

*Del Fantasma*

**Unicorn  
Jet Mykles**



**Aspen Mountain Press**

## Del Fantasma: Unicorn

It takes a special kind of virgin to bind a unicorn.

Scott would never have dreamed he was pure of body, heart and soul, but then he had no cause to believe unicorns even existed until he reluctantly drove to Del Fantasma late one night to rescue his stranded brother, Bryan.

Jack may be a unicorn, but he's he avoids virgins like the plague. The chance of meeting that special type of virgin is slim-to-none in bars like Del Fantasma and he delights in every opportunity to feed his own lusty appetites while he can. After all, a unicorn may be undeniably attracted to virgins but that doesn't mean he has to be one himself.

Unfortunately for Jack's plans, their bond is instantly formed when he meets Scott. Jack is now Scott's to command. He just has to convince him what he is, something that sounds a lot easier than it is.

And Bryan? Well, it turns out that their meeting wasn't entirely by chance. Bryan was instructed by a group of vampires to get the two together. Now that he has, can Jack and Scott discover the threat against them and save Bryan in time?

Thank you for your purchase of *Del Fantasma: Unciorn* by Jet Mykles. Cody Warren keeps romance hopping at the Del Fantasma bar where he enjoys playing matchmaker to some of the world's more unusual paranormal creatures. From coyote shifters to vamps to sparrows, Cody finds the right mate for those seeking love.

Stop by [www.AspenMountainPress.com](http://www.AspenMountainPress.com) and take a look at some of the couples he's set up. And, while you're there, consider joining the Aspen Mountain Press newsletter where you can stay informed of new releases, contests and drawings, and other specials available only to members of our newsletter.

## Warning

This e-Books contains material that may be considered objectionable by some including graphic scenes of violence and adult language. Please store your e-Books carefully where they cannot be accessed by underage readers.

Jet Mykles

# Del Fantasma: Unicorn

Jet Mykles

Aspen Mountain Press

# Del Fantasma: Unicorn

Del Fantasma: Unicorn  
Copyright © October 2008 by Jet Mykles

This e-Book is a work of fiction. While references may be made to actual places or events, the names, characters, incidents, and locations within are from the author's imagination and are not a resemblance to actual living or dead persons, businesses, or events. Any similarity is coincidental.

Aspen Mountain Press  
PO Box 473543  
Aurora CO 80047-3543  
**[www.AspenMountainPress.com](http://www.AspenMountainPress.com)**

First published by Aspen Mountain Press, October 2008

**[www.AspenMountainPress.com](http://www.AspenMountainPress.com)**

This book is licensed to the original purchaser only. Duplication or distribution via any means is illegal and a violation of International Copyright Law, subject to criminal prosecution and upon conviction fines and / or imprisonment. The e-Book cannot be legally loaned or given to others. No part of this e-Book can be shared or reproduced without the express permission of the publisher.

ISBN: 978-1-60168-145-4

Released in the United States of America

Editor: Nikita Gordyn  
Cover artist: Nikita Gordyn

## Chapter One

“Are you really a unicorn?”

Jack smiled at the ravishing female vampire seated beside him. “I am.”

“Shouldn’t you be into virgin maidens?” asked the male shapeshifter seated around the bend of the bar to Jack’s other side. He grinned, deep brown eyes crinkling at the corners as he turned a pointed look around the darkened room. “I don’t think there are any of those here.”

General laughter erupted from the small crowd that had gathered around Jack’s end of the bar. He did tend to draw a crowd when he showed off. He blamed the abundance of shining platinum curls and crystal blue eyes. His nature had enhanced his natural qualities over the years and he took ruthless advantage when it suited him.

Jack gave the shapeshifter a warmer smile than he’d given the vampire. “I assure you, *mon ami*,” he began, affecting the French accent he had long ago lost but found useful when flirting, “that unicorns are *quite* capable of attraction to non-virgins.” He raised a pale eyebrow. “And to men.”

The female vampire groaned. “Oh no. Please don’t tell me that you’re gay.”

Jack chuckled, lifting his Manhattan to toast her before taking another sip. “I am a connoisseur of beauty of any sex.”

Her eyes lit up and she leaned toward him. Her breasts, pushed up by the laced corset of her top, nearly brushed his arm. “Then there is hope?”

He shook his head, setting his martini glass down carefully. "My apologies, *ma chérie*. Vampires are not for me."

Chuckles all around.

She pouted, tilting her head so some of her loose flaxen hair spilled over her bare shoulder. "You shouldn't judge all vampires by past experience."

"It's not that. My blood is, shall we say, *addictive*."

He saw the interest in her pale blue eyes, even if she tried to hide it beneath a seductive smile. "I don't have to bite you, sweetheart."

He reached out to brush his fingers against the soft, cool skin of her cheek, making sure his pulse was close enough for a good scent. "Could you truly resist?"

Her nostrils flared and her eyelids shuttered in a bliss that resembled sexual ardor but he knew was blood lust. He'd seen it many times before. She opened her mouth, exposing dainty fangs, inhaling like a cat. When he slowly pulled his hand back, her head tipped forward to follow for a brief instant before she caught herself and blinked back to focus.

He picked up his glass again. "You see?"

Her mouth was still open, eyes still closed and she bent her head backwards. "Oh yes," she sighed, nostrils flaring as she breathed deeply. "I can see how you'd be addictive."

The three other vampires standing beside them looked at Jack with new interest.

"Don't get any ideas," warned a voice from behind the bar. Cody – the owner and bartender of the Del Fantasma bar – was also a vampire, whom Jack had come to know rather well in the short year since he'd taken up residence in Point Loma, California. "Just for the record, Jack's powers are *way* out of your league."

"Spoilsport," Jack pouted. The smile curling the edge of his mouth probably ruined it.

"How do you know?" challenged one of the male vampires.

Cody raised one brow, sea blue eyes gleaming with that otherworldly red in the dark lighting. "Think heroin for vampires. You want to get into that?"

Via the mirror behind the bar, he saw the lingering interest. Cody was right. All four vampires who stood beside him were very young, as was Cody himself, in vampire terms. Not one of them was over a few decades dead. Only a vampire of a century or more could hope to maintain autonomy after a taste of Jack.

"Okay, so vampires are off the menu." The shapeshifter leaned farther over the bar toward Jack. His tanned arms, bared by a white tank top and sleeveless, unbuttoned button-down shirt, bulged nicely. Shorn sable hair framed his small ears and the smooth forehead over thick black eyebrows. He smiled; a very pleasant expression on his handsome round face. "What about shapeshifters?"

Jack set down his glass and leaned in close so that their faces were only inches apart. He could smell the whiskey on the other's breath, a pleasant overtone to the pure clean scents of man and cat. Definitely a large feline, leopard or mountain lion most likely. "Shapeshifters are very much on the menu."

With that, the rest of Jack's admirers began to wander away.

The werecat smiled. He unfolded one thick forearm to extend his hand toward Jack. "I'm Alex."

Jack wrapped his fingers around that warm hand and held it. "I'm Jacques. But you may call me Jack."

Still holding his hand, Alex chuckled. "Jack? Is the accent fake?"

Jack dropped it with a smile. "Not at all. Just something I've long grown out of."

"Long?" Alex eyed him. As a shapeshifter, he would know that supernatural creatures rarely showed their true age. "How old are you?"

Jack adjusted his hold so he could raise both his and Alex's hands between them, fingers interlaced, elbows on the bar. He kissed one of Alex's knuckles. "Old enough."

"So," Alex's gaze lingered over Jack's lips before returning to his eyes, "the virgin thing. Are the legends are all wrong?"

“Not *all* wrong. Let us say that the legends exclude a number of salient points.”

“Mmmm, you sure do talk pretty.” Oh yes, that purr definitely belonged to a cat.

He adored felines. Such wonderfully sensual creatures. He finally released Alex’s hand, freeing his fingers to reach up and trail along the other man’s stubbly chin. Jack couldn’t grow facial hair himself so the presence of it on other men fascinated him. “I do a number of things *pretty, mon ami.*”

Scott did *not* want to go to a bar. He hated bars. Truth, he hated crowds. Well, all right, not *hate* but he was so very not good in crowds. With people. Bryan knew that. Why was he forcing Scott to go to one?

“He’s not,” Scott announced to himself, staring at the road ahead. “Not his fault that his car won’t start. Maybe. When was the last time he had the dang thing serviced?” He groaned, feeling more and more agitated the closer he got to Point Loma. It was a nice drive down from La Jolla. Not a long one, but each second brought him closer to a crowd. “Maybe it’s not crowded tonight.”

Scott couldn’t recall when Bryan had become so obsessed with this particular bar, but he did know that Bryan had become something of a regular recently, spending just about every night there. Which was strange since he didn’t seem to hang out there with that woman, Margaret, he was obsessed with. For a while, he’d practically moved out; he was spending so much time with her. Then he started spending most of his nights at Del Fantasma.

Scott shook his head, resigned that he’d never figure his older brother out. They were vastly different people. Hardly knew each other since they only shared a mother. Bryan was the product of a first marriage, Scott of a second, and Bryan had opted to remain mostly with his dad up in Calabasas. Only reason they saw more of each other now was that Bryan had opted to move in with Scott two years ago after their mother died, enjoying the rent-free, mortgage-free life. Scott didn’t mind so much. His father

had died when he was ten, his mother when he was twenty. He welcomed the company, even if it was with a brother he hardly knew.

He turned off Ocean Beach Freeway and continued along toward the shore. A yawn nearly split his head. To top it all off, Bryan had called at one in the morning! True, Scott had only just gone to bed, having decided to work late on one of his programs, but that was beside the point.

It turned out the bar was rather easy to find. A big pink and blue neon light gleamed "Del Fantasma" over the road and not much else was around except palm trees, asphalt and sand. Scott was nearly giddy with relief to see the parking lot more than half empty. That had to mean that the bar wasn't all that full. He parked his little Mazda just a few rows from the brightly lit front door of the adobe style building. Getting out of his car, he spotted Bryan's beat up second-hand Mustang not far away. Seeing it there, sitting decrepit and lonesome, Scott was shocked he hadn't gotten more of these late-night SOS calls.

Palming his keys, he took a breath and headed for the door. *You can do this.*

Jack clung to the top of the low wall, painted brick crumbling underneath his fingertips as the heavy weight of another body ground into him from behind. "Oh yes!"

Hot breath curled around his ear, puffing some of his curly platinum curls into his face. "Like that?"

"Mmmmm." Jack arched his back, tucking the back of his skull into the bend of the other man's neck. "Harder."

He gasped when the blessed werecat immediately took him at his word, shoving that thick, heavy cock into Jack's greedy body.

Over the wall, across the parking lot and around the corner of the building, the front lights of the Del Fantasma gleamed. A car pulled into the lot but here, beyond the lights and under a cover of trees in a vacant lot, they couldn't be seen. Jack had taken advantage of many a shapeshifter, male and female, in this very spot. He'd only found

the Del Fantasma in his recent travels, but he was beginning to think he should stick around longer.

Tossing out that frightening thought, Jack pried one of his hands from the wall to reach down to palm his own cock. He didn't need much. Just a little squeeze, a little pull then the right kind of yank right under the flared head and...

"Ungh!" Spilling his seed into the dusty ground, he made sure to clench his ass around Alex's cock.

The man was already close and that just set him off. With a roar that could have come out of his other form, he coated Jack's insides.

Grinning, content for the moment, Jack was happy to wait for them both to catch their breath before they did up their clothes and went back inside. If he was lucky, the adorable little werewolf he'd spotted earlier might still be with her friends.

Scott took a deep, steadying breath and walked into the bar. It was really very, well, *ordinary*. He'd expected a dark smoky den of iniquity and was quite taken aback to find a nice, but very normal looking bar. The moderate crowd that filled the tables and booths didn't look like denizens of the underworld or like shadowy creatures of the night. He'd expected a much more seedy bar for some reason. Allowing himself another breath, he stepped into the dimmed light.

Bryan was sitting all alone at a table in the back, half watching a game of pool not far away. His big hand was curled around a mostly empty glass mug of what was probably beer. There were enough people in the bar but it didn't feel terribly crowded to Scott so he didn't start to panic. He kept his attention on Bryan as he navigated through the tables set in the middle of the room.

Bryan caught sight of him and sat up straighter. Oddly, his gaze shifted around the room like he was looking for someone. Did he have a friend here? If so, why'd he call Scott to pick him up?

Scott reached the table but Bryan didn't stand. He looked awful. Probably not drunk, but definitely a few sheets to the wind. His brown eyes were red around the edges, which just made the dark circles under his eyes look worse. The dim lighting disguised the gray tone that had been in his skin lately. Scott wondered again if maybe he should suggest Bryan go to a doctor. He gave Scott a lame, drunken smile. "Hey."

"Hey." When Bryan still didn't stand, Scott raised his eyebrows. "Well? Let's go."

"What's your hurry?" He gestured at the other chair at the small little table. "Stay awhile."

"Are you crazy? No way." He glanced back toward the door, relieved to see the path still clear. "Let's go."

"Oh come on." Bryan kicked at an empty chair to move it away from the table. "Have a seat. I'll buy you a drink."

"I have to drive us home."

Bryan ignored him, holding up his hand toward the bar.

Aghast, Scott glanced toward the bar to see a big, muscular man with dark hair, a military look about him, acknowledge Bryan's beckon. He turned back on his brother. "What the heck? It's after one. Isn't it closing time yet?"

"Nah. Cody's got some deal with the locals. He stays open 'til nearly dawn most nights. Sit."

Not surprising. The bar's nearest neighbors were at least two or three plots of land away on any side. The bar wasn't likely to cause a disturbance. "Look, I didn't come all the way down here to have a drink."

"It's not that far."

"I need to go to bed."

"What? You have to be up early?"

"Yes."

Bryan frowned, reaching up to comb a hand through his short red hair. "No, you don't. Jesus, Scott, would you sit the fuck down and live just a little."

Scowling, Scott sat. It wasn't like he could drag Bryan out of there. Bryan, half again as big as him, was a man who worked construction, where Scott worked on computers. Scott was hopelessly slight next to Bryan's brawn, another mark of their different fathers.

"There you go. See? Did that hurt?"

Petulant, Scott folded his arms over his chest and glared at his brother.

Bryan, for his part, kept glancing around the bar. Nervous.

Scott kept staring at him, wondering what would happen if he just left. "Are you here with someone?" Who was he kidding? He'd never strand anyone if he could help it so he couldn't just get up and leave.

"Huh? What?"

"You keep looking for someone."

"What? Oh, no. Just, uh, looking. You know."

Scott narrowed his eyes. "What's going on?"

"Going on? Nothing. Jeez. Why're you so suspicious? I'm bummed about my car breaking down, and I haven't had any luck with picking anyone up tonight. Let me have one more beer to drown my sorrows."

"Pick someone up? You and Margaret break up?"

Bryan winced. "We were never really a couple."

"Oh? You spent enough time with her."

Bryan laughed. "You don't know anything about women like Margaret, Scott."

Scott didn't know anything about women—or men—period, but he let that go. "She stop seeing you?" He hoped so. He'd only met the woman once but she gave him the creeps.

"She said we're through until I do something for her."

"Do something? What?"

Bryan shook his head. "Nothing you need to worry about." Again he cast his glance around but this time he seemed to find what he was looking for. His eyes lit up, pointed somewhere behind Scott toward the front entrance.

Scott was just about to turn and look when the bartender stepped up to their table and placed a strange concoction before him. Pale, opaque fluid filled a martini glass but the drink itself was nearly hidden underneath an absurd collection of brightly colored cocktail stirrers. A few of the stirrers had animals at their tips, mainly horses and fish. The bartender set a fresh beer down in front of Bryan.

"Wait." Scott looked up at the man. "I didn't order this."

The man smiled. "It's on the house."

"What? Why?"

The man smiled as he turned to go. "It's called a unicorn. You'll like it."

Jack sauntered back into the bar, the sated werecat at his back. Sighing, he reached up to finger-comb his past-shoulder length curls, realizing he was going to need to visit the bathroom first before he could sit down. Alex slid a hand down his back in a friendly caress. Jack threw a smile over his shoulder and they parted gracefully, Alex back toward his friends at the pool table, and Jack toward the restroom sign in the back.

Halfway across the bar, he recognized the tingle crawling just under his skin, creeping over his scalp, seeping into his chest. It was different than the after-sex tingle, but the recent sex feel had initially disguised it. Freezing in his tracks, he frowned, staring at the scuffed floor. *Oh no*. It couldn't be. Not *that!* He didn't dare look up. Determined, he kept on course toward the restrooms despite a growing need to veer toward the right. *No, no, no. This isn't happening.*

He reached the little two-stall restroom by sheer force of will. Thankfully, no one else was there so he took his time with the disposable towels, soap and hot water to freshen up. He hadn't done too much damage to his white dress shirt and he'd been careful enough not to spill in or on his jeans.

As he was again finger combing his unruly platinum locks, he felt something on his forehead that froze him again. His own crystal blue eyes stared at him, wide and frightened in the mirror, as he ran the pads of his fingers over the hard lump just beneath his widow's peak. "No!" he hissed, glaring at the spot that was a few shades yellower than his pale skin. "Go away!"

The bathroom door opened, startling him. The new arrival headed straight for the urinals, not looking Jack's way as he unzipped.

Trance broken, nothing left to do, Jack gave himself one last once over. Where earlier tonight he'd been confident and cocky, now he was just wary and starting to get pissed. He didn't even bother asking "why me", knowing it was a fruitless question.

He left the restroom, forcing himself to remain calm. He studiously did *not* look to his left as he headed for the bar, pulling out his wallet. "Cody," he called when he got there, "what do I owe you?"

As he was sifting through bills, a glass coffee mug was set before him. He frowned at the fizzy drink, the bubbles pushing a citrus aroma into the air, light but enough for his sensitive nostrils to pick up. He gave Cody the eye. "What's this?"

The man who had started to become a friend gave him a level stare that Jack didn't like one damn bit. "Your drink."

Jack's nostrils flared. Cody was famous in paranormal circles as not only a vampire but a matchmaker extraordinaire. He liked to announce such matches with special drinks. Jack had seen him do it a few times with much amusement. He'd never wanted to be the recipient of one. "What's it called?" he asked, against his better judgment.

"Death of a virgin."

## Chapter Two

Frowning, Scott watched the bartender's broad back as he headed back to the bar. Perplexed, he looked down at the colorful drink, wondering if he was supposed to take the various straws and stirrers out before sipping or if he was supposed to leave them in. "Is this normal?"

Bryan wasn't paying attention; his focus on the short hallway with the restroom and telephone signs above it.

"Bryan?"

"What? Huh?"

Scott gestured at the drink. "Is it normal for them to give you drinks on the house?"

Bryan shrugged. "That's Cody. He owns the place. He does that sometimes, they say."

Scott blinked at his brother then turned to look at the bar. *The owner?* A sight to behold took his breath away before his gaze met its intended object. A man emerged from the back and headed toward the bar. "Man" might be relative because Scott was not sure such a beautiful creature could even be considered human. He'd have sworn the hair had to belong to a woman since the big, fluffy ringlets hanging down the person's back were quite feminine. But the body was tall and undoubtedly male, possessed of a grace of movement that would put any trained classical dancer to shame. Scott wouldn't be surprised if his feet never touched the ground. He seemed to pick his

steps carefully, like one of those trained Lipizzaner stallions. Yes. Actually, he looked a lot like one of those amazing creatures. His pale skin was quite reminiscent of a white stallion's coat and the flowing curly mane of thick hair that fell about his head and shoulders was so white that it had icy blue highlights, or maybe that was the neon lights. His facial features were proud but delicate, long and elegant even though he was frowning. Long fingers pulled a wallet out of the back of slim, worn jeans and began to rummage through it as he stepped up to the bar.

So stunned by the vision, Scott was speechless when Bryan stood and grabbed his arm to haul him to his feet. When his brother mumbled something and started pulling him toward the bar, he finally came back to himself. "Hey!" He tried to stop but Bryan yanked him forward.

"Watch it!" snapped a woman when Scott bowled into the back of her chair.

"Sorry. Hey, Bryan..."

Jack stared at Cody's eyes. His own powers assured that he couldn't become mesmerized by the vampire yet he stood stock still trying not to understand the truth he saw in the man's steady blue gaze. "No."

Cody's gaze flicked over Jack's right shoulder right before the sound of a scuffle. Jack heard a woman snap angrily, followed a sweet, lower voice apologize then complain: "Hey Bryan, what are you doing?" The voice was close.

The tingle just underneath Jack's skin became a buzz. He closed his eyes, shaking his head. "Please no."

"I'm afraid so," Cody murmured. He sounded sincerely sympathetic.

The vampire didn't have to say it. Jack knew even if he fought it with every ounce of his being. He hung out at places like Del Fantasma because the bane of his existence couldn't possibly be there. It was absurd to find someone pure of heart, body and soul in a bar after one in the morning. It was inconceivable. But it was happening. The

person he least wanted to see in the world was quickly approaching his back and his wayward body and soul were opening like the petals of a flower even as his heart flinched, anticipating the inevitable. He set his wallet carefully on the bar beside the ridiculous drink Cody had put before him and braced his hands on the edge of the bar right before a body plowed into him.

Horrified, Scott was unable to stop or balance himself when Bryan swung him around and practically threw him into the vision's back. Scott stumbled then his chest came up against rock hard muscle and his face mashed into a pillow of curly, thick hair the consistency of raw silk. His only option of maintaining some balance without slipping gracelessly to the floor was to wrap his arms around the man's slim waist. A trim, firm behind pressed into his belly and the faint trace of lilies underlined by a deeper, muskier scent filled his head, making him dizzier than the stumble.

A cool hand wrapped around his wrist, the grip steady. Scott shook his head, trying to get out of the daze as the body he held turned in his arms. "Are you all right?" asked the most gorgeous baritone he'd ever heard.

Amazed, he tilted his head up to gaze into a face that was painful in its clear, vivid beauty, instantly captivated by multifaceted blue eyes that would put crystals to shame. Scott's mouth fell open as tingly warmth from the man's body seeped into his skin like sun on a summer day.

The eyes blinked slowly, the absurdly long, pale lashes of the man's eyelids nearly touching the jut of his cheekbones. "Are you all right?" The voice had a faint trace of an accent, too subtle for Scott's dazed mind to process.

Sense tried to burble through Scott's amazement. "Yes."

The vision nodded, lifting his free hand to brush wayward hair from Scott's face. "What's your name?"

"Scott."

A small, sad smile curled the edges of his wide, generous mouth. "Hello, Scott. I'm Jack."

Jack's heart didn't have a chance. He didn't try to flirt, didn't put on his normal act. There was no need. He would follow this young man to the ends of the earth. Huge, deep, innocent green eyes were framed by thick, dark lashes. Freckles. Dozens upon dozens of freckles dotted an adorable oval face. Dark hair made burgundy by the bluish lighting above the bar framed that angelic face with a lot more of it braided down his back. How could Jack think to run from such a precious treasure? Scott was to be nurtured and cared for, protected above all else. He knew that instantly and had to comply, ready to do anything this marvelous creature bid.

*Until he moves beyond me or gets me killed,* said a muted voice at the back of Jack's mind.

He would have kissed him. He wanted to kiss him. He wanted to loosen the braid that hung down Scott's back so he could dig his fingers into what had to be abundant, soft hair and hold delicious, precious lips to his for hours of sampling. But he couldn't. Abundant danger stood near and he had to be vigilant.

Scott's arms remained where they belonged about Jack's waist. Jack wound his own arm about the shorter man's shoulder protectively before he allowed his gaze to dart sideways toward the most obvious, immediate danger.

The man Scott had been with had a scent similar enough that Jack decided they were related. Perhaps brothers. They had a similar look, although the other was obviously a cretin compared to Jack's angel. The same red hair was cropped short about a head that looked more like a potato than Scott's delicate oval. Frightened hazel eyes stared on level with Jack's, not nearly the emerald color of the smaller man. The worst part, however, was that he stank of the undead of the worse kind. Cody, behind Jack, smelled of the grave but he didn't have that evil stench of those who reveled in death.

This man did, although it was somewhat removed. This told Jack he was someone's dupe, sent and controlled by a worse evil.

Jack narrowed his eyes at the man, content to let the other cower. "Who are you?"

"B-Bryan." The whites of his eyes showing, he took a step back. "I'm..." he pointed at Scott, "that's my brother."

Confirmation did not please Jack. He didn't want his angel to be related to this tainted human. Unfortunately, the relationship meant he couldn't kill the man outright. Scott might object. "Why are you here?"

Bryan held up his hands, palms toward Jack as he took another step back. "J-just getting a d-drink, man." His eyes darted toward Cody then back. Around them, the normal activity of the bar stilled. "Chill."

He'd not seen the man around recently. Himself, this Bryan was not much of a threat, certainly not to Jack. Mostly human with a dark, vampiric overtone. He doubted Scott could know about that.

Scott drew in a breath and held it, thinking vacantly that if he couldn't smell the man, perhaps his brain would start to work correctly again. But it didn't happen. It just made him more aware of the feel of him.

Carefully, Scott drew back. He avoided looking up when he felt Jack's head turn and tilt down to look at him. He continued to pull gently when Jack would have held him close. When he'd managed to take a step away, then another, almost out of arm range from the body he wanted to mold himself to, he decided to concentrate on Bryan first. Turning to face his brother, he frowned. "What's going on? What's the matter with you?"

Bryan's anxious gaze flittered from Scott to Jack and back. He seemed entirely unaware of the people around them, watching. "I..." It looked like he was waiting for something. "I, uh..."

Scott chanced a glance up at Jack, proud of himself for managing it even if his blood was all tingly and there was an alarming stir in his pants. "I'm very sorry about—" he gestured at Bryan, "—that."

Jack shook his head, silky hair rustling about the shoulders of his white shirt. His gaze fastened on Scott's face, as though it was the most fascinating thing in the world. "Don't worry about it."

Scott lost the ability to speak as he gazed into those mesmerizing blue eyes. He was vaguely aware of Cody, the bartender, speaking, telling others to mind their own business. He was aware of other people around them, but they were kind of all out of focus. There was just him and Jack and, out of the corner of his eye, Bryan. Little else existed.

*Get a grip!* The fact that he was so mesmerized with a man didn't particularly shock him, but he knew it wasn't a good idea to project such things in mixed company. Although, if he could judge by the way Jack had briefly held him, Jack didn't mind his attention. Held him. Hard muscles. Warmth. What would it feel like to wrap up in that? To taste that pale skin? *Stop it!* "I..." he cleared his throat, tearing his gaze away to look at the neon beer signs to his left instead. "Bryan, we should go."

Bryan hesitated. "You sure?"

"What?"

"Wait." Long, cool fingers closed around the bare flesh just under Scott's polo shirt sleeve. He was forced to look up at Jack and was nearly spell bound again. "You can't leave."

"Why not?"

Jack glanced darkly at Bryan, then back at Scott. "We have to talk."

Scott felt his brows crowd down closer to his eyes. "What for?"

Beside him, Bryan gaped at the tall, pale man.

Jack ignored him, stepping well into Scott's personal space to grab hold of his other arm. That intoxicating scent of lilies and man washed over Scott. "I have so much to explain to you."

Scott shook his head and tried to back away, tried unsuccessfully not to breathe. "What are you talking about?"

Jack released one arm, but held fast to the other. He faced Bryan, scowling. "Does he know about you?"

If possible, Bryan's jaw dropped farther as he scrambled back another step, backing into an empty table and nearly tipping it over. "No." He whipped up a placating hand, leaning on the table as Jack took a menacing step toward him. "No! He doesn't know."

"Know what?" Scott asked. Neither man paid him any attention.

Jack scowled. "Does he know anything?"

Bryan shook his head frantically. "I, uh, don't know what you're talking about, man."

Scott's older brother was not the sharpest tack in the bunch and was a pretty bad liar. Clearly, Jack saw that. Lightning quick, he released Scott and was hovering over Bryan. Scott hadn't even seen him move but he was suddenly there, nose-to-nose with Scott's brother, those long fingers digging into the meat of Bryan's shoulders as he bent the beefy man back over the little table. "You had him come here *alone* and he didn't even know what he was getting into?"

Bryan's meaty fingers closed around the elbows of Jack's dress shirt, faded tan against pristine white. "No one would do anything to him!" he hissed. The table creaked under his weight. "Cody wouldn't allow it."

It was Scott's turn to gape. "What are you two talking about?"

Again, he got no answer.

Jack shook Bryan hard enough to knock his teeth and rattle the table. "What kind of danger have you exposed him to?"

"I haven't! He's fine."

“Who sent you?”

Bryan’s eyes bugged. “No one.”

“Don’t lie to me. I can smell a lie and you stink of it.” He sneered. “As well as *other* things.”

Bryan paled, honest-to-God tears welling in his eyes as he wilted in Jack’s grasp.

Scott had enough. He palmed his keys as a ready weapon he hoped he wouldn’t have to use – because he didn’t know how, really – and yelled: “Hey, let him go!”

Instantly, Jack released Bryan, giving him a little shove so that the table under his weight almost toppled again.

Cody was there at Jack’s other side, hovering without touching the man. “All right, Jack. Can’t say as I blame you, but no more in here, got it?”

Jack drew up, thrusting his chin out as his gaze never wavered from Bryan. “Right. Sorry, Cody.”

Cody reached up to briefly pat the back of his shoulder. “It’s okay. But maybe you should take it outside.”

A few of the men around the pool table who had been watching started toward them. Warily, Bryan edged around the tiny table to put it between him and Jack.

*That’s enough.* Scott always liked to avoid confrontation whenever possible and brawls at all costs. “No,” said Scott, stepping toward his brother. “That’s okay, we’re... whoa!” He stumbled to avoid running into Jack as the bigger man stepped between him and Bryan. His fingers went lax and his car keys clattered to the top of the table.

“I can’t let you be alone with him.”

Scott gaped up at him. “What?”

Jack sighed, closing his eyes briefly with a pained look. “Let’s go outside and I’ll explain.” He reached for Scott.

Scott backed up, farther away from Bryan. "That's okay, you don't have to explain anything." He edged to the side, trying to figure out a way to skirt around Jack. "I'll just take my brother home now."

Jack shook his head. "I... can't. You'll be in danger."

"Don't touch me." He slapped away the hands that had been reaching for him. "Mister, I don't know what's wrong with you but that's my *brother*."

Jack's hands closed into ineffectual fists. *This is going so well*, Jack thought as he glared at the bigger brother. The cretin had shuffled around to the other side of the flimsy table, as though it would afford some sort of protection. Jack sneered at him and felt the tail from his other form flick in annoyance. It was important that Jack diffuse Scott's anger so they could talk, but the impending threat of the brother loomed large enough to throw off his usual good sense. "If you intend him harm, I will see you die." The dark promise spilled from Jack's lips without his full knowledge.

He had reason to curse his lack of restraint instantly. "Hey!" Scott's tone made Jack flinch. "Who do you think you are?"

Knowing the words weren't going to sound right, he said them anyway. "I'm yours."

His unknowing master looked at him like he was crazy. It was laughable, really.

"Hey, Jack." He recognized Alex the werecat's voice and the friendly hand on his shoulder. "You okay?"

Where earlier the man's touch had been pleasant, now it did nothing for Jack. No one would do for him except Scott now. Not until the curse was broken or he died. Or both. "Fine," he said, without looking at the man. He had to tone it down. Although he wouldn't be against help with tearing Bryan to pieces, he couldn't risk a brawl with Scott around. He also didn't think Scott would allow it and Jack didn't feel like tamping down a bunch of shapeshifter anger.

Scott's wide eyes drifted over the men at Jack's side and he backed toward the front door. "I don't know what's going on, but we're just going to go. Right, Bryan?"

"Uh, right." Jack had to throttle a shriek of defiance that tried to fight free from his throat as Bryan picked up Scott's keys and slowly started to follow suit.

Jack glared at him. "What now?"

"Huh?"

Jack slowly circled the table between them, narrowing his eyes. He was told they gave off a cold blue light when he was angry sometimes. He wondered if he was angry enough now. "You were supposed to put me with him," the ploy was obvious, "what now?"

Bryan backed up, shaking his head. "Nothing. I swear, I was just supposed..."

Hands in claws, Jack kept advancing. Other patrons cleared a path for the siblings and Jack. "'Supposed' to what?"

"I... She never said..." A stinking cloud of fear emanated from the man, gaining the attention of every shifter in the place. Only the combined vampire stench kept them at bay. The few other vampires in the place just watched coolly. Trembling, clearly out of his league, Bryan turned tail and ran for the front door, nearly running over his brother in his haste.

Shocked, Scott regained his balance and watched his brother's retreating back. "Bryan?!" Not until Bryan was shoving the front door did Scott think to pursue. "Hey, Bryan!" he called, running after him.

He heard the "wait" behind him but disregarded it. When he cleared the front door, he cast around to find Bryan already opening the door to his Mazda.

"Hey!" Scott called.

Bryan probably didn't hear him over the starting rumble of the car's engine. Certainly wasn't looking as he stepped on the gas. In a squeal of tires on asphalt, he tore out of the parking lot and down the street.

In Scott's car.

Leaving Scott behind.

Scott could only stare.

## Chapter Three

*Coward.* Although he was glad for some distance between Scott and Bryan, Jack cursed the brother who left Scott in a state of utter confusion.

Waving the others back inside, Jack stepped down the one concrete stair to the pavement and went to stand a pace behind Scott. The other man probably knew he was there but was too stunned by what just happened to react. Resisting the urge to pull Scott into his arms, or to at least wrap his hand around the thick rope of Scott's braid, Jack took that moment to make sure things were safe. He'd been to Del Fantasma a number of times in the past few weeks, but he saw it all with new perspective. Now it was imperative that he knew each place someone could hide, where someone might try and ambush his treasure. He pushed out with magic so that he would be alerted if there was even a trace of paranormal activity in the vicinity. Other than the cars, a few rats in the distance, the passing cars and the ocean, nothing was amiss.

His survey of the surroundings took mere seconds, allowing him to step closer to Scott while he still stood, dumbfounded, staring after his brother. Scott was a small man, slimly built, and exquisite. His hair, Jack could now see properly, was auburn, the thick cap lighter than the threads that wove together to form his braid. *Why the long hair?* Jack wondered, his fingers just hovering over the warm hued strands that had escaped the base of the braid. Scott didn't seem the type for long hair. Jack didn't sense

the vanity usually present in anyone who would bother with the care of long tresses. In fact, there was very little self-awareness emanating from Scott at all. He stood straight but with a forward angle to his neck, suggesting a habitual dip of his neck. He wore shy reserve as obviously as his light blue polo and neat jeans. It would have to be that reserve that had kept him pure enough to become the center of Jack's cursed world.

At last, Scott snapped out of his daze. He turned his head to the side, gaze tilted toward the pocked pavement beneath his feet. He spied Jack out of the corner of his eyes, but didn't face him. "What were you saying to him?"

Jack watched blue and pink lights from the Del Fantasma sign play across Scott's pale skin, the freckles not so evident here. "Which part?"

"All of it." Cautiously, Scott took a half step around, peeking briefly at Jack's face. "You... accused him of bringing me here. You said I was in danger. Why?"

"I think you *are* in danger. There are things about your brother that I doubt he's told you."

"How do you know that? Have you met before?"

Jack took a deep breath, both to clear his thoughts and to fill his lungs with the sweet vanilla musk that clung to Scott. "Could we go back inside and sit down?"

"Why?"

"It'll take a lot of explaining."

Now Scott faced him fully, confusion twisting his delicate features. Despite that, Jack wanted to lick at the freckles mapping that pert little nose. "Who are you?"

Jack glanced toward the shaded area in the back where he'd had his earlier tryst. That seemed so long ago and it couldn't have been more than a half hour. He couldn't use it with Scott, not that way, but it could serve a purpose. He sighed and gestured that way. "Can I show you something?"

Scott looked toward the darkened area. He knew he was naive in a lot of things, but he wasn't stupid. "I don't think so." He started a wide circle around the man toward the

front door of the bar. If anything went wrong, if he shouted, would someone come out?  
“I need to call a cab.”

Jack frowned then glanced down the road the way Bryan had gone. “He took your car.”

“Yes.”

Jack met him at the door, holding an arm up to stop Scott from going inside. His bigger body cast a shadow over Scott from the lamp over the entrance. “Let me drive you home.”

Scott forced himself to back up a step even though everything in him wanted to step *forward* into the man’s embrace. He recalled too well how safe it felt with those arms around him, how good it felt to press into the man’s heat. “No.”

“Please?” A small breeze scattered gleaming white curls against the sharp lines of Jack’s jaw. “I won’t hurt you. I can’t.” He tucked the errant hair away with one elegant hand. “If you don’t believe me, Cody can vouch for me.”

“I don’t know Cody.” Those bluer-than-blue eyes mesmerized him. How was it possible to see that light color so clearly in the dim lighting? Especially when the light was behind Jack, creating an ethereal halo about his platinum curls.

Jack smiled, and it was such a nice smile, filled with the promise of comfort and laughter. “What can I do to convince you that I’d never hurt you?”

A number of rather alarming ideas popped into Scott’s head, most of them involving direct, physical contact with Jack’s body, but he immediately brushed them aside as he was wont to do. “I...”

“Please, come here.” Jack stepped back, toward the corner of the building. “Let me show you something.”

“What?”

“Just come. You don’t even have to come all the way around the corner.”

Jack walked backward, leading. Helpless, Scott followed. Despite his misgivings, he wanted to trust the man. He wanted to wrap himself in Jack and do things he rarely let himself think about doing. Stubbornly, he stopped at the exact corner of the building, refusing to set foot within the shadow. "All right. What?" How was it he could make out Jack's every feature even though the light didn't hit him? He knew Jack was pale and all, but he shouldn't be able to clearly make out Jack's crooked grin or see the creases in the vivid white dress shirt he wore. How odd that...

Scott gasped, blinking and falling back a step when Jack... disappeared. There was no other word for it. One second Jack stood there, grinning at him, the next there stood a creature out of legend. There was no mistaking the pony sized, pony shaped creature with its glowing white hide, flowing white mane and cloven hooves. Not with the long, slim horn of gold that erupted from its equine forehead. Strangely, the blue eyes, while shaped differently, could be none other than Jack's. Scott's mother had adored unicorns and Scott still had a number of the figurines she'd collected over the years so he knew one when he saw one. Swallowing in a dry throat, Scott fell against the side of the building for support. Then, in the blink of an eye, the unicorn was gone, to be replaced by the man from before. Almost the man from before, the difference being a shorter, squatter version of the long gold horn poking out of his forehead. He took a step toward Scott.

Who whimpered. "What...?" He didn't even know what to ask.

"I'm a unicorn."

Scott shook his head as the man stopped a pace in front of him. Too strange how Jack's pale skin seemed to glow. Or was the horn giving off some light? "Unicorns don't exist."

"You probably don't believe in vampires or shapeshifters either."

Scott shook his head.

Jack nodded, the horn twinkling in its own light. "If you come inside, I can personally introduce you to at least one vampire and a werecat." He pursed his lips, thinking. "I'm still not sure if he's a leopard or a mountain cat."

Scott gaped. "No werewolf?"

Jack grinned. "I don't know her as well, but I might be able to arrange it."

Scott stumbled back a pace. "You're serious."

"Very."

"But..."

Jack held up a warning finger. "Don't say they don't exist or I'll be forced to shift again." His genial tone made it less a threat.

"But..." *It's not possible.* Scott focused on the gold horn protruding from Jack's forehead. He didn't realize he was reaching up to touch it until Jack bent his head toward Scott's rising hand. Scott snatched his hand away.

"It's okay." Blue eyes twinkled at him. "You may touch me all you like." There was far more promise in Jack's tone than just proof the horn existed.

Because now he had to know, Scott reached up again. Carefully, he slid his fingertips over the shining gold of the horn, startled by the soft, warm tingles that spread across his skin. It felt like slightly roughened metal, two rods, perhaps as big around as his little finger at the base, twisted together and narrowing to form a sharp point perhaps three inches out from Jack's forehead. Jack closed his eyes with a smile of pleasure, platinum hair falling forward to frame his face as he tilted closer to Scott. A crazy superimposition of the unicorn over the man flashed across Scott's vision, the creature and the man not all that dissimilar, despite the difference in body structure.

Carefully, Scott drew his hand back, the pads of his fingers still tingling. "Wow."

He didn't flinch when Jack's hand closed around his elbow. "Come inside and let me introduce you to the others."

"Why?"

“Because it’s important that you believe we all exist.”

After meeting Cody and seeing his fangs, Scott couldn’t very well deny what he was. Even if the teeth were fake, the weird red glint in his blue eyes couldn’t be. Besides, Scott just couldn’t believe that Jack was lying to him. It simply didn’t seem possible.

Cody took them to a small office in back of the bar and was very good about answering Scott’s stupid questions about his vampiric nature. Well, answering many of them. There were some that he chose to decline answering, but he was very polite about it. Cody had drinks brought in and they sat at a small, solid table in his office, discussing things that Scott had believed the stuff of horror movie scripts.

When Scott sat back in his seat, flabbergasted and out of questions for the moment, Cody turned to Jack. “You know, don’t you?”

Jack raised a brow. The horn was gone now and Scott didn’t remember when it had disappeared. “Know what?”

“About his brother.”

Jack sighed, scowling at the backs of the hands he had folded before him at the table. He’d lost that otherworldly glow, although the pale cast to his skin still kind of gave that illusion. “Yes, I know.”

Scott frowned. “What about my brother?”

Cody regarded him levelly. “He’s been bitten by a vampire.”

“What?”

Jack looked to Cody. “Any chance you could tell who has him in thrall?”

Cody shook his head. “No. But anyone who’d do that is not someone I’d knowingly allow in my place.”

Gaping, Scott’s attention switched from man to man like he was watching a tennis match.

Jack nodded. “I thought not. Do you have any idea where I could start looking?”

Cody glanced at Scott. "You sure you want to do that?"

Jack tapped his fingertips on the shellacked wood. "It's something I'll need to see to."

"Hold on." Scott leaned forward, switching his gaze between them. "Could you please explain what you're talking about?"

They exchanged a glance then Jack drew a resigned breath. "Your brother's been bitten by a vampire. A number of times, actually."

"What?"

"He hasn't been turned. He's still human but he's under the control of the vampire who bit him. He or she has a measure of control over him."

Words escaped Scott. Evidence that such creatures existed was one thing, hearing that one had control of his brother was another.

Cody spoke up. "Has he been acting strangely lately?"

"No. Well," he hesitated. "Actually, he has. Sort of." He frowned at the table. "You have to understand, we've only been living with each other for about two years. We didn't know each other that well when we were kids. We had different fathers." He wasn't sure why he felt compelled to explain that, but he did. "About two months ago, he started dating this woman and he hasn't been quite the same since. I just figured it was unrequited love or something."

"What do you mean he hasn't been the same?"

"Sleeping at odd hours. Skipping work. Neglecting his appearance and his car. He *loves* that car. He's a mechanic and he's been restoring it. But he called me to come pick him up tonight because it broke down." He exchanged glances with the two men. "Well, at least that's what he said."

"Have you ever met the girlfriend?"

"Once."

"What was she like?"

"Weird." That strange shudder tingled at the back of Scott's neck. "She's really beautiful but kind of... intense."

"Pale?" Jack asked.

"Yes."

"A weird sort of beauty that both attracted and repelled?" Cody asked.

Slowly, Scott nodded. "Yes." He blinked. "Is she a vampire?"

"Probably."

"No," he shook his head, relieved as he remembered something. "I met her during the day."

Cody shook his head. "The only at night thing's a myth. Vampires can go out during the day. We're weak and we'll get a bad burn if we don't cover up, but it's possible."

Scott's hopes deflated.

Jack's hand closed over his wrist. "Do you know her name?"

Scott shrugged, aware of the hand but choosing not to brush it off. "Margaret." Bryan had brought a vampire into their house. Wasn't that something you weren't supposed to do? Jack squeezed his wrist and Scott took absurd solace in the touch.

"This Margaret," Cody began, "did she have straight blonde hair, just past her shoulders? One of those beauty marks next to her mouth?" He pointed to the right corner of his mouth, then cupped his hands in front of his chest. "Stacked?"

Startled, Scott nodded.

Cody growled low in his throat. "That explains it."

Jack regarded him. "You know her?"

"We've met. She's an evil bitch, I'm sorry to say. She travels up and down the coast with a disgusting little band of followers. They came to my bar once. I kicked them out when they started threatening the humans." The glance he exchanged with Jack carried a weight of information Scott wasn't privy to, and it didn't look good.

Scott swallowed. "Are you sure it's the same woman?"

“Can’t be positive but I only know of one vampire named Margaret.” He leveled another look at Jack. “She stylizes herself a vampire ‘queen’ and is real into legends and stuff.” From his expression, Cody didn’t think much of the self-appointed title.

Jack grimaced, catching Cody’s meaning immediately. “Do you think she’s heard about my being in town?”

“Not from anyone here, but this isn’t the only place in town.”

“Of course.”

Scott’s confusion was palpable. Was it wrong for Jack to take heart in the fact that he’d turned his hand over so their fingers were now laced? Did he even know he’d done it? “What’s so bad about her knowing about you?”

Jack rubbed the bump on his forehead. He’d managed to make most of the horn go away, but the nub would remain for as long as the curse held. He’d have to start wearing his hair differently again. “If she’s studied the legends, she’ll know that a unicorn’s blood is one of the ultimate highs for a vampire. Kind of like heroin and steroids without all the side effects.”

Scott’s gaze, understandably, flicked to the vampire who sat with them.

Cody laughed quietly, the chair creaking under his weight as he leaned back. “Don’t look at me. I’ve never been into drugs myself.”

Jack smiled at Cody’s humor. One of the many things he liked about the vampire.

“And you say this vampire has my brother under her control?”

“Yes.”

“Like magic?”

“Not entirely. But she’s definitely got him hooked on the bite’s high.”

Jack practically heard the pieces falling into place behind Scott’s wide green eyes. “Before, you accused Bryan of being sent by someone.”

“Yes.”

"You think he came here for you?"

"I think he was told to bring *you* here for me," Jack clarified.

Scott gaped. Then his gaze fell to their intertwined hands. "Me?" more pieces clicked. "You mean...?" he shook his head. "No. You'd better tell me what you mean."

"Probably exactly what you're thinking. You know the thing about unicorns and virgins?"

If Jack's hand had been a rat, Scott couldn't have dropped it any faster or been more horrified.

Cody stood. "This is where I leave you." He checked the clock. "It's almost two. We're open until dawn." He walked toward the door. "Feel free to use the office until then."

"Thanks, Cody," Jack called.

The vampire nodded. He smiled at Scott. "Nice to meet you." Then he left.

Scott hadn't wiped off the horrified look. "You've *got* to be kidding me!"

Jack shook his head. "Afraid not."

"Because I'm a virgin, Bryan brought me here to-to... to what, exactly?"

"You're more than a virgin."

"I am?"

Calmly, Jack folded his hands on the shiny surface of the table. He hadn't done this explanation for a long time, but the information was part of his very nature. "It takes more than just a virgin to snare me."

"Snare'?"

Jack continued, ignoring the question for now. "It takes a person pure of body, pure of soul and pure of heart. Believe me, they are a rare breed. Margaret must be old to have sensed that you were special without direct contact."

Scott shook his head, unwilling to be distracted by more about the vampire. "I'm not special. Okay, yes, I've managed to remain a virgin at twenty two and I haven't

done a heck of a lot of wild things in my life, but I wouldn't go so far as to say pure of soul and pure of *heart*."

Jack smiled. "You have to be. Otherwise, I wouldn't be hooked."

Scott frowned. "'Hooked'?"

"Snared."

"You said that before."

"I meant it."

"Meant it how?"

"I meant it when I said I was yours." He let his gaze linger over Scott's adorable features, thinking that if he had to be snared by another virgin, this one might just be a pleasure to be with. Although, that was probably the curse talking. "From the moment you touched me, I became your servant, mind, body and soul." Jack was a little glad to see Scott was horrified by this even if the reaction was guaranteed by his nature. "I'm bound to do whatever you say."

"Whatever?"

"Unless you ask me to do something that would compromise the purity thing. For instance, asking me to kill someone in cold blood or for your own personal gain would break the curse. But you wouldn't do that."

Scott's brain was racing behind those clear green eyes. Hopefully he never played poker because he was an easy read. "Earlier, when I told you to let Bryan go...?"

Jack was impressed he'd caught that. "It wasn't even a thought on my part. I had to. If I'm at all capable of obeying, I must. If I'm not capable, I'll probably try anyway."

Scott's gaze was drawn over Jack's face, down what part of Jack's body he could see. Jack grinned as the flush started up Scott's neck. Perhaps a few risqué thoughts were snaking through that busy little mind? Scott shook his head, looking away, clearly embarrassed. "That's impossible. I-I'm not..."

“Don’t let a few thoughts throw you off. First, the definition of ‘pure’ is a lot more lax than you might think. Second, it’s more of the follow through changes things, not just the thought occurring.” Jack leaned forward, letting a sly grin take his lips. “And contrary to popular belief—as least as far as the unicorn curse goes—sexual thoughts are not considered impure. At least not the basic ones.” Jack had yet to meet a virgin who’d thought beyond the basics before meeting him. After... that was a different story.

Blushing furiously, Scott stared at the edge of the table right in front of him.

Jack didn’t let up. “One of the better catches of our bond is that you and I can do a good number of things together and you remain pure of body.”

That one always dumbfounded them. At least it had confounded the three virgins who had previously caught Jack and it managed to confound this one as well, enough to get him to raise his head and set those pretty green eyes on Jack. “Huh?!”

Jack put on his best, seductive smile. “I’m a unicorn. I’m the essence of purity.” That last one always made Jack laugh, given that when he wasn’t bound by the curse he enjoyed all sorts of so-called depravities. But the rule still stood, despite Jack’s actions. As long as he was what he was, he stood as a representation of purity. He’d long ago, however, stopped trying to figure it out. Holding Scott’s gaze, he slid his chair around closer to the smaller man. Scott startled but remained like a deer caught in the headlights as Jack’s hands came up to cradle his jaw. “Sex with a unicorn is, I’m told, amazing. Even more if I’m bound to you.” He brushed his lips across the tip of Scott’s nose. “Not only am I compelled to do all that you command, it’s impossible for me to hurt you.”

He felt the tremor that scuttled through Scott, echoed by the fluttering of his lashes. “I-impossible?”

Jack tilted both his head and Scott’s, leaning in until their lips were almost touching. “Impossible. Your pleasure is my command.”

Scott could not fathom how a man who was so obviously sex on wheels as Jack could possibly be considered anything close to pure. But the thought was fleeting and easily overlooked when the sense of Jack surrounded him. His slightly floral, warmly masculine scent. The heat from his skin. The brush of his lips. The wet of the tip of his tongue as it gently traced the seam of Scott's lips, coaxing them open. Scott's eyes fluttered shut of their own accord, the better to concentrate on the feel of the man, the sound of his breath. Lips pressed to his, the tongue still teasing the outer curves without delving inside.

Scott had never shared a kiss with someone else. Not like this. He'd managed to get through all of school without a girlfriend or boyfriend of any sort. There were few children in his neighborhood to play with and he'd always preferred his computer anyway. He didn't particularly mind that it was a man with whom he shared his first kiss. He'd long suspected he was gay anyway. But he was wholly unprepared for the full body experience that a simple meeting of lips could be. His *toes* were tingling!

For long, aching minutes – or perhaps hours – Jack did no more than press his lips a little more firmly against Scott's. His fingers gently massaged the back curve of Scott's jaw, his thumbs lightly caressing Scott's clean-shaven cheeks. It was Scott who pressed for more, leaning into Jack, turning so he could grab Jack's shoulders, needing the support as the rest of the world spiraled away from his consciousness. Only then did Jack's tongue reappear, tapping a little more firmly at Scott's lips. With a sigh, Scott opened. He'd *seen* tongue kissing before, of course. He'd just given up on ever enjoying the experience for himself. Oh, what he would have missed. Jack's hands angled his head, the better to slant their mouths together. Jack's tongue found Scott's and teased it into play, tasting of warm, spicy mint. Whimpering, Scott wiggled closer, obeying an imperative to get as close to Jack as possible. He couldn't have said how it happened, but he was straddling Jack's hips, the larger man's arms surrounding his waist, his own

wound about Jack's neck. His hands dug deep into the raw silk of Jack's curls as his mouth followed Jack's through the endless rhythm of the kiss.

He was the one to pull back, requiring more breath than could be sucked in through his nostrils. Dazed, panting, he met Jack's darkly amused gaze. "Wow."

Jack smiled, licking wet, pink lips. "Did you like that?"

"Uh-huh. Can we do it some more?"

"As much as you like. However," he glanced over Scott's shoulder, "perhaps I should take you home so we can continue this at our leisure without the threat of Cody throwing us out of his office?"

Scott gulped. He'd completely forgotten where they were. "Uh, yeah. That's a good idea."

Awkwardly, he climbed off Jack's lap. Inside his jeans, an erection of mammoth proportions made it difficult to stand. His only consolation, he saw after a quick glance, was that Jack's jeans were just as full.

Scott was pretty sure he'd die of embarrassment if Jack said anything. Thankfully, he did not. He stood and carefully adjusted himself, then waited patiently until Scott looked up at him. He smiled. "Shall we go?"

## Chapter Four

“Do you do this often?”

“This?”

The lights from passing cars and the streetlamps flashed over Scott where he sat in the passenger seat of Jack’s BMW. He was calmer now that they’d left the bar, but still a little wide-eyed. “Pick up wayward virgins and bond with them?”

Jack grinned. Oh, he might just like this one. “*Non,*” the accent deepened sometimes when he was content. One of his lovers had likened it to Jack’s version of a purr. “I tend to stay as far away from any place a virgin is likely to be.”

That got Scott’s attention, dragging it away from the passing scenery. “Why?”

“Forgive me for saying it, but I don’t particularly want to be caught.”

“Oh? Oh. Yeah. I guess that makes sense.” He toyed with the seam of his jeans just inside the knee. “So you’ve been *caught* before?”

“Three times.”

“Is that a lot?”

“Not particularly. My predecessor served nearly a dozen in his lifetime. Then there are some of my ancestors who only ever bonded to one. That’s rather rare these days.”

“Guess people don’t stay very pure anymore, huh?”

Jack smiled. "The definition of pure has evolved with the times, but no, purity is not as easy to maintain as in times past."

"Were you always a unicorn?"

"I've always had the latent ability, but if my predecessor hadn't died, I would never have become active." He brushed a lock of hair from his face, just managing to avoid scowling when he felt the hard bump at his hairline again. "Think of it as a gene that gets passed down in my family but only a few of us exhibit the signs. And we only come into our powers when one of the active unicorns passes on."

"When did you come into your powers?"

"I was eighteen."

"High school?"

"*Non*. I am not originally from the United States."

"Where are you from?"

"France. Not far from Paris."

"You speak English really well. I only make out your accent sometimes."

Jack nodded his head. "I learned English and French as I was growing up. As well as German, Swedish, Gaelic, Latin, Japanese and Chinese."

"Whoa."

"Because of what I am, I travel a lot. We all do. My parents knew to prepare me as best they could."

"So you were born knowing you could be a unicorn, but until you were eighteen you were just a normal kid?"

"My family might not say that I was 'normal'." He chuckled. "But mostly, yes. I did have some training and extra schooling to learn our legends and background and we traveled much more than the ordinary family. But other than that, yes. No magic. No other form."

"Then one day, bam?"

“Yes, that was pretty much it. I got nauseous and passed out in a class one day. I woke up two days later with my powers in full swing.”

“You woke up knowing everything you needed to know?”

“The essentials, yes.”

“Wow. How long after that did you meet your first... uh...”

“Virgin?” Jack had expected Scott’s curiosity and was just as glad to get the explanations over quickly. The drive to Scott’s house seemed a good enough time to do it. “I met Mary the next week. I was spending time in a high school that year and she was a fellow student. Took me a few days to know what I felt, and then I had to find which virgin I was drawn to.” He grinned. “Once she touched me, though, I knew.”

“What happened to her?”

“We dated for two years. She eventually got bored with me and ran off with a lead singer of a rock group.”

“Got bored with *you*?”

“My instinct to protect stifled her. Or so she said. Once she slept with the new boyfriend, I was free.” He let Scott digest that for a few moments then continued. “I met Patty three years later. She worked as an administrative assistant for a textile company. She was a werewolf.” Jack heaved a dramatic sigh. “We didn’t last long. She was only a virgin because she was a late bloomer. Very late. Once she hit her first heat, though, we were finished.” Scott didn’t ask for further details so Jack didn’t provide. “Then there was Chris. He and I lasted for five years. I think we might actually have been in love for awhile.” Jack shrugged. “But he wanted to ‘live’ eventually and he started taking drugs.”

“That breaks the bond?”

“Not of itself, no. Believe it or not, we were still bonded while he smoked pot, snorted cocaine, took ecstasy...”

“Did you?”

"No. Drugs don't affect me at all. My system processes them out immediately."

"Oh."

"It was when he decided he could take heroin because he counted on my curing the poison so he wouldn't get hooked. That selfishness broke the bond." Jack kept his eyes on the road. That one still stung. Chris had been his first gay experience, his introduction to, in his opinion, a better type of sex. After Chris, although Jack had slept with women, he found he slept with a lot more men.

"Did you cure him anyway?"

"I did." Long practice let him keep the sadness from his voice. "The first time. But then I left. I hope he's okay."

"How long ago was that?"

"Seven years."

"How old are you?"

"Nearly forty."

"You're kidding!"

"No. While my powers are active, I age extremely slowly. I'm told that I can't die of old age. If nothing kills me, I'll live for a long, long time."

"If nothing kills you?"

"It's hard to kill me, to be honest. Most of my kind are killed in defense of the one they're bonded to." He said it casually but watched Scott out of the corner of his eye.

Scott grimaced, staring morosely through the windshield. "That's how you catch a unicorn, right? Get a virgin. The unicorn will come to her and just lay down to let himself get caught."

"You know the popular legends."

"Are they true?"

"For the most part, yes. I've told you that I have to do everything you say."

Scott chewed his lip. He was quiet for a long time, breaking the silence only to point out their exit to Jack.

*Interesting.* It'd taken Chris weeks before he'd ask the nitty gritty of the curse. Scott was hitting the high points all in one night. Maybe it had something to do with hearing his brother was in danger from a vampire.

"Where's my car?" Scott unbelted himself as Jack pulled to a stop in the driveway. He got out scowling. His Mazda was nowhere in sight. "I don't believe this." He headed for the narrow walkway to the side of the garage.

Jack grabbed his arm to stop him. "Where are you going?" His eyes were on the shadowed corridor.

Ignoring the bright tingle of awareness that Jack's touch caused, Scott pointed in the direction he wanted to go. "He's got my keys. I need to get the spare to get in."

"What's back there?"

Jack's wariness got Scott's hackles up. He stared into the dark space, now imagining fanged monsters hiding in the dense bougainvillea. *Absurd.* Still, he'd actually *met* a vampire tonight. "Just the gate to the backyard."

"Let me go first."

A small part of Scott protested, but only a little. He did stay on Jack's heels as the unicorn headed into the darkness.

*Unicorn. God!*

There were no vampires with great black capes waiting to swoop down on them. There weren't even vampires without capes. Not even a vampire bat. Just the normal shrubbery scratching the side of the garage in the breeze. A light from the neighbor's side porch dimly lit the pitiful little lawn area behind Scott's house. The motion sensor over his own back door blared to life as they kicked its sensors. Jack's hair gleamed so white in the fluorescent it was hard to look at. Scott retrieved the spare key from its spot under a fake rock beside the stoop and didn't protest when Jack lifted it from his hand and unlocked the door to lead the way inside.

Jack found the light switch easily enough and the laundry room came to life. The kitchen beyond was empty, as was the living room, exposed as Jack turned on lights in each room he carefully approached. Scott followed quietly, afraid to say a word.

Jack stopped at the foot of the narrow stairs that led up to the second floor. Head tilted up, eyes narrowed, his nostrils flared and he by-God sniffed the air. A breath later, the gold horn sprouted full from his forehead, emitting a light clearer and brighter than any of the lamps. "Just bedrooms upstairs?" he asked, voice deep and attention focused upward.

Scott backed up against the wall beside the kitchen door. "Yes. And a bathroom."

A slight nod and a nasty sneer. "I can smell you." He didn't raise his voice, but Scott knew Jack wasn't talking to him. "Come out and show yourselves and I might not destroy you."

Scott glanced up into the darkness but nothing happened.

Jack's gaze narrowed further. "Scott," he held out his hand without looking at Scott, "come here, please."

Swallowing, Scott went, putting his hand in Jack's. He gasped when a strange, warm tingling shot up his arm to spill all throughout his body.

Jack glanced at him as he released his hand, pressing it to the ball atop the last post of the balustrade lining the staircase. "It won't last terribly long, but as long as you feel that and don't move from this spot—" he patted Scott's hand, "they can't touch you. Do you understand?"

Scott nodded. He wanted to ask who 'they' were but fear kept his lips pressed tightly together.

Jack smoothed a hand over his cheek, a soothing gesture despite the scary serious expression on his face. "I will be *right* back."

He headed up the stairs, his horn lighting the way.

Scott bit his lip, clutching the banister with both hands to still their trembling. For a moment, he couldn't hear anything, not even Jack's footsteps then a terrible scream

ripped through the air. If he hadn't been holding so tightly, he might have fallen back. *Please don't let that be Jack!* He thought desperately. But he knew it wasn't. Didn't sound like Jack. And he had a feeling he'd know if Jack was hurt.

A tumble of bodies, then a loud thud. Another scream, this one ending in a dwindling wet gurgle. Deadly silent, a dark figure slipped around the corner above. At first, it seemed to be a moving part of the darkness then it sped down the stairs. Its movement was strangely slow, like a movie that was set to slow motion. Scott had enough time to see that it was a man in a worn t-shirt and jeans – at least it looked like a man – with wild black hair, wilder dark eyes, pale gray skin and a gaping red mouth with sharp, elongated fangs. The hands he extended toward Scott curled in claws, the nails at the tips sharp like a dog's claws and just as black.

When the man was halfway down the stairs, barely touching the treads, Jack rounded the same corner above. Scott experienced a strange bit of double vision, seeing both of Jack's forms superimposed within each other. Jack's eyes were entirely too big for his human face, glowing a fierce blue-white. He leapt from the top step and hurtled into the other man, tumbling both of them well past Scott onto the carpeted floor of the entryway. Scott watched in horror as they grappled, the vampire – for he couldn't be anything else – twisting in Jack's arms, mouth open and hissing. Those black claws swiped at Jack's shoulders and back, ripping Jack's pristine white shirt to shreds. Grimacing, Jack leaned up, pinning the vampire on his back with one hand. He spread his hand, glowing white, and slapped it over the other's face. The vampire's teeth might have bit in, Scott couldn't tell. There was another awful scream. The white light blazed hot all around Jack, blinding Scott. He had to close his eyes. A second cry ended in a gurgle. When Scott cracked his lids to try and see again, the light was gone. Jack sat beside the motionless body of the vampire, looking down into the face and its frozen angry screech.

Jack raised his head, eyes closed. The horn was gone. The strange double-vision of his other form was gone. He lifted his face to the ceiling, took a deep, cleansing breath then shook himself as he let it out. "There aren't any more of them," he told Scott calmly as he stood. He twisted his head as far as he could to look at his shoulders and back. "Damn," he muttered.

Scott gaped at him. The collar and most of the sleeves of the white dress shirt were fine, as was the front of the shirt, but the back was torn to shreds, strips of fabric gaping open to expose most of the wide pale expanse of Jack's back. There wasn't a scratch on him.

Jack sighed. "Ah well, no help for it." Facing Scott, he stepped up to him, raised a hand to cup his cheek. "You're all right." It was not a question but a statement of fact.

Scott swallowed. "I-I..." His voice didn't work. The blinding light had left colorful splotches dancing in his vision. He was shaking. "Vampires?"

Jack gripped both of his arms, rubbing them up and down as though to warm him. "Yes."

Scott tried to turn his head to look at the body but Jack wouldn't let him, stepping into his line of sight. "It... he was going to..."

"Shhh." Jack's stepped close enough to rub soothing circles between his shoulder blades. "Not while I'm around."

A whimper escaped Scott and Jack folded him closer, burying Scott's face into the warmth of his chest. Scott yanked his hands from where they were clinging to the banister and switched to clinging Jack instead. Tremors took over his body. Helpless tears welled in his eyes. "There was another one?"

"Was. Yes."

"He's dead?"

"She was already dead, technically," Jack pointed out calmly. "But this time she won't be rising."

"Why are they here?"

Jack stroked his hair. "I'm not sure. I didn't ask them."

"But you know. Tell me."

Jack squeezed. "They were either here to try and take me by force, or to take you from me as bait to lure me to this Margaret."

"Bryan's not here?"

"No. We're alone."

"Where is he?"

"I'm truly not sure."

Determined, Scott drew back, but not out of Jack's embrace. He looked up. "What now?"

Those freckles were going to drive him mad. They were so adorable. He wanted to map them all with his tongue. Resisting that urge, Jack lowered his lips to brush them over Scott's, gratified when the brief kiss was returned. Then he stepped back, keeping hold of Scott's hand. "I think you should pack a bag and come to my place. It's much safer."

Scott mulled that one over then nodded. As he led Jack up the stairs, Jack glanced over his shoulder at the body. He sent down a brief surge of magic and the corpse started to rapidly decompose. It would be dust in empty clothing by the time they came back down. He sent a similar thought ahead to the other corpse.

Scott stopped just inside the neat bedroom Jack knew had to be his. When he'd flushed out the vampires before, he hadn't gotten a very good look in it, but the presence of a huge desk with at least three visible computers clued him in. Scott had the look and smell of a computer nerd.

"Oh no!" Scott cried, ignoring the decomposing body in the flimsy black dress that had been the female vampire and heading straight for the desk. A MacBook sat open in front of the backwards facing chair, a web browser blazing whitely in the dark. Scott

dropped into the chair and turned it forward, hands flying to the keys of the laptop. “What were they doing with my computer?”

“Any number of things,” Jack murmured. Both vamps had been relatively young so it was entirely possible for them to be computer-savvy.

Scott’s fingers flew over the keyboard and touchpad, confirming Jack’s suspicions about his technical prowess. “They got into my email.”

Jack stepped up behind him, watching. “How bad is it?”

“I don’t know.” More clicking. Windows flashed. “Nothing seems to be missing.”

“Do a quick check of what you can think of and change any password you think is necessary.” He surveyed the mess of the bedroom. Scott hadn’t even noticed that all of his dresser drawers were open and his closet was in shambles. Jack didn’t think the mess was normal for Scott. “Mind if I pack a bag for you while you do that?”

Scott nodded, not even glancing back over his shoulder. “Yeah. Huh? What? No, go ahead.”

*Adorable*, Jack chuckled. He always had liked the smart ones.

Shortly before dawn—or as close as Scott could reckon, exhausted as he was—Jack steered him across the threshold of a swanky second-floor condo near the beach. The neighborhood alone reeked of wealth, as did the building within the gated community. Jack’s place was nice and roomy, sparsely but nicely furnished. It had that barely lived-in feel, like he hadn’t been there for long or like it was his second place.

Scott, however, was too tired to ask. He let Jack lead him to the end of the main hallway and into a gorgeous tan and green bedroom that seemed to glow a little in a light that streamed through translucent curtains hung in front of the glass of a marvelous bay window.

Jack stopped him at the foot of the bed, standing behind him with hands on his shoulders. “Are you okay sleeping in here with me?”

Despite exhaustion, a tiny thrill coursed through Scott, making his penis throb a bit.

Jack's breath was warm behind his ear. "I can sleep in the guest bedroom if you'd prefer."

*Or I could,* Scott's brain immediately protested, not wanting to oust the man from his own bed. Two immediate recollections tumbled through his mind at once: one the feel of Jack's embrace, the other the sight of the vampire's gaping mouth. Both made him shudder and turn to tuck himself against the strength of Jack's chest. "Stay with me. Please."

Jack hugged him, kissing the top of his head. "I'd try seducing you but I think you might fall asleep on me. I don't think my ego could abide that."

Scott's laugh was cut short by a jaw-cracking yawn. "You may be right." He rubbed a hand over his gritty eyes. "I'm so tired."

"Understandable. Come," Jack patted his back as he stepped away. "Let's sleep."

As best he could, Scott watched Jack undress as he did so himself. So pale, he was. Like a marble statue come to life, just a little bit of a pink flush or a hint of blue here and there to prove that blood pumped beneath the surface of his skin. Other than the wealth of curls that draped his head and shoulders, there didn't seem to be any hair on him. No, there was a tell-tale sheen to his legs that suggested very light hair. Sitting on the side of the bed, Scott studied the front of his briefs as though he could see through them.

Jack chuckled. "Keep looking at me like that and I'll be forced to seduce you."

Scott jumped, dropping his jeans to the floor. He, too, was down to briefs.

Jack hooked his thumbs in his waistband. "Should I take them off?"

Scott felt his eyes go wide. "Uh..."

Laughing softly, Jack left them on and pulled down the thick green and gold bedspread. "We'll save that for when we can both appreciate it." He lay down, fluffing up a pillow then held a hand out to Scott. "Come to me, beautiful."

Blushing, Scott crawled into bed next to the unicorn, stretching out. Jack turned him over then cuddled up to his back. *Spooning?* Scott used to sleep with his mother like this, back when he was a very small boy. As back then, the feel was amazingly soothing. So was this, although Jack wasn't as soft as he remembered his mother. But Jack did have some interesting curves...

"Sleep," Jack soothed, kissing the back of his shoulder.

A bunch of questions rambled through Scott's mind, but he chose to ignore them in favor of restful unconsciousness.

## Chapter Five

Scott speared the last strawberry on his plate and lifted it to his lips. "What do we do now?"

Sticking the berry in his mouth, he fully appreciated the sight of Jack's broad, pale back as the other man rinsed dishes and put them in a dishwasher. It still amused him that Jack cooked. He'd wakened that morning to the scent of crepes, toast and fresh fruit. Per Jack, since he preferred to live alone and he traveled often, he'd learned to cook mainly so he could enjoy good food wherever he was. Evidently, he believed in cleaning up after himself too because the kitchen was quite tidy and he looked like he knew what he was doing with the dishwasher. His wealth of curly hair was pulled behind his neck and banded with a hair tie, the bushy white fall looking remarkably like a horse's tail. "Do?"

*Except his unicorn tail's more like a lion's than a horse's tail,* Scott mused, setting his fork down. "Bryan. The vampires."

"That's up to you," Jack grabbed a blue and white dishtowel and turned to face Scott, wiping his hands dry with it. The front view was even better than the back view. Shirtless, showered, wearing only soft blue lounge pants, he looked more delicious than the fruit Scott had just eaten.

*Focus!* Scott admonished himself. "Up to me?"

Jack came to sit with Scott in the little breakfast nook that had a gorgeous view of the ocean in the not-so-far-distance. He tossed the rag on the table and hooked two fingers through the handle on the mug of coffee he'd left before he started to clean up. "As long as you're with me, you're as safe as you can be. You can move in here if you like, or we could move away."

Scott blinked. Their breakfast conversation had revealed that Jack had not only inherited money, he also owned a few businesses, all run by perfectly capable people who could function largely on their own, only needing him for executive decisions. He, therefore, had plenty of money to spare and the freedom to spend it wherever and however he liked. He'd made it very plain that whatever he had was at Scott's command. "I can't just leave Bryan."

Jack sipped his coffee then nodded. "I thought you might say that." He reached for the carafe that sat in the coffee maker on a shelf unit right beside the table. "My guess is that they'll have Bryan contact you sometime soon, if not tonight, and have him tell you where to bring me."

Scott scowled. "I'm not just going to give you over to them."

Jack raised his freshened cup to his lips and regarded Scott over the rim. "Not even to save your brother's life?"

Scott watched him sip. His lips were pale like the rest of him but had this intriguing pink flush. "No."

"It might be the only way."

Scott had to close his eyes to keep his thoughts from derailing thanks to the sight of Jack. "Can't you, you know, take care of them?" He did his best not to think about what 'taking care of them' would entail, fighting memories of Jack killing the vampire in his house.

Jack set down his cup. "That would depend on how many of them there are and how old they are. I'm not all powerful, and enough of them could take me down. They'd have to catch me, of course, but with the proper lure that'd be possible."

“Me being the lure.”

“Yes. Even if I could take them down, there’s no guarantee they wouldn’t kill Bryan first.”

Scott wrapped his hands around his own mostly empty mug of coffee, staring down into its creamed-and-sugared depths. “Are you sure they haven’t already killed him?”

“I’m pretty sure, yes. He’s their only link to you.”

“And I’m the key to you.”

“Yes.”

“They’ll want you that badly?”

Jack shrugged. “It seems so. I could be wrong about their motivations, but I’ve met vampires like this Margaret before.”

“What happened then?”

“They’re dead now.”

Scott nodded, not wanting to know the details. “Were you lured to them before?”

“No. They tried to capture me without a virgin.”

So he was working with a handicap this time, named Scott. Terrific.

“Are there any other relatives we should worry about?” Jack asked lightly.

“No. Just me and Bryan. Our mom died two years ago, my dad long before that. I barely even know his dad.”

“Well, that’s something. I’m sorry about your mom, though.”

“Thanks.” Scott turned to gaze out at the ocean, sitting back in his chair. He, too, was freshly showered, dressed in a borrowed pair of gray sweatpants. His long hair was still mostly wet, even long after the rest of him was dry. He’d debated washing it, but in the end, he’d needed to feel clean. He shook his head, hooking some of the wayward red length back behind his ear. He was used to feeling it cool and heavy against his back. “Jack, I’m so sorry.”

“None of this is your fault, Scott.”

“If I wasn’t a virgin, they wouldn’t have used me to catch you.”

Jack laughed. “If you weren’t who you *are*, and that vampire who has Bryan in thrall hadn’t recognized it, you’d mostly likely be dead or living on a blood diet.” Jack’s chair scraped and then his hand closed around Scott’s wrist. “It’s because of what you are that she left you alone. And if you weren’t what you are, I would never have met you.” His thumb rubbed the inside of Scott’s wrist. “Believe me; I would have stayed clear if I could.”

Brows drawn down, Scott looked at Jack. The man was so close, his knees were almost touching Scott’s chair. His solid strength and aching beauty were a balm to the self-recriminating emotions churning in Scott. “You would have stayed clear. You wouldn’t have gotten into this mess.”

“Don’t be so sure. I’m always getting into messes. At least in this one, I got to meet you.”

Scott didn’t fall for the sunny smile. He searched those chiseled features, tried to fathom those bluer-than-blue eyes. “Is that you or your curse talking?”

Jack shook his head. “Doesn’t matter.”

“Yes. It does. Tell me the truth.”

Jack grimaced. He looked aside for a moment, thinking, before regaining Scott’s gaze. “I’m sorry, Scott, I don’t know. It’s the nature of the curse that I can’t tell.”

Nodding, Scott started to get up.

“Hey.” Jack stopped him by yanking his wrist to him back down. “That’s not fair. We’ve only known each other a *day*.” He scooted closer, boxing Scott in. One hand smoothed over the damp hair at the back of Scott’s neck. A shiver of delight skipped up Scott’s spine as Jack leaned even closer. “What I *do* know is that I like you. I can’t say that about the other three virgins I was with.”

“No?”

Fingers tunneled into his hair to slowly, gently try to comb through some of it. "I liked Chris and I liked Patty for the most part, but I'm not sure I ever liked Mary. I was completely caught up and infatuated with her. I would have laid down my life for her. But I don't think I ever really liked her as a person. You, I think I like."

"You don't even know me."

Jack grabbed a handful of hair and pulled, forcing Scott's head back a little. He closed the distance, brushing pink lips over Scott's cheekbone. "I like what I see so far. Let me learn more and we'll see if I like it."

Finally, Scott had to smile. He allowed the kiss that followed, welcomed it, gladly opening his mouth to Jack's coffee-flavored tongue. "I like you too," he whispered when he could, and placed a hand on one of Jack's knees.

Jack purred into his ear, tilting his head back a little more to taste the juncture of neck and jaw. "How much?"

"Huh?"

"Enough to let me take you into my bedroom and lay you out on my bed?"

Scott shivered both from the words and from the butterfly caress at his pulse. "Yes."

Jack stood, taking Scott's hand to draw him up.

"But—" he followed willingly, but a part of his brain felt guilty, "—shouldn't we be planning or something? Getting ready for them?"

"We are."

"We are?"

"Yes." Jack said not a word more until they were in the bedroom. He spun Scott onto the bed, causing him to topple into the rumpled sheets. "The closer we are emotionally, the stronger our bond. The stronger our bond, the better I can protect you."

Scott didn't protest when Jack spread his legs and knelt between them. "Really?"

Jack lowered himself on top of Scott, the warmth from his skin blending into Scott's. "Before it was known that we were shapeshifters, it wasn't all that uncommon for unicorns to marry the virgins who caught them." He nuzzled just underneath Scott's left ear. Tendrils of hair that had escaped his bushy ponytail tickled Scott's chin. "It was easier to protect them and it strengthened the bond." He moved lower, kissing a path over Scott's collarbone. "Other times, unicorns were trusted bodyguards who spent every moment with their charge."

Scott gasped when Jack's hot mouth closed on his nipple. "Is that true?" Reaching up, he grabbed most of his own hair and, wiggling a little, managed to get all of the damp, uncomfortable stuff out from under him.

Jack braced over him, watching Scott deal with his hair. "Mother Earth, I love that."

"What?" With a practiced flip, he tossed his hair above his head.

"Your hair." Jack picked up a damp lock and drew it down to lay on Scott's chest. "Why do you wear it long?"

Scott flushed. "Lazy, I guess." He tried to distract himself from embarrassment by sliding his hands up the smooth satin of Jack's arms.

"There's more to it than that."

Scott stared at Jack's clavicle, entranced by the sharp bones. "My mother liked it long."

Jack lowered to take Scott's mouth in another breath-stealing kiss. "Then I have even more to be thankful to her for."

He returned to Scott's nipple, keeping the lock of hair there, laving both it and the pebbled peak to create interesting friction. Then he drew slow, sweet kisses down the center of Scott's body until he could lave Scott's navel. His hands slid down Scott's sides. Scott's penis was so hard and achy he could barely keep still.

"You can stop me with a word," Jack murmured into his belly, hooking long fingers into the elastic waistband of the pants.

Eyes shut, Scott lifted his hips a little, thrilled when the sensitive shaft of his erection brushed Jack's chin. "Please don't stop."

"Your wish is my command." The pants drew down slowly, carefully avoiding the sensitive organ within. They were abandoned just above his knees as Jack gave an appreciative growl.

Scott gasped at the riot of pure sensation at his crotch. Jack's chest pinning his thighs to the mattress, Jack's hands spanning his hips, smoothing over his lower belly and Jack's breath on the underside of his penis. He couldn't bear to look down and give visuals to what he was feeling for fear he'd combust.

The warmth of Jack's soft humming teased Scott. Mouth and nose buried into the hair between groin and crotch, causing his cheek to brush Scott's penis. So soft, so warm. Jack's tongue laved at the side of Scott's balls and Scott nearly came out of his skin, gasping Jack's name.

"So beautiful," Jack murmured, shifting so he could pull the pants the rest of the way off Scott's legs. Once done, strong hands pushed Scott's thighs apart. His tongue again laved the side of Scott's scrotum then nuzzled underneath to a spot Scott had never known was so sensitive. His whole body shook as Jack's tongue pressed and laved, briefly teasing down even farther before switching to the other side of Scott's groin to nuzzle his way up.

Scott gripped the pillow underneath his head. "Jack."

"Mmmm?" Teeth nipped the inside of his thigh.

"Please."

"Mmmm."

Scott cried out. He couldn't help it. Jack's tongue dragged a broad stroke up Scott's penis from balls to head. No one had ever touched Scott like that. *He'd* barely ever touched himself, and he certainly couldn't do it like *that*. Jack stroked him again, wet and firm, then traced his tongue underneath the head. "Jack!"

No reply this time. None necessary. Moist satin lips edged over the tip of Scott's erection then the most delicious wet heat sank over his erection. Without any conscious thought on his part, Scott's body bent into itself, his hands grappling at Jack's back, fingers digging into the firm muscle. Mewling cries poured from his lips as fire ignited at the base of his groin, exploding through his hips, compressing his balls, shooting up and pumping from his penis. Jack held him through it, kept his mouth over Scott's explosion, swallowing every last drop until Scott collapsed back to the mattress, depleted.

Only then did Jack release him, carefully laying his very moist, now-soft penis toward his thigh. "Feel good?"

A weary laugh escaped Scott's lips. "That was amazing."

"My pleasure." The sexy French accent now laced every word. Fingers nudged underneath Scott's balls, tapping a place that made Scott wonder if he was as satisfied as he'd thought. "Are we finished?"

Scott swallowed. He had zero experience in situations like this. "I-I don't know. Are we?"

"We could stop." The pad of a fingertip caressed Scott's anus. "But there's more pleasure I could give you."

"More?"

"Mmm-hmm." The bed between Scott's thighs rustled, the heat of Jack's torso moving away. "Turn over."

Biting his lip, Scott complied, noting that Jack had slid off the side of the bed and was rummaging around in the nightstand. *Lube*. Scott may be inexperienced, but he knew the basics about sex, both with women and with men. The internet was a wealth of information. *More* than he'd ever wanted to know. He blushed to think of some of the things he'd seen, some of the videos he'd watched, and wondered that Jack insisted he was still pure.

True enough, Jack turned back to the bed and tossed a bottle of clear liquid next to Scott. He urged Scott to scoot father toward the middle of the bed and rearranged his thighs so that they were spread wide enough so Jack could lie down between them. He took a few minutes to gather Scott's drying hair, arranging it as he liked it about Scott's back and shoulders. From where he lay between Scott's thighs, Jack placed both hands on either cheek of Scott's rear and squeezed. Scott moaned, pressing his forehead to his forearms, wondering if melons in the grocery store felt such pleasure when squeezed. The firm massage of strong fingers on his flesh made Scott lightheaded, so much so that he didn't realize what it was until Jack's wet, warm tongue had completed one slow swipe from just behind his balls to the small of his back.

"Oh God, don't do that," he hissed, but his moan belied his words.

Teeth sank into the meat of his bottom to just shy of pain then relinquished. "Why not?"

"It's... embarrassing."

"No need to be embarrassed," Jack crooned, his lips and tongue in the crease between Scott's cheeks. His massaging hands kept them parted and Scott was having a devil of a time not rocking back into his touch. "You're beautiful."

"There?" The undignified squeak came out before he could stop it.

"Mmmm." What had to be the tip of Jack's tongue traced Scott's anus. "Very much so."

Scott couldn't believe he could be beautiful there, but very much did not want to engage in a discussion on the aesthetic values of his rear end so he kept his mouth shut. Besides, despite his misgivings, it felt so *good*.

"Relax." Jack's tongue pressed his opening again. "Enjoy it."

Swallowing, Scott took a deep breath and tried to relax. It did feel amazing, if he could get over the annoying insistence that no one's tongue should even be *down* there. But Jack's touch was profoundly persuasive. Eventually, the tension eased from Scott's

shoulders and legs, and that's when it started to feel even better. Jack's tongue did wicked things, probing inside, making Scott wet. At some point, one of Jack's hands slid down to toy with Scott's balls, adding another strange, but delicious sensation to the mix. Scott's heartbeat picked up speed again and soft little mewls poured from his lips as he forgot to be embarrassed and started to drown in the pure sensation Jack offered him. When Jack started to make short, stabbing motions with his tongue, Scott had to start. How did Jack's tongue get so deep? Or did it just feel that way? Either way, it was marvelous.

"More," he heard himself demand, rocking his hips backward. His re-hardening cock dragged on the soft fabric of the sheets beneath him.

Jack complied, licking and probing in earnest, his one hand reaching farther beneath Scott's rocking hips to bring his penis down for stroking.

Still wasn't enough. "Jack, please." He pulled one knee underneath him, the better to give Jack more access. He needed something, needed more. Despite all the touching, there was something profound he was missing and he was quite certain Jack knew what it was and how to give it to him.

He whimpered when Jack's attentions stopped, but his protest stopped when he heard the pop of the lube bottle's cap. It dawned on him what was coming next. A part of him said they should probably stop. The rest of him called that part insane. Surely, *that* is what his body was yearning for.

A wet finger probed where Jack's tongue had been. He knew it wasn't Jack's tongue this time because he felt Jack's lips at the small of his back. The finger slid in slowly but easily, creating a curiously wonderful friction inside Scott. If Jack's finger and tongue felt that good inside him, what would Jack's penis feel like? Aroused by the very thought, he squirmed and pushed back on the finger. "More."

"Already?"

“Yes. Please.” He peered over his shoulder. A heavy wave of his hair bisected his vision. Still he saw that Jack’s clear blue gaze swam with a thunderous desire. It made Scott’s heart stop. So beautiful, and all focused on him.

Grinning, Jack watched him as he pulled out the one finger then pressed in with two.

Scott’s breath hitched a little. It didn’t exactly hurt, but it wasn’t completely comfortable either. It got better when Jack burrowed his free hand between Scott’s legs and found his erection again. Scott moaned, lifting his hips up to let Jack easily close his palm around the head, massaging there while the fingers of his other hand massaged Scott from within. He got so lost in the sensation that he barely noticed when Jack eased out then probed him with three fingers. In fact, that felt better. He now decided that the stretch felt kind of good. Definitely the friction inside was wonderful. Clutching the pillow underneath his chin, he rocked into Jack’s hands, letting the other man drive him crazy.

When the boil at the base of his spine threatened to burst, he gasped. “Stop.”

Instantly, Jack stopped moving. “You all right?” His lips ghosted over one of Scott’s buttocks.

Scott nodded, desperately trying to tamp down the swirling arousal. “I’m going to come if you keep doing that.”

“That’s all right.”

“No. I...” He twisted to peeked down at Jack. “I want you inside me this time.”

Jack didn’t know if it was years of experience or Scott’s hold over him that kept him from coming on the spot. He’d never seen anything sexier in his life than Scott laid bare before him, blanketed in his own auburn hair, his ass rhythmically clutching Jack’s fingers and his pretty cock oozing into Jack’s other palm. Those green eyes peeked out

from underneath the red curtain of hair and the shy little words that asked Jack to fuck him were too much.

Almost.

“All right.” Carefully, he eased his fingers from Scott’s anus, watching the little mouth pucker closed and pulse once after it was empty. He released Scott’s dick and happily licked his palm clean, aware his actions produced another one of those sexy little groans. The redhead was going to be his undoing. He knew it now. And he was jumping willingly into the fray.

“You should get up on your knees,” he instructed, reaching for the bottle of lube. As Scott complied, Jack ditched his briefs then returned to the bed to pour more than enough liquid onto one palm. He recapped the bottle and tossed it aside. He slathered a good portion on his cock, shocked when he had to pause for fear of coming just at the touch of his own hand. He hadn’t been this primed in years. Had it been like this at first with Chris? He couldn’t remember.

He knelt behind Scott and parted those gorgeous round cheeks again, trying not to get distracted by the wealth of freckles dotting the smooth, tight globes. He couldn’t resist dragging his wet hand over Scott’s hole, nor could he resist probing again with his fingers.

“Jack!”

“Patience, sweetness,” he crooned.

“No. Now.”

Jack’s hips jerked forward, his cock doing its best to jump to comply. Compelled, Jack took himself in hand and aimed the reddened head of his cock at that bright pink hole and gently pushed. “Wait,” he begged, when Scott pushed back. “I can’t hurt you.”

“Don’t care.” Scott’s breathy tone was like a vacuum sucking Jack in. Or was that his anus? Blossoming open around the head of Jack’s cock and pulling with delicious velvet heat. “Ooooh, yes,” Scott sighed, pushing back as Jack sank in. *Mother Earth, he*

*was made for this.* Made for Jack. His ass hotter and tighter than any ass or pussy Jack had ever plumbed.

Jack held onto his hips, guiding the concerted movements until the sparse white curls at the base of his cock tickled the globes of Scott's ass and his thighs kissed the backs of Scott's. Scott wiggled, forcing Jack to close his eyes and calm lest the instincts of the beast take him over too quickly. A unicorn may be a tender guardian but he was also a fierce protector and the last was based in the fact that he was a stallion at heart. The urge to rut would take him eventually and he had to make sure Scott would welcome that when it happened.

From all Jack could tell Scott was well on his way. As Jack started to draw out, Scott gasped, no doubt feeling the drag on his prostate. Scott took to the feeling readily, moaning and clutching at the pillow beneath him. When Jack thrust forward again, Scott pushed back, greedy for more. Twice more and he almost took over, eagerly impaling himself on Jack's cock while adorable, sexy moans poured from his mouth.

Jack fell forward, bracing his hands in the tangle of sheets beside Scott's shoulders. Better positioned, he drew back and thrust forward with more force, his heart melting when that only kicked up Scott's enjoyment.

"Oh. Jack! Please!"

The plea released the beast, who was now convinced that pain was no longer a danger. Jack's hips picked up rhythm and Scott went wild beneath him, clawing at the bed, begging for more.

When Scott came, he bleated Jack's name, arching back into the man above him as his ass clenched Jack's cock. Overcome by this exquisite man's release, the beast let go, pouring seed deep into Scott's body. Probably unfelt by Scott, a surge of power erupted around Jack, aflame over every inch of his skin. He braced himself, still coming, as the heat sluiced down his skin to his groin and shot into, over and around Scott's body, coating him, claiming him, bonding Jack closer to him than before.

Drained when it was over, Jack carefully pulled out of Scott and dropped down on the mattress beside him. Immediately, like a kitten seeking its mother, Scott burrowed into Jack's arms, inserting his leg in between Jack's as he attached himself firmly to Jack's chest and side.

Jack smiled, aware that Scott was asleep almost before he breathed the sigh that settled him. Clearly, it was time for a nap. Jack knew he was going to need to get up in a minute to at least wipe them both down but, for the moment, he simply held his new lover.

## Chapter Six

Two days later, Scott snatched his phone from where it rested on the desk beside him and raced into the bathroom.

“Jack! It’s Bryan’s cell!”

Jack pushed open the glass door of the shower, wiping water from his face. “Answer it.”

It was a measure of Scott’s worry that his eyes didn’t even roam over the intriguing paths the water took down Jack’s naked torso. “What do I say?”

“Hello.”

“What?”

“All we can do now is find out what she wants.” He nodded toward the phone that kept trilling in Scott’s hand then turned back to rinsing.

Grimacing, Scott punched the call button. “Hello?”

“This would be Scott, yes?” It was a woman’s voice. Deep. Sultry. “You have been expecting my call, no doubt.”

“Yes.”

“My name is Margaret. I have your brother.”

“Is he alive?”

“Oh yes, he is still alive.”

"Is he a vampire?"

She chuckled. "If he were a vampire, he would not be alive."

"What do you want?"

"I thought that would be obvious. I want the unicorn." Just like that. Like he was a toy Scott could just hand over.

Jack stepped out of the shower, reaching for one of the fluffy white towels to dry himself.

"He's not mine to give."

"Oh, I beg to differ. I'm confident that he *is* yours to give. Or, at least, yours to control. Certainly he's yours enough to kill for you, which he has done already."

He swallowed. He'd tried hard not to think of the two vampires Jack had killed. Jack's presence in the last two days had kept the nightmares at bay, but didn't erase the replay of the death Scott had witnessed. "Do you expect me to just hand him over?"

"In a manner of speaking, yes. Is the unicorn there?"

"He has a *name*."

She chuckled. "Yes. I'm sure that he does. Unfortunately, it doesn't interest me. Is he there?"

Scott fought an extreme urge to hang up on her. "Yes."

Jack just stood there calmly, blotting his hair with the towel. The bathroom was redolent with warm, moist air scented by minty soap. The bright lights illuminated every chiseled line of Jack's muscles and his skin had a healthy pink glow. Scott wanted nothing more than the hang up on this woman, this vampire, and lose himself in the man before him.

"Let me speak to him." Her voice shattered the dream before it really began.

Scott held out the cell phone to Jack. "She wants to speak to you." Probably better that Jack handled it anyway.

Jack just nodded and, with one last swipe of the towel over his hair, took the phone. "Yes?"

Scott stood in the doorway, wishing he had super hearing so he knew what she was saying.

“Yes.” Jack’s expression gave nothing away and he wouldn’t meet Scott’s eyes, staring instead at the shiny white counter. “No, of course not.” Was that sarcastic? “Go on.”

Scott glanced at the frosted window over the shower. It was still daylight. No fair that, that one basic rule of vampires wasn’t true. Vampires going out in the daylight was just...wrong.

“Yes, I know.”

Scott tugged at his braid, impatiently switching his weight from one bare foot to the other. For two days now, except for the few times they’d gone out, he and Jack had only worn lounge pants if they’d worn anything. Much of their time together had been spent completely naked.

Jack glanced at his feet, maybe distracted by the movement. The pure white of his eyelashes shielded the expression in his blue eyes. The strange gold-ish lump of his horn peeked through the wet curls fallen over his forehead. “No.” Pause. “No.” Pause. “No.”

Scott was going to go insane!

“Fine. Yes.” Jack lowered the cell phone and pressed the disconnect button.

“Well?”

Jack stared at his own reflection in the wide mirror. “I’m to bring you to Mexico.”

“Mexico?!”

“It’s just a few hours’ drive.” Too calmly, Jack set the phone on the counter then raised the towel to his hair again. “She named a deserted stretch of beach. I vaguely know where it is.”

“Why Mexico?”

"I assume to take us away from familiar ground. To throw me off." He tossed the towel into a hamper in the corner. "Do you have a passport?"

"Yes. At the house."

"We'll have to go get it."

Confused, Scott could only follow Jack's train. "But you said it wasn't safe to go to the house."

Jack shrugged. "Apparently, we don't have a choice. Unless you want to leave Bryan to them."

"No!"

"Then we need to go to the house." He pulled a wide-tooth comb from a drawer and began to run it through his hair, tackling the thick ends at one side first. "I doubt she's left anyone behind. If I were her, I'd have every lackey at my disposal on hand. None of them are going to do her any good here anymore. She knows we're coming."

"You're so calm about this."

"I have to be."

Scott bit his lip, watching droplets from the ends of Jack's hair spatter on the curve of his perfect, porcelain ass. "Do you have a plan?"

"Not yet."

"So we just go, knowing it's a trap?"

"I'm not exactly easy prey, Scott. There's a chance I can overpower them."

He opened his mouth then shut it. His heart was racing, and not because a beautifully perfect man stood naked before him. Eyes burning, he turned and stalked back into the bedroom. Before too long, he might just be the reason for that beautiful man's *death!* Swallowing over a lump in his throat, he stood, arms crossed, surrounded by the bay window, staring at the ocean.

Within moments, Jack stepped up behind him, wrapping an arm about his shoulders. Warm lips brushed the rim of his ear as still-damp skin pressed his bare back.

"I'm scared." He reached up to grip Jack's wrist, leaning back into the warmth of his chest. "What if Bryan's already dead and she's lying?"

"It's possible. We won't know until we see for ourselves."

"You're stronger than they are, aren't you? The truth, don't placate me."

He felt Jack's forehead gently bump the side of his skull. A soft sigh. "I've never known a single vampire who's a match for me. I could probably take on as many as three or four of them and still hold my own. Any more and things get dicey. The older any of them are, the dicier it gets."

"Older means more powerful?"

"Usually, yes."

"Does the fact that she was awake during the day mean she's older and more powerful?"

"Not necessarily, no. But the older ones do handle daylight better."

"Which means trouble."

"Possibly."

He reached back to pet the soft hair at the side of Jack's thigh. "Can we bring help? Your friends at Del Fantasma?"

"We could try. But I don't know how many I can ask for such a thing, especially at this short notice. Vampires don't tend to pry into each others' affairs unless they must, and shapeshifters aren't always as much help as you would think." Scott wondered if he emphasized his accent on purpose, knowing Scott liked it. "Regardless, we don't have time."

"You can't call?"

"I could." He sighed. "Scott, if she was sensitive enough to sense what you were without tasting you, then she'd very likely sense their presence. She was very specific about not bringing help."

"Was she?"

"Yes."

"What else did she say?"

Jack's hand smoothed small circles on Scott's chest, probably a soothing gesture. "Just that both of us are to come in one car and we're to be alone. If we're not there by midnight, dire things might happen."

"Did she say 'dire things'?"

"Yes."

"You didn't ask what she meant."

"I've a pretty good idea what she meant."

Scott swallowed. "She'll hurt Bryan."

"Yes."

He leaned his head back against Jack's shoulder then twisted his neck so he could rub his forehead against the other man's jaw. No stubble. Jack didn't grow facial hair, which Scott thought was just monumentally unfair. But he did enjoy the man's smooth skin. "This isn't fair. If it wasn't for me, you wouldn't be in this."

"If it wasn't for Bryan, neither would you." Jack's other arm came around his waist, rubbing low on his belly. "If it wasn't for you, and what this vampire knew you might be capable of, Bryan would likely be dead." Jack kissed his forehead. "There's no sense in placing blame. What's done is done."

"But you're bound to help me."

"And you're bound to help Bryan."

"It's not the same."

"Close enough. The result is similar."

"What if I said let's not go?"

"You can't."

"I can't?"

"You don't mean it. You can't leave Bryan there."

"What if I could?"

“Then the curse would be broken.”

Tempting. If he decided to be selfish, if he decided he wanted time with Jack more than saving his brother, then Jack would be free of his command. That would negate the whole thing. But then, Bryan would be a dead man. Also, there was no guarantee Jack would let Scott stay with him. The unicorn had been nothing but honest about the curse and, although Scott had not asked for a direct explanation, he could read between the lines to understand that what Jack felt for Scott now might be no more than the curse. Wasn't it selfish of him to want to keep that?

A heavy, helpless sigh deflated Scott. The thoughts made his head hurt, and why bother? He knew they had to go get Bryan. Jack was right. He couldn't leave him. Dejected, Scott turned in Jack's embrace, winding his arms around the taller man's bare torso. “So we go to Mexico. Then what?”

“I don't know.” Arms wrapped about Scott's shoulders, enveloping him in safety. “I imagine they'll use you to subdue me.”

“Can they do that?”

“Yes. Even I become weak if enough blood is drained from me.”

Compelled, Scott burrowed into Jack's neck, kissing the soft skin. “I won't let that happen.”

Jack hugged him tighter. “I doubt you'll be given a choice.”

Jack held Scott close, wishing this warmth between them wasn't almost at an end. For two days, he'd known they were living on borrowed time. For two days, he'd thoroughly enjoyed Scott's company both in and out of his bed. A few times he'd even forgotten the curse. But not for long. And not now.

Unfair indeed. Scott didn't know the extent of it. With Mary and Chris, all of the problems had come from within the relationship, not from outside influence. With Patty, the curse had been broken due to her shapeshifter family, but that hadn't been

particularly dangerous since she'd given him up. This was the first time he'd faced true danger because of his charge, and this was the reason he'd run from his curse with every skill he'd developed. Ironic that the man who put him in the danger he'd always avoided was the one that he felt glad to offer the sacrifice. Or was that just the nature of the curse? He honestly couldn't tell, and couldn't say that it really mattered at this point.

With one finger, he tilted Scott's face up. Those beautiful green eyes swam with uncertainty and unshed tears. Jack brushed his lips over Scott's. "We should go."

Scott held on. "No." He tipped up to try and recapture Jack's lips.

Jack turned his head out of the kiss reluctantly, unable to pull away completely. "Much as I'd like to make love with you before we go, we don't have time. It's going to take a few hours to get to there and we still need to get your passport then drive over the border."

Scott still didn't let go, reaching up to tangle his fingers in Jack's damp hair so he could tip Jack's head where he wanted it.

Between them, Jack's cock was already hard but swelled even more. As he was still naked from the shower, it was rather obvious. When Scott reached down to palm it, Jack groaned. "Scott..."

"No. We'll make time." The conviction in his voice was plenty command for Jack, effectively defeating his escape. Scott sucked in Jack's bottom lip. "Just a little. Real quick. I need..." His voice broke on a tiny sob. "I need to feel you inside me one more time."

Even without the curse, Jack wasn't sure he could have disobeyed that heartbreaking request. Cupping Scott's chin, he held that precious face for a soul-devouring kiss. Truth, he needed what could be this final connection as much as Scott did. When he walked backward, he took Scott with him, halting only when the back of his legs met the side of the high mattress.

"Get naked," he rasped, tearing his lips from Scott's.

While Scott complied, Jack got the lube and poured a goodly amount on his palm.

Scott knelt on the unmade bed, ass presented to Jack.

“No, on your back.”

Without question, Scott flopped on his back; legs spread wide, his mostly hard cock lying on his belly. He reached up demanding arms toward Jack. “Come here.”

Jack fit perfectly between Scott’s legs. Scott held his own knees, fully opening himself. It was easy for Jack to aim and, after two days of frequent fucking, even easier for him to sink in for the long slide home.

Scott gave one of those sexy little whimpers, releasing his legs to wrap them around Jack’s hips. His hands found Jack’s shoulders then grabbed handfuls of damp hair to pull Jack down to him. “Please,” he whispered into Jack’s mouth before taking it in a kiss.

Jack could only comply, bracing himself above the darling, wiggling wonder beneath him, feeding from Scott’s mouth as Scott’s ass devoured his cock. Scott was everything and he strove, mind and body to give that precious soul all that he desired.

## Chapter Seven

"It won't work."

Startled from his dark thoughts, Scott turned from watching the starlit ocean on their right. "Huh?"

Jack's pale profile eerily reflected the orange of the instrument panel, almost as though he sat in front of a fire. He didn't glance Scott's way, keeping his eyes on the road. "You're trying to think thoughts that'll break the curse."

Shock over Jack's words dispelled everything Scott had been brooding over. "What?"

Reaching up to brush back some of his loose hair, Jack smiled sadly. "Let me guess, you've been doing your best to wish the death of the vampires we're going to see? Or were you concentrating on Bryan?"

"You know that?"

"It's a good guess. Patty and Mary both tried it a few times, trying to think impure thoughts so they could break free." He chuckled hollowly. "Believe me, Scott, if it were that easy to break, it wouldn't be much of a curse."

"How did you know?"

"I can sense it. Like a cloud drifting across the moon." He glanced over. "But the moon's still there, Scott. Your heart's not behind what you're thinking."

Scott pounded a fist on his knee. "But it *is*!"

"You want it to be but you can't change your nature just like that."

Grumbling, Scott turned away to regard the ocean again. "That's not fair."

"Didn't say it was."

Scott listened to the quiet roar of the tires on the dark, lonely road. "There's nothing you can do to get out of the curse?"

"We've had this discussion."

"I know. It just seems that you should be able to..." He broke off, frustrated.

Jack's hand landed on his knee, squeezing. "I've been given a huge amount of instinctive magical ability, physical advantages and an extended lifespan. The balance of that is the curse. There is no action I can take that will change that about my life."

*So he gets to die for me.* Scott thumped his head on the passenger side window. He couldn't even enjoy his first driving trip to Mexico. He'd lived in San Diego for years and had rarely traveled outside the city. It was a crying shame he'd never taken a trip over the border. He dearly wished the reason for doing so now was pleasure rather than necessity.

Their only plan of action was for Scott to stay as close to Jack as possible. Unless fighting broke out, then he was to look for cover but stay in sight if he could. If all else failed, Scott was to get in the car and drive like a bat out of hell to safety. If no car was available, he was to run. He had a thousand dollars on him in cash courtesy of Jack, and a bank card that would allow him to withdraw funds from one of Jack's many accounts. They had fought most of the way to the Mexican border about that one. Scott had relented finally, but had promised himself that he would *not* be using the card or the money. They were going to get out of this. Somehow.

Jack slowed the car and turned down a rocky path strewn with branches from the ragged line of trees standing sentinel along the shore.

Scott gripped the handle in the passenger door. "Is this it?" He wasn't ready!

"Yes."

The car rocked as the asphalt gave way to rocks and sand. There was still a road, but not much of one. Jack stopped the car just short of the first few trees. The scraggly

things resembled beat up pencils stuck in the sand with a bunch of leaves and branches stuck on their tops instead of erasers. Bushes started to cluster about their bases toward the left where a sharp, rocky cliff rose up about the height of a two-story house. The moonless night provided no illumination to penetrate the darkness at its base.

*There are too many places to hide.* The ocean was perfectly visible since the trees were widely spaced and their trunks were slim. There was no real sign of civilization other than a rusted gate and a few poles from what used to be a chain link fence. But Scott saw a bunch of places people could be laying in wait. He was sure Jack spotted even more.

“Shit,” Jack murmured, bringing the car to a halt.

“What?”

Jack was looking through the passenger door toward the rusted gate. “It’s Bryan.”

Grabbing the dashboard, Scott leaned forward. The gate lay too far to the right to fall in the range of the headlamps. All he could see was lumps of what he took to be rocks or debris. “Are you sure? How can you...?”

But then it didn’t matter. A figure rose from behind the shallow hill on which the gate stood and walked toward them, toward the lump that Scott was now recognizing to be—or making out to be—a body lying on the ground.

A flash in front of the car distracted him. There was another figure in the light of the headlamps. A woman, non-descript and pale with a shaggy dark ponytail and a gaunt face. Her worn white t-shirt blazed bright in the harsh light.

“Lovely,” Jack grumbled.

There were more of them now, figures moving about the car and the hill by the gate. “What?” The ones Scott could see had a similar look to the one woman. Shambling. They didn’t look *exactly* like vampires in the movies, but they sure didn’t look completely human.

“They haven’t fed for awhile.”

“That’s bad?”

“Hungry vampires are *very* dangerous.”

That seemed like it should go without saying. Scott’s heart beat in his throat, his fingers digging into the shiny console.

“Come, Scott.” He turned to regard the first figure, the one by the gate, the one by the body on the ground. It was the woman’s voice, the woman from the phone call earlier. He heard her clearly, even though she was more than fifty feet away and she hadn’t shouted. “Come save your brother’s life.”

He looked to Jack.

The unicorn glanced around, taking in the vampires that surrounded the car. There were a lot of them. “*I could probably take on as many as three or four of them and still hold my own. Any more and things get dicey.*” Those blue eyes—black in the dim light from the instrument console—met his. Loose hair flowed in glorious waves about his head, neck and the shoulders of the snug light blue, long sleeved shirt he wore. A strategically placed curl covered his forehead and the tell-tale bump there. The glance was quick, as though his eyes didn’t want to stray from the vampires too long. “Let’s go.”

Petrified, Scott stayed where he was. Jack exited the car after shutting down the engine, but he left the keys in the car. He also left his door open, allowing in a wash of moist, salt-laden air. Scott’s eyes darted from Jack to each dark figure he passed as he crossed around the front of the car toward Scott’s passenger seat. *Tell him to kill them*, Scott thought, but he couldn’t. Bryan was out there, probably alive. And now Scott saw that there were many more than three or four vampires. More like a dozen. *Too many*. Why were there so many? *Because she knows what she’s dealing with*. A fit of trembling stole Scott’s breath. *Jack’s going to die*. The thought was intolerable but undeniable.

He jumped when Jack knocked on his window. Anxiously, he looked up. How could Jack be so calm and just point toward the lock? But he was. Cool and collected and so darn beautiful in the moonlight that it broke Scott’s heart to just to look up at him. Heaving a deep breath, Scott unlatched his seatbelt and opened the door. It took

an amazing amount of effort to step out to of the car and stand. Beside him, Jack squeezed his shoulder. It made him feel just a teeny bit better.

*Not enough.*

“Come, Scott.” He turned toward the woman who called to him. This had to be Margaret. It was the same voice from the phone call. She held up a bulky object, which revealed itself to be a battery-powered lamp when she turned it on. Now he could see her white face, her paleness cold and empty where Jack’s was warm and ethereal. Long, abundant blond hair fell straight about her neck and shoulders and a black blouse gaped at the neck to expose a good amount of cleavage. The rest of her remained a shadow but it was enough to see that she wore slacks instead of a skirt. Modern enough for that. Could she just be a really smart younger vampire? That’d be better, right? Her smile as she beckoned him held no warmth. “Bryan doesn’t have much time.”

He hated the sound of that. At a nudge from Jack, he started walking toward her. “What do you mean?”

She laughed, a deep, full sound that chilled him to the bone. “Come see for yourself.” She set the lamp down beside the lump he’d had to assume was a body.

It was Bryan. Lying on his side, facing Scott. He was either dead or unconscious, the twist of his upper body not comfortable enough for sleep. He wore the same shirt and jeans from the other night at the Del Fantasma, both showing signs that he’d not had them off since then. The dim lighting showed a heavy growth of stubble on his cheeks and a horrible dark bruise on the exposed side of his neck. Jack’s hand on Scott’s shoulder kept him from running forward, keeping them together. A surge of guilt poured through Scott. He’d considered leaving his brother to this. How could he?

Margaret stepped back out of the range of the lamp as Scott and Jack approached. By the time Scott could kneel by his brother’s side, she was well out of reach. The other vampires shuffled closer, ominously quiet, until they all ringed the edges of the lamplight

"He's alive," she said, as Scott put his fingers beneath Bryan's nostrils. "But he needs help."

Scott swallowed. He had no medical knowledge and his fingers were shaking so badly he didn't know if the breeze he felt was from that or from Bryan's breath. "Jack?"

"He's alive." Jack's voice was a smooth, solid balm above him. The unicorn remained standing at Scott's back. "But his heart's faltering."

"God!" Scott gasped. "Bryan."

"You should get him to a doctor," advised the woman calmly.

Scott glared up at her. Away from the main glare of the car headlights and out of range of the dim battery lamp, he could only see the vague outline of her face. Could see that she was smiling. *Bitch!* "You're Margaret?"

"I am."

Scott lay a hand on his brother's shoulder. "He thought he was in love with you."

"He should be more careful with his affections." Unaffected by the daggers Scott glared at her, she gave one of those very lazy, very European shrugs. "Time is running out. You should put your brother in your car and drive away. I'll even provide help to put him in the car. Tell the unicorn to stay put."

Scott stared. "You'll let me take Bryan away?"

"I will. And I assure you that neither you nor he will ever again hear from any of us. You have my word."

"I don't believe you."

"I can see why you might not. Nonetheless, it's true. We will have no need of you."

Her attention lifted from him to Jack, a hungry leer curling her lips. He was, after all, her prize. She took a step forward, watching Jack like a cat watches a mouse with nowhere to go.

There were thirteen of them. Most of them weren't very old, not all that far away from being human. Cannon fodder, he decided, meant to help slow him down. He wondered what she had promised them. Three of them were older, with Margaret the oldest of the bunch. She was a century or two at least. Which meant she was strong. Unfortunate, for him.

Jack waited. It was all he could do. That and make sure he knew where they all were. Soon Scott would make his decision and that decision would be in favor of his brother. It had to be. Of the two of them, Jack had something of a chance—however slim—of surviving. Bryan had none. Besides, the blood ties were stronger. No matter his feelings, Scott had no reason to sacrifice himself or his brother for a man he'd only met, even if that man happened to be a unicorn.

"So what are you saying?" Scott asked.

*Good boy, get clarification.* Although the plan was pretty clear to Jack.

"I am saying that you are free to put your brother in that lovely automobile over there and drive away. Also, you should do it soon. We might have taken a bit more blood than was necessary."

A vampire her age would know *exactly* what it would take to kill a man. From what Jack could sense, Bryan was indeed on death's door, but he did have a chance to survive given the right circumstances and care.

"What about Jack?"

"You will tell the unicorn to kneel and to remain exactly where he is."

*Simple, really.* But then, that's what he'd always been taught. That's what he'd always rallied against. All it took was exploiting a weakness of the virgin, and the near-indestructible might of the unicorn was useless. He'd known that his entire life. He'd run from it since his powers had become active. Deep inside, he'd always known it would be his downfall. Every unicorn knew it. Virgins would look to a unicorn for protection, companionship and guidance, but a scant few ever loved the unicorn enough to make the sacrifice in his favor. The fact that they could sacrifice themselves

for the unicorn rarely ever occurred to the virgin and it was another rule of the curse that the unicorn couldn't point it out. Of course not. To point that out would be to make the virgin aware of an avenue where he or she would cause themselves ultimate harm. That went against all the unicorn was.

"And if I don't?" Scott was a beautiful man to try. The situation upset him. Of course it did. The virgins always cried as they brought about the death or capture of the unicorn. Tragic, really.

The circle of vampires around them closed in by a step, forcing Scott to recognize the threat. "If you don't do exactly as I say, *how* I say it, we will attack. I grant you, the unicorn may kill some of us, but we will target *you* and your brother first. You will die."

Good strategy. Jack wondered how many of the younger vamps had really agreed to it. But then, if she filled their heads with the magic and wonder of a unicorn's blood, they might well take their chances. Seeing the blank, hungry looks on most of the faces surrounding them, Jack was frankly surprised that they hesitated at all.

The circle closed yet another step. Too close. He would protect his charge until the bitter end. Narrowing his eyes, Jack let some of his white energy spill outward from his body. It lit the space around him, encompassing Scott as well. The younger vampires fell back, raising their arms up to shield their eyes. Even the older ones squinted and averted their gaze. The woman just squinted and smiled.

Margaret gestured behind her. A young man climbed up the hill behind her. *So that's who was down there.* At another signal from her, he stepped cautiously toward the trio in the middle of the circle. "Donny will help you carry Bryan to the car."

Jack speared the brawny youth with a look, but the other's attention was fixed on the men on the ground, purposely ignoring Jack. "He's not a vampire."

"No. Donny is my pet werewolf. He will see the humans to safety."

Scott jerked up. "What?"

Jack glared.

She focused on Scott. "Donny will be perfectly well behaved if you are. I promise. He is simply insurance that you don't try and double back."

She'd thought this through. Jack was impressed.

Donny knelt on the other side of Bryan from Scott and met the other young man's eyes. Calm. Waiting. The silver-white sheen of Jack's magic made his brown tan more vivid and highlighted the gold in his dark hair.

Scott twisted so he could look up. "Jack?"

Jack looked down, drinking in the sight of those beautiful green eyes; certain this was the last he'd see of them. But he couldn't—shouldn't—drag this on. He brushed the back of one finger over Scott's cheek. "Take Bryan and go."

"But...?"

Jack shook his head, stalling Scott's protest. "This is the way it has to be."

Scott was standing and in Jack's arms faster than Jack thought he could move. "I don't want to do this," he hissed.

Keeping an eye on the vampires and the kneeling werewolf, Jack nonetheless took a selfish moment to hug Scott close, to kiss his hair. "It's okay."

"No. It's not."

"It's as okay as it can be."

"Time is running out for your brother," Margaret called.

Jack glared at her, smothering Scott's curses in the curve of his neck. The murderous thoughts tumbling through Scott's mind shadowed the light of his soul, but didn't blot it completely. He just didn't have it in him.

"I love you." The words were so soft that even the vampires might not have heard them.

But as they were spoken right underneath Jack's ear, he heard them fine. He stiffened, closing his eyes briefly. The base of his horn throbbed. *I love you too*. How shocking. He actually meant his thoughts. But he would not say the words back. It would make it too hard for Scott. "Thank you." Insulting, he knew, but better Scott

thought the love was not returned. Better Scott thought all of Jack's caring was a result of the curse. It would be easier for him later.

With supreme effort, he pried Scott away, keeping his head high, lips out of reach for a kiss. "You need to get Bryan out of here."

Scott wanted to fight him; he saw the rebellion in those wide, innocent eyes. But then the eyes blinked and turned down to see the dying man on the ground. "Fine." He stepped away, out of arm's reach.

The werewolf reached for Bryan, watching Scott. At a nod from the latter, he picked up the body and stood.

Scott turned.

"Not so fast," Margaret called. "Order the unicorn to kneel."

Perversely, Jack fell to his knees on his own.

Scott watched him, eyes hooded, lower lip twitching.

Margaret chuckled. "Very well. Order the unicorn to remain where he is. Do it now or I'll have Donny kill your brother rather than take him to the car."

The werewolf growled for emphasis.

"Stay there, Jack," Scott sneered.

"Tell him to not move from that spot, no matter who touches him."

Scott swallowed. "Don't move from that spot." A tear fell down his cheek. "No matter who touches you."

Jack drank in the sight of that face, touched by the show of emotion. *I love you.* He could say the words easily in his head, hoping Scott was too distraught to see the truth in his gaze.

The vampires drew closer as the werewolf stepped away.

"Tell him to not use his magic against us."

Scott sneered. "Don't..." His voice caught and he had to take a shuddering breath. "Don't use your magic against them."

"Tell him not to fight us."

"Don't fight them."

"I'll know if he's harmed." Jack's eyes were on Scott but his words were for Margaret and her werewolf. "If he's harmed or loses consciousness, I'll know. If you kill him, I'll know."

"I'm aware of that." She wasn't far away now. Jack could see her clearly out of the corner of his eye. "But he'll be perfectly safe. If he drives away and doesn't look back, no harm will come to him. Donny will leave them at daybreak."

Jack nodded.

Scott's misery poured off of him just like the tears streamed from his eyes.

To the left, the car door opened. That would be Donny putting Bryan inside.

"Go." Jack had to speak softly, otherwise he'd give away the lump in his throat.

A small sob burst from Scott's throat. He turned and fled. Jack watched the ring of vampires part for him. They stayed that way, allowing him to see Scott hurry to the driver's side of the BMW. Donny closed the back door, presumably having laid Bryan on the back seat. As Scott climbed in, the werewolf settled into the passenger seat.

The werewolf lowered the window, looking toward the vampires.

"You know what to do," Margaret said, her low voice carrying with the breeze.

Donny nodded.

Scott's gaze was fixed on Jack, his beautiful face marred by crying.

A few of the vampires knelt beside Jack. A cold hand reached in from the side to brush hair away from the side of his neck. He flinched, but could do no more. As a test, he tried to make himself summon magic, but he couldn't. Even the glow from before had faded. His horn throbbed but did not sprout forth from his forehead. He was helpless to move, helpless to defend himself.

*Don't touch him!* Scott's scream couldn't get past his tightly clenched teeth.

He watched past the werewolf as the dark figures slowly descended on Jack. Jack, who knelt so bright, so magnificent among them. Stock still. A stallion trapped by invisible bonds. Invisible bonds that Scott had placed there.

“Let’s get going.”

Scott glared at the man beside him.

Who stared back. “Your brother’s dying back there.”

Why bother with a scathing retort? It wouldn’t do him any good. There was no way out of this. Angrily, he reached for the steering wheel, only to find that the seat was back way too far for him to drive comfortably. He spent a few moments, cursing through the tears streaming down his face as he adjusted the seat closer. He ignored the ‘fasten seatbelt’ warning. What did he care if he died?

*If he died.*

If he died, things would be better. His death would free Jack. It would doom Bryan, but how did he know Bryan wasn’t doomed already?

“Hey, let’s go.”

Besides, the death of two humans didn’t measure up to the loss of a unicorn, did they? He was just an ordinary person, a statistic, a consumer. Jack was a thing of beauty, a creature of legend, a magical being. Such a loss had to be devastating!

“Do you know how to drive a stick?”

Jack had explained to Scott that another unicorn would take his place. As soon as he died, the powers of one of his relatives would become active. Another unicorn would, effectively, be born. But they wouldn’t be Jack. They *couldn’t* be Jack. Jack was unique. Jack was special. Jack was willing to die for him even though he despised the curse that forced it on him. Jack had been wonderful to Scott even though Scott was his downfall.

“Get out. I’ll drive.”

Scott heard the car door open. Heard it close. The werewolf was coming around the front of the car.

Scott slammed on the gas. "Jack!" he cried, flinching as the werewolf's body rolled up on the hood of the car, hoping like hell Jack could hear his words, "Move! Kill them! Use your magic! Get them!"

## Chapter Eight

As though a rope had been cut, Jack swayed forward, shocked. He heard Scott screaming but couldn't make out the words. His sudden ability to move and the magic that resurfaced in his blood made the words obvious enough.

*No!*

Unable to see to his own safety first, Jack surged to his feet, running toward the car almost before he gained his feet. Bodies in his way were as inconsequential as branches to be brushed aside. His body shifted from human to unicorn in the blink of an eye, his bestial form giving him greater speed.

Behind him, vampires shrieked. Fingers with long, sharp nails tore at his sides and ripped at the tuft of his tail but he barely felt them. A heavy body barreled into him, strong arms surrounding his neck. Strong enough to slow him, turning him slightly as teeth bit into him. Enraged, he kicked with a cloven hoof, breaking a kneecap. The vampire held on, gorging on Jack's blood. Another vampire climbed aboard Jack's back. Instinctively, Jack lashed out with his hooves, rearing and bucking. Only three vampires managed to hold on, more interested in drinking than anything else. Jack dropped to his knees and rolled, pushing raw, white magic from himself into his assailants. The magic stunned them, filling them with dumb euphoria. Losing

consciousness, they fell to the sand, perhaps unaware when Jack rolled his bulk over them, ripping into fragile bodies with his hooves as he scrambled to his feet.

He couldn't stay to make sure they were dead. Scott was still alive and still in danger. The car flew over the rise of sand then sped toward the ocean. Trumpeting to the sky, Jack charged down the ragged, broken path left by the tires.

The car rushed toward the churning water. Scott spun the wheel but loose sand did not allow for much traction. He managed to angle the BMW but he didn't dare take his foot off the gas pedal. He didn't know how he was going to escape but moving seemed to be the best option.

The car shook as something heavy landed on the trunk. A frightened shriek tore from Scott's throat when he looked in the rearview mirror. Donny had survived getting hit by the car and seemed none the worse for wear. Scott couldn't tell what he held onto, but his fist came down on the back windshield, creating a spider web of cracks that obscured him from view. Scott swerved, thinking to shake Donny, only that took the speeding car into the waves. It spun a little before Scott could get back a measure of control.

Another crack of safety glass. This one to his right. He screamed. Margaret was there, trying to break her way into the car. Where had she come from?!

Screaming, terrified, Scott spun the wheel again, thinking to throw them off. The car did a 180, skidding sideways into the surf. Stopped. Scott slammed his foot on the gas but no forward motion. *So dead.* Panicked, Scott opened his door, thinking to run, unable to say in the car to get caught.

In the distance, the sound of an equine scream gave him pause. Glancing up, he saw Jack in unicorn form crashing into what looked like a wolf not all that far away. *Jack!*

Scott spilled into the frothing surf. Jack was free! There were no vampires chasing behind him, just the werewolf. If Scott could just stay alive long enough, Jack might be able to save him. God, maybe he should have stayed in the car!

His head yanked back, his braid caught by something. Wide-eyed, he looked up.

From where she knelt on the roof of the car, Margaret hissed down at him, mouth twisted in a sneer. "Damn you," she growled, claspng his neck with one hand. She didn't bother to bite him.

Snapping his neck was quicker.

There was pain. Then there was nothing.

*Too late!*

Jack felt Scott die, knew it as surely as he knew how to breathe. The magic of the curse dissipated instantly and he knew he could now turn and run for safety. He could be free. There was nothing tying him to this beach, to the group of remaining vampires.

Except vengeance!

Shrieking defiance, he lashed out with magic, snaring the werewolf in a punishing web of shining, ephemeral threads. It wasn't a spell he could do often. He saved it because he could only do it once within a few days' period. But panic overrode caution, rage melted prudence. The furry beast fell to the sand with a helpless yelp, twitching. Jack reared to clear himself of the body, then pounded all of his weight into his front hooves as they came crashing down on the werewolf's skull. The shapeshifter might be able to heal the damage, but it wouldn't be any time soon.

Forgetting everything else, Jack launched himself toward the car with tires submerged in surf. Margaret squatted on the roof, holding Scott's body with one hand by the neck. Meeting his gaze, she hissed, dropped Scott, turned and fled.

Perhaps she thought he'd stop to see to the body. Perhaps she thought he wouldn't know Scott was dead. Maybe she didn't remember his warning. If so, it was her folly. Pouring magic into his gait, he galloped after her. She was fast, but not nearly fast enough. He bowled her over and bent over her body, his weight behind the thrust that pierced her body with his horn. She shrieked once, then blood from her ruptured heart

ejecting from her open mouth, splattering his coat. Furious, he tossed his head, ripping the hole in her body wider, wanting her to suffer more even though he knew she was beyond it.

He pulled himself free and spun, charging back up the beach. A few of the vampires had revived enough to come after him. He drove them down and killed them all, the merciless rage of a beast filled with heartache overriding any modicum of mercy.

At last, bloodied and battered, he turned back toward the car. Rage sank to suffocating depression with each plodding step. He clearly saw Scott's body, wedged in the open door, his legs hidden by the shushing surf.

Jack shifted back to human as he knelt in the water, the better to open the door fully and roll Scott into his arms. The smaller man's head lolled at a sickening angle, green eyes open and unseeing. A sob caught in Jack's throat as he hugged his lover's body close. Never had his heart hurt this much. He had mourned the passing of others in his time, had witnessed friends and family die. He'd pined when Chris finally broke their bond. But it had never hurt like this. It felt as though a piece of his soul had been ripped away. If he'd doubted his love for Scott before, he couldn't do so now.

Gathering Scott's body in his arms, he carried the smaller man out of the surf to the damp sand. Carefully, he lay the body down and turned Scott's head so that it just looked like he was sleeping. Leaving him there for the moment, Jack returned to the car. Using both physical and magical brawn, he managed to push the vehicle far enough out of the surf that it wouldn't get washed away. Once he was sure it would stay, he opened the back door and checked on Bryan. Scott's brother had been thrown to the floor of the car in a profoundly uncomfortable position but he was still alive. Tears streaming down his cheeks, Jack used his healing powers to fix the damage to Bryan's heart. He prodded at one of the wounds the vampires had left on his arm and let it bleed a little onto the wound on Bryan's neck. Not much, just enough to seep in. The little bit of unicorn blood would fade before the morning, but for now it would help the

recovery of blood flow through his system. He would live. Jack put a sleeping spell on him, arranged him more comfortably in the back seat of the BMW, and left him there. If nothing else, they had at least accomplished Scott's need to save his brother.

Kneeling in the sand at Scott's side, Jack stared at his lover's face. He refused to think of the body before him as a corpse. He had one last option that might just provide a miracle. Legend had it, that a unicorn could resurrect the dead. But only on a very limited scale. He could do it for true love. *His* true love. A reciprocal love that was all encompassing between both parties. He was not permitted to talk about this ability and it only worked if the one he loved, the one to whom he was bonded, had sacrificed his or her own life to save his. Only after his true love had performed this ultimate sacrifice, could Jack even try resurrection. To do it, he had to risk his own life and give up his powers. If he was wrong and tried to resurrect someone who didn't truly love him, he would die and his particular unicorn legacy would not be passed on. He smoothed a hand over Scott's cool cheek. They'd only known each other a little more than two days. Could it be love? Scott had put himself in danger. Was that enough to be considered a sacrifice of his life for Jack's? There might have been a more selfish reason behind his actions.

*I love you.* Scott had said the words. Jack chose to believe them. He had no other choice. Despite the short time they'd known each other, he *felt* more for Scott than he had for any other single person alive. He didn't want to live without Scott. The other man's death created a burning, gaping hole in Jack's heart that threatened to kill him just as surely as what he now intended to do.

Decided, he closed his eyes, gathered his power and reached up to grasp the base of the horn that thrust from his forehead. The metal-like matter of the horn heated, responding to his intentions. Jack's hand and forearm began to burn with strength that he'd need, draining the rest of his body. It felt like all moisture drained from Jack's

veins, his muscles atrophying while he was still alive. He gasped, falling forward, barely catching himself on his free hand.

When the moment came, his hand moved of its own accord. Or perhaps it was the horn itself. Excruciating pain seared through his head, worse than any headache he could have imagined. He might have screamed but the ability to hear was beyond him, unfathomable beyond the pain. It lasted forever, testing his resolve. Perhaps he could have stopped it but he discarded that thought before it could fully form.

It broke.

Energy, blood, life-force, Jack didn't know what it was, couldn't see properly, but something poured from the place where his horn had been. With the last of his energy, he pushed himself to the side, collapsing atop Scott. He closed eyes blinded with pain, head pillowed on Scott's cold chest, trying to breathe through what might be the last few painful moments of his life.

## Chapter Nine

Warmth. On his face. A slight breeze. A rhythmic roar. Grit at his back. Something with a hard edge poking into the back of one shoulder. Squinching his face, Scott tried to open his eyes. It took two tries to crack the muck that had glued his upper lids to his lower but his eyes opened. Only to snap shut again as scant protection against the bright of the sun.

Where was he?

It took too much time for his thoughts to reach his arm, to raise his hand to his eyes for shade. His fingers were covered with sand. A strange, humming throb seemed to pulse at the back of his eyeballs. Again he opened his eyes, wincing at the slice of fire in his skull before his eyesight adjusted under the shadow of his fingers.

His other arm wouldn't move. It was caught under something. In fact, half of him was caught under something. With effort, he turned his head. His neck hurt, the muscles protesting as though bruised. But he twisted it, tilted his head down. Saw what was draped on his chest. The hair was wet but the color clued him in immediately. Light gray in this state, but clean and brushed it would be satiny platinum.

*Jack?* He tried to speak the man's name but the sound was only a croak in a dry, rasping throat. Licking his lips, tasting the salt that laced them, he tried again. "Jack?" For added measure, he jostled his shoulder.

A twitch. A soft groan. Then Jack's head rolled a little. The hand from the arm that had been resting across Scott's belly slowly slid up to his chest. Once there, Jack used it

as leverage to push back to his elbow, mostly off of Scott. Only then did he look up. Those crystal blue eyes widened in evident surprise. "Scott?"

Scott nodded.

Jack's hand made it to his chin. His gaze tracked his finger's progress over Scott's jaw. "Scott."

Alarmed, Scott watched tears well in those gorgeous blue eyes. Instinctively, he reached up to cup Jack's cheek. "Jack, what...?"

Their gazes met again and memories flooded back. The vampires. The beach. The car. The werewolf. Margaret on the roof of the BMW. Margaret grabbing his throat. Pain.

He gaped. "Jack...?"

Jack shifted, wincing. He brought himself further up Scott's body then set gentle fingers to the Scott's neck, studying it intently. "Are you all right?"

"Jack?" His voice cracked. "I... did I... I thought she killed me."

Jack closed his eyes, fingers resting at Scott's pulse. More tears poured down the sparse layer of sand that had blown on his cheek. How long had they been lying there? "She did."

"She...?" Tremors took Scott's body.

Jack was there. Jack gathered him up, awkwardly hugging him close. Scott forced his arms up and around Jack, squeezing as tightly as he could.

"What happened?"

"Shhh," Jack soothed. "All that matters now is that you're alive." He kissed Scott's temple. "And you're safe."

"B-but...?"

"No. No, please. Not right now. Just—" Jack's voice broke on a heartbreaking sob, "—just let me hold you."

## Chapter Ten

“Call me when you get there.”

Bryan nodded, eyes on the floor at Scott’s feet.

Disregarding his brother’s hesitation, Scott gathered the bigger man into a hug. It took a second, but Bryan finally returned it, even squeezing Scott tight. Once.

They broke apart and Bryan half-turned to face Jack. He was able to lift his gaze as high as Jack’s shoulder, but no higher. He extended his hand. “Thanks. For... everything.”

Without comment, Jack took the hand and shook it. “You’re welcome. Please do call so Scott doesn’t worry.”

Bryan nodded, already turning toward the condo’s front door. “Bye.”

“Bye.” Scott watched his brother’s back until the door closed, and even for a long moment after that. He resisted the urge to follow him out and watch him all the way to his car.

A strong arm draped around Scott’s shoulders from behind. “He’ll be fine.”

“Will he?”

“Yes.”

“You don’t think he’ll go off and find another vampire?”

“Truthfully? No. I think his vampire days are over.”

Leaning back into Jack, Scott sighed. “I hope you’re right.”

Lips brushed his temple. "I'm always right."

Scott snorted, batting at Jack's arm. "Yeah, sure."

Chuckling, Jack kissed his cheek then slid away from him. "Are you hungry?"

Scott turned to watch his lover head for the kitchen. Jeans lovingly molded to what Scott happened to think was the finest ass in the world. Jack wore no shirt and his newly short hair exposed his entire broad back for Scott's viewing pleasure. They'd both cut their hair after the ordeal. Scott's ponytail now only extended just a little beyond his shoulders and Jack's riot of silky platinum curls now barely passed his chin. Following into the kitchen, Scott continued to appreciate the sight of Jack as he opened the refrigerator to look inside. Sunlight streamed in through the west-facing window, highlighting the light gold sheen of a tan that Jack now sported. Seemed that beyond being a unicorn, he could actually tan. And sunburn. The latter, which Scott still found amusing and Jack found insulting.

All human. His lover was just as mortal as he was now, just as vulnerable. Well, okay, not quite as vulnerable since Jack had undergone combat training at some point in his past so he was still pretty handy at protecting what was his. But he could die now, he could get sick, he didn't have magical powers that would alert him to danger, heal any wound or—best of all—force him to do Scott's bidding. Only a faint scar remained in the center of his forehead where his horn used to be. He had given up all the good and the bad of his existence on the one chance that their love was the real deal.

Heart full, Scott padded barefoot across the cool kitchen tiles and inserted himself between Jack and the refrigerator. Pressing into Jack's chest, he urged his lover backward, letting the refrigerator door close behind him.

Jack chuckled, willingly backing into the island that separated the kitchen from the dining area, his arms automatically encompassing Scott. "I take if you're not hungry?"

Scott spread his legs a little and pressed his cock against Jack's thigh. "I'm hungry." His arms tightened around Jack's neck, forcing the taller man to bend. "For you."

“Mmmm.” Jack sank into a brief kiss, his hands roaming low over Scott’s bare back. “It is the first time we’ve really been alone in awhile.”

True. After waking on the beach, they’d had to call help to come and rescue them since the BMW had no hopes of starting. They never did find any vehicles that might have brought the vampires and the werewolf to the beach. Jack had used the time while they waited to explain to Scott what had happened. Although words of love had been exchanged, and quite a bit of making out had occurred, neither Scott nor Jack had been in any shape to make love. Once they were rescued by some friends of Jack’s who helped with the corpses as well, they’d driven back to San Diego with Bryan. The next few days were exhaustive as Jack had to get in touch with his family both to assure them that he was still alive and to look for his successor. It seemed there was a second cousin who was pleased that Jack was still around, but not all that happy to find that he was now a unicorn. Meantime, Scott had his hands full dealing with Bryan, who was not remotely comfortable in Jack’s presence for a number of reasons. All this had resulted in Scott and Jack sleeping odd hours, and not always together.

A week later, Scott had enough. Jack’s personal life was now mostly sorted out. Bryan was headed back to the house he used to share with Scott. He and Jack had purposely arranged this weekend to be alone together and Scott didn’t plan to waste a second of it.

Impatient, he wove his fingers into Jack’s curls and forcefully guided him into a long, involved kiss that left them both breathless. By the time he released Jack from the kiss, they were both straining in their jeans. He met Jack’s gaze, letting every bit of love, lust, and *need* show in his gaze. “Fuck me, Jack. I need you.”

Jack groaned, reaching down to firmly cup Scott’s ass. “Your wish.” He stepped from the counter. “My command.”

Easily, Scott jumped, wrapping his legs and arms around Jack, reveling in his lover’s strength as Jack carried him from the kitchen and down the short hall to their

bedroom. *Their* bedroom. They'd yet to move all of Scott's things in, but Jack's home was now most definitely his as well.

Jack lowered him on the bed, kissing him all the while. Scott clung like a limpet, devouring Jack's mouth, hardly letting him move.

Jack laughed, finally managing to free his mouth just enough to speak. "You need to let me go if we're going to get naked."

Scott growled, gave him one more fierce kiss, then unwrapped his arms and legs. As Jack stood, he shimmied out of his jeans. Because Jack was moving entirely too slowly, Scott snatched the bottle of lube from its place on the nightstand and poured some onto his palm.

"Impatient, aren't you?" Jack mused with a smile, watching Scott's hands as he dropped his own jeans to the floor.

"Yes." Scott spread his legs wide, reaching down past his cock, past his balls. He gasped when his own wet fingers probed his ass. "I need your cock inside me now." 'Cock'. He'd learned to love that word.

Jack stood there and watched, not making a move to touch his own erection. Scott looked absolutely edible all spread out before him, two then three wet fingers pressing into his own little puckered entrance. His neglected cock oozed pre-cum onto his smooth, flat belly and that riot of dark red hair formed a fiery halo about his head.

"Seems my innocent virgin's turned into quite a slut."

Those sexy green eyes glowered at him as Scott gave himself a particularly hard shove with his fingers. "Only for you."

Jack smiled, kneeling on the bed. "That's as it should be." He slid his hands from Scott's knees to his ankles, wrapping his hands around them so he could bend Scott's legs back. "Lube me up."

Without hesitation, Scott removed his fingers from his body and brought both hands up to grip Jack's cock. Jack swayed, eyes closed as he struggled not to come just

from the squeeze of those wonderful hands. Scott's palms twisted around Jack's shaft, sliding up and down, coating his entire length. The extra squeeze at the tip of him wasn't quite necessary but God it felt good!

"Enough," he groaned, opening his eyes to see Scott's impish grin. "Keep doing that and I won't have anything left to fuck you with."

"Can't have that," Scott growled. He switched his hold, now guiding Jack's cock down until the tip pressed his waiting entrance. "Need you to fuck me."

Jack pushed forward, a little cautious since it had been a few days since they'd done this. But Scott showed no signs of discomfort. Jack knew that the only pain his scowl reflected was the sweet agony of pleasure surging through his body. Pressing Scott's legs back farther, Jack leaned in, sinking deeper into his lover's tight, velvet depths. Scott whimpered and mewled beneath him, switching his death grip on the bed's sheets to a nail-gouging hold on Jack's shoulders.

Jack's hands slipped from Scott's legs to the bed, Scott's knees draped over his elbows as he lowered closer. "Is this what you need?"

"Yes!"

"Just this?"

"No. You. Always. Fuck me. Now!"

There may no longer be a curse that forced him to do Scott's bidding, but the man still owned Jack's heart. He could no more disobey those bleeding little pleas now than he could when he was still a unicorn. He pulled back and slammed back in; reveling in Scott's anguished cries. Lips hovering over Scott's, he drank in those beautiful sounds as he thrust into his lover's body.

"Jack!"

He knew that one. Scott was almost there. He just needed a little something to shove him over the edge. Jack stilled, cock halfway out. Ignoring, Scott's insistent

whimper, he lowered his lips toward Scott's ear. "I love you," he whispered, then thrust home. Hard.

Scott exploded, screaming, nearly bucking Jack off as his body convulsed wildly. Satisfied, Jack let himself go, pouring into Scott's squeezing channel.

Jack waited until Scott subsided, panting, sweating, eyes closed. Disheveled. Gorgeous. Carefully, he eased out of Scott's body and rolled to lower himself on the bed beside his lover.

Like a magnet, Scott rolled to face him, cuddling close. "I love you," he murmured, eyes open just enough for the green to burn into Jack's heart.

Jack smiled, stroking Scott's jaw. This was the person for whom he'd risked everything, for whom he'd given up power and near immortality. His heart swelled. Did he regret it? Not one damn bit.

The End

## Unicorn Recipe

### Ingredients

1 dash Midori Melon Liqueur  
1 part Vodka  
1 part Brandy  
1 part Coffee Liqueur  
1 dash Cointreau  
2 parts Irish Cream  
2 parts Milk

### Directions

Pour all ingredients into cocktail shaker, shake & strain into martini glass or champagne cup. Garnish with red straws & tacky plastic animals (preferably horses or mermaids) Add parasols & slice of orange if available.

Serve Unicorn in a Martini Glass

## About the author

Jet is a 38 year old Gemini. College graduate, with a B.F.A. in acting that I've never used professionally. Been writing all my life for fun.

The artwork and the website have been around since 1998. If you go into the gallery archives, you'll still see my earliest attempts.

In 2005, I was finally published! Dream come true for me.

Now? I just hope I can continue to write and do artwork. It's really what I enjoy.

### League of Amazing Writers



**Codename:** Rhae

**Author Name:** Jet Mykles

**Hair:** Black

**Eye Color:** Brown

**Height:** 5'5"

**Skills:** Rapier and dagger and shapeshifting into a panther

**Weaknesses:** beautiful, gorgeous or just downright pretty men

**Strengths:** Crafty and fondness for verbal intrigue

**Preferred Genres:** fantasy and contemporary with fantastical elements

**Website:** [www.jetmykles.com](http://www.jetmykles.com)

The image of Rhae is Copyright © [Chris Achilleos](#) and is used with permission.