

Chapter One

Ruby Macdonald woke to a frightful bang and the rattle of roof tiles. Something crashed onto the skylight above her bed, knocking the window wide. She instinctively ducked beneath her bedcovers, and a huge heavy object thudded down on the mattress beside her, making the bedsprings bounce and strain under the impact. Downstairs her two dogs started barking.

After a second's shock, Ruby yanked the covers away from her face. A dark figure crouched on the comforter near her feet. She recoiled against the headboard, a scream searing her throat. The streak of light coming through the bedroom doorway from the hall silhouetted the creature's naked, heavily muscled chest and widespread black wings.

Her mother had carted her all over the place, searching for supernatural creatures. Ruby had met many strange beings, including tiny leprechauns in Ireland and beautiful people who could breathe underwater, but after everything she had gone through back then and her mother's horrible death, she had tried to forget. She hadn't wanted to believe her mother's claim that Ruby was the result of a nocturnal seduction by a beautiful winged angel, even though she knew she wasn't like other people.

Ruby's blood thundered in her ears. Was her father really an angel? And was history about to repeat itself? Although the intruder's gleaming black skin and leathery wings suggested he was more demon than angel. She had never seen anything like him in her travels, but she vaguely remembered seeing his likeness in a book.

The creature spat white stuff at her. Ruby dove to the floor and grabbed out from under her bed the baseball bat she'd hoped never to have to use. She jumped up, getting a firm two-handed grip on its wooden handle.

"Keep away from me or you're dog food."

Instead of pursuing her, the winged man clambered off the other side of the bed and dragged a hand over his mouth.

"Bloody bird," he bit out in a deep British accent. "Closed my eyes for half a second and the damn thing hit me in the face." He spat out something else that Ruby realized was a feather. At over six feet tall, his powerful body dominated the room. Yet his cultured voice was so at odds with his appearance that Ruby had the crazy urge to laugh. Without taking her eyes off him, she bent to snap on the bedside light.

She had wondered if he was completely naked, having noticed his bare chest, but he wore black jeans and boots. His eyes shone an unnerving silver in a savagely beautiful face. He swept aside his long black hair with a careless hand and folded his wings against his back.

"Who are you?" he demanded, his head angled arrogantly as he pinned her with his gaze.

"Oh no, laddie." She pointed at him with the bat. "You're going to tell me who *you* are first."

He ruffled his wings against his back, looking disgruntled. "I'm Nightshade."

In her experience, these supernatural beings usually had strange names. "*What* are you?" Ruby demanded.

His nostrils flared and his jaw clenched. "I don't appreciate that tone of voice."

Despite his fierce expression, she didn't sense any real malice in him, and she had always been very perceptive about the nature of "supernaturals," as her mother had called them. "Tough. You land on my bed in the middle of the night; you answer my questions."

He narrowed his eyes. Ruby held his gaze and tightened her grip on the bat. As they stared each other down, a tingle of excitement ran up her spine. She had thought she never wanted to see another supernatural after what happened to her mother, but there was something about this one's vibrant male energy that set her nerves singing.

He gave a hiss of reluctant surrender. "I'm a nightstalker."

Yes, that did ring a bell. She wished now she hadn't burned all her mother's supernatural books. "Is that some type of demon?"

He bristled. "I'm not a bloody shadow elemental, woman. I'm a fairy."

"A what?" The bat sagged in Ruby's hands while her brain scrambled to process. She had thought fairies were tiny with translucent wings. A slightly hysterical giggle burst from her lips.

"What's so funny?" he demanded.

"I thought fairies were small." At his scowl, she had to stop herself from grinning. He was so easy to get a rise out of. "Don't fairies wear sparkly dresses and have bells on their slippers?"

A growl broke from the back of his throat. She raised her bat again, wondering if she'd pushed him too far. Time to change the subject.

"To answer your first question, I'm Ruby Macdonald."

He grunted, his gaze tracking down her body, then back to her face. "And this place is?"

"Glenskelly Lodge. I suppose you realize you're in Scotland?" She watched him take stock of his surroundings, absently ruffling his wings against his back. Ruby stabbed a finger toward the ceiling and added, "It sounded as though you damaged my roof."

The nightstalker glanced up, his nostrils flaring. "It wasn't my fault. The damn bird should have looked where it was going." He flexed his shoulders before raising a hand to rub one.

"Bathroom?" he demanded.

"You use bathroom facilities?" The leprechauns who had helped her and her mother when she was small had lived in caves. But, come to think of it, some of the others supernaturals they'd met had seemed very civilized. Still, she couldn't imagine a man with wings sitting on the toilet

or lying in a bath.

“Of course, woman. This is the twenty-first century.” He tapped the cell phone on his belt. “Where I come from we make use of modern technology and live among humans. Although most do not know what we are.”

Ruby pointed the bat at the door of her en suite. Nightshade strode inside, leaving the door open. He washed his hands and face, then wiped himself dry on her towel before dropping it over the side of the bath.

“Make yourself at home, why don’t you,” Ruby said under her breath.

The nightstalker wandered back into the room, blinked, and rubbed his eyes. His hand went to his shoulder again, and he looked exhausted. With a sigh, he glanced at the open skylight. “Sorry about the intrusion,” he offered reluctantly. “Don’t often get birds flying at night.”

“Looks to me like you were asleep at the wheel,” Ruby retorted. “So to speak.”

He pinned her with a belligerent gaze but didn’t deny the accusation. His gaze roamed more slowly over her body, as if he were really noticing it. The tension between them shifted subtly. The annoyance melted from his face and he licked his lips.

A prickle of awareness skittered across her skin, making her nipples peak beneath the tight jersey tank top, which she belatedly realized left little to the imagination. And her pajama shorts made her thighs look fat. She tossed the bat on the bed, hurried across the room to grab her dressing gown off the back of the door, and put it on.

She considered him for a moment and remembered the kindness of many supernaturals whom her mother had intruded upon in her relentless search for Ruby’s father. Although the last thing she wanted to do was get tangled up in that weird world again, she strongly believed that what goes around comes around and it was time to reciprocate. “When it’s lighter out, you can check my roof’s not damaged where you hit it. First I think you need to sleep. Before you fall over.”

Winged ebony brows rose in surprise. “You’ll let me stay in your house?”

“You can go outside and sleep in the dog kennel if you’d rather, but I think you’re too big.”

He scowled—an expression with which Ruby was fast becoming familiar. She’d always been good at sensing the energy of people and animals, she’d been told it was a gift, and she was certain this stranger didn’t pose any danger to her. He was exhausted and he could hardly check into the nearest hotel. And, now he had dropped in on her, she might as well take the opportunity to question him. She was determined to rid herself of the annoying power she’d inherited from her supernatural father. Perhaps Nightshade could help.

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Nightshade narrowed his eyes on the woman’s back while she made up the bed in her spare room. He couldn’t pick up her psychic signature in the way he would expect if she carried fairy

blood, yet she wasn't completely human. The house resonated with strange energy. It was as though he could *feel* her in the wood beneath his feet.

She turned and bent over the bed to tuck in the sheets, and her breasts swung forward and made the dressing gown gape. All thought of psychic signatures disappeared from his brain. Excitement raced through him at the thought of standing behind her and catching those breasts in his hands. She was no slender creature like the Cornish pisky women from the troop with whom he lived; she was only just over five feet tall but with buxom curves. He'd never seen a full-bodied woman like her. And although his fangs burned within his gums with the desire to taste the sweetness of her blood, they did not slide out over his lower lip. Instead, the tight heaviness in his groin dominated his awareness. For the first time in his life, his instinct to mate was stronger than his desire to bite.

"One bed ready for occupation." She straightened and put her hands on her shapely hips with a long exhalation of breath, then flashed him a quick smile, her hazel eyes twinkling. The small diamond stud in her nose glinted in the overhead light. She was so different from other females he knew, with her short spiky red hair and the many piercings in her ears.

"Thank you," he mumbled, uncomfortable with being in her debt. He wouldn't have blamed her for tossing him out after he'd crashed onto her bed in the middle of the night. She had a sharp tongue, yet she must have a kind nature to have offered him a place to rest.

"Would you like a cuppa before you turn in?" Then, without waiting for his answer, she bustled past, leaving a trail of sweet floral fragrance in her wake.

This healthy well-built woman would produce big strong babies. Could she be the right woman to give him the son he longed for?

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"Come on. You're dead on your feet," Ruby said, beckoning Nightshade into the guest room after he'd silently drunk his cup of tea. She'd been hoping he'd be chattier. As she stood aside to let him pass, she noticed scratches marring the smooth skin of the shoulder he'd been favoring. The impact with her roof must have injured him, but his black skin hid the damage.

He slanted her a sideways glance through his hair as he sat on the edge of the bed to pull off his boots. "Thanks."

"Want me to look at your shoulder?"

"No." He made to lie down.

Ruby hurried across to the bed and caught his wrist. "Yes, you do."

Sinews flexed beneath her hand like tensile steel cables, and a shock of response burst through her at contact with the leashed power of his body. Drawing an uneven breath she released him and leaned over to examine his injured shoulder. A sticky trail of blood had seeped from a nasty gash to run down his back beneath one of his wings. He must be in pain but she would never

have guessed. The smell of blood mingled with the unusual scent of almonds and the musky male fragrance of his skin.

“Leave me be, woman. Let me get some rest.”

He turned his head toward her, and she stared into the brilliance of his silver gaze, looked so close she could see every hair in his dense ebony lashes. His face was a study of masculine beauty, his strong jaw and brows giving a rugged cast to his otherwise fine features. For a moment she couldn't breathe, then she pulled back and rested her hands on her hips, determined not to show he affected her.

“Sit tight for a few minutes. I'm going to dress that wound or you'll ruin my sheets.”

Ruby grabbed the first-aid kit from the bathroom and returned to find Nightshade sitting with his head in his hands. To see this huge über macho creature looking vulnerable did something strange to her insides.

“I'll be quick,” she assured him.

She climbed onto the bed behind him and started wiping the blood off his skin. When she eased aside his wing, the stretchy skin was strong and soft as kid gloves. She had a crazy urge to rub her cheek against it and decided she must be lightheaded with tiredness. She smoothed away the thick silk of his hair before she cleaned up his wound and covered it with gauze.

“There you go,” she said in a brightly efficient voice. “Ready for bed.”

He didn't move. She went around in front of him and squatted down. His eyelids were lowered, his lashes thick ebony crescents against his cheeks.

“Nightshade,” she whispered, and silver slivers appeared beneath those lashes. “Lie down, laddie.”

He eased onto his side, and she threw a duvet over him, then watched while he went back to sleep. His guarded expression relaxed and he looked even more beautiful. His lean dark fingers gripped the edge of the pillow, and she clenched her hand as she imagined running her fingertips up his sinewy forearm to the bulge of his biceps. He must be casting some kind of magic over her; she could hardly tear her eyes away. She had thought that only a mad and irresponsible woman like her mother would succumb to a supernatural man who appeared in her bedroom in the middle of the night.

Perhaps she had inherited the same madness.

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Nightshade woke to stillness. For a moment he wondered where he was. Then he recognized Ruby's light floral fragrance on the air.

He stared at the clock beside the bed and puzzled over the fact that, although he felt well rested,

he'd apparently slept for only fifteen minutes. After more thought, he worked out that he'd slept round the clock. As it would soon be dawn and he couldn't be seen flying during daylight, he would have to wait another day before he went on to the fairy Gathering of Kith and Kin in the Scottish Highlands. At least that meant he would have time to check Ruby's roof for damage.

He listened for her, heard the steady beating of her heart on the other side of the wall. Guilt flickered within him at how he'd dropped in and frightened her; he should never have flown all the way from one end of the country to the other when he was out of practice. Normal nightstalkers who lived a solitary life got used to flying all the time. But he'd grown soft living his comfortable life in Cornwall, with the modern-thinking pisky troop, being driven around in cars.

Longing ticked in his chest. Only two days away from home and he already missed his brother. He imagined Rhys sleeping peacefully in the nursery at Trevelion Manor with the Cornish pisky king and queen's children. His beloved baby half brother. To protect Rhys, he would find their evil father Dragon and make him swear a blood oath to give up all rights to the boy. He would never let Dragon injure the child again, as he had in the past.

Nightshade's stomach rumbled in protest. Heaving himself out of bed, he ripped the dressing off his healing shoulder and went downstairs to find the kitchen. When he snapped on the lights, they gleamed off the contemporary white-fronted units. The house was a strange combination of rustic wooden hunting lodge and modern styling. He preferred old houses, like Trevelion Manor where he lived, that breathed history from every seasoned-oak beam and floorboard.

He opened cupboards at random until he found a loaf of bread, then dropped two slices into the toaster before making a cup of tea. That would have to tide him over until Ruby prepared him a proper breakfast.

While he ate, he sat at the pine kitchen table, scrolling through the photos of Rhys saved on his cell phone. The Gathering of Kith and Kin where he hoped to find his father would last five nights, and he had already missed the first. He must arrive tonight in order to get his bearings and plan his strategy.

After he finished eating, Nightshade looked for a calendar to check his dates. One hung beside the fridge, each full moon highlighted in orange. The Cornish pisky wise woman kept just such a moon calendar in her room at Trevelion Manor, but Nightshade couldn't understand why Ruby would be interested in lunar cycles. Maybe she was a wise woman or witch. That would explain the strange power he'd sensed in the house. He stared at the calendar for a few seconds, frowning, then noticed the wall clock showed it was getting-up time. So he went upstairs, impatient for Ruby to wake and cook for him.

Her bedroom door stood ajar, the bed visible through the gap. Early sunlight glowed through the thin white curtains, illuminating her. She lay in a state of abandon, arms flung above her head, one leg protruding from beneath the covers. Without him making a conscious decision to go inside, his feet carried him to the foot of her bed.

He had never noticed how women smelled before. Her floral scent mingled with an enticingly musky feminine fragrance that stirred an unfamiliar hunger. The covers rode lower as she

moved, revealing the ripe swells of her breasts. Nightshade clenched his teeth to hold in his fangs.

This woman did things to him he'd never experienced. He might be a vampire, but for him taking blood was a pleasure rather than a necessity. He'd only ever wanted to bite men, and the idea of mating rarely entered his head. Now his body ached to mate with Ruby's while he sank his fangs into her soft pink curves and formed a blood bond so that he could control her. He would only be able to take blood from her a couple of times a week, assuming he didn't want to hurt her, but that could be enough to satisfy him. She was the woman he needed to complete his life. He would make her scream with pleasure and start his baby growing in her belly. Then, after he'd secured the blood oath from his father, he would collect Ruby and bring her home with him to Cornwall.

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The sound of her name dragged Ruby up from the depths of sleep. She groaned when shafts of early morning sunlight fell on her face, then blinked sleepily and met determined silver eyes.

"Hey, shut the damn curtains and get out of my bedroom."

"It's time to get up," Nightshade replied.

"Go away."

"I'm hungry," he announced, as though that was a momentous statement.

"I'm not surprised. You were comatose for a day. Was I supposed to drip-feed you while you slept?"

Ruby watched his gaze cruise slowly down her body beneath the sheet, and that made her heart do a funny little jig. For a moment she imagined that his hunger was for something other than food, but then she dismissed the thought. He was a spectacular example of masculine beauty. There wasn't much chance he'd be attracted to a short and overweight human. He probably only went for lady nightstalkers, whatever they were.

"Kitchen's downstairs," she said.

"I've already had toast. I need something more substantial, please."

When he tapped impatient fingers on the footboard, Ruby gave him a threatening look. "You touch my bed once more and all you'll get is dog food."

He ruffled his wings against his back, disgruntled. "I need to replenish the energy I used flying up here!"

"You'll have to wait till seven-thirty. That's when I get up." Ruby glanced meaningfully at her alarm clock, which read six fifty-four.

With a sigh Nightshade turned to stare out the window. The rising sun hung over the glen. “You get used to early starts when there are small children in the house.”

*Small children?* Ruby stared at his neatly folded wings. Did that mean he had a Mrs. Nightshade at home? What sort of a house did he live in? And why did she even care?

“Okay, I’m getting up.” She was already too wide awake to go back to sleep. Climbing out of bed, she trudged over to fetch her dressing gown off the door. Then she realized: “Are you telling me you can’t cook anything but toast?”

His chin hitched up. “The kitchen is a female’s place.”

Ruby’s step faltered. “Your wife must be tolerant to put up with an attitude like that.”

“I don’t have a wife.”

“But you’ve got kids?”

“A three-year-old brother,” he replied.

“Ah.” Ruby stared at him, unmoving, an unwanted flash of relief tingling through her.

Fifteen minutes later, a full Scottish breakfast of eggs, bacon, sausage, black pudding, haggis, and oatcakes was in preparation, while Nightshade paced back and forth across the kitchen speaking into his cell phone. He was questioning someone about a little boy called Rhys—presumably his brother, although Nightshade sounded more like a concerned father. When Ruby imagined a tiny version of him with small wings, she found herself smiling.

She placed two plates on the table, and Nightshade snapped his phone shut and sat down. He mumbled a thank-you before tucking in as though he hadn’t eaten for a week. Ruby picked at her scrambled eggs. She didn’t feel hungry this early, but she’d wanted to sit with him. He cleared half his plate in record time.

“Who were you talking to?” she asked.

“Eloise, my brother’s mother.”

“Not your mother?”

He shook his head, forking food into his mouth. She so rarely cooked for anyone that it was gratifying to see him enjoy what she’d prepared.

“Eloise is human, but my mother was a Cornish pisky. That’s why I live with them.”

“A Cornish pisky?” She remembered them from her mother’s books. “Aren’t they small?”

“No. Our size.”

Ruby’s heart rate doubled as she realized this was the ideal moment to ask about her father. “Do

you know any angels?”

He wiped his mouth and leaned back with a satisfied sigh. “They don’t exist. Humans probably muddle them up with some sort of fairy.”

Could her father be a fairy? The idea made her snort with disbelief. She was about as unfairylike as it was possible to get. “So, there are beautiful glowing fairies with wings?”

Nightshade sniggered. “The only beautiful glowing individual I know doesn’t have wings, and he definitely isn’t angelic...but I suppose a human might think he was an angel.”

Disappointed, Ruby sagged back in her seat. Even if he didn’t know her father, he might know something about the strange magical affliction that had plagued her at full moon since puberty. “Have you ever heard of anyone who makes plants grow when they touch them?”

“You mean a nature spirit? You don’t want to mess with them. They’re strange. I met a dryad once and his skin looked like leaves.”

“So none of them look like angels?”

“Not that I know of, but the Cornish piskies keep to themselves and live an almost human life because the pisky queen is half human. There are different fairy courts in different parts of the country, but I’ve only visited a few. If you ever go to Ireland, steer clear of the Wicklow Mountains. The Irish fairy queen has her court there, and she’s a psycho.”

Ruby didn’t need that advice. She’d discovered the Irish fairies were dangerous years ago when her mother was searching for Ruby’s father. If not for the leprechauns’ help, she and her mother probably wouldn’t have escaped alive. And, as usual, her mother had blamed Ruby for not sensing the Irish fairies were dangerous. Whenever things went wrong it was always her fault, just because she had the stupid power.

Nightshade patted his stomach. “That breakfast was good, Ruby.”

She ignored the ridiculous flash of pleasure his words gave her. “So, does your father live in Cornwall?”

“No!” His expression darkened and his jaw clenched. “I would not allow Dragon within ten miles of Rhys.” For the first time she saw the threat of violence in his eyes. With his cell phone and his love of her cooking, Nightshade had lulled her into a false sense of normality, but his civilized veneer only thinly disguised the powerful male beneath. She would do well to remember that he wasn’t human. Whatever he said about living a human-style life, the rules and conventions nightstalkers lived by were likely different from her own.

Ruby busied herself loading the dishwasher before washing up the griddle. Yet, while she worked, Nightshade’s potent presence dominated her senses. She’d dated a few men she met at art exhibitions, but no human man emanated such raw masculine power. She would definitely paint a picture of his energy if she got the chance.

She tensed when she felt him approach behind her. His hands landed on her upper arms in a firm but gentle touch that sent tingles racing across her skin, and she tried to concentrate on the dishes as he bent close to her ear.

“You’re a strong and beautiful female, Ruby,” he whispered in a velvet voice. He made a little noise in his throat that sounded like a growl. Then his lips brushed the side of her neck.

The griddle slipped from Ruby’s hands, splashing greasy water up the front of her dressing gown. Where had his sudden interest in her sprung from? She cast a sideways glance at his strong black fingers gripping her arm, and her knees felt weak.

“I want you, Ruby,” he whispered. The tip of his tongue stroked her skin, and a pulsing knot of heat tied low in her belly. “You taste so good.”

She should pull away from him, but her feet were glued to the floor. The tiniest scrape of teeth against her skin nearly made her legs give way. His hands gripped her waist to steady her as if he sensed her weakness.

“I’ve never met a female who makes me feel like this,” he said in a low sexy growl. “I want to mate with you.”

Ruby should say no and push him away. She’d only known him for two days, and she knew supernaturals could be trouble. Yet there was something about Nightshade that resonated with her.

Actually, it was an advantage that he would be a one-night stand. The guys she dated were rarely invited home, in case they discovered her secret affliction. Such a discovery wouldn’t be a problem with Nightshade. And, this way, she would never become obsessed with him like her mother had been with her father. When darkness fell that night, he’d just leave. She had a chance for passion with no strings.

Even as the idea pleased her, it also made Ruby sad. She felt a natural affinity with him that she couldn’t explain. He might be the one man who wouldn’t be freaked out by her affliction.

Before she had the chance to make a decision, Nightshade turned her to face him. Although he didn’t hurt her, his grip was so assured and controlling that she realized how much stronger he was. If he forced himself on her, she couldn’t resist. His arms slid around her, pulling her flat against his hard chest while his mouth came down on hers, and by the time he broke that claiming kiss, she was disoriented and gasping for breath. He swept her up into his arms and heat rushed to her face. She struggled to get down before he noticed how much she weighed.

“Stop wriggling, woman,” he said as he carried her upstairs. Then, with a satisfied male smile, he deposited her in the center of her bed.

He flicked open the button on his jeans. Languorous heat flooded Ruby’s body as he lowered the zipper. Hard, sleek muscles rippled with every movement, and when he pushed his jeans down over his hips, every other thought fled her mind. Little flickers of heat raced through her, making her so hot she thought she might melt.

“Strewth,” she whispered. “That’s one for the record books.”

Nightshade had a tadger the size of a rolling pin.

“Ruby, you’re special,” he whispered.

He eased down onto the bed at her side, then leaned over and stroked his fingers across her cheek. He pressed his lips against her neck, and the scrape of his teeth made her tremble with a deep primeval excitement that had an edge of fear. A tiny voice in the back of her mind told her she shouldn’t be doing this; her mother had come to a terrible end over her dalliance with a powerful supernatural. But, heck, Ruby was a woman with needs. And this was a one-time deal. When would she ever get a chance like this again? Her hands went to Nightshade’s chest. For a moment she paused; then her fingers slipped over the firm contours of his pectorals to his shoulders and dragged him close.

His hand swept up her body to cup a breast through her dressing gown. He gave a little grunt of displeasure at the clothing in his way, reared back and untied the belt of her robe before pulling the offending garment off her and tossing it away. Then he buried his face in her breasts. Ruby’s eyelids closed on a burning wave of sensation.

She ran her hands over his back to the hard ridge where his wings joined his body and let her fingers play over that unfamiliar structure. His breath hissed in and he raised his head to stare at her.

“I love being touched there,” he whispered.

He threw a leg over her, and the impressive length of his arousal pressed against her thigh, sending wicked little whirls of heat swirling through her. His mouth came down on hers again, hot and hard, almost desperate. He trailed kisses along her jaw. His teeth nipped her neck and spikes of pleasure pierced her.

“You’re my ideal woman,” he whispered in a sizzling purr. “We’ll make a beautiful son together.”

His words shattered Ruby’s rapturous haze like a hand grenade. “What!” She turned her face away and pushed at his shoulders.

Nightshade raised his head, his smooth ebony brows drawing together in confusion. “We’ll have a beautiful son,” he repeated, in a tone that suggested he was paying her a huge compliment.

“Are you freaking mad?” Little slivers of pain sliced through her: He didn’t want her at all. He wanted a baby. She shoved at his shoulders, raised one leg and managed to wedge a foot against his thigh. She should have known it was a mistake to even think about getting mixed up with a supernatural, especially when her father had done the exact same thing, left her mother with a baby.

“Oomph.” Nightshade rolled away. With a snap of his wings, he retreated from the battlefield the bed had become. “What is wrong with you, woman?”

“What’s wrong with *me*?” Ruby grabbed the covers and pulled them over herself. “I’m not having a baby with you.” The fact the doctors said she was infertile and couldn’t have a baby was irrelevant. He’d already ruined the mood.

He blinked, looking genuinely puzzled. “But you were happy to mate with me.”

“That doesn’t have to mean a baby,” she shouted.

A frown creased his forehead. “Why else should we want to mate?”

Ruby let her head drop back on the pillow with a thump and threw an arm over her face. They’d obviously hit a major cultural difference. She fought to control her fractured breathing and calm down. The fact he’d called it mating should have warned her that something was off. It wasn’t his fault if nightstalkers only made love when they wanted children; she was human, he was not.

“There’s been a misunderstanding,” she said, striving for a level tone. “I am not having a baby.”

His lip curled with disdain. “You mean you don’t want to bear a nightstalker boy.”

“No. That’s not what I mean. Well, it is, but...” Blast. Now she’d hurt his feelings, although why she cared after this fiasco she didn’t know. “Listen, Nightshade. I’m not prejudiced against nightstalkers, if that’s something you’re worried about. I won’t have any man’s baby.”

He stared at her as though she blasphemed. “I thought females wanted babies. My friends’ women all have babies.”

“Two misunderstandings there: I’m not your woman, and I definitely do not want a baby right now. Surely you’ve had other lovers who didn’t want babies?”

He stared at her blankly for a moment, managing to look intimidating even in the nude. “The situation has never arisen. I usually prefer men.”

Ruby’s mouth dropped open. For long seconds she couldn’t think of a single thing to say. Then blood rushed to her head. “Get out of my bedroom. Now!”

“What have I done to anger you?” he demanded. He looked even more confused.

“Do you want a bloody list?” she screeched, the last shreds of her self-control shot to pieces. “Get out!”

With a grunt of disgust, he snatched up his jeans and headed for the door.

When he’d left the room, Ruby closed her eyes and dragged in steadying breaths. How the hell had she gotten herself into such a mess? With a slight twinge of regret, she realized she had probably been unfair to him, but babies were a sensitive subject and her emotions had flared out of control.

Downstairs, her dogs barked like mad and the back door slammed. He was gone. An ache of missed opportunity hit her. Too late she feared she might have ruined something special.