



Wolf's Valentine

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The Westervelt Wolves

Rebecca Royce

Published 2010

ISBN 978-1-59578-679-1

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Manufactured in the United States of America

Liquid Silver Books
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Blurb

Jana thought she was through with Westervelt. Fleeing for her life thirty years ago, she's hidden as a human ever since. But a strangely worded Valentine delivered to her desk at work has given her pause.

Malcolm never expected to find his mate working for a crooked company he was sent to investigate in New York City. But there she is. Now, on Valentine's Day, the two will battle their attraction for each other while taking down a conglomerate built for the

sole purpose of destroying the Westervelt Wolves.
Will love win the day?

Chapter One

Happy Valentine's Day—to my Mate.

It was like a goddamn nightmare come to life. The *M* word, she'd not seen it or heard it in thirty years and she could have gone another hundred without seeing it again. When she'd lived on the island it had been a constant reminder of what she didn't and might never have.

Jana crumpled the red heart-shaped paper in her hands and threw it as hard as she could into the garbage can next to her desk. Sinking into her chair, she considered two possibilities for its origin.

One, someone had found out what she was, even though she never shifted unless absolutely sure she was alone, and even then only at her house in upstate New York...or two, the curse had been lifted and she now had a mate who had found her in Manhattan and sent her a card.

Maybe it is the second one.

Her wolf didn't usually speak to her during business hours, finding advertising to be truly dull; she slept most of the day. The card must have woken her. Picking up the paper, she took a deep sniff, letting the canine inside of her take a gander at the scent.

Sorry, nothing.

Still bored with the idea, her wolf snuggled back down to sleep.

Jana scoffed at the second possibility. Surely if the nightmare Kendrick Kane had inflicted on all of them had gone away, she would have felt some sort of inclination to go back home to Westervelt. Shrugging, she placed her head in her hands. Or maybe not. The remote island off the coast of Maine felt so removed from her real life it was almost as if she had imagined the whole thing.

Almost.

There was still the problem with the fact that she didn't age, ever, and had zero sexual interest in any men she met ever. Plus, she shifted as often as she could into a wolf and ran through the woods at night.

A knock on her office door startled her and she jumped. Checking her appearance in the mirror on the wall to make sure the strong outer exterior she presented to the world was in place, she stood up. Picking up her cup of coffee, she took a sip and smiled. "Come in."

Malcolm Denon entered the room. His long dark hair was tied neatly, as always, behind his head in a braid while his crescent shaped blue eyes examined her closely from the doorway of her office. Jana didn't understand why Carl let him wear his hair like that when everyone else in the building had to be clean cut to even enter the building.

Then again, Malcolm didn't exactly work for them. He consulted, so he got to do exactly what he wanted. Swallowing, she took a deep breath. No wolf. Malcolm was all man, but not a shifter. Raising her gaze, she caught for a second what looked to be curiosity in his eyes before they hid away any emotion.

She was half-certain his blue-eyed gaze could see right into her soul.

If he could see that, he'd know about me.

Jana tried to keep the smile from her face and had no idea if she'd accomplished her

goal. Malcolm was enough of a presence that even her wolf perked up to take note when he was around. But sadly, he wasn't a wolf, and her canine companion had shown over and over again that she was not going to mate with a human. She wanted wolf, she wanted pack.

Truthfully, so did Jana. It had been too long since she'd been anything other than a lone wolf.

"Am I interrupting something?" Malcolm raised a black eyebrow and she wondered, not for the first time, if he had any Native American in his background. She didn't dare ask—that would mean opening up a dialogue she simply avoided ever having with people about their personal lives, but his high cheekbones and long black hair reminded her of the Passamaquoddy tribe that resided in Maine. That was the problem, she decided, Malcolm reminded her too much of home.

Clearing her throat, she smiled her best corporate smile. It said to the world, *I'm interested, but I don't want to be your friend*. Everyone was safer that way. "Of course not Mr. Denon, have a seat."

Malcolm walked to the chair in front of her desk and sat down in it. After a moment, he seemed to get comfortable in the wooden office furniture. At his height, which she would guess at being at least six foot five inches tall or perhaps a little more, it couldn't be easy for him to fit into basic chairs. There weren't too many men she ran into who were the sheer size of the one in front of her. Even if they were as tall as he, they didn't have the broad shoulders and the wide muscular chest, legs, and arms.

She waited a beat to make sure he was comfortable before she began. "What can I do for you, Mr. Denon?"

"Please call me Malcolm."

Business pleasantries. She was used to them. "Okay. Then you call me Jana."

He nodded and looked down at her desk. She'd taken great care to make sure that her office was filled with things that people looked at but didn't question, and she never displayed a picture of anything anyone would want to talk about. Coworkers felt compelled to make conversation about them and that led to too many inquiries about Jana's coming and goings that she didn't need.

"So what can I do for you, Malcolm?"

"It's really more of a question as to what I can do for you. You still haven't come to see me."

She raised her hands slightly. "I'll admit, I have no use for security. No one wants to kill the advertising girl from a shoe company. I write copy, Malcolm—good enough copy that Carl Elders doesn't have to employ outside agencies to do more than film the commercials that I write—but none of those skills are going to get me in too much trouble, other than dirty looks from the top firms that would love to land us."

"A major shoe company, sporting goods really." Malcolm's eyes said he found her downgrading the size of their athletics company less than amusing. "And evidently someone found it important enough to threaten the top executives here, or Carl wouldn't have brought my firm on board to protect his top people."

She smiled, showing no teeth as she feared her mouth would look too wolfish. With her luck, her fangs would have elongated and he'd either shoot her or go running from the room in terror. "I'm hardly a top person."

"Carl disagrees."

"He's very kind." Malcolm's strong gaze made her cheeks flame and she hoped she wasn't blushing. It really was too bad he wasn't a wolf.

Too bad indeed. If he was a wolf, I would like him.

I know you would. Jana would too.

Malcolm leaned forward, his gaze looking nothing less than predatory, and Jana stopped breathing for a moment. Her wolf awoke, rushing to the forefront of her consciousness. Was she being threatened? It certainly felt that way or at least close to it. Holding on as tightly as she could, she begged her wolf to stay hidden, promising her a run tonight. They'd take the eight o'clock train out of Penn Station and be running by eleven. Together they could run all weekend if she just restrained herself now.

What was it about Malcolm that made her insides go nuts?

"Your relationship with Carl, what is it exactly?"

Jana raised an eyebrow. "And that is your business *why*?" Truth was, she and Carl had a very good working relationship but that was it, and that was all it would ever be, despite her employer's desire for more. It had been years since Carl suggested it be anything else. She suspected he'd forgotten it by now.

"I'm supposed to be protecting everyone. If two of my charges are more than just colleagues or friends, it is my job to know about it so I can account for it."

Shrugging, Jana tried not to smile at the aggravation that had shown up in the otherwise unflappable Mr. Denon's voice. "Seems like a pretty weak argument to me. Wouldn't sell in my line of work."

Leaning back in his chair, unfettered amusement lit his complexion before he grinned. Jana couldn't help responding. She didn't have friends but she wouldn't mind keeping this man around for a while to test her wit and intellect. He would be a worthy opponent. Back on Westervelt, even though he wasn't a Kane, he would have been considered among the top advisors to the Alpha for his sheer audacity.

"It's Valentine's Day."

She nodded, remembering the crumpled up card in her wastebasket. "Yes, it is."

"Have dinner with me. Unless, of course, you're having dinner with *Carl*." The way he said their boss' name was akin to his having suggested she was having dinner with a dictator, or a person responsible for mass genocide, not the head of a sporting goods company.

"I am not having dinner with Carl."

She had, however, promised her wolf a nice long run. But she could still do that, she'd just have to take the ten o'clock train and make it to her running spot later than usual. It wouldn't be a problem considering she hardly required any sleep to function and she had all day Saturday or Sunday to sleep if she needed it.

"Good. Then you'll have dinner with me."

Jana couldn't recall actually saying she would eat with him but she nodded like she'd agreed to it just the same.

"I'll pick you up at eight."

So maybe she'd have to make the eleven o'clock train instead. "I live at..."

He flashed a grin and winked. "I know where you live."

"You do?"

"I'm good at what I do, and knowing where you live is one of the things I have to know." Reaching out he stroked the side of her face with his long callused finger. She

jumped at the contact. When was the last time someone had touched her unexpectedly? Her heart pounded. "I'll see you at eight."

As she watched him walk out the door, his hair in the braid swinging behind him, Jana couldn't help but smile. She had a date. So what that it could never go anywhere? It was a date and she would enjoy it as just that. An evening alone with an interesting man she wanted to know more about.

Swinging around in her chair, she stared out of her large window at the Manhattan skyline in front of her. A million plus people lived their lives in this city every day and she would hasten to guess that quite a number of them had dates for Valentine's Day and now she was one of them. Alone, she let herself grin.

* * * *

Malcolm stomped out of the high-rise office building at full speed. Walking down Park Avenue, he stared at the window displays even as he moved faster than he probably should, given the surroundings. She'd thrown out his damn card. Maybe it was pathetic but it had taken him the better part of the day before to decide how to phrase that card and the woman had put it in the garbage.

What do you want? It's not like she knows you are who you are. You don't even smell like a wolf.

The herbs Theo Kane ordered them all to take when they were out on assignment rid them of their shifter smell so they couldn't be scented by Kendrick's created wolves. It had never bothered Malcolm before; however, knowing now that he could scent his mate as clearly as he could breathe in the soot, sewer, and leftover sludged-up snow of New York City and she didn't react to him at all made him crazy.

Perhaps you should have just signed your name.

His wolf was not in the habit of not saying 'I told you so' when appropriate.

You would think she would know, she gets a card, signed Your Mate and then I show up and she doesn't put two and two together?

She's having dinner with us. What more do you want?

Well truthfully, that was bugging him too. She didn't know who her mate was and so she was having dinner with a man she couldn't be sure was her destiny? The woman infuriated him. Why wouldn't she just tell him if she was dating Carl? Did shifter women away from Westervelt just *date*?

His cell phone began to vibrate and he groaned as he pulled it out of his coat pocket. Malcolm looked down at the display, recognizing one of the secret numbers from Westervelt. Moving to the side of the street to avoid oncoming pedestrians, he leaned up against the jewelry store window earning him an odd glare from one of the employees coming out. It had to be a big day for them; maybe they didn't want to miss out in sales based on his blocking the storefront. Who the hell knew what these humans did or did not want?

"This is Denon."

Malcolm watched his breath form into tiny crystals in front of his face as he spoke. He needed one of those hands free devices but he still hadn't gotten around to getting one so he had to hold it. Most of the people on the street wore gloves to prevent the cold but he just didn't find fifteen degrees to be that chilly, not when he'd been raised in Maine and carried wolf blood.

"It's Theo." Malcolm could have guessed. The fourth Kane brother had designed this mission and micromanaging was his middle name.

"What's going on?"

"How is the mate thing going?" If he heard amusement in the prince's voice, he decided to ignore it. Theo had had to fight off demons to mate with Faith. He supposed the man had earned the right to find the love lives of others amusing. Even if Malcolm wasn't in the mood to listen to it at the current moment.

"I have a date with her tonight." Looking at his watch, he saw it was almost five o'clock. That gave him three hours to change his clothes, pick her up, and decide where the hell they were going to eat. It was next to impossible to get a restaurant reservation on Valentine's Day.

"Date? She wants to date?"

"Still doesn't realize I'm her mate."

There was a pause on the other end of the phone. "You know you can stop taking the drugs long enough to expose your wolf scent to your mate, right?"

Now there was some information he could have used a week ago. "No I was not aware of that."

"You could have just asked, Malcolm."

"My prince in charge of safety of our pack tells me to disguise my scent, I disguise my scent. Your order is a direct order from our beloved Alpha." It wasn't lip service to Malcolm. He meant it. They'd been through hell and back, saved only by Tristan becoming their Alpha. He'd rob, destroy, or kill anyone that tried to harm Tristan Kane or any of the Westervelt Wolves.

"We know you feel that way. I suppose I should have realized when I sent our Warriors out to investigate this problem with the made-wolves that fate would give some of you your destined mates and that the scent would be a problem."

Malcolm nodded even though he knew Theo couldn't see him. "You've been working on keeping us safe. That is certainly enough without considering our love lives."

"Your love lives are what will continue this pack and our traditions. Ha. Unless we all rely on Tristan and Ashlee to produce endless heirs."

"Did the Alpha's wife give birth?"

"Any moment."

Malcolm couldn't help letting his mind wander to Jana. The woman was exquisite and now that he had scented her, found her, and claimed her—at least in his mind—he could understand his Alpha's desire to continuously procreate with his mate. Jana's long dark hair that nearly touched her waist when she didn't keep it tied up at work would hang down below her belly as it grew with his child. He closed his eyes on the image. They had to 'date' first.

"So I have your permission to reinstate my scent for the moment."

"Yes you do, but it's not why I phoned."

Malcolm could have guessed that. "Has something happened?"

"Tristan sent Michael to Louisiana. We found the other pack."

Michael was the oldest Kane, but he wasn't their Alpha. That role had been destined for Tristan, the third Kane brother. The news of the other pack was interesting but Malcolm didn't think that was why Theo had called. The Kane's quest to find their sister was not on his agenda; at least he didn't think it was at the moment. "Uh-huh. And?"

"And Gabriel, Stow, and Lance were attacked on their way into the subway about an hour ago."

Now *that* was interesting. He felt his eyes turn wolf as he scanned the area around him. Nothing looked threatening. A lot of people walking cautiously up and down Park Avenue, not an easy task considering it was the one street in New York without Walk/Don't Walk signals.

"Are they okay?" He fisted his free hand. Without a second thought he would pursue their attackers.

"Yes, they managed to capture a whole bunch of made-wolves and they're on their way back here. I just wanted to change your objective slightly."

He'd had an objective? He thought it was to seek and catch as many made-wolves as possible and in his case, mate Jana. "What would that be?"

"We need you to stay where you are. You're definitely onto something. Carl Elders has been funding several of the clinics we have identified as sending patients to Kendrick. Follow the money. It can't be a coincidence that so many wolves are prowling around in New York City where Carl is."

Malcolm agreed. With Kendrick in Arizona, someone was feeding the lab-created wolves the drugs they needed to stay alive. He just hadn't figured out how it was getting done yet. "I'll figure out how they're doing it."

"I know you will. Just be diligent and safe."

"Give the pack my regards." He hoped he'd be returning there with his mate, which reminded him that he needed to get changed. Walking briskly, he looked up to see snow flurries starting in the sky.

Snow just wasn't the same here. It never had been. For the last twenty years he'd run one security consulting company or another in a major city somewhere in the United States or Europe. There was never a time he didn't prefer to be home on Westervelt with the small mountain, surrounded by water.

The first attack took him down as he crossed from Park to Eighty-Third Avenue. Hitting the ground, five wolves bit and growled as they assaulted his human body.

Change.

He didn't need to be told twice as he let his wolf do what his wolf did best and shift into his canine form. What the hell were they doing? It was still light out and it was the middle of New York frickin' City. He waited for the shift to complete, protected for a moment by the warm white light that accompanied the change the Westervelt Wolves went through but the made-wolves did not.

He did a quick glance around, growling as he bared his fangs and arched his back at his five soon-to-be-dead assailants. None of the humans passing them on the street seemed to notice there was a wolf fight going on right in front of them.

Shifting completely, he was still a huge wolf. Mostly black with white spots and a white underbelly none of his current companions would ever see, he was still over five feet tall, much larger than the five who had signed their death warrants when they'd come at him on the street.

He growled and leapt at the first one to his right. It was a small, dirty grey wolf that looked too sick to even be standing let alone attacking him. He grabbed it by the scruff of its neck and threw it in the middle of the street. Whatever protected them from being seen did not stop it from being struck by a yellow cab racing through a light.

The front window of the cab shattered as the car screeched to a stop. Clever manipulation of the other cars prevented a major pile up and Malcolm heard people start to scream and yell. They couldn't see the wolf that lay sprawled out in the middle of the street until it shifted back into its human form. By the angle of its neck, Malcolm knew it was dead.

It wasn't that he didn't care of the loss of life—he never would have attacked them but given that they had just assaulted him, he couldn't feel too sorry about it.

Watch out.

The other four wolves leapt at him all at once. As the first one made contact with his fur, he growled. It was going to be a very long night. One way or another he would be rid of them.

Chapter Two

He had stood her up. Jana took a deep breath and tried not to breathe fire. She was a wolf, not a dragon, and if this was going to be one of those powers she picked up over time, as she grew older and more powerful, well the fates could just shove it. Pulling the little black dress she'd put on for the occasion over her head, she slipped on her comfortable red and black flannel pants that really should be pajama pants but that she happily wore out of the house for occasions like these.

She wasn't going to sit around anymore. Throwing on a long grey sweater—she felt no inclination to match her clothes at the moment, besides she could always change upstate—she grabbed her black pea-coat and stomped out of her apartment loudly. Slamming the door behind her, she waited a beat until she heard the automatic lock latch.

Pressing the down button to call the elevator, she wasn't surprised when it took a few minutes to arrive. It was V-day. Everyone was going out. Just most of them not alone. A full elevator dinged on her floor and she tried not to breathe as she entered. So many bodies stuffed in one spot meant way too much body odor, way too much perfume, and way too much aerosol deodorant for her wolf nose to tolerate.

Forcing her way out of the elevator first when it reached the lobby, she walked out of the lobby of her apartment building smiling at the doorman and putting her head down as she walked out. She hailed a taxi and directed the cabbie to Penn Station.

The taxi took off at top speed and she sighed, promising herself it would be the last time she made that sound. Things had been a lot harder than this. Much *much* worse, in fact. The first time she'd arrived in Manhattan, fifty dollars in her pocket, wearing clothes that pinched and itched, she barely been able to see or hear anything at all due to sensory overdrive. For two days, she'd sat on the street and tried not to breathe.

It hadn't helped that she'd been rushed from her home in the middle of the night surrounded by mostly young girls and babies. One of just a few unmated grown women; not being mated had always seemed a nightmare. It wasn't easy watching all her friends and family find their soul mates. Deported in the middle of the night while everyone else she loved and knew was butchered by her mate—now *that* was hell.

What she'd discovered a few weeks later was that she was completely adaptable and more capable than she ever could have imagined. In no way would she fall apart, ever. Not then. Not now that a human stood her up on Valentine's Day. She had a date with her wolf. Together they would run until they collapsed.

The taxi pulled in front of the train station and she paid the driver as she opened the door to the cab and ran out. If she didn't hurry, she would miss the nine o'clock train to Woodstock. Then it would just be a quick drive later until she was alone on her land where she could run as her wolf. She loved New York City—the anonymity of it and the hustle and bustle—but she'd bought the place upstate so whenever she needed to she could still be the wolf she needed to be.

Running through the terminal, she made the train with a split second to spare and sat down in her seat. Closing her eyes, she took a deep breath. Soon she would be where she needed to be and then Monday morning she could pretend the whole thing never happened.

The seat next to her slumped down as someone sat next to her. She took a deep breath preparing to smile and say nothing at all when the scent hit her like a truck slamming into her senses.

Wolf.

Jana's eyes darted open as her heart beat frantically. Sitting next to her, his eyes half open as he stared at her through dark lashes was Malcolm. She gasped. He couldn't be a wolf. She'd sniffed him to her heart's content in the office just that afternoon. She took a deep breath again.

He's a wolf. Trust me on this.

Never having doubted her wolf's knowledge on this subject before, Jana narrowed her eyes.

"Surprise." Malcolm's voice sounded rough, like sandpaper, much different than he had in their earlier encounters. "I didn't want to stand you up. Sorry I was a little late."

She sucked in a breath. "What are you?"

"I'm like you, Jana. I'm a shifter."

He was and he was much bigger than she was. It might have been thirty years since she'd gotten to live like a wolf but she remembered the rules of these things well enough. He was male and large in human form. He'd be huge as a canine. Sitting back in her seat she tried to make herself as small as possible, as non-threatening as she could be.

There was no way she was going to be murdered on the train to Woodstock by a cursed Westervelt male who could somehow disguise his scent from her.

He reached out and touched her arm. She tried not to jump and swallowed the lump of anxiety in her throat.

"I'm not going to hurt you. I could never hurt you. I'd rather cut off my own arm. Take a deep breath; now that you can smell me you'll see I'm your mate."

Jana nodded. "I'm sure that is what I would find. That's why I'm terrified. You are not going to be killing me on this train. I will fight you to the death before I let you do that."

Closing his eyes, Malcolm smiled. "Good. That's exactly what I would want you to do if I threatened you in any way."

"You want me to challenge you?" Something was off and Jana couldn't get her senses around it yet.

He is our mate. And he is yummy.

Don't start purring. You're a wolf, not a cat. And he might psychotic or struck by a curse.

"The curse has been removed from Westervelt. It was in play for thirty years but now it's gone. Almost four years ago."

Four years? Had it been more than thirty years since she'd been home? Had four more years passed somehow and she hadn't marked them? Her mind whirled as she counted backwards in her mind. Yes, he was right. The thought made her slightly sick.

"So why didn't I feel compelled to come home? And how come I couldn't smell you earlier?"

Still not opening his eyes, Malcolm sighed. "I took an herb that disguises my scent. It's how the bad wolves that are running around hide from us. In terms of going home, as far as we can tell, it has to do with the danger not being entirely gone. The curse is off of the island, it's off of us, but Kendrick is still out there, still wreaking havoc, and so very

few of the female wolves are feeling the compulsion either from Mary Jo's spell or Ashlee's advertising to come home."

"Why should I believe you?" She wanted to. Oh man did she want to think he told her the truth. That would mean possibilities opened up she hadn't considered and Malcolm was her mate. Her wolf was right, he was yummy.

Opening his eyes just enough to look down, he pulled his phone out of his coat. Pressing a button, he handed it to her.

"It's ringing."

She stared at the phone, dumb struck for a moment. "Who is it calling?"

"Theo Kane."

Now there was a name she hadn't heard in a long time. She pushed the phone to her ear.

"Malcolm. Are you hurt?" Theo's voice, which brought immediate memories of home through Jana's head, sounded frantic.

"Theo?" She had no idea if he'd remember her or not. She'd been slightly older than he was.

"Jana. I see Malcolm finally approached you. Is he hurt? Tristan is going crazy here. He says he can feel Malcolm's pain, that he's been injured."

I smell the blood.

Thanks for saying something earlier.

Staring at Malcolm, Jana couldn't see any obvious injuries but that didn't mean it wasn't true. "I'm not sure if he's injured. Um, Theo." She stuttered. "Is the curse really lifted?"

"It is. He's safe to you. Take care of him."

Theo disconnected. She stared at Malcolm for a moment before shutting the phone and moving into action.

She shook his arm. "Malcolm, you're hurt. Where? What happened?"

"It must have been strange to talk to a Kane again."

"Don't avoid the question."

Coughing, he smiled with his eyes still closed. "Think of it this way, we haven't yet technically mated so if I die on this train, you won't have to follow."

"You're funny. You're also hurt so let me help you." She paused. "At least tell me what happened and I think you'd better fill me in on what's going on with Westervelt. I'm really confused."

"What was the last thing you heard?"

She shook her head. "The last thing I heard? It was Kendrick's wife pounding on my door and running me off the island, telling me all of the mated wolves were going to go nuts...that I had to hide from all the male shifters until the curse was broken.

"It was gruesome. You can imagine. Utter betrayal at the hands of our Alpha and in the most horrendous way." She watched him shiver. "When all the men came back to their senses and discovered they had killed their mates, it was mass ritual suicide. The unmated men tried to find all of you but Mary Jo had put a spell on the unmated women so they couldn't be found until the curse was lifted."

She looked up at him, eyes inscrutable. "When did it get lifted?"

"About four years ago, Tristan Kane found his mate and took the role of Alpha. Since then, everyone has been slowly finding their other halves...but Kendrick is still a

problem. Ashlee, that's Tristan's wife, thinks that we can find the women even though Kendrick is still a threat because we need the women to come home to beat him."

That was a lot to digest and she needed to sit with it for a while. "What about the here and now? What are you doing in New York?"

"We're looking into your boss, Carl Elders. Finding you, it was like a dream in the midst of a nightmare."

His words made her heart flutter. She hadn't missed that he'd changed the subject. "Do you not trust me? Is that why you won't tell me?"

This time his eyes flew open and she didn't miss the pain illuminating them. "When I pictured finding my mate, I never imagined I'd have to discuss with her, issues of security and danger. It was more about romance and love notes."

"I think it's adorable that you're a romantic. However, there are some things we're going to have to get out of the way between us before I will listen to any of that."

"Tristan had Theo and Gabriel put together their best warriors and sent us out to find out what is happening with Kendrick and his newly made wolves. It became immediately obvious that too large a majority of wolves were hanging out in Manhattan. Your boss, Carl, funds a lot of projects for Kendrick. We think the wolves are here working for him but we don't know how or in what capacity yet. That's my job to find out. When I left your office today, five of the wolves jumped me on the street. They had some pretty serious mojo magic. None of the humans could even see us." Malcolm coughed. "That's why I was late."

"What's a newly made wolf?" Her mind whirled. All of the years she worked for Carl, had he known what she was? No. She didn't believe that. Her status as a shifter was protected.

"Kendrick has found a way to create wolf-shifters. But not like us. It's really grotesque and they're entirely dependent on him for a drug we have not yet been able to synthesize. They're entirely controlled by him, and if they don't get their dose of this drug, they die. It's horrible."

Jana narrowed her eyes, as for the first time she saw the blood seeping out of his coat. A shifter didn't bleed like this unless they were really hurt. "Malcolm." His name was more like a gasp as the reality of just how hurt he really was hit her. "You should be in your wolf form; you can't heal as well like this."

"That would be really tough to explain, wouldn't it? How a giant black and white wolf got onto the train? If I let myself shift, I'm likely to lose consciousness. It'll be my fourth or fifth one today. I've lost count. How would you get me off the train?"

"It wouldn't be a problem if I could shift too."

A smile touched his lips before it disappeared back under the pain. "That would be a disaster. Two wolves on the train. They'd bring out news crews."

"You don't seem like most of the shifters I've known."

"That's good, I guess."

"I don't remember you from Westervelt."

He shrugged and the movement made him grimace. "I don't remember you either."

"Why is that, do you think?"

"Because I was six years old at the time of the female mass exodus."

Her head threatened to explode. "So you're only forty years old now?"

"Only you would think that was young."

"I'm old enough to be your great-great grandmother."

"Doesn't seem to stop Cullen and Summer."

Jana closed her eyes. "Who were your parents?"

Just then another coughing fit hit Malcolm. Jana opened her eyes and grabbed his arm. "If you can't shift, tell me what I can do for you."

"You don't happen to have any hidden healing magic do you?"

She shook her head. "No. I never mated so I never came into my full powers."

"It might help if I could rest. How long is the ride up to wherever we're going?"

How the hell had he gotten on the train? "A few hours."

"Wake me when we get there." Malcolm's eyes closed instantly like he'd been struggling to keep them open. She felt guilty about all the talking she'd been making him do. His head drooped, his face still pained.

We can't lose our mate now that we've just found him.

Jana couldn't agree more. She pulled him down until he stretched over her body in lying position. He had to be more comfortable like that. Absently, she stroked his long hair as she realized it was the first time she'd ever seen it loose. Black as midnight, it felt like silk under her fingertips.

Moving his jacket, she took a look at his wounds. Besides the one she'd seen seeping, he had several others that bled through his shirt. Damn those wolves working for Kendrick. If she'd been there, she would have...

Would have what? It's been 34 years since we attacked anything except a deer.

That was true but Jana would guess it was like riding a bike. You didn't forget how to fight, not if you were half-wolf.

The train plowed on into the night, whistling into the darkness. Jana shivered and pulled Malcolm closer enjoying the feel of his warmth. She would find a way to get him off the train safely, and then he could shift. Later when he was healed, she would help him with the wolf problem, and then they could both go home to Westervelt. But this time she'd go home with a mate.

The word brought heat to her belly. What did it even mean to have a mate? Or more specifically, what would it mean to be mated to Malcolm with his blue eyes, pitch-black hair, and his rank in the pack as one of the top warriors?

She supposed she was about to find out.

* * * *

The first thing Malcolm became aware of was the sound of crickets. They chirped loudly and he was surprised he could hear them at all through the window of his apartment. Next, he realized he wasn't in his apartment but partially on the ground and partially on something warm and soft.

Mate.

His wolf wasn't being particularly articulate but that word alone was enough to get his attention. His eyes flew open. He'd been right. The majority of his body was on the cool grass in an open field he didn't recognize. His head rested gently on Jana's stomach. She stroked his hair gently, running her fingers from the top of his scalp all the way down to where the strands ended.

He couldn't remember his parents and the Kane's aunts, who had raised him, had been kind but this was the first time he could remember ever being stroked so gently.

Jana's face was turned up to the moon, her neck back, but her eyes stared down at him in amusement. He ached everywhere. Even so, he couldn't help the heat that travelled to his groin at just the look from her. In truth, he'd been perpetually hard since he'd first scented her a month earlier.

"How did we get here?" He knew he must have helped her move him but he had no recollection of it whatsoever.

"Luggage rack to a taxi."

He raised an eyebrow, the idea amusing him more than it should have. "You wheeled me on a luggage rack? Like a piece of baggage?"

She nodded and sat up. His weight shifted as she did and he grudgingly sat up, missing her scent immediately. The best he'd been able to tell, she was somehow a combination of roses and strawberries. Both 'girlie' smells, he never knew they could be so addictive or that he could like them so much.

"It was ingenious."

So our mate is clever. Every second I spend with her, I like her more.

She smiled. "I've looked at your wounds. They're mostly healed. I think you need a run to make them heal completely."

Nodding at the truth of her words, he sniffed the air around them. If the wolves had found him unscented in New York City, it could only mean that Carl had somehow found him out. That meant they weren't safe here, wherever that might be. Malcolm stood up.

"Where are we?"

"Woodstock. Well, just outside of it."

"Really?" He swung around looking around the dark field. Of all the places he thought he'd visit in his life, this had never been one of them; however it was thrilling that he actually was.

"Are you a music fan?"

He shrugged and felt his cheeks warm. He was glad it was dark outside even though she'd be able to smell his embarrassment. "Sort of."

"Let me guess, you used to play in a band?" He loved the sound of amusement in her voice.

Pulling his shirt over his head, he didn't want to destroy another set of clothes even if they were bloody. Anything was better than ending up stranded and naked. He laid it gently down on the grass. "Who said anything about 'used to'?" She stared at him, her face showing nothing while her eyes were huge. "What is it?" He reached out and grabbed her arms tightly.

"Oh." She exhaled loudly. "I guess it's just two things."

"Like what?"

"First, I'm not used to having any other wolves around anymore. When I used to do this alone, it felt a little bit like dying each time but now I'm used to it. I guess I had the feeling all of a sudden of being brought back from the dead. Silly right?"

He shook his head, his heart breaking a little. "No, it doesn't sound silly." She had been so alone for so long. Never having thought about it, he had always assumed the men left behind on the island were the ones worse off. But the women, most of them would never see another wolf or have any pack around. How had Jana stayed sane the whole time?

Clearing his throat, he continued. "What's the second thing?"

"You have a really nice looking bare chest."

Now he could smell her embarrassment and it made him feel intoxicated. Unable to think of anything even remarkably appropriate to say, he pulled her into his arms and against his chest more tightly. Leaning down, he breathed in the essence that was Jana. Quietly, he exhaled her name like a prayer. Inside of him, his wolf paced in happiness, still anxious to get out.

Malcolm couldn't believe how perfectly she just seemed to fit with him. "I never knew you but I feel like I've missed you my whole life."

She giggled, rubbing her nose against his chest.

"What's funny?"

"You made me a Valentine's Day card and you say the most beautiful things. You're not like any wolf I've ever known."

"Do you not like the card? I know you tossed it away."

"Well, I didn't know you were a wolf, I thought it was some kind of joke or something."

Malcolm's muscles were still tight. He needed to shift so he could give Jana the Valentine's Day gift he really wanted to present her with. However, there was no way he was going to attempt it until he was in peak physical condition. It would be a bad way to begin their life together, disappointing her sexually.

"Come on. Let's run."

She nodded, biting her lower lip. "Turn around."

"What?"

"I've been living like a human for some time now. I'm not used to nudity. Turn around so I'm not embarrassed."

Oh they were going to get her over this one quickly, but for the moment he nodded and looked away, even though he was dying to see her nude form.

Don't upset our mate.

I have no intention of doing so.

Pulling off his pants, he called the shift on himself and let the white light bring on his wolf form. Looking down during the change, he saw Jana's white light emerge and join with his. For a moment, he could see her very soul before it shifted from human to wolf. She was still in there, as her wolf was always with her when she was human, but the shift did change them.

He whirled around. She stood on all fours in front of him, a small dark brown wolf with white spots decorating her small body.

Good heavens she is tiny.

His wolf couldn't have been more right. He was bigger than most other wolves when he shifted, he'd been told his father was too, but he hadn't anticipated Jana, not overly small in human form, being so miniscule as a wolf.

Letting out a yelp, she ran forward looking over her right shoulder, a grin in her eyes. Okay, he got it. She wanted to play. He'd have to be careful not to hurt her since she was so fragile. Darting after her, he let out a mock growl and gave chase. Or at least he attempted to.

Whatever Jana lacked in size, she made up for in speed. He'd never seen a wolf move so quickly. Picking up speed, he attempted to catch her but could barely see her form up ahead. Sniffing the air, he had to follow her scent rather than watch her as she looked

nothing more than a blur when he could manage to see her in the night.

She howled, a joyful sound, her meaning clear. She had won their little race. Jana must have known what he thought when he saw her size and set out to teach him a lesson. Well, he'd been taught. He would not make assumptions about her based on size alone.

Finally catching her when she stopped to look at the moon, he rubbed against her, needing to feel her physical presence next to his. He hadn't liked not being able to be with her. He was her mate—even if they hadn't done the ceremony yet—and it was his job to protect and look out for her even if she didn't need it. Moving his body around, he quickly made note that he no longer hurt anywhere. His wounds, which had still burned slightly when he shifted, were completely healed.

His wolf was amazing when it came to fixing physical ailments.

Jana called the shift on herself and he watched as the beauty of the light led her body to realign itself into its human form. Naked and stunning, she looked at him, her hands at her side. In the moonlight, he could see she had one eyebrow raised in amusement.

Sauntering to him, she bent over and scratched between his ears. "Bet you thought you had a slow, small old lady on your hands, didn't you Malcolm?"

Wanting to laugh, he called his own shift enjoying the feel of his humanity coming back. "Never old. I'll admit to underestimating your size. But I've learned my lesson."

Nodding, she wrapped her arms around his waist and rubbed her face back and forth against the dark hairs on his chest. This time when he growled, it wasn't in jest. Here was his mate, he would claim her.

Chapter Three

Jana stayed very still as Malcolm's fingers ran down her back and through her long brown hair. His eyes were hungry and sent shivers through her body. This was the mating—this is what she'd dreamed of during her lonely years. Together, they would undertake a ritual not spoken of except between mates.

"You are so beautiful. Looking at you is like having the gates of heaven open for a moment to prove there is eternity."

She reached up to stroke the side of his face and he closed his eyes. Rubbing his whiskers, she stroked him like she had his ears earlier when he'd been a wolf. Shifters loved touch—loved to give it and adored receiving it—and it had been too long since she'd had anyone to share small pleasures like this with. She got the impression from his reactions that Malcolm was as touch starved as she was.

"What happens now?"

Malcolm's eyes flew open and he laughed. "Ha. I don't know about the actual ritual but the rest of it, the mating, I think we both can sort of imagine what that is."

"That we can."

Pulling his head down to hers by the back of his neck, she moaned as his warm lips met hers. Malcolm tasted like the night. Wind-blown and secretive. The longer they embraced the more she noticed the smell of embers on his scent and the ferocity of the woods. He was everything she'd waited for and more.

"You are such a miracle to me. I thought to walk alone through time waiting for my mate, that I was somehow unworthy of finding my other half as I was so small during the destruction and others had waited longer. But there you were standing in that lobby and I knew my soul would never again be empty. An angel had been sent to fill it."

"Oh, Malcolm." Jana rubbed her head against his chest, gently biting him. He pulled her closer. "I was alone long enough for the both of us."

The sadness in his voice made her heart weep, and she wished she could climb inside of him and take away any hurt he had ever endured before they met. What must it have been like? To be raised on Westervelt in the shadow of the destruction? Knowing from early childhood what his father did to his mother? Her own youth had been so joyful, full of pack and easy days.

Back then, Kendrick had seemed like their benevolent leader, the Alpha who would never let them down.

Jana's body felt anxious, warm, uncomfortable, and expectant like she was no longer satisfied in her own skin and needed to join with him to make her whole again. Malcolm's mouth met hers, this time his kiss demanding and declaring ownership. That was fine with Jana, she would be owned by Malcolm, and would own him back in return.

Reaching between them, she ran her hands through the thick, dark hair she'd been teasing since their shift and let herself indulge in the feel of his maleness. His body was so different than hers. Hard in places she was soft and she'd never thought fate would grant her the opportunity to mate.

"When you touch me like that, I want to throw you down on the ground and lose all my good intentions of being gentle and slow."

Jana bit her lower lip. This was fun. "I'm sure you can control yourself, big strong shifter like you."

He growled and bit her shoulder. She shuddered under the very welcome assault. Inside her wolf howled with pleasure. Malcolm knew how to appeal to her as a woman and a shifter. Both of them were falling for him, hard.

Malcolm traced his finger from her navel up to her neck and she shuddered. Another second of this, and she was going to beg him to make good on his threat of doing it fast and furious. She wasn't sure she could survive slow and easy. Not if what he was doing was what he considered those two words to mean.

Reaching down, she took his strong manhood into her hand and cupped it. He groaned and closed his eyes, laying his head down on her shoulder. She felt his body shake as she rubbed him gently.

"Careful, Jana, I've been hard since I saw you a month ago."

"That's a long time to be so uncomfortable. Why didn't you show yourself earlier?"

"By nature, I'm cautious. I wanted to make sure revealing myself wouldn't place you in more danger, and I was under the mistaken impression that Theo didn't want us to stop taking the herbs under any circumstances." He sucked in his breath. "Damn, you are killing me."

Jana eased the pressure.

"You haven't had as much time to know me as I had to know you, beautiful lady." His voice sounded husky and hard. It made her insides feel, if it was possible, warmer to know she'd done that to him. "I've done very little but watch you for the last month."

"I didn't know you were my mate—despite your valentine—but I did know I was more obsessed with you than I've ever been with a human before. I thought maybe my wolf was relenting on the human rule."

He planted kisses up and down her shoulder blades and on the top of her breasts. "Human rule?"

"My wolf made it very clear early on in my forced exile from Westervelt that she would not consider taking a human as a mate. She said there was no way a human could keep up with her and she wouldn't settle."

Malcolm snickered. "No, she just knew I was coming and evidently decided to keep that information from you."

I had a pretty good idea he was a wolf.

Rolling her eyes, Jana smiled. Why should she be surprised? Her wolf had made somewhat of a career of keeping things from her.

This time when they met, lip-to-lip, she felt as compelled to hurry things as he did. His hands rubbed and stroked all over her body, and she wished she were taller so she could be as attentive to his form as he was being to hers. Everywhere she could reach, she stroked and touched him. He groaned, kissing her harder, and she sighed under the strong feel of him.

Together, they lowered themselves down onto the ground. It didn't feel cold or wet on the grass, it felt like home. As if the earth itself welcomed their joining with open arms. The moonlight danced over their naked bodies, illuminating the field in shadows and silver rays of moonlight.

Jana kissed the bottom of Malcolm's chin. "My mate."

He nodded. "I am." As if he needed the confirmation as much as she did that this was

real and not a figment of their mutual imagination.

He smoothed her hair out of her eyes. "Happy Valentine's Day, Jana."

"Happy Valentine's Day, Malcolm."

When they actually joined their bodies together physically, Jana cried not from pain but from the sheer joy of having Malcolm inside of her, a part of her body, his soul mingled with hers. She was complete for the first time in years—maybe ever, knowing she was joined to this strong male shifter who would be forever hers.

"Open your eyes, my mate." Jana obeyed his strong command and gasped.

Colors floated through the air, connecting them together. She could see his soul entering hers, color by color, piece by piece. The first piece of Malcolm to enter Jana was his extreme sense of loyalty. Colored red, she wasn't surprised to see it was his most dominant characteristic. He never would have been sent on such a dangerous mission if the Alpha hadn't been completely sure of his loyalty to them.

What did surprise her, though, was the tremendous loyalty he'd held for her even before they had met. Just the very idea of having an eternal mate had led him to make decisions he thought would make him better suited to a potential mate. Indeed, he had been correct, there was nothing she admired more in others than sheer undaunted love and loyalty to those who deserved it.

Next, she was filled with his sense of humor, his strength, and determination. He could be obstinate, but only when he was sure he was right—a decision he didn't come to lightly. In some ways, he was insecure. Younger than most of the other males on Westervelt he often didn't feel worthy, as if his youth had shielded him from most of the pain they'd lived with on a daily basis.

Each one of his character traits held a beautiful color. So dazzling, in fact, she forgot for a moment that he was receiving the same information about her. In her chest, her heart sped up. What did he see about her? The fact that she fought with her wolf and couldn't match a handbag with a pair of shoes if someone paid her.

Malcolm reached out and smoothed her hair on her head. The effect was so soothing that for a second she closed her eyes and let herself enjoy the sensations filling her body.

"I can see why no one talks about this. It's way too personal." Malcolm's voice was barely a whisper as if too much conversation or too loud a tone would destroy the quiet piece surrounding them. She stroked his chin.

"It's just us. It belongs only to us."

The last color whisked into her soul, where she became aware of it as it took hold. It was now as integral to her very existence as her liver. If someone took those colors away, she would quite simply perish. One mate followed the other to death. This wasn't just a foreign concept to her anymore, or something she'd once watched happen to her parents. No, Malcolm was integral and if he went she would follow.

Malcolm pinched her nose and she yelped. "I don't know what you're thinking about but I can't imagine that with that look on your face that it's very pleasant. Knock it off, no worries right now." He paused. "Or at least let me worry about them for you."

Is that how it's going to work now? You're going to do all my thinking and worrying? How gothic or Victorian of you, Malcolm.

He snickered, putting his head down next to hers on the grass. *I can hear your sarcasm even over telepathy.*

She sighed curling up next to him. They lay quietly for a second before she watched

Malcolm sniff the air. Following his lead, she let her senses search the night for any scents that shouldn't be there.

Nothing attracted her attention but Malcolm's body had gone rigid, tense, and she knew he wasn't prone to fits of fancy. She sat up. "What is it?"

Shaking his head, he looked right and left. "Not sure, more of a feeling than anything else at the moment." He stood up and offered her his hand, which she took. His hand was callused and she shivered at the recent memory of what that hand had done to and for her. Jana's cheeks heated and Malcolm grinned for a moment before his expression became serious again.

"Time to go, I think."

"On just a hunch?"

"Saved my life a few times."

Jana nodded. "Do we have time to grab our clothes?"

"With the way you run? Absolutely."

Malcolm took off first, shifting as he ran. Jana was right behind him for a short distance and then overtook him on the way back to their clothes.

* * * *

He was playing it cool in front of Jana. If he turned out to be wrong, she might not trust his instincts so completely next time so it was better to act nonchalant and hope that this time he just overreacted.

Of course, he didn't believe that for a second.

If he'd learned anything over the last few years, it was that scent could no longer be trusted. If he could hide his smell from Jana and anyone else, Kendrick's wolves could do the same. They were on a dark field and he was with his mate whose incredibly gracious and capable soul he was now in possession of. There was no way in hell he was going to let a bunch of monstrous wolves get the jump on them. Not while they wiled away like they had all the time in the world.

Looking at the sky, he judged it to be about three in the morning. Valentine's Day was over and the moon was full. He wondered briefly if there was some sort of luck associated with that. Good or bad, Jana would be making it safely back to her apartment if he had to kill every wolf between here and Manhattan to get her there.

Penny for your thoughts? Jana was up ahead of him where he could watch her and cover her behind.

He smiled, his wolf grin appearing in the moonlight. *Don't know if they're worth that much or not.*

Funny. She paused, swinging around until she faced him in the grass. For such a tiny wolf, she could intimidate with the best of them. *Don't avoid the question.*

I think they're here, they're watching us, and they're disguising their scents.

Jana's ears flattened to her skull as she narrowed her eyes and growled. Swinging around, she challenged the darkness. He raised his tail; his mate was a force to be reckoned with. *How is everyone doing that? How did you keep yours hidden for so long and on that subject why did you do that?*

Malcolm ran up next to her bumping her side with his head. He wanted her to keep moving. She growled at him but picked up her speed. *I'm told Kendrick used to dish out an extract made from some herbs to his chosen warriors. But we have this herb on*

Westervelt, that's where it comes from. It temporarily hides our scents, and mostly we use it to spy on Kendrick. Theo felt, given the nature of the assignment, that the warriors out looking for the made-wolves should be using it too. Hence, why I hid my scent from you for so long.

In his head, he heard Jana laugh. *I always thought that was the stuff of legend. 'Be careful or Kendrick will come and get you, you'll never smell him coming.' Like the way we all spoke about Cullen. 'Watch how you behave or your parents will send Cullen Murphy to your room in the middle of the night.'*

I never heard those stories. By the time I was a child, all the nightmares had come true. He paused, sniffing the air. There was simply nothing to scent and yet he knew they were there. As soon as they reached the clearing with their belongings, he was going to do something he never did in front of others and use his other ability to figure out who was out there.

We're here. Jana ran to her clothes.

Don't shift yet. I want to know how many of them are out there. They might just be waiting for us to go back to our human form so they can beat the hell out of us. He sniffed the night air. *Still nothing. Damn.*

How do you plan to accomplish this?

I have certain abilities. Sometimes I can see things other people can't see.

Like an extrasensory ability?

That's a good way to put it.

Anything I can do to help? She ran closer to him rubbing her midsection against his.

Just by existing you help more than you can ever know.

He knew he should probably be more suave than he was, but she was his mate and he felt no inclination to hide his true nature from her. Closing his eyes, he sent his senses searching. It was hard to describe to people exactly what it was that he was able to do. It would be like someone asking him to instruct them in breathing or swallowing. Malcolm had simply known how to do it since he was old enough to know how to do anything.

The night spread out before him like he looked through a digital camera. At first all he could see was what was close to him but as if he pressed a button to extend his viewing range, he could suddenly see more and more detail further away. The blades of grass seemed clearer, and the dust that floated on the wind was illuminated in the moonlight. Where were they? He gritted his teeth, he needed more power, more strength. Pushing through the pain that had started in his head, he moved one more stretch of space.

He sucked in the air he breathed—hard. They were here and there were a lot of them. Quickly, he did a head count of the wolves. Fifty at least. Damn. He wouldn't have thought they warranted that much attention but evidently he was wrong. The Alpha of the group, or at least that's what he assumed it was due to the sheer size of the wolf, stood up on its hind legs and shook its head. Slobber fell from its fur and Malcolm tried not to gag at the sight.

Pull back now. We need to save our mate from this fight.

Nodding, Malcolm listened to his wolf as he brought his focus back to their immediate surroundings. Jana ran to him, hitting his head with hers.

What the hell did you just do?

Unlike most of the males in our pack, I actually have a few magical things I can do.

In general, I don't advertize them because it's so odd amongst our kind.

Maybe I've just been away from the pack for a long time, but I don't really care what they find strange or odd. Did you just manage to somehow look into the darkness?

I did and now I know we need to get you out of here.

She shook her head. Get me out? Ha. If you think I'm the type of woman to be left behind while you go handle this, you're wrong. Out of the two of us, you're the one who got the crap beat out of him earlier. Not me.

Malcolm had to admit, he admired his mate's courage. But that didn't mean he had any intention of letting her fight anyone. In this case, they had clear-cut roles and his was to protect his woman.

A snapping twig was the only indication he got the attack was coming. He whirled around at the sound and Jana growled as the first wave of disgusting made-wolves plowed out of the bushes. He bared his teeth and leaped at the Alpha. If he brought him down, perhaps the others would crumble.

As he bit down into the rotting flesh of the animal that should never have been made, he swung around to check for Jana. She had three wolves approaching her yet she stood her ground, easily taking one of them out by diving beneath it, lifting up, and sending it skywards. He heard a yelp from the gross creature.

Don't worry about me. Focus on you.

Jana sounded exasperated and he supposed he had been distracting her by not paying attention to what he needed to do.

Crouching low, he lunged at the Alpha, biting it again. He'd learned from his last encounter with the strange creatures. They didn't fight like real wolves. While the Westervelt pack behaved like wolves when they were in their four-footed bodies, these 'animals' still attacked like a wild bunch of thugs. It was like they didn't know how to coordinate their movements.

That first attack had thrown him for a loop. But he knew better now. If they wanted to fight like humans with tails, he knew how to do that too. Every untrained pup in the pack started out that way. He would take them down like he'd been when he was still learning.

Reaching up with a paw, he swiped his claws at the attacking wolf, catching it in the eye. Screeching, the wolf jumped backwards, blood gushing from the open wound. If the mad canine lived through this encounter, Malcolm just blinded him in that eye. His wolf wanted to roar at the small win after the disastrous fight on the streets of New York earlier but he restrained himself, as he concentrated on taking the grey Alpha down to the ground.

Biting with his fangs and tearing with his claws, Malcolm lunged forward using his immense weight to force the other wolf onto its back. With its paws in the air, the monstrosity looked more like a tipped over bug than a canine with fighting abilities. Tearing at his soft center belly, the Alpha howled.

Time seemed to slow down around them as the other wolves hearing that noise stopped their fight mid-stride. Malcolm's tail waved back and forth. He'd been right. This one was the Alpha and an injured Alpha would leave this group of misfits confused. Raising his ears, he made a split second decision.

Jana, I'm capturing the Alpha.

You're what? Her voice couldn't have sounded more incredulous if she tried.

Azriel is studying these wolves—trying to help them, free them, or something. I bet he could use an Alpha.

Jana growled at two wolves in front of her and they yelped and ran away into the woods. *How the hell are we going to get it back to Westervelt?*

Biting the wolf once more to make sure it was still pinned down, Malcolm considered her question. *We'll rent a car.*

Oh heavens help me, I'm mated to a crazy wolf.

Ha. Think you could growl at the stragglers who haven't run off?

I can do that. But we aren't renting any damn car. Jana growled loudly and lunged at one of the distorted wolves. It yelped and ran off.

Malcolm gripped his opponent's head in his powerful jaws and slammed it on the ground, rendering the Alpha creature unconscious. Calling the shift on himself, Malcolm turned to Jana who was doing the same. In front of his eyes, she changed from a small petite wolf into the glorious shape of his woman, his mate, his life.

It seemed to him that she had been shaped from the soil in Fate's effort to create the perfect woman. How was it possible that one person could be everything to him? A lump formed in his throat and he swallowed it away.

"Malcolm, why are you looking at me that way?" Jana narrowed her eyes.

"I like to look at you Jana."

His heart pounded as in the darkness he could see her cheeks redden. "It's one of the reasons I took so long to reveal myself to you. There was just something so sensual about watching you for that month without you knowing who I was."

She raised an eyebrow. "And now that I know you, I bet you thought it would be super romantic to reveal yourself on Valentine's Day."

"Okay, there was that aspect to it too."

The wolf on the ground made a groaning noise and started to rise. Malcolm cuffed it with a swift fist, causing it to lose consciousness again.

"If you're not careful, you're going to kill that thing."

He shook his head. "They don't die so easily, unfortunately."

"So I mean it, we're not renting a car."

"Why not?"

She walked up to him and ran a hand down his arm. "Because we have something else to do."

Sensual images of Jana naked beneath him filled his mind and he swallowed hard. "I have a feeling you're not talking about what I'm imagining."

"If you're imagining the two of us going after my illustrious boss Carl, then yes, we're thinking about the same thing."

"Not even close." He paused to consider what she said. "Okay, then how do we get Alpha here up to Maine?"

Jana shrugged. "Get on your cell phone. If Az and the boys need an Alpha, let them come down and pick it up."

The idea of calling a Kane and demanding they come down and pick up this wolf made him snicker. Jana obviously had no fear.

As if reading his mind, she laughed. "It's one of the benefits of having grown up with Michael and Gabriel. It makes me older than our Alpha. I can still remember them all as little boys."

"And I guess you haven't technically sworn allegiance to the new pack yet."

"True." She ran a hand through her brown hair. "But I will."

Picking up his cell phone out of his pants pocket, he grinned. "Maybe I can demand they send down Cullen."

Jana's eyes got huge. "Even I wouldn't go that far."

"Woman, you make me feel like embracing danger."

Sniffing the air, he hoped his words weren't premonitions of things to come.

Chapter Four

Frozen rain spilled down on her hair but Jana didn't notice as she listened to the clink of her high heels on the pavement beneath her. Three more feet and she'd be inside the building she'd called her second home for so many years. When this was over, she would miss work.

But she wouldn't miss the sick son-of-a-bitch that'd sent the wolves after them last night.

Stepping into the building, she thought of Malcolm. She could feel his eyes on her even though she wasn't entirely sure where he was hidden. Well, where he and the team that had shown up early this morning currently resided.

She had been right. One call to Westervelt had sent down a recovery team. It was the other group that shocked her. To give them their due, the Kane brothers seemed to be running a more efficient team than their father had. Plus the private plane landing at dawn in a field had been pretty cool to watch.

She clenched her hands at her side. How long had Carl known about her and how had he known it? There would be answers today, if she had to personally rip them out of his worthless throat.

Smiling at the receptionist as she headed for the elevators, she had the strangest inclination to shift right there in the lobby and see what happened. At least some of the people had to have cellular phone cameras. It might make a good video on the Internet.

The elevator was crowded and she tried not to breathe. She'd spent a lot of time in wolf form the night before and the fight had brought back long suppressed instincts. There was no way she was going to be able to commune with the humans in such small spaces for very long.

Not if they were going to insist on wearing perfumes, deodorants, and scented soaps. There was a real worry that she might gag. Tapping her foot, she tried not to breathe as the elevator seemingly stopped on every floor on its way to the top. At least she was certain that none of these people were made-wolves in disguise since none of them would willingly wear the products that were making her ill.

Looking up, she caught a glance of the video camera recording the goings on inside the elevator. As she leaned back against the wall, she raised her right hand and waved. They knew she was coming. There was no point in acting like they didn't. She'd survived the night—thanks to Malcolm's instincts—and she knew what Carl was up to.

The elevator dinged, signaling her arrival at the top floor. She was alone on the elevator, most of the employees having no reason to go near Carl's private offices that morning. As the door opened, Jana raised an eyebrow. Standing in front of her was Carl himself.

Short with broad shoulders and the body of a battering ram, Carl had almost single handedly brought his small sneaker company from a one-man operation to a multi-billion dollar corporation with offices and factories nearly everywhere in the world. For the last ten years, Jana had run his advertising. Now, she wanted to rip out his throat with her teeth.

Calm down, my mate. You are not alone. Nothing he can say or do right now will

matter very much. Malcolm's voice was like a balm on a sore leg. It immediately settled her.

"Hello, Carl. I have to say; I expected to be greeted by hoards of wolves and guards, not you yourself. Or maybe you're just so surprised that I'm alive you had to come out of your office and see me yourself?"

Carl grabbed her arm and pulled her forward. "This was never about you. They were not sent there to go after you." Jana felt herself hauled forward with a surprising amount of strength by Carl. When had he gotten so strong? His voice was a low hiss and Jana realized he didn't want the secretaries to hear what it was he said. She smiled. What would the others do if she started ranting and raving about shifters in the woods at night? The thought amused her more than it should and she couldn't help the giggle that exploded. Quickly, she covered her mouth with her free hand.

Finding composure, she continued. "So what was it about then? Just a Valentine's Day surprise?"

He pushed open the double doors that led to his office suites and locked them behind him. If a little thing like a lock could keep Malcolm out, Jana might be worried. But she was more than aware that her mate would scale the side of the building to get to her so she shrugged off the feeling of dread that threatened to overtake her. She was a wolf. Even without Malcolm, she could destroy this little man.

Carl grabbed both her arms, his face showing no emotion. He looked like a robot or, she shuddered, a psychopath. He pulled her close like he wanted to hug or kiss her. Turning her head away, she tried not to retch at the thought. Pre-Malcolm she wouldn't have liked it; now she wanted to hurl the contents of her stomach.

"It was about eliminating Malcolm Denon who was sent here to interfere with what is between us."

She shook her head. "Are you insane? There is nothing between us, just a working relationship. I've made that clear over and over."

"Kendrick explained it to me."

Raising an eyebrow, she pushed down her inner wolf that wanted to push to the surface. This is what she'd been sent here to retrieve, information. Carl was obviously in the mood to share. "Kendrick Kane explained what to you, Carl?"

"That you are a wolf princess and that there are rules that have to be followed to woo a wolf princess."

This was going to be bad, she could just tell. In no way was she Westervelt royalty. Carl had been sold a bill of goods by her psycho former Alpha and he was likely going to pay for all of that with his life. It was unfortunate but considering the ordeal she and Malcolm had endured on Valentine's Day, she just couldn't seem to bring herself to care all that much.

"What rules would those be?"

"I have to be a strong Alpha. I need my own army. He told me you would never settle for anything less than to be one of the Queens in his pack."

She cleared her throat. There was so much wrong with that, she couldn't even begin to pick it apart. The main point was that Kendrick was trying to create a pack and had obviously promised her to Carl. Kendrick was the key. Her goal was to gather as much information as she could gather about him and the sick wolves.

"So he gave you the wolves?"

Carl let go of her arms and walked to the window. She took a silent deep breath, grateful to be rid of his touch. "'Gave' would not exactly be correct considering that I'm paying a fortune for them." Aha. There was the money angle. Malcolm just got his proof that Carl was one of Kendrick's financial suppliers.

See if you can find out how they met. But be aware, I am in the building. I will have you out of there in moments with or without the information.

Smiling at Carl, she hoped she looked sexy. "You certainly are a man of means, Carl. I wish I had known you were going to all of this trouble."

So I could have bit him.

Jana did her best to ignore her wolf. She wouldn't help anything at the moment.

"I've always been able to make one dollar turn into one hundred. You know this."

Sighing, she walked closer to him. "And Kendrick helped you turn the hundred into thousands, even millions, how? Is it one of his witches? One of those women he employs to turn those poor people into the doomed wolves he's creating? Is she conducting spells for you too?"

"It's a mutually comfortable relationship. I pay to keep the Institutes furnished with everything they need and he uses his witches to keep me very wealthy. That first witch that your wolf friends slaughtered did me a favor that I'll never be able to repay by cursing Westervelt. Kendrick was smart to find others who could do the same things, almost like he knew she would eventually be killed."

She traced her hand down his cheek and he shuddered. "Why doesn't he just have his witches make money for him?"

"He needs allies, darling."

The double doors burst open with a crash that caused three paintings to fall from the wall. Malcolm stood in the doorway like an avenging angel, his hair long around his shoulders, looking as though black fury fell from the sky. For a moment, he stood alone his eyes assaulting Carl as his hands clenched at his sides ready to fulfill the promises his glare had already made.

"We are not his allies and you picked the wrong side."

Carl's eyes got huge as he realized Malcolm meant to grab him. Jana pushed Carl forward, surprising him and Malcolm caught him in his arms. Immediately, her mate threw the other man to the floor.

"Couple of questions, and I'm not as nice as my Jana."

Carl's head banged on the ground with the force of Malcolm's elbow pushed against it. "I'll tell you whatever you want but you might want to be careful. All I do is make a small noise and I'll have fifty wolves on you and this time there won't be any dark field to hide you."

"Ha. I don't have to make a noise."

The door banged open again and Westervelt wolves plowed into the room. Jana had to smile. It had been too long since she'd seen them assembled like this. Standing at the front with his head tilted to the side was Gabriel Kane. With the absence of Kendrick, Gabriel seemed less intimidating than he had when she was a child. Not to mention, he was looking at Malcolm for direction. Things had obviously changed with the Kanes.

In what Jana assumed was his quick round up of the odds, Carl scanned the room. Finally sighing, he looked up into the eyes of her mate and Jana saw terror in his brown gaze. She snorted. Had it just occurred to the man that it was a bad idea to taunt a bunch

of wolves? It was highly likely you would get eaten.

She bent down. "Let's start with question number one, shall we? You lured Malcolm here on purpose. That much is obvious. How did you know to hire his security company?"

Carl's eyes darted left and right, as he tried to look anywhere but at her. She blinked twice and realized from the dry feeling that she wore her wolf in her eyes. It seemed to be disturbing the little man. Smiling, she tried not to laugh. So much for his wanting her sexually.

I still want you. Malcolm's voice filled her mind.

You'd better.

"Kendrick told me to."

Behind them, Gabriel Kane hissed a breath. "Damn it. He is still getting way too much information from us. What is the point of neutralizing a traitor if another one is just going to pop up?"

"You'll never stop him. He's a genius, he's a god. Kendrick creates life."

Jana rolled her eyes and looked back at Carl. "Are you on drugs? He creates monstrosities."

"All of our inside operations are going to have to be altered and once again we are going to have to ferret out a traitor." Gabriel looked tired and Malcolm moved to continue the interrogation.

"How did you know Jana was a wolf?"

"Kendrick told me." Jana dwelled on that for a moment. The devil incarnate had known who she was. How many other women were in precarious situations and didn't even know it? It wasn't bad enough they'd had to leave their homes, or never knew their wolf heritage, now they had to be on guard all the time from Kendrick?

"Where are the made-wolves and how many are running around New York City?"

"The wolves are here. You can't smell them anymore. You can't see them unless we want you to. It's really quite pathetic how completely clueless you are." Carl motioned with the top of his chin towards a full-length mirror that hung from the wall. Jana stared at the mirror. Wow. This place crawled with secrets.

Gabriel moved forward and ripped the mirror off the wall, revealing a hidden door. The mirror hit the ground hard and shattered into a thousand pieces. Jana sucked in her breath at the noise. If they'd been human they would worry that mirror breaking was a sign of bad luck to come. By contrast, the wolves in the room were trying to hide their smiles at Gabriel's display. It was a clear 'fuck you' to both Carl and Kendrick. Breaking something that belonged to them was akin to peeing on their doorstep. It was insulting, plain and simple.

Kicking in the closed door without even trying the handle, Gabriel disappeared into the darkened room. Malcolm waved his hand and two males Jana didn't recognize came forward.

"Hold him."

They nodded and Malcolm followed Gabriel into the room. Never one to be left out of any situation, Jana quickly made her way in as well. The room was at least three degrees colder than in the rest of the building and the lights were dimmed. A loud humming noise filled the air. Hundreds of cages lined the walls. Jana gasped. It wasn't wolves in the cages. No, instead of being caged as wolves, they'd been shifted back to

their human forms.

Jana felt tears sting her eyes and she blinked them away. Whatever else they were, they had been at one time human beings who Kendrick had all but destroyed in his sick scientific games. One lone tear slipped to her cheek before she wiped it away.

Turning around, Malcolm walked behind her and squeezed her shoulder tightly. "Any sign of the medicine they need to stay alive?"

Gabriel shook his head. "Not anything. Evidently, Carl isn't overly concerned with these people living very long. He probably gets new shipments of them when they die."

"How long can they live without that drug?"

"Az has been examining this subject for some time. It seems to depend on the wolf but none of them live more than a month."

Jana approached the cages cautiously. Gripping the cool metal of one holding cells, she stared at the young woman inside. Almost unblinking, the poor thing couldn't be more than in her late twenties. Her hair, ill kept, unwashed, and tangled looked like it fell somewhere between the blonde and brown hair categories. "Can they understand us?"

Gabriel shook his head. "No. They have less communication than actual wolves. Their lives are devoted to nothing more than instinct. Whoever feeds them, commands them."

For a moment, Jana thought she saw the woman's eyes flare before she saw the glazed, no one at home look reappear in her pupils. Had she just imagined what happened?

"Are you sure?"

"That's what Az tells us and I've never known him to be wrong." He sighed. "Looks like he really got the mother lode here to test on."

Jana's stomach rolled. "Feels really wrong to me that you experiment on these people."

Gabriel's eyes flared. "My brother is trying to save them. He's been killing himself trying to synthesize the drugs they need to survive or to figure out how to wean them off of the stuff so they don't die. I assure you, he is not treating them like lab rats."

"I know you're not thinking of yelling at my mate, Gabriel." Jana swung her head around to stare at Malcolm. Had he just threatened a Kane for her? She placed a hand on his arm hoping he would take the message of restraint.

So nice to have a powerful man as our mate.

Jana agreed with her wolf but she'd be damned if she watched him get his head placed on a stick because he spoke disrespectfully to a Kane.

Gabriel snorted. "What the hell happens to you mated males? You all become something out of a regency romance novel. No, I was not going to yell at Jana. I've known her since I was born." Jana winced at the reminder of her ancient age. "I don't want anything to do with this mating thing I see going on with everyone. I'd rather keep my brain."

Laughing as he walked from the room, Jana heard him pick up his cell phone and snap it open to call back to Westervelt.

Jana ran her hands on Malcolm's hard chest. "What were you going to do if he had planned on yelling at me?"

"Let him know in no uncertain terms that wasn't an acceptable thing to do." Leaning down she smelled his earthy scent and thanked the fates that she had found Malcolm and

was not currently residing in one of those cages.

"How would you have done with that?"

He raised an eyebrow, his dark hair lifting off his shoulders as he shrugged.

"Anyway I needed to."

She laughed and snuggled closer as she let him lead her from the room. "What now?"

"Well, if it's okay with you. We go home."

Home. The word caused a shiver to pass through her body. She would love to go home. More than she'd ever even admitted to herself. Nodding, she took his hand and decided not to ask what they planned to do with Carl.

* * * *

The boat shook in the water and Malcolm felt Jana shake in his arms. He had a feeling it had nothing to do with the cold air that assaulted their senses. Compared to New York, Maine was an icebox.

No, he could only imagine the nervousness she must be feeling and he was doing his best not to speak telepathically to her. It seemed to him that if he were returning to a place he'd had to run for his life from in the middle of the night, he might be having strong reactions as well.

That did mean, however, that he couldn't distract her if he wanted to. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out the cardboard cutout he'd gotten up way too early to construct. Would she think it was dumb? The last one had quickly found its way into her garbage can.

Clearing his throat, he handed her the red wolf he'd made that morning.

"What is this?" She stared up at him and his heart jumped in his chest.

Swallowing, he tried to compose himself. "It's a valentine."

"It's a wolf."

He shrugged. "It's a wolf valentine."

"But you already gave me a valentine."

"Which you promptly put in the trash."

She sat back against the side railing. "Because I thought it wasn't real."

"So, now I'm giving you this one in person."

Her grin rocked him to his core. "I love it." Reaching up, she kissed him. Her lips felt soft against his and he couldn't help the groan that came from his throat. How could he want her again? It had only been a few hours since their early morning joining. He ran his hands through her hair to get a better look at her face. The dark circles that had formed when they got on the boat seemed to be diminishing.

"I'm glad."

A mischievous glint lit her eyes. "I have an idea. February fourteenth is the actual Valentine's Day. Let's make February fifteenth the Wolf's Valentine's Day. It'll be our thing."

He liked that idea and nodded. Fairly certain he would still give her gifts on the actual Valentine's Day he had some ideas of what he could do every February fifteenth too.

Jana turned from him, drawn by the island as it appeared in the horizon. She gasped and leaned forward a little further. Not liking how far over the edge she seemed, he pulled her back slightly.

"All of those buildings?"

"Tristan's mate Ashlee made us all modernize a bit."

He tried to imagine the horizon as she'd last seen it in the pitch blackness. Much better to witness it like this.

She squeezed his hand tightly in hers and brought it to her mouth to kiss. "I assume one of those buildings belongs to you."

"I live in the main facility but now that we're mated we can take one of the cottages if we want to." He pulled her closer into his arms. "Happy Wolf's Valentine's Day, Jana...and welcome home."

"Thank you, mate, I'm so glad to be here."

The End

About the Author:

As a teenager, Rebecca would hide in her room to read her favorite romance novels when she was supposed to be doing her homework. She hopes that these days, her parents think it was worth it.

She is the mother of three adorable boys, and she is fortunate to be married to her best friend. They live in northern New Jersey and try not to freeze too badly during the winter months.

A hardcore fan of science fiction, fantasy, and the paranormal, Rebecca tries to use all of these elements in her writing. She's been told she's a little bloodthirsty so she hopes that when you read her work you'll enjoy the action-packed ride that always ends in romance. In her world, anything is possible, anything can happen, and you should suspect it probably will.

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