

## Excerpt: Tempt Me Eternally

They were coming.

Warriors unlike any other. Monsters of unimaginable power. Otherworlders. Fierce creatures with the ability to look inside your soul, glimpse your greatest fear, and present it to you with an unrepentant smile.

*Should've stayed home, Aleaha Love thought. 'Cause we're gonna get spanked. Hard. And not in a good way.* Instead, she'd answered her cell and her captain's call to action, and now found herself crouched in the middle of a gnarled forest, staring into a snow-laden clearing, moonlight shooting bright amber rays in every direction as flakes wafted in the breeze like fairy dust.

Though she wore white from head to toe, had a pyre-gun stretched forward, and was burrowed in a drift as cover, she felt exposed. Vulnerable. And yeah, damn cold.

*What the hell did I get myself into?*

"Everyone in position?" a voice whispered from her headset.

A whisper, yeah, but it startled her. She managed to cut off a yelp, but couldn't stop tremors from sweeping through her. *Steady.* She'd never hear the end of it if she accidentally fired her weapon before the fight had even begun.

"Premature weapon ejaculation," they'd say with a chuckle, and she wouldn't be able to deny it.

One by one, twenty teammates uttered their assent. They had wicked cool nicknames like Hawk Eye and Ghost. Her turn, she said, "Lollipop, in place."

As in, so tasty you could lick her. She rolled her eyes. "Dress her up and watch her play bad alien, delicious cop," the boyz had laughed before giving her the stupid moniker her first day on the job. "Naughty lawbreakers will want to taste her, not outrun her."

That had been, what? Five weeks ago, she realized with a jolt. Oh, how life had changed since then. From hiding in the shadows, afraid of what she was, to working cases with New Chicago's elite team of smart-asses, content with her somewhat pampered existence. A pampered existence she didn't deserve and hadn't earned, but whatever. No guilt for her. Really.

"Need someone to snuggle against, Lolli?" a quiet, amused male voice asked. Devyn, supposedly a king of some sort and a self-proclaimed collector of women. He wasn't really a member of Alien Investigation and Removal but was a special contractor, as well as the man who'd once wired her gun to blow bubbles rather than fire at target practice.

Word on the street, he was more powerful than God and deadlier than the devil, though no one would tell her outright what he could do. He was an otherworlder, that much she knew. That, and most of AIR's flunkies kept their distance from him. They feared him, which only heightened Aleaha's need to keep her own secrets.

She, too, was different.

She didn't know whether she was human or alien. Or both. She didn't know whether there were others like her or not. She didn't know who her parents were or why they'd abandoned her on the dirty streets of the Southern District –a.k.a Whore's Corner–of New Chicago, and she didn't care. Not anymore. All she knew was that she could assume anyone's identity with only a touch. That person's face became hers; their height became hers; their body became hers.

For years, she'd lived in fear of being found out, of being hunted and tortured for her unnatural ability, afraid that everyone who looked at her saw the truth and knew she wasn't who she claimed to be. But she couldn't drop the mask. As herself, she was wanted for theft, assault against a police officer, and more theft. And then maybe kinda sorta more assault.

She'd rather lose a limb than spend any more time in jail.

Her fear of discovery was waning, though, and she was settling comfortably into her newest life as Macy Briggs. *Maybe one day I'll even be worthy of it.* Again, not that she felt guilty. *Really.*

But with Christmas only a few weeks away . . . ugh. Worst. Holiday. Ever. Her "friends" would bake Macy's favorite foods, not Aleaha's. They would give her gifts meant for Macy, and reminisce fondly about good ole days she knew nothing about, and she would have to smile through every minute of it. And yeah, okay. Fine. *Then* she would feel guilty.

"What, ignoring me?" Devyn said with another of those snarky laughs. "Wasn't like I was going to ask to feel you up or anything. I mean, I was just gonna surprise you with my handsiness."

God, she was on the job, yet she'd lost track of her thoughts. Mortifying. "Can you take nothing seriously?"

"Hello, have you met me? I take making out very seriously."

All the men on the line snorted in their attempts to muffle their laughter. They might be wary of him, but they couldn't help but enjoy his perverted sense of humor.

"Fuck you, Chuckles," she said, trying not to reveal *her* amusement. Irreverent bastard.

"Excellent. We're on the same page, because that's exactly what I'm trying to do to you."

Give herself to Devyn? Not in this lifetime, and not because he wasn't attractive. If anything, he was *too* attractive. Hell, he was total screw-like-an-animal perfection. Tall, with dark hair, wide amber eyes, and skin that glittered like a jewel; there was no one else like him. There *was* a recipe for his

smile, though: wicked desire dipped in acid, wrapped in steel and sprinkled with candy. The recipe for his laughter? Well, that was wicked desire tossed in the gutter, wrung out in a whorehouse, and slathered with scented body lotion. Women threw themselves at him constantly, and he ate it up like they were his own personal smorgasbord.

They probably were. Thank God she wasn't in the market for a boyfriend. Or, rather, a lover, since that's all someone as fickle as Devyn could ever amount to. Macy – the real Macy – had been dating a piece of scum Aleaha was still trying to lose and she didn't have the time or patience to throw anyone else into the mix.

"Temper, temper," Jaxon Tremain chided. He was one of two agents who hung out with the sexy otherworlder, and the resident smoother. There was something unnaturally calming about his presence, as if he could slink inside a person's psyche and wash away her fears. "Would you kiss me with that mouth?"

"Funny," she said dryly.

She could hear the others chortling and snorting with more surprised amusement. Someone said, "Soliciting kisses from women, Jaxon? Mishka will kill you for that."

"If by *kill* you mean *seduce*, then yeah," Jaxon replied. "You're right."

Mishka was Jaxon's wife and a hired killer who possessed a robotic arm. Aleaha had only seen her once, but that had been enough to scare ten years off her life. Never had she seen eyes so cold or heard a voice so uncaring. Of course, the moment Mishka spied Jaxon, her entire demeanor had changed. So had Jaxon's, for that matter. Usually he was as conservative as a priest. One glance at Mishka, though, and he'd morphed into gutter man.

Aleaha had marveled at the change in him, a change she was witnessing once again. Empathetic as he was, perhaps he was veering onto the perverted track now to get her mind off the bloody massacre sure to begin. Apparently, though, she didn't need help today. She couldn't concentrate worth a damn. What was wrong with her?

"Well," Devyn said, drawing the spotlight back to him, as always. "Be a good lollipop and answer the man. Will you kiss him or not?"

"I could give you a list of all the things I'll never do to you with my mouth," she muttered. "How 'bout that?"

Devyn laughed, and, yep. It was wicked desire. "She reminds me of Mia when she talks like that. Tell us, Lolli, is that list for everyone or just Jaxon?"

"All right, team," Mia Snow herself interjected before Aleaha could reply. "Save it. You know I only want you to stun these men. Do not burn them. I repeat, do not burn them. An open wound will bleed and that will spread their infection. And believe me, I will kill every single one of you myself if that happens."

There was a moment of frightening silence. Infection. What a delightful reminder. Not only were the warriors coming here vicious, there was a possibility that they were bringing the plague with them.

"Good," Mia continued. "I've got your attention. Solar flare approaching in ten." She was inside a van about a mile away, watching the action on a night-vision monitor with a handful of backup agents. "Nine."

Aleaha tensed. A few months ago, a big case had busted wide open and AIR had learned that otherworlders were traveling to Earth through interworld wormholes that initiated with solar flares. Then, a few weeks after that, another case had come to light. Members of a race of aliens known as the Schön had descended upon Earth, their bodies carriers of a virus that passed to humans through their blood and ejaculate. This virus turned men and women into cannibals. Their queen--or living host of this sickness--was on her way here, due to arrive in the near future.

Tonight, ten members of her horde were supposed to utilize one of those wormholes. Their purpose: to smooth the way for her. Which meant, destroying AIR.

"Six."

Shit. The countdown. Despite the frigid temperatures, sweat beaded on Aleaha's brow, dripping from the brim of the white cap she wore. *Stay calm. You have to stay calm.*

"Five."

Though her résumé claimed she'd worked as a cop for more than two years, this was actually *Aleaha's* first mission.

What seemed forever ago but had only been a few months, she'd stumbled upon the body of a woman who'd been raped and killed in a back alley – a woman she'd recognized as Miss New Chicago's Finest in Uniform calendar girl, Macy Briggs.

She'd almost walked away. The higher the public profile, the more scrutiny she received. But...

Already tired of the adult-toy-store clerk identity she'd previously stolen, Aleaha had seized the chance to better herself, hiding the body and shifting so that she was an exact match to Macy's appearance, thereby claiming the woman's life as her own.

Only later had she learned that Macy had applied to AIR and been accepted. To back out would have looked suspicious and changing identities yet again hadn't appealed. So she'd done it. She'd attended that first day, then the next. And the next. They'd watched her suspiciously, as if they knew the truth, but they had never accused her and she'd realized she was probably paranoid. Soon they'd even relaxed, accepting her as one of their own. Now, here she was, done with trials and on mission one.

"--must have been off, so I'll try this again," Mia said, cutting into her thoughts. "Ten. Nine."

Shit. She'd missed the end of the first countdown? She was practically begging to be killed tonight.

"Seven. Six."

Oh, God. What if she did, in fact, die out here? What if she lost everything she'd worked so hard to gain? Her gun hand shook. *You have to stay calm, damn it.*

With bouts of extreme emotion, she shifted from one identity to another without any control.

"Three. Remember, guns set to stun and only stun."

Her pyre-gun was already dialed to the proper setting, so she curled her index finger around the trigger and swallowed the hard lump in her throat. *Breathe in, breathe out. You do know how to fire a weapon, at least.* A skill she'd learned from her only true friend, Bride McKells. A vampire, and her champion. They'd been separated more than a decade ago, chased apart by cops who'd caught them breaking into homes for food, and Aleaha hadn't been able to find her since. She'd never stop looking, though.

"One."

All the air in Aleaha's lungs escaped on a sudden rush, hot and blistering, burning her throat and mouth. She tensed, waiting. Waiting. And then it happened. Overhead, the gloomy darkness gave way to sparkling orange-pink flickers. The wind picked up, swirling leaves and beating limbs against each other. Snow danced in every direction.

Then . . . nothing.

The flickers died, leaving only the haze of stars. The wind quieted, leaving only the rasp of human breathing. Gradually, she relaxed. Maybe the Schön had decided to stay home. Maybe there'd be a party tonight rather than a war, and she wouldn't have to worry about--

"Commander?" someone asked.

"Hold," Mia replied. "Hold steady. We'll stay here all night if we have to."

Easy for her to say. She was nestled inside that warm van.

Several minutes ticked by in silence. Shudders of cold began rocking through Aleaha, causing her teeth to chatter. This sucked. Much longer, and her gloved fingers would be frozen to her gun. If that happened, growing a penis would be easier than shooting. 'Cause, yeah, she could even become a man. And had, on several occasions. Hadn't been as fun as she'd assumed. Penises were weird.

One second the circular clearing was empty, the next it was bursting with hulking, black-clad warriors. And there were far more than the expected ten.

"What the hell?" someone barked.

Aleaha jolted in surprise, sizing the visitors up in one panicked flash: living weapons. They were tall, well-muscled and radiated absolute power and authority. In the traitorous moonlight and snow, she could see that their features were humanoid--if you didn't count their glowing, golden eyes, like twin suns crashing through daybreak.

"Fuck!" another of her teammates shouted. "They aren't Schön, they're Rakans! What do we do?"

Rakans? The peace-lovers? Couldn't be. There was no damn way these warriors would be waving a white flag.

"Do not kill," Mia commanded. "I repeat, do not kill them. Continue with stun. I want to know why they're here. Now go, go, go."

Just as she was about to squeeze her gun's trigger, a honey-scented breeze wafted through the air, taunting, beckoning her to lassitude and...How odd. Her nipples were beading, but not from the cold. Moisture was beading between her legs, her skin tightening over her bones, drugging heat pouring into her veins.

Surely not. Surely the scent was *not* arousing her. Yet...

Why shoot them when she could kiss them? Kiss them...yes...Naughty images saturated her mind. Images of naked, writhing bodies--one of them golden. Seeking, hungry mouths--one of them golden. Wandering, teasing hands--again, a pair was golden. Satisfaction was only a heartbeat away, the anticipation of pleasure a consuming ache. All she had to do was drop her weapon, stand, and strip.

Strip? Seriously? What the hell was wrong with her? Was she the only one feeling this way?

"Beautiful," an agent said.

"Want," another moaned.

Apparently not.

The warriors remained unmoving, silent, as if they were disoriented and needed to sober.

"Why are you just lying there, lusting after them? Did you not hear me? I said stun them, damn it," the commander growled.

Forcing her mind to blank, one of the toughest things Aleaha had ever done, she hammered at the trigger with her index finger. Other agents followed suit, and multiple blue stun-beams erupted in the night, blending with hers and charting a direct course to the aliens.

*Hit. Hit. Hit.*

As the beams made contact, the Rakans were rendered immobile, aware of their surroundings but now unable to move. Most remained untouched, their comrades having acted as their shields.

As though realizing what was happening, those men quickly gained their bearings and charged forward, successfully dodging the next round of rays.

Aleaha blinked in shock. Never in all her twenty-six years had she seen anyone move so swiftly. They moved so swiftly, in fact, that they left some kind of ethereal, ghostly outline of themselves behind. Their spirits? Those outlines then had to play catch-up with the tangible bodies, which created a dizzying blur of movement, light, and shadow.

"I'm down! I'm down!" someone cried. "Had the shit knocked out of me."

"I can't fucking freeze them," Devyn said. Odd. He had refused to bring a gun to this fight, the cocky bastard, so he wouldn't have been able to freeze them anyway.

After that, absolute chaos erupted. There were screams of pain, frantic footfalls, and humans collapsing. Aleaha pinched off a few more rounds. And, goddamn it, she missed every time.

She never missed. People who lived on the streets often depended on their aim for survival. She'd taught herself to hit whatever she aimed at--no matter what she was doing or what was going on around her. This was unacceptable.

*Calm. Focus.* She concentrated on the blurs as best she could, narrowing her eyes until she saw--

Squeeze.

This time, she hit a target dead-center. No, she realized a baffled moment later. She'd hit his spirit, that ghostly animation or whatever it was. Damn it! Unaffected, his body continued moving, darting from one place to another, felling one agent after another. And then, before her horrified gaze, the Rakans scattered in precise, measured increments. They weren't running away, but were encircling the entire AIR team and lethally closing in.

*Caged*, she thought. *We're being caged.* Despite the direness of their circumstances, the agents continued to fight, and Aleaha was utterly proud of them. Blue stun-beams glowed throughout the enclosure, lighting up the snowy night with majestic fury.

"Shit," someone said. "What the hell should we do? I can't see them anymore. I can't fucking see them!"

An agent ran over her, mowing right over her legs. No longer quite so proud, she popped to her feet, abandoning her cover in favor of protecting her limbs. Her knees knocked, but she managed to remain upright.

"Keep firing," Devyn commanded one and all. "Stay together, and for God's sake, stay calm."

He sounded so close that she turned her head – and found him standing right beside her.

“You okay, Lolli? You staying calm like I said?”

If her emotions wouldn't listen to her, perhaps they'd listen to him and calm. “Yeah.” At the moment, she wasn't capable of saying more. Okay, so no. Her emotions wouldn't be listening to him, either. Fear still held her in a tight clasp, growing as another agent fell just in front of her. Much more, and she might lose her hold on Macy's image.

Jaxon sidled up to her other side, firing two guns at once, each pointed in a different direction. His green eyes were eerie in the darkness. Eerie but calming. Just being near him was like finding shelter in the midst of a raging storm. Finally, blessedly.

“Aim just ahead of the bodies,” he instructed. “Or rather, ahead of the lights. It's the best way to lock on them.”

Grunts, groans and screams filled her ears, louder by the second, distracting her. She pivoted and fired, pivoted and fired, trying to direct her beams in front of the blurs, just as Jaxon had said.

To her consternation, she only managed to nail one of the warriors. How many were out there, damn it? They seemed to be multiplying like flies.

“Help me!” an agent sobbed. “Please, help me.”

Automatically, her gaze searched the night, the frenzied crowd. Before she found the beseeching male, one of the Rakans bypassed Aleaha's protective wall of testosterone and slammed into her, shoving her to the ground. She landed flat on her back, suddenly breathless and experiencing a moment of terror and anger, helplessness and courage.

As she raised her weapon to defend herself, she could feel her face and body beginning to change, the bones adjusting to accommodate a new form. No. No, no, no. When she lost control, she never knew who she would end up looking like.

The alien with glowing golden eyes leaned down, not to strike her but to...kiss her? She struggled against him, and, yep, he opened his mouth to fit it over hers.

“Woman,” he said, voice slightly slurred. “Mine.” Just before contact, an azure shower of sparks exploded around him, framing his large body and freezing him in place. Panting, instantly comforted, Aleaha crawled backward, forcing her image to conform once again to Macy's.

Jaxon held out a hand to help her up, and Aleaha prayed he hadn't seen her mini-transformation.

“Thanks,” she rasped, somehow finding her balance. She ripped off her headset and tossed it on the ground. No more distractions.

“These guys are Rakan,” he said. “Don't worry if you were dripped on.”

Until that moment, she'd forgotten about possible contamination. Shit. Rakan or Schön, she was going to be more careful. The few times she'd been sick, she'd unknowingly transformed into an ailing identity. Each experienced had taught her that it's more fun to be stabbed than ill.

"On my signal," Jaxon told her, shooting around her, "I want you to run and lock yourself in one of the vans."

The vans, hidden as they were, would offer a reprieve from danger, injury and death.

"No," she said, surprising herself. She'd stay and she'd fight, even though the prospect terrified her. How could she live with herself if these men died and she'd done nothing to help? "I'm staying."

"Don't argue," Devyn snapped. "Women are always prettier when they agree."

Pig. "I need to stay." She wouldn't defile everything Macy had built with her own cowardice. "I *have* to sta—ohmygod!" One of the aliens had just stepped into an agent. *Stepped into*. Like a phantom of the night, the otherworlder's body had entered the human's, fusing them until only the human was visible.

There was a tormented scream. The agent spasmed, shaking and quaking as he raised his own gun to his temple and fired. Brain tissue sprayed, obscene against the snow, and Aleaha gaped in horror.

"Fuck," snarled Dallas Gutierrez, Mia's second in command, as he joined them. "They're motherfucking soul jumpers."

Soul jumpers. She didn't know what that meant exactly, and she didn't want to find out. Her hands shook as she increased the speed of her shots.

"I've controlled the energy of a Rakan before," Devyn said, his voice strained. "But I can't grasp on to a single energy molecule to control these guys."

"Unlike Eden, they weren't raised on Earth. Maybe that's the problem. But it doesn't matter. Surely they'll tire soon," Jaxon replied. "That kind of speed has to drain them."

Aleaha lost the thread of the conversation. Energy molecule? Eden? All she knew was that a few more minutes passed and the aliens *didn't* slow. Their unparalleled swiftness only seemed to increase, so much so that she had trouble fixing another target in her sights.

"Shit." Devyn slid a knife from his boot. "You were wrong, my friend, and we're out of time. They're coming for us next." He slapped the hilt of the knife into Aleaha's free hand, the silver tip gleaming in the moonlight. "Be ready, Lolli. Go for the jugular."

She gulped. The blade weighed less than her gun, but somehow felt all the more menacing. "O—okay."

Jaxon turned those eerie green eyes on her. "There's still time to run."

Sixteen Rakans remained standing and they continued to close their circle, hopping over fallen agents. There might as well have been a thousand. Not long before she, Devyn, Dallas, and Jaxon—who held the center of that circle—would be reached. But Jaxon was right. There was still time to escape. Not much, but enough.

"No." Determined, she shook her head. "I'm staying. We can win this." If not, if AIR fell, she'd fall, too. *For Macy.* Aleaha owed the woman that much.

She kept firing with one hand while gripping the hilt of the serrated knife with the other, trying to prepare herself for what she might have to do. She'd never used a knife on anyone but herself, and the thought of slicing into someone else's flesh...*You can do it.* A cornered animal did anything necessary to ensure survival.

Another agent placed a gun to his own temple and fired.

Yeah, she could do it.

"For all that's holy, Lolli," Devyn snapped. His hard tone of voice made her blink. Especially since he'd used it twice in one night and that was twice more than ever before. Where was his dry sense of humor? Where were his dirty jokes? "The knife was supposed to scare you, not empower you. Hit the vans so we don't have to worry about you!"

"Stop worrying and do your job!"

"Go." This from Dallas. "Run."

"No!" Even as she spoke, strong fingers of compulsion and agreement stabbed their way into her mind. *Do what he says. Don't argue with him. Run.*

Aleaha was almost into the woods, sidestepping the Rakans as Dallas distracted them, before she realized what she was doing. She stopped short and frowned. What... why?

The answer hit her with the force of pyre-fire. Mind control.

Which agent was responsible? Devyn, Jaxon or Dallas? Didn't matter, she supposed, because they were all bastards. Somehow, someday, one of them had controlled her with a thought.

Scowling, she whipped around. Trees stretched on both sides, so close she had only to reach out to hug their trunks. Their twisted, snow-heavy limbs shuttered her line of vision, so she brushed them aside.

The sight she next drank in would haunt her for years to come.

Most of the agents were lying on the ground, some writhing and groaning sounds of impending death. Others were motionless in the blood splattered snow. Dallas, Devyn, and Jaxon were slashes of white in that violent nighttime canvas, the tallest of the Rakans stalking the outer edge of the

circle. Other Rakans took turns taunting them with punches and kicks, each expertly evading the pyre-fire launched at them.

*What can I do? What the hell can I do?* "Stop," she called, hoping the distraction would give her friends some kind of opening to...what? Take off? Attack? "Stop!"

The stalking alien obeyed, stopping in a ray of moonlight, his gaze quickly finding her. Jolting her.

Aleaha trembled in shock, another honey-scented breeze suddenly enveloping her. Arousing her. *Kiss*, she thought again. The man was utterly and absolutely breathtaking. A hedonistic god fallen straight to Earth. Sensual, exotic, with kohl-rimmed eyes of gold, a strong nose, a square chin, and chiseled...everything.

He put Devyn to shame.

What little of his skin was visible glowed like liquid rays of sunlight poured over hot steel. His hair hung to his jawline, the same golden shade as his skin. He was mesmerizing, unimaginable power and dark savagery blanketing his expression. And God, he was a predator, the knowledge banked in every line of his big body. Yet he was also a being so beautiful, he lured with only a look. Probably snared women before they could snap out of his spell.

"Female," he said, his voice as mesmerizing as his face. How did he know English? In fact, how had the other, the one who'd tried to molest her?

"Oh, no, you don't," Dallas said, breaking through the circle and punching him in the jaw.

His head whipped to the side. Still staring at Aleaha, he reached out, grabbed Dallas by the neck, and tossed him against a nearby tree. "Mine."

The force he used--amazing. The speed and agility--dumbfounding. Dallas slumped to the ground, unconscious. Jaxon roared, a wild sound, and attacked. The beast reached out yet again. This time, he slammed a ghostly hand inside the agent's chest cavity and twisted.

Jaxon crumpled to the ground, and like Dallas, he didn't get up. Devyn watched it all, a hard smile on his face. A smile that promised death. But he didn't strike. No, he held up his hands in surrender.

Aleaha could barely believe her eyes. That wasn't like him. He'd rather be stabbed than lose a fight. The situation must be grimmer than even she had realized.

Instinctively, she backed up, halting only when she considered a new possibility. Maybe, hopefully, he had a plan. Maybe he was pretending to surrender while giving Mia and crew time to get here. Yes, of course. But why hadn't help already arrived? They were supposed to swoop in if something like this happened, and close as they were, they should have been here by now.

The tall golden alien strode toward her, shoving his own men aside. With every step, he appeared more indomitable. Deadly. Her heart drummed erratically in her chest as he came closer...closer.

*Do something! Stop him!* He was almost upon her. "Stop," she shouted again. *Good going. I'm sure he'll obey.* "Stay where you are." If Mia needed more time, it was up to Aleaha to stall this man.

Surprisingly, he stilled at the sound of her voice. Except for his eyes. Those trekked over her, hot and blistering, as if she were his property, already naked and begging for his touch. Goose bumps broke out over her skin; her mouth dried.

"One more step, and I'll shoot." Trembling, she raised her gun until she had a direct shot at his groin. Men tended to agree to anything when their dicks were threatened. "Let's talk about this. Maybe we can work something out. Why are you here? What do you want?" *Come on, Mia.*

Slowly he grinned, silently promising that he'd do whatever he wanted, whenever he wanted. There'd be no chatting. Bastard. She squeezed the trigger. Just like the others had done, he darted away from the azure beam as if it were nothing more than a pesky insect.

A second later, he was in front of her, appearing in the blink of an eye and towering over her. She gasped in surprise, heat radiating off him and enveloping her. Heat and that honey smell. Her nipples beaded again, reaching for him, and her stomach fluttered. The need for him to strip her, to slide inside of her, was potent, heady, part of her wanting to drop to her knees and beg him for it.

*Who are you?* she wondered, dazed. In fact, the urges were so unlike her, common sense easily fought its way to the surface. *Kill him. Now. End this!* Mia had told them not to kill, yes, but Mia wasn't here. At this rate, Aleaha would be dead before backup arrived.

"I told you I'd shoot you, and I never lie." Of course, that was a lie. Her entire life was a lie. This, however, she would do. "I mean it! Back away or I start firing."

He remained in place. "Shooting has not been favorable for you so far, has it?"

"There's a first time for everything."

"I agree."

Before she could act, he knocked the gun from her hand. It clattered to the ground, out of reach, and he purred silkily, all kinds of erotic suggestion in the undertones. "What do you plan to shoot me with, my female?"