't moved Paul gave her a little nudge toward the door. "He's waiting, Liss." She took deep breaths. Good thing air was free, because today she used extra amounts of oxygen.

She smiled brightly up at Paul, willing her body to affect the same calm she plastered on her face, still nervous enough that her heart kicked up a beat. With another gulp of air to swallow back her paranoia she walked through the door, unsure of what to expect.

Alisa spun around in a circle, taking in the setting before her in awe. Unsettled feelings disappeared, replaced by wonder. How had Colin orchestrated this without her knowing?

The entire restaurant was empty, rented for just the two of them. Aside from the waiter, she was alone in the room. Rose petals were scattered along the floor and over tables, and soft music emitted from the speakers. A table in the center of the room held a huge bouquet, filled with all her favorite flowers: daisies, roses, lilies, and of course Colin's favorite, lavender.

Colin insisted she smelled of lavender, swore it reminded him of her, and never brought her flowers that didn't have lavender in them. The very idea that she smelled of anything more than Tide or whatever perfume she wore seemed ridiculous to her.

Ummm. Her mouth watered as delicious aromas wafted on the air from under shiny domes arranged around the table. Lifting each lid individually, she smiled whimsically at the sight of chicken soft tacos from Taco Bell and Chick-Fil-A nuggets. Colin knew her well.

It was sweet, the trouble he'd obviously gone to, even more so that he considered the fact she ate much like a five-year-old and prepared for it.

"Does it meet with your approval?"

She turned at the sound of his voice, only to lose herself in his emerald-green gaze. She floated dizzily, enraptured by his eyes. Those eyes had captured her interest even during the months when she had disliked him. The color of rare emeralds, his eyes were deep, dark, penetrating, and sexy. "You are the best boyfriend ever," she affirmed, taking a step back to see the rest of him, and her breath caught. It didn't seem possible, but he was more stunning than usual.

Sleek black dress pants hugged his perfect butt, which he'd paired with a lavender button-up shirt that made those green eyes pop brighter. He'd left the first two buttons of his shirt undone, showing off a hint of tawny brown skin, and his sleeves were rolled to his elbows revealing the only tattoo he had: her name, printed in bold block letters with a pink heart to dot the I, filled the space on the inside of Colin's forearm. On her shoulder she

carried a smaller tattoo—Colin, written in flowing cursive script with a jade-green heart over the I.

Colin's curly brown hair, streaked with honey highlights, was lightly tousled, giving the impression he'd spent hours styling it to that perfect messy appearance. But in reality, his hair naturally looked great, even when he woke up in the morning. As a girl who spent hours on her own hair most days before giving up and throwing it in a ponytail, Alisa found it irritating, that he looked so good without effort.

Colin looked so adorable she felt the need to add a small warning. "Except when you're flirtin' it up with other girls, and then..."

"Then what?" he asked with a silly grin on his baby face.

She knew he loved it when she got all possessive and crazy over him. "Then I want to lock you in a closet so I can keep you all to myself."

"I'm all yours," he whispered sweetly against her ear, causing her to shiver against him—the sensation tickled her all the way to her feet.

He pulled back and gazed down at her with such a sad expression that it pulled at her heart, but seconds later the look was gone, replaced by a bright smile. Instead of questioning his strange behavior she wrapped her arms around his waist and hugged him, rising on to her tiptoes to kiss his lips softly.

Whatever bothered him, he would share it when he was ready. Spoiling this perfect evening when he went to such lengths to surprise her with felt sacrilegious.

Colin pulled back first and gently cradled her face in his palms, looking directly in her eyes. "I love you with all that I am."

His green eyes filled with so much raw emotion, she wondered what she'd done to deserve a great guy like him. Colin was too good to be true: sweet, sensitive, and athletic, all rolled into one hot package. From the day she met him, going on seven years ago now, she'd been in love with him. She smiled up at

him and breathed, “I love you with every inch of my soul, right down to my toes.”

Colin pulled her close and kissed her deeply.
She had to be the luckiest girl in the world.

“That was amazing,” Alisa gushed as she and Colin walked back to their apartment. “I don’t know how you managed to keep it a secret from me, especially since Paul was in on it. He’s the worst leaker.”

Colin chuckled around a grimace. “It wasn’t easy, baby. I had to threaten to erase all his soaps from the DVR. He slipped up last week, and mysteriously, one full day of soaps went missing to remind him to keep his mouth shut.”

For a twentysomething male, Paul had an unnatural love for daytime soaps. He was addicted and watched them faithfully. She giggled at the thought of Paul flipping out because *The Guiding Light* was missing from his DVR list. “Not his soaps, you monster!”

“I know. I’m evil.” Colin stopped walking to face her. He needed to somehow tell her everything he couldn’t outright say. Everything he wanted her to remember when he was gone. “I wanted tonight to be special for you. For you to know how special you are to me. You will forever be in my heart, Alisa, no matter what happens. Don’t ever forget that, okay?”

“Aww, baby, I love you too.” Rising up on tiptoes, she planted a quick peck on the end of his nose.

“Hey, do you think Paul will be out for the night?”

Her tone was light and breezy. She didn’t understand what he tried to tell her and she wouldn’t—not yet, anyway. He forced himself to relax and enjoy what little time they had left, grinning back at her as hunger clawed at his gut. He caught her train of thought. “Probably, his date was with easy Stacy.”

“They’re all easy when they’re with Paul but I’m glad, because that means we have the apartment to ourselves.” She winked at him impishly, trailing a finger lightly down his chest and catching it in the waistband of his pants. She pulled him closer and kissed him.

A deep growl eased from Colin’s chest and her body responded, igniting with heat and longing. He scooped her off her feet and a giddy giggle bubbled from her lips as he carried her through their apartment to the bedroom they shared. Gently, Colin laid her down on the bed and leaned over her, kissing her, turning her to melted butter. He moved slowly from her lips to her neck, then down her collarbone.

She shuttered under his touch, eager for more of him.

In the bedroom Colin excelled, just like on the football field. Every heated look, every touch brought out the wild side of her. And she wasn’t ashamed to admit she spent a good many hours thinking of doing naughty things, too, and with Colin.

He was that talented, an expert at the art of touch; he could make her pant for more of him— all of him. Colin could make her beg. And if his clothes didn’t come off soon, hers would.

Her fingers fumbled with the buttons on his shirt, and one by one she unbuttoned them until his smooth perfectly cut chest was bared to her. She pushed it from his shoulders, letting it fall free of his body. She wanted to see him, ogle every inch of his gorgeous body.

With Colin’s smooth tan chest bare, she couldn’t resist trailing kisses along his soft skin. She needed more, more of him, more taste, more touch. Her body was hot with need, and she ached from it.

Shaking, she clumsily worked his shorts down over his hips in a rush to feel him naked against her own skin. He aided her efforts, pulling them free of his ankles. Her hands covered the bare flesh he exposed, stroking him, filling him with the same desperate ache that filled her.

Colin removed Alisa's clothes quickly and discarded them on the floor, desperate to taste her, to touch her. Rising on his knees above her, he spread her thighs apart with his hands and took a minute to enjoy the sight of her glistening pussy, wet just for him.

A hollow ache settled in his chest. After tonight he would lose this pleasure. Someone else would eventually take his place in her bed and have the honor of touching her, of pleasing her. That man better hope he never crossed his path with the scent of Alisa on his body. He would kill.

She arched beneath him and a small whimper escaped her lips. "Colin, please," she moaned.

She didn't have to ask twice; he was ready to take her. He lowered his head and swiped his tongue through the pink wet slit, savoring the taste of her, whetting his appetite for more. Settling in, he buried his face in her sex, spearing her with his tongue.

On contact, Alisa arched her hips and whimpered. Her fingers ran through his curls, holding his head in place while his wicked tongue worked her sweet spot. As he took her to the brink of eruption, her fingers curled in his hair and she pulled roughly.

"Oh God, Colin, don't stop," she cried.

Colin lifted his head from her core and she whimpered again. He grinned mischievously, then slowly, tortuously kissed his way back up top. His tongue licked over her breast and her nails dug into his back.

She begged him for more, ready to have him inside her. She was so close. She needed him to ease the ache between her thighs.

Pushing him to his back she took control, desperate to feel the hard length of his erection stretching her, stroking her. She straddled his waist and prowled up his body, licking and tasting him as she went. His skin was soft to the touch and his muscles flexed under her hands, growing tight as she teased him with her kisses.

She held back from taking him inside her; she wanted to tease him for a while. Make him beg. She kissed a line from his stomach up his chest, making her way back to his lips, locking eyes with him before their lips met. She paused, hovering just inches from his face.

What in the hell?

His dark green eyes glowed. An internal light shone through them, illuminating the darkened room.

That wasn't possible.

That didn't happen.

Was she dreaming?

Maybe she really was going crazy, seeing things now as well as feeling people's emotions.

Blinking rapidly to clear her eyes, she ventured another peek at his. The glow had disappeared just as suddenly as it had appeared.

Briefly, she hesitated for a mental check, searching his eyes for signs that she'd seen what she thought she saw. And found nothing but dark green perfect pools. She relegated the strange glow to the recesses of her mind where she put everything that didn't make sense.

Colin stroked a warm hand across her breast and pulled her head to his to nip her lips. His skin rubbed against hers, heating her further as he slid inside her with ease. He gripped her hips, holding her in place moving inside her in a slow rhythmical pattern that made her head spin.

God, she loved the feel of him.

She couldn't concentrate on the weird phenomenon if she tried; all her lust-riddled brain could hold right now was the feel of Colin moving inside her, reminding her she had bigger things to work on, much bigger.

She loved the way his naked body felt wrapped around hers. She could make love to him all night, and in fact had, more than once, in their seven years together.

Colin was her first and only love, but who needed to experiment when you had perfection at home? She was head over heels in love with him. Couple that with chemistry and passion . . . What they shared couldn't be duplicated with anyone else. Colin ruined her for other guys; he'd stolen her heart and with it the only pleasure she could imagine was with him.

Colin lay in bed with Alisa asleep across his chest. Lightly, he trailed his fingertips down her back, listening to the gentle rise and fall of her breath. By morning he would be nothing more than a distant dream for her.

Alone, with no one to share his pain, he was tormented by knowledge that she would hate him soon. Anguish washed over him, feeding him like a drug. He welcomed the discomfort as punishment for hurting her.

From the day he met her he'd known he would have to leave, and against his better judgment had loved her anyway. Worse, he let her love him back, and clung to her as if she was the very air he breathed. He could have been a dick; that would have been kinder. Ignored her or pushed her away. Hell, she didn't even like him at first; he could have just left her alone. But he hadn't. He'd pursued her until she relented.

He was selfish, and because he was selfish she would pay the price.

Every moment he spent with her was worth the pain of losing her. Never having held her would have been worse.

Could the same be said for her?

He wasn't sure it could.

Tonight he would disappear, never to see her again.

Would she feel the time had been worth it, and cherish it? Or would she hate him?

It hurt too much to envision the latter, so he chose to believe that in time she would forgive him. And one day, when she was married with children, she might look back on these years with him fondly.

Rising from bed, he started to quietly pack. He was out of time. His coming of age and subsequent transition were only a couple of days off and until he learned to control the change, he would be a danger to her.

He would tell her if he could . . .

What he was.

Why he had to go away.

She loved him. She would understand, possibly even promise to wait for him. There was nothing she wouldn't accept about him. Except another woman in his bed, and then she could get vicious. And there she had no competition; he might be a flirt but no one held his heart as she did, nor could he stomach the thought of taking another.

She was it; she was his amor.

His father disagreed and, by mandate of the Lycaon King and law of the Sanguine Gentes, unless he took her as his Sodalis and moved her into one of the many Lycaon Dens, she couldn't know what he was. He didn't have a problem taking her as his Sodalis; matter of fact, that's what he wanted. But his father had other plans, and made it clear his pure bloodline would not be tainted by a human.

He'd begged his father, King of the Lycaons, to no avail. He made threats of running away with her and even resorted to a childish tantrum once. Yet nothing would move his father from his stance.

Briefly, he'd considered running away with her for real, then tossed it. His father would send Lycaon Veneto after them, and she would die. And it would be his fault, because he selfishly refused to let her go. His father wouldn't hesitate to kill humans if they stood in the way of what he wanted for his son and, most importantly, for his bloodline.

Twin Secrets

Knowing she was alive and well somewhere in the world was better than her not being in the world at all.

He'd never hated his heritage as much as he did now. Being a king's son came with many perks. But in this moment he would trade places with any other Lycaon in the world, because then she would be his for life. Lycaons mated until death.

With an ache that burned inside his chest so brightly it could physically cripple him, he bent over her sleeping form to place one last kiss good-bye on her shoulder, over the spot where she would forever carry his name. The proof they had loved completely without fear or reservation.

Pausing by the door he took one last look around wishing for the hundredth time he wasn't leaving in the middle of the night without a real good-bye. Although that wouldn't make it easier, only harder when he couldn't explain why he had to leave.

He placed the letter he'd written for Paul on the end table by the tacky lamp Alisa loved. He hadn't been able to write a good-bye to her. That made it too real, too final. What could he say anyway that would make Alisa hurt less, or hate him less? She would never forgive him and he would never forget her.

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