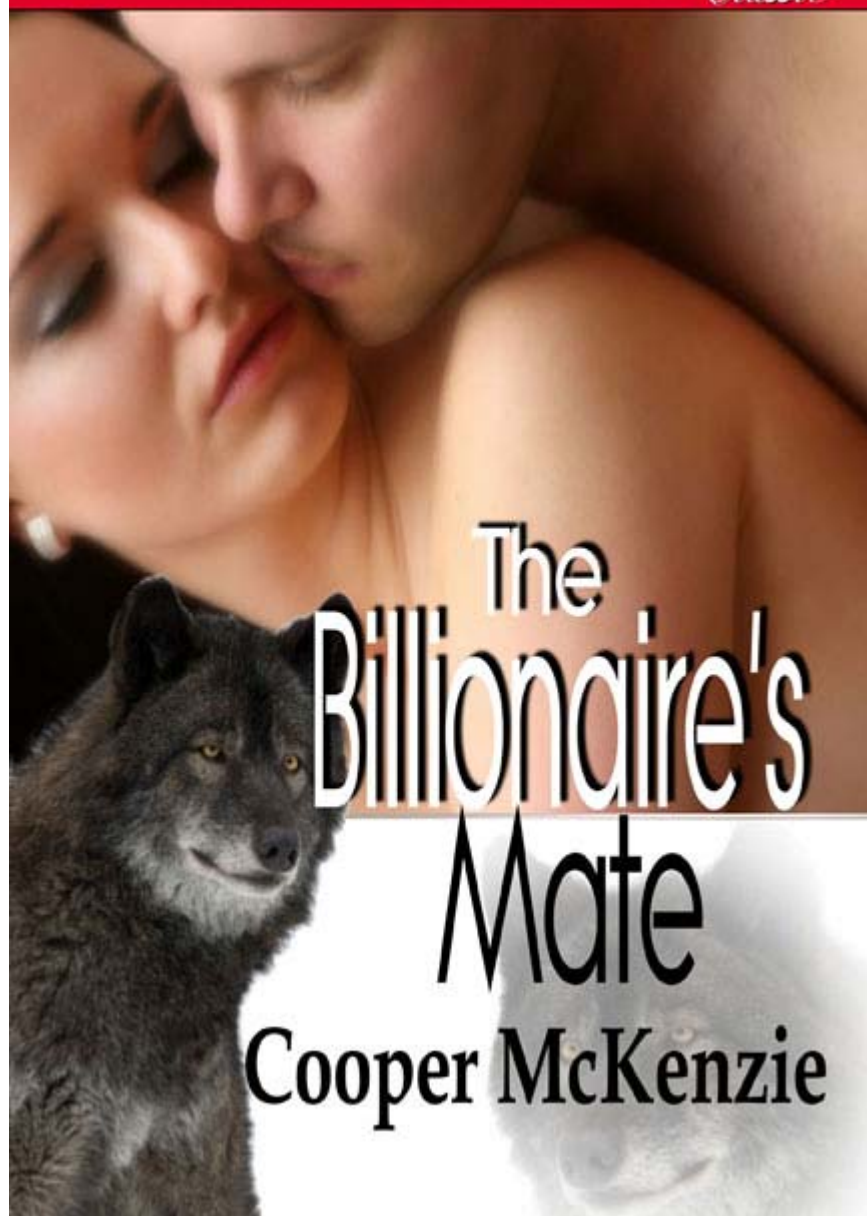


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THE BILLIONAIRE'S MATE

Cooper McKenzie

EROTIC ROMANCE



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A SIREN PUBLISHING BOOK

IMPRINT: Erotic Romance

THE BILLIONAIRE'S MATE

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Letter from Cooper McKenzie
Regarding Ebook Piracy

Dear Readers,

I love writing my books and interacting with you, my readers. I love imagining and creating the worlds and characters and situations found in my books. Writing is also my job and I work hard at it.

I get upset when my books are pirated. This means that someone has stolen my work.

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Please respect my hard work and creativity and do not pirate my ebooks.

With deep gratitude,

Cooper McKenzie

DEDICATION

To M.J. Thanks for your friendship.

THE BILLIONAIRE'S MATE

COOPER MCKENZIE

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Chapter 1

What do you want?

The voice in her head always attacked Margot Jackson when she didn't want to think about such things. In the shower, washing dishes, or trying to sleep was when the voice refused to leave her alone. She didn't know if the question originated in Heaven, Hell, or her own needy heart. Wherever it came from, she wished it would go back there and leave her alone.

What do you want?

Tonight the dark, sexy voice curled around her, inviting her to make a wish for anything her heart desired. She'd answered before, though nothing happened. What made her think tonight would be any different?

Her "I want" list was long, encompassing every aspect of her life in one form or another. Getting realistic, it came down to two things—money and a kind, good-looking, well-hung man who knew how to use what he'd been given.

A kind, good-looking, well-hung man with buckets of money would narrow her list even further. Especially if he stepped out of one of the dozens of erotic romance novels she read and reread and drooled over. A big, beautiful alpha male. She'd even take a paranormal man. Maybe not a vampire, but she wouldn't turn away a shape-shifting man with a horn dog's sex drive and a lot of money in

the bank.

But that would never happen. Erotic romance heroes didn't step out of books, no matter how much she wanted one. Even if they did, a man like that would never look twice in her direction. No one ever looked at her with lust shining in his eyes. Not even her ex-husband.

She knew she was too short for her weight and too round to fit the dictates of fashion. An emotional eater, she hated dieting, and exercise never pared off the extra pounds and inches from around her waist and hips. She had neither the money nor the style sense to keep her wardrobe updated, even if she'd wanted to. Comfortable, classic clothes were more important to her than which designer was hot, hot, hot this season.

Margot had experienced a handful of one-night stands and one relationship that lasted six months, all BM—before marriage. Her marriage to William lasted fifteen years, ending three years before when he'd left her for a woman half her size and two-thirds her age.

At forty-two, she now slept alone and stayed away from men. Instead, she immersed herself in the fantasies of happily ever after found in romance novels.

When she'd discovered the erotic romance genre and the explicit and imaginative sex they contained, she began buying the sexy books in bulk, though her budget squealed in protest.

Each evening after a day at the bank where she worked as a clerk, she came home to read about hot sex and relationships that seemed to work, at least until the words *The End* scrolled into view. If only *she* could find a romance-book hero of her own.

What do you want?

The voice persisted, becoming demanding. She would never be able to fall asleep if she did not find a way to silence it. She needed her rest tonight. She needed to be sharp and prepared and wide awake for the job interview she had first thing in the morning. She'd survived the first two rounds with Thomasson Enterprises' underlings, and she supposed she passed the physical and background checks

since they'd scheduled a third interview with the woman she would actually be working for. All she had to do was get through tomorrow, and hopefully she would have a new job.

"What do you want?"

"Enough already. I want my own erotic romance story. I want to meet the perfect man. Good looking and sexy with lots of money in the bank and a cock he knows how to use to satisfy us both. A man who is nurturing and protective and who loves me as I am, curves and all. A man who doesn't care about my potential and whether I can achieve it. I want one of those romance-book sex gods to take human form, fall instantly in love with me, and take care of me for the rest of my life. If I can't have that, then I want a new job that pays really well. A job that's interesting and will fulfill my need to be a caregiver. There, happy? That's what I want. Now leave me the hell alone."

Rolling over, Margot punched her pillow several times before pulling the covers over her head until only her face was exposed to the cool air. With a weary sigh, she pulled her legs up closer to her chest and willed herself to fall asleep.

* * * *

No one ever accused billionaire Adam Thomasson of being a hero. Ruthless, hell-driven, son of a bitch, type A, alpha male bastard who *always* got what he wanted were more accurate descriptions used by both friends and enemies.

One of the few people who didn't feel that way was his mother. She understood that his genetic makeup as much as his type A personality drove him. As a shape shifter, he *had* to be in charge and take care of those he cared about.

Stalking into the lobby of the Thomasson Enterprises' building where a dozen accountants, twice that many attorneys, and who knew how many support staff kept the company growing even when other

companies floundered, Adam wanted to howl in frustration. After a week of negotiations for a European conglomerate he'd been trying to buy for three years, the deal had died at the eleventh hour. The owner backed out because his board didn't approve of Adam's choice of ties or some such shit.

He'd climbed off the corporate jet exhausted and looked forward to a long run around his fifty-acre estate just outside of town followed by a hot shower and a dozen hours of sleep. Then Sam reminded him it was Thursday morning, and he had just enough time to make it across town for weekly breakfast with his mother. Usually these two-hour breakfasts were his time to relax and catch up as well as make sure that Joel and Mercedes were taking good care of her.

Unfortunately, this week was not the relaxing visit he'd hoped it would be. His mother had spent the entire meal reminding him he was thirty-five years old, and it was past time he grew serious about finding his mate. He listened respectfully as she went on about the happiness and contentment he would find with her, once he claimed the mate the universe intended just for him. Though tempted, he did not snarl at her that he'd been looking for her since high school and was beginning to give up hope that she was anywhere to be found.

His mother also reminded him that his presence was required at a charity auction that evening. She was part of the committee that decided a bachelor auction would be the perfect way to raise money for renovating the local historic theater.

He was exhausted, jet lagged, and jittery from too much coffee and too little sleep. His faded blue jeans, scuffed cowboy boots, and battered leather jacket were comfortable for traveling but not appropriate for running a multi-billion dollar company. He was also an hour late arriving at the office, and Adam Thomasson was *never* late.

Halfway across the lobby, his stepped faltered as he inhaled a glorious scent. Closing his eyes, he sniffed the air again. An enticing combination of vanilla, cinnamon, and honey wrapped around him

and cut through his negative emotions instantly. From one heartbeat to the next, he was hard and horny and anxious to claim his mate.

It was her. His woman. The mate he'd been looking for since puberty. He didn't have to go looking for her as he'd promised his mother just twenty minutes before. She had found him. But how had she known?

Opening his eyes, he swept the lobby. Which one? Three women and a man waited for appointments. Adam dismissed the man immediately. No way would the fates mate him with a man. But which one? He couldn't just go up and sniff each woman's neck. Not only would it get him slapped, but what would he do once he singled her out? Fall on his knees and beg her to mate him?

No, he had to be more discreet. Filling his lungs again with the sweet smell of his mate, he finished crossing the room and passed through the frosted glass doors that separated the lobby from the inner workings of the office. He stopped in the open doorway to the first office he came to. Sarah would know what was going on. Sarah knew everything that happened in the company, even if he didn't.

"Who are the people in the lobby?" he asked the older woman who looked harried as she piled several files together.

"Candidates to be the personal assistant you promised me."

Adam frowned. "Why are they all here at once?"

"Like you, I'm running late. How is your mother?"

"She's demanding I find my mate."

Sarah smiled her "indulge the boss" smile. "And?"

Sarah Hansen had been the first employee of Thomasson Enterprises seventeen years before when Adam started the company in the shed in his parents' backyard. As such, she knew all of Adam's secrets, including that of his true nature. She was also like a second mother to him as well as a trusted advisor. She and his mother talked daily and were of the same mind that he needed to find a mate instead of dating an endless parade of beautiful, but shallow, arm candy.

"Finding one's life mate isn't as easy as you might think." Adam

turned toward his office, but he changed his mind when Sarah followed him into the hall. When she went into the conference room, he followed and took a seat in the corner. Sarah frowned at him but did not order him out of the room.

Once seated, Adam opened the file she offered him and looked over the contents. His photographic memory came in handy as he scanned the pages, which held everything he might want to know about one Margot Jackson. Handing the folder back, he nodded. He was ready. Sarah picked up the phone and dialed the receptionist.

* * * *

Margot flipped through an old copy of a woman's magazine she thought was offensive. She'd seen the magazine before at the store, and every week it touted a new diet that would blast off the pounds as well as new ways to keep a man hot and horny and other nonsense. And each issue seemed to contradict the week before. She'd already gone through several old issues of business magazines and one on health and fitness. It had been an hour since her arrival, and no one had bothered to explain what the holdup was. Instead, every fifteen minutes another much younger, better-dressed businessperson walked in, gave their name to the receptionist, and took a seat.

She was ready to leave when he stalked through the room. His faded jeans, cowboy boots, and a black leather jacket looked like he'd worn them around the world and back. Except for the clothes, he looked like he'd just stepped off the cover of one of her erotic romance novels. She snapped her mouth closed and discreetly wiped the corners of her mouth to make sure she wasn't drooling.

Her fingers itched with the need to run through the curly, black hair that hugged his scalp. His bright turquoise eyes were full of anger. He looked like a thundercloud ready to explode. Halfway across the room, he stopped. A look of surprise crossed his face before he closed his eyes and took a deep breath. When he opened his

eyes, the anger was gone, and he swept the room with a sharp, assessing gaze.

When she met his bright blue-green eyes, her stomach flipped and she stopped breathing. He was gorgeous.

Her panties grew damp just looking at him. No man, not even her ex-husband, had ever turned her on just by walking in the room and looking at her. Before she could throw herself at his boots, he spun on his heel and disappeared through the frosted glass door behind the receptionist's desk. That was when she recognized him. That gorgeous man was Adam Thomasson.

A few minutes later, a phone rang. After a short conversation, the woman manning the front desk looked up. "Margot Jackson?"

"Yes." Margot picked up her purse and stood.

"Through that door and down the hall, second door to the left."

"Thank you," Margot said as she crossed to the frosted glass door the man had just walked through. She thought she smelled him, earthy, musky, and male, then chided herself for being fanciful.

She paused for a moment before the second door down the hall to the left.

"Be smart, be cooperative, and do not bend," she murmured to herself as she lifted her hand. Knocking twice, she winced when it sounded too loud in the silent hallway.

"Come in."

Opening the door, she swallowed when she saw *him* sitting off in the corner.

"Good morning, Ms. Jackson. Please sit down." The woman sitting at the long conference table waved her forward.

Once seated, Margot folded her hands together in her lap so they wouldn't see her fingers nervously twisting together. Could she get through the next few minutes without making a fool of herself by drooling on the table or throwing herself at the sex god sitting in the corner?

Chapter 2

Vanilla, cinnamon, and honey wrapped around him as soon as she sat down. A moment later, the scent of her arousal added to the sweet aroma filling the room. Blood surged into his cock, and Adam was happy he'd remained seated. Leaning back, he crossed his right leg over his left thigh, hoping to give his swelling cock more room while hiding the sudden bulge in his jeans. He swallowed and fought the urge to jump over the table to get to his mate.

Margot Jackson might not be beautiful by today's standards, but he'd never gone for the anorexic, long-haired, waif-like creatures that populated the world these days. He preferred a woman who looked like a woman. Margot's auburn hair glinted red and gold under the lights. The shaggy pixie cut suited her oval face. Freckles dusted her nose, cheeks, and forehead, showing she wasn't afraid of the sun, but didn't tan well. Golden brown eyes sparkled with intelligence. The few lines around her eyes proved she smiled easily, though he also noted lines between her feathery brows from worrying.

Her body was voluptuous with the curves a woman should have. Curves a man could hold on to as he loved her. Curves telling the world she was a woman. Margot Jackson was perfect. Thank the gods, he'd found his mate.

The background check Sarah ran told him she was forty-two years old and divorced with no children. She looked much younger, though he saw both pain and wisdom deep into her eyes.

The financial check Sarah put together proved she paid her bills on time. She rented a small house in an older development near the commercial district. It wasn't a safe neighborhood, and he couldn't

wait to move her out of there. Her drug test was clean. She had no diseases, though her blood pressure was a little high. Probably due to stress, he surmised.

He sat back as Sarah began the interview, though before Margot Jackson sat down, he'd already decided she couldn't work for Thomasson Enterprises. She belonged to him.

* * * *

"I am Sarah Hansen. You're here to interview for the personal assistant position?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Ms. Hansen studied her resume a moment before laying it down and folding her hands over it. "Your resume seems to have a rather large hole in it, Ms. Jackson. What were you doing up until three years ago?"

"I was married. My ex-husband didn't like me working outside the home."

"And why are you interested in this position?"

Though Margot focused on the woman asking questions, she couldn't help but notice the man's frown after she spoke of her ex-husband. Did he not approve of a man taking care of his wife? Or was it the sour tone she could never seem to erase when talking about her ex-husband?

"The bank where I work has made staff cut backs. As a single woman, I'm the one responsible for the bills."

Keep your answers short. Don't ramble or whine about how unfair life can be.

After a few more questions, none of which were as invasive or as thorough as she'd expected from a third interview, the woman closed the file and stood.

"Thank you, Ms. Jackson, for coming in. We'll be in touch."

"Thank you for your time," she said politely, blinking back tears

of disappointment. She would be receiving the “thanks, but no thanks” letter in the mail in the next few days while someone else got the phone call offering them the job.

Walking out of the room, she worked hard to keep her tears under control. Once alone in the hallway, she looked around for the ladies’ room. Instead of heading for the lobby, she headed in the opposite direction. She had to rein in her wild emotions before she could face the other job candidates, one of whom would get her job.

* * * *

Adam smelled her disappointment as she shook Sarah’s hand and nodded silently in his direction. As soon as the door closed behind her, Adam pushed to his feet. “Mine.”

Sarah looked at him like he’d lost his mind. “You told me just last week you did not want a personal assistant under any circumstances. What’s changed your mind?”

Adam looked at her and smiled, wondering if he looked like a wolf on the hunt since that was how he felt. “She’s *my* mate. Interview the others and choose yourself an assistant, just not her. She’s mine.” He walked out of the room without another word. He had to catch Margot Jackson before she could disappear.

In the hallway, he caught her delicious scent, tainted with sadness and sour desperation. He tracked her to the ladies’ room. The next candidate went into the conference room behind him, but he didn’t care. He’d found his mate. Nothing else mattered until he claimed Margot Jackson as his own.

* * * *

Once in the restroom, Margot entered the first stall, closed the door, and pulled a length of toilet paper off the roll. After blotting beads of sweat from her face and neck, she focused on breathing. She

could not have the meltdown she wanted so badly. Not until she got home, where she could scream and cry and crawl into bed and hide for a while before starting the search all over again. She also could not go back into the interview room and throw herself at Adam Thomasson's feet. It didn't matter that just by looking at her he made her feel more feminine than William had during their entire marriage.

What was it about the billionaire playboy that flipped her switch? Sure he was gorgeous, as rich as several medium-sized countries, and smelled sinfully delicious. He was also out of her league. Way, way beyond the kind of man she could ever hope to meet and fall in love with.

So much for getting the perfect job, being on her own and independent. She would have to call her brother, Matt, tonight and see how the job market fared in Santa Fe. Of course, he'd have to send her the money to move.

Finally feeling that she could walk to her car without crying, Margot took a deep breath and left the restroom. Stepping into the hallway, she was surprised to find someone leaning against the wall just outside the doorway. Looking up, she blinked when she met a pair of pale turquoise eyes. Adam Thomasson stood outside the ladies' room, and it looked as if he'd been there awhile.

"Mr. Thomasson?"

"Ah, there you are. I was afraid you might have escaped out the window or something."

Straightening, he towered over her. He was tall, really tall. At least a foot taller than her own five-and-a-half feet, and big all over. The exact opposite of William. Just the kind of man she'd always found most attractive. His smile made her knees weak and her nipples hard.

"There are no windows in there." Margot flinched when she heard her inane response. She bit the inside of her cheek to keep from begging him to fuck her. A glance down his body showed a generous bulge behind the fly of his jeans. Could he be interested? In her?

“And I thank the heavens for that. Come with me, please.”

Wrapping one large hand around her upper arm, he guided her to the end of the hall. He pushed through a set of frosted glass double doors, past an empty desk, and through the open door beyond. “Would you like something? Coffee? Tea? Water?” He closed and locked the doors once they were inside.

A triple scotch would be nice. Margot swallowed hard before shaking her head. “No, thank you, Mr. Thomasson.”

“Please, call me Adam.”

“Why?”

“Excuse me?”

“Why should I call you Adam?” Margot looked up into his Caribbean Ocean gaze, her heart pounding, her palms sweating. What did he want from her?

“You could call me lover, sexy, or mate, but Adam will do for now.”

He stepped close then lowered his head as his hands claimed her shoulders, keeping her from moving away.

As soon as his lips touched hers, Margot’s heart gave a rebel yell she was sure he could hear. Of their own volition, her arms wrapped around his waist to hold him tight. She wanted to protest when he eased back a fraction of an inch, breaking their kiss.

With a soft growl that sounded like “my mate,” he traced her lips with his tongue. One arm around her shoulders held her secure while the other stroked up and down her spine as if trying to assure himself she was real. For the first time in more years than she wanted to think about, Margot felt desirable. She pressed closer, never wanting this comforting, protective warmth that bloomed in her to end.

“Your what?” she asked when her brain made sense of his words.

His arms tightened as his tongue pressed for entrance. Her lips parted on a sigh, anxious for a taste of him. He moved tentatively at first, exploring her teeth, tongue, and entire mouth. Then he retreated, and she eagerly followed. He tasted like expensive coffee, cinnamon

rolls, and sexy male. The flavor went straight to her head, igniting a lust like she'd never felt before.

Her nipples grew hard as steel bearings, and her cunt filled with heat and wetness as their kiss went on and on. Her breath caught as a sizeable erection pressed into the softness of her belly. She'd never felt any man as big or as hard as Adam. In fact, no man had ever gotten hard from just kissing her.

Her pussy clenched, reminding her it had been empty far too long. Though a voracious erotic-romance reader, she had yet to buy any sex toys, and her fingers just weren't the same as a man's cock. She began to rub her belly against his hard cock, wanting more. He twitched in response.

What would it feel like to fuck something that big? That thought dumped an ice bucket on her burning-hot daydream. She was bad at sex. She'd not been with a man in nearly seven years, ever since her ex-husband told her that he'd rather be celibate than sleep with her fat ass.

Pushing hard against Adam's chest, she jerked out of his arms. Backing up, she did not stop until several feet separated them. "Oh God," she whispered. "What the hell have I done?"

She wiped trembling hands over burning cheeks before wrapping her arms around her middle. Her pudgy middle. She was short and overweight and poor. No man wanted her. Especially not a rich, gorgeous man who turned her on with a glance.

"Margot, it's all right." Adam's deep voice caressed her nerves and somehow calmed them. The sound wrapped around her like a warm coat on a bitter-cold day. "This is meant to be. *We* are meant to be."

Margot shook her head and wiped at the tears that ran freely down her cheeks. "No. You can't be interested in me. I'm not...I don't..."

She sniffed as the enormity of her inadequacies rolled over her. He was so perfect, beautiful and rich and so sexy it almost hurt to look at him. She, on the other hand, was so far from perfect she

couldn't see its glow on the horizon. Turning, she hurried to the door. A large, warm hand clamped down on her shoulder before she could work the lock.

“You can't leave me.”

“Why not?”

“You're my mate, and now that I've finally found you, I'm never letting you go.”

Chapter 3

The air around them had been filled with the delicious aroma of their combined arousal. Now the scent changed as her fear filled the air. She slowly turned to look at him. Her light-brown eyes grew impossibly wider, their surface glossy with unshed tears.

Heaven help him, she was gorgeous, though he didn't understand what made her want to cry. How had he not seen her beauty earlier? If he'd met her on the street, he'd guess she was a good ten years younger than her forty-two years.

He wanted to pull her inside his skin and carry her around close to his heart. He wanted to fuck her until she forgot every other man she'd ever been with. He didn't care that she had been married before. That was the past. Nothing mattered except their future. Together. From here on out, she belonged to him.

Her eyes narrowed. "You're crazy, right? Or do you just get your jollies turning fat women on with your amazing kissing abilities?"

* * * *

When she heard her words come out of her mouth in such an acid, hurt tone, she closed her eyes and wished for a hole to disappear into. She didn't care if the hole was in the floor, a wall, or into another dimension. She needed to get away before she did something she would really regret. Like beg him to fuck her right here, right now.

Turning around, she backed away, surprised when he followed and closed the distance between them. One hand wrapped around her back, pulling her against his chest while the other hand slapped her

left ass cheek. Hard.

“Ow! What was that for?” she asked, looking up at him as she tried to step back. He would not let her go, easily holding her against his broad, muscular chest.

“Don’t you ever talk about yourself like that again. You’re not fat. You’re perfect. Lush and curvy and sexy. You fit against me the way a woman is supposed to fit against a man.” His voice took on a growly rumble as he glared at her with blue fire glowing in his eyes. “I’ll put you over my lap and paddle you bare-assed if I ever hear you talk bad about yourself again. Do you understand?” He leaned down until they were nose to nose.

Margot went wide-eyed for a moment. *What the hell?* Was she still sleeping? Or had she stepped into her own romance novel without realizing it? Finally, she nodded her understanding even as her knees went weak.

Adam took a deep breath. As he exhaled, she felt the tension flow out of him. Then he smiled, the angry frown replaced by a flirtatious grin. “You really like the way I kiss?”

“Of course. Who wouldn’t? You’ve had a lot of practice if the newspapers are to be believed.”

Great, Margot, be a bitch. Her cheeks burned as she dropped her head to rest her forehead against his chest. She stared at their shoes. Her dressiest, low-heeled pumps were almost as battered as his cowboy boots.

“I’m sorry.” She sniffed as a tear escaped to track down her cheek. “It’s just...oh, never mind.”

“Shh, sweet baby. I understand. I haven’t been a monk, though the papers do have a way of blowing things out of proportion. But from now on, you are the only woman I kiss. Well, except my mother. She wouldn’t understand if I suddenly stopped kissing her after all these years.”

He tightened his strong arms around her but did not make any further moves. She felt his cheek rub against the top of her head as if

trying to mark her. His erection twitched against her belly. Under her cheek his heartbeat picked up speed.

She'd never felt so sexy before. Taking a deep breath, she smiled. He smelled so damn good, all musky and male. He smelled like a man should smell. Her ex always smelled of cologne that did nothing for her except make her nose itch.

Slowly her hands traced their way around to his back. Grinning, she tucked her thumbs in the waistband of his jeans. "No, she probably wouldn't understand," she murmured, trying to keep up her end of the conversation, though all she wanted to do was rub against him and purr with contentment.

"So, sweet Margot mine, tell me what you want." The words rumbled through his chest.

"What do you mean?"

"Anything you want. Name it, and it's yours."

You. I want you for the rest of my life.

She bit her lip to keep from speaking before she could filter her thoughts. "All I wanted this morning was a job so I could pay my bills."

Adam used a single finger to lift her face so she stared into his eyes. "I have the perfect job for you. Long hours, no time off, but I can assure you the compensation package will more than make up for any of the negative aspects."

"And what job would that be?"

"Life mate to a billionaire."

Margot blinked and pulled back to frown at the man holding her. He certainly looked serious. But how could she be sure he wasn't just crazy?

"If I say yes, how long will this position last? Until some pretty, sexy, skinny young thing catches your eye?" Margot winced again at the bitter tone in her voice.

"This is a lifetime contract. But there is one other thing I need to disclose before you make your final decision. It's the reason I know

we're meant to be together."

Adam soothed her another moment before releasing her. Taking her hand, he led her to a long leather couch that sat against one wall. As she sat down, he pushed aside the oversized coffee table, clearing the area in front of her. Her eyes grew as he took off his jacket and tossed it on top of his desk. A moment later his shirt followed, revealing his impressively muscled chest and abdomen with a dusting of black hair that made a triangle down to his bellybutton. Just enough hair to be oh so sexy without being bear-like.

"Adam?" She began to shiver, but she wasn't sure if it was fear or lust that affected her more. *What the hell was he doing?*

Before he answered, Adam pulled off his boots. Even his feet were perfect, long and slim with well-shaped toes and high arches.

"I've been called a lot of things in my life. But there's one thing very few know about."

"What is it?" Margot asked as her stomach clenched. Was he deathly ill? Or deformed? Or gay? A dozen possibilities raced through her mind as she watched him unbuckle his belt and loosen the waistband of his jeans.

"I'm a shape shifter. An alpha wolf to be exact."

"I don't believe you. There's no such thing, except in books."

As soon as the words were out of her mouth, Adam Thomasson, businessman, disappeared. Instead, a huge black wolf with turquoise eyes wearing Adam's jeans stood before her.

She sat stunned a moment before she realized that Adam had spoken the truth. He was indeed a shape shifter, just like in one of her books.

"Oh my fucking God. That's so cool!"

She stood and took two steps forward before kneeling an arm's length from the wolf. Though she knew it was Adam, she didn't want to scare him and have him react badly.

"Can you understand me when you're in this form?" she asked, more curious than scared.

Her easy acceptance shocked her more than his ability to change into a wolf.

He nodded then took a step closer. Then another and another until his chin rested on her shoulder.

Needing to assure herself that this was real and not one of her romance-inspired daydreams, Margot began to pet him. His fur was soft and silky and warm. She ran her hands down his back, over his sides, and then reached up to rub behind his ears. When she dropped her hands to her lap a few minutes later, Adam leaned closer. He rubbed his cheek against the side of her head, doggy begging for more.

She indulged him for a few more minutes before pushing him back. "Enough petting for now. I have questions, and you can't answer them until you change back." Standing, she returned to the couch and sat down.

Adam made a disgruntled doggy sound before backing away. Margot blinked and a very naked, very aroused man knelt where the wolf had been only a heartbeat before.

Trying not to stare at the long, solid cock between his legs, she licked her lips. She had questions, many questions, but couldn't think of a single one when Adam's cock twitched, drawing her attention again as it grew even bigger.

"You had questions?" He stood and walked toward her, not hiding his nakedness or his erection.

She envied him that. She would give anything to be that comfortable in her skin. She never walked around naked and usually changed clothes in the dark.

"Does it hurt when you change like that?" Margot whispered, her eyes darting once more to his groin.

"No, shifting doesn't hurt. This, on the other hand," he said, wrapping one hand around his cock, "is uncomfortable as I wait for you, my lovely mate."

Margot's cheeks began to burn as he stroked his hand from the

base of his cock to tip and back again.

When he moved close enough, she reached out and ran the pad of her index finger over the slit in the wide, red-purple head of his cock, smearing the fluid there. He responded with a deep-throated moan and thrusting of his hips.

She pulled her finger away, putting it in her mouth, not able to wait another moment to taste his essence. She expected his seed to be bitter and salty as she remembered William's always tasting, but Adam tasted dark and manly with no bitterness.

"Mmm," she breathed as he took another step closer.

"Why aren't I running out of here screaming?" she murmured as she leaned forward to taste the source. She took just the head of his cock into her mouth.

"Deep in your soul you know this is right. You can feel we are meant to be together." Adam allowed her only a moment to swirl her tongue around the head of his cock before gently pulling from her lips.

When he stepped back out of reach, Margot leaned forward. "Don't go," she whimpered, needing more than the small taste he'd allowed.

"You can have more, after you take off your clothes," Adam said, sounding as frustrated as she felt.

Before he finished speaking, she surged to her feet. Crossing to his desk, she pulled off her suit jacket and dropped it on top of his jacket and shirt. At the same time, she toed off her shoes. She didn't bother to unbutton all the buttons of her blouse, just enough so she could pull it over her head before tossing it on the pile as well. Her skirt, panties, and bra were stripped off before she thought past the need to have him back in her mouth again.

As soon as the last bit of clothing was gone, she froze. She watched Adam's bright gaze travel from head to toe and back again. She half turned as panic tried to consume her. Where could she hide? The room was too bright with overhead lights as well as sunlight

streaming in the windows, exposing every flaw and extra pound. He would turn away now, just like her ex had.

Taking a deep breath she turned back, prepared for rejection. When he walked away she would pull on her skirt, blouse, and jacket before leaving. She didn't need bra and panties to drive home. She wrapped her arms around her middle, trying to hide the extra inches.

She blinked several times to clear unshed tears from her eyes before trying to read his expression. She blinked again, surprised by what she saw there. He had not turned away in disgust. Nor had his lust-filled expression cooled. He still looked very hungry. His gaze traveled up and down her body as if trying to commit every inch of her to memory.

"You're beautiful." He closed the distance between them.

"No, I'm not," she countered.

A hard hand landed on her left ass cheek. "What the hell?" She lifted her head to glare at him.

"Yes, you are beautiful," he assured her as his hard cock pushed against her lower belly. "You're beautiful and all mine. I don't want you tempting anyone else from now on. I'm the only one who gets to see this lush, beautiful body." His deep voice dropped even lower as he wrapped his arms around her back and pulled her to close the final few inches between them.

* * * *

Adam sucked in a breath as skin met skin. Closing his eyes, he moved, reveling in the feel of rubbing against his mate. Their combined scents of lust filled the room with a heady aroma that made his need overwhelming. All at once, he was out of control. He had to claim her.

Lowering his head, he brushed his cheek against hers before licking the spot where neck flowed into shoulder. His bite mark was going to look so good there. "Need you now. Right now."

He blinked when Margot pulled back to look at him. Her amber eyes glowed with a lust all her own. "Take me."

He wrapped his hands under the cheeks of her ass and lifted her easily. Walking to the desk, he laid her down then lifted her legs high and wide. The tip of his cock brushed against her slick entrance. With a single push of his hips, he was inside her, merging their two bodies into one. She gasped as he pushed deeper and deeper until he could go no farther.

He guided her legs around his back and leaned over until he looked directly in her eyes. "So tight. You feel so damn good, baby girl."

Lowering his head, he licked a hardened nipple as he slowly pulled out until only the head remained inside.

"More, Adam. Fuck me," she breathed as she reached up to pull his chest down to cover her. Licking her nipple, he gave up trying to stay in control. Holding her hips steady, he began to fuck her. In seconds his lust spiraled out of control and the beast's need to claim his mate took over. His canine teeth had already dropped in preparation for this moment.

Hot, wet tissues tightened around him as she rode her lust to its peak. A moment later, he felt her orgasm begin, her cunt caressing him in rippling waves. He thrust deep twice more before lowering his open mouth to her neck.

"My pretty, pretty mate. All mine," he growled. A heartbeat later his teeth entered her skin, and he claimed his mate.

The taste of her blood crossing his tongue sent him over the top. With a howl, he came, blasting his seed deep into her waiting womb. She tasted so damn good that he couldn't stop himself from drinking deep. She cried out as she came again.

Once his orgasm passed and he could think again, he pulled his teeth from her skin. After licking the bite closed, he kissed the area. Then he looked at his mate and smiled with joy. Her eyes were closed, and she lay completely relaxed beneath him.

Picking her up, he easily carried her behind his desk where he sat down. He arranged her so she sat across his lap. He cuddled her close, truly content for the first time in his life. Kissing the top of her head, he murmured, "You're mine now, sweet Margot. My mate forever."

Chapter 4

Margot heard his declaration but couldn't respond. Her entire being still rocked, making it impossible to find words. Sure she'd read in books about sex of devastatingly mythic proportions, but she never, ever dreamed she would get such an experience.

She had never orgasmed so hard. And the pleasure-pain when he bit into her shoulder sent her rocketing into climax a second time without any other effort.

As she lay between the cool desk top and Adam's warm body, Margot realized the stress that had been a part of her life for so long was gone. What was it about this man that he could get her to relax when not even a pint of her favorite Rocky Road ice cream could?

When he picked her up and carried her, she wanted to argue and say she was too heavy. But he was so warm, and she didn't have the energy to do more than breathe and float on the fizzy pink cloud of sexual release she currently rode.

When she finally opened her eyes, she found herself cradled in his arms behind his huge desk. "You bit me," was the only thing she could think to say.

"No, I claimed you," he corrected, nuzzling the hair at her temple.

"You bit me," she repeated, her brain still not functioning at full capacity. "What if it gets infected? I could die. And we didn't use protection. What were you thinking?"

She tried to struggle, but her body wouldn't cooperate. She ended up wiggling in his lap, which did nothing toward gaining her freedom. All she did was wake up his cock, which she felt harden against her ass cheek.

“Shh, baby. The bite mark won’t get infected. In fact, it’s almost completely healed already. I had to claim you. You are my mate. We are now one.” Adam stroked her arm and back, his touch calming her at the same time her sexual hungers reawakened. “And shape shifters are immune to disease, though you could get pregnant.”

His soothing tone and warm touch eased her panic. All at once, she no longer wanted to run away. She no longer cared that she had no job and less than a hundred dollars in the bank. None of that mattered. All that mattered was the man currently wrapped around her. A billionaire shape shifter who’d just claimed her as his life mate.

“So what now?” she asked, snuggling into the warmth of his chest. She rubbed her cheek against the skin it lay against.

“Now we need to get moving. We need to arrange to have your things moved to the estate. It may take a few days, so we’ll go by, and you can pack what you’ll need until then. Tonight, oh shit, I forgot the auction. Do you have an evening gown?”

Margot leaned back to look at him. “You’re kidding, right? That suit over there getting wrinkled is as dressy as I get, and it came from the resale store. And who says I’m moving to your estate?”

Pulling her close, Adam kissed her until she felt boneless. Once he finished, he pulled out a desk drawer and unearthed a pen and pad of paper. Handing them to her, he dictated, “Make a list. Money. Clothes. Dress for tonight. Movers.”

“What’s tonight?” she asked as she wrote down the list.

“You’re moving to my home because we’re mated now. You belong to me. Once the world discovers that, people might want to take advantage. Besides, we won’t want to be too far from one another. It’s instinctual to want to be close to your mate.” He stroked her jaw line with his nose. “I know I won’t want you out of my sight for a long time, if ever.”

Margot shivered from the tone of his words as well as the words themselves. Her nipples hardened again, and she felt itchy low in her belly. Never had she felt such need before with a man. She turned and

kissed him, hoping that would satisfy her hunger.

It didn't .

"Fuck me again," she purred into his mouth. She shifted around to straddle his lap.

Wrapping one hand around his cock, she began to stroke him gently. Her other hand found one brown nipple hidden in his chest hair. Tweaking it, she smiled when his hips shifted, driving his cock through her gentle grip.

"Harder," he breathed.

She tightened her grip around his cock, wondering if she would hurt him. She had never played like this before and didn't know what she was supposed to do.

After several more strokes, Adam grabbed her hips. "Guide me into you," he said, his voice deep and growly once again.

Meeting his glowing blue-green gaze, she moved up so his tip brushed again her entrance. As she sank down over his length, they both sighed.

Once he was fully sheathed, she sat for a moment and marveled at how well they fit together. When the hunger grew until she could no longer stay still, Margot put her hands on his shoulders and began to ride. His hands on her hips helped lift and lower her. Looking into his eyes, she saw heat and warmth and something else. Something she'd never seen in another man's eyes before, not even William's. She told herself it couldn't be love, but she wondered. Closing her eyes, she focused on where they were joined together. It felt so right.

She jumped and opened her eyes when his hand moved between their bodies. A single finger found her clit and, as she rode up and down his cock, her clit rode his finger.

"Come for me, baby," Adam murmured as he rubbed his face against her cheeks and licked her jaw.

As soon as he spoke, her orgasm came out of nowhere to overwhelm her once again. "Oh, oh, ooh," she cried.

She heard him follow with a shout of his own. A rainbow of lights

flickered behind her eyelids before everything went black.

When she roused next, she found he had moved her again. This time she lay wrapped in a soft blue blanket on the couch. Alone.

Looking around the room, she noted his clothes were gone. Her suit was draped neatly over the back of a chair. Though the last thing she wanted was to move, she forced herself to stand and get dressed.

She was slipping her feet into her shoes when the door opened, and Adam walked in. He looked relaxed and happy. "Oh good, you're awake. Did you sleep well, baby?"

"I guess," Margot said, once again unsure of herself. "Sorry I conked out on you like that."

"Shh, no apologies. We slept together in the chair until a few minutes ago. I had to talk to Sarah and cancel my day, but there wasn't anything that couldn't be rescheduled. So I'm all yours now. What should we do first, go to your house so you can pack or go shopping for your dress for tonight?"

Adam handed her her purse, then took her hand and led the way out of his office. Down the hall, they went through an unmarked side door out of the building directly to the parking lot.

"Why do I need a dress for tonight? You never did answer my question."

"You are going to buy me tonight at the Civic Theatre's Bachelor Auction. Oh, that reminds me." Adam pulled his cell phone out of his pocket. Hitting a speed dial combination, he waited for it to connect. "Hi, Mom. I need you to get me an extra ticket and bidder's paddle for tonight. Yes. Uh-huh. No, I'm bringing my mate. Yes. My office. Margot Jackson. Yes, I suppose that would be okay. Yes, see you tonight. Love you, Mom." He hung up and returned the phone to his pocket. "Okay, she's going to take care of that. Now, have you decided? Packing or shopping first?"

"How about we go back to your office and play some more," she offered, brushing her hand down the front of his body to the front of his jeans. For someone who had never enjoyed sex before, she was

becoming quite the wanton.

“How about we go to your house for what you’ll need for the next few days and then go shopping for your dress. After that we’ll see about playing.”

Margot wrinkled her nose at him. “I like my idea better, but if you insist.”

“I do. Get in the car.” Adam dropped a kiss on her nose before swatting her ass and pointing her toward a long black limo. A big, bald, muscular, rugged-looking man wearing faded jeans and a black windbreaker stood next to the open back door.

“This is Sam. If I’m not around, he will be. Sam, this is my mate, Margot Jackson.”

Sam’s pale gray eyes went wide with obvious shock.

Then he blinked, and his craggy expression smoothed. “It’s good to meet you, Miss Jackson.”

Margot paused, not sure she wanted this man to be around. He looked mean and, coupled with his ginormous frame, she was glad they weren’t in a back alley alone.

“Margot, please.”

Sam nodded.

“If he tells you to do something, I want you to do it, okay? Sam is not only my friend and driver, he is now your bodyguard.”

Margot nodded though she did not really understand. “Do you think there’ll be trouble?” Fear skittered through her. What was she getting into?

“Sweetheart, I’m a billionaire. There are people who want to take advantage of rich people. Once the world learns that I’m completely dedicated to you, someone might try to use you to get to me.”

“Oh.”

“Don’t worry. I won’t let anything happen to either one of you,” Sam reassured her. The half smile he sent her way changed the whole appearance of his face. Her earlier fear slipped away, and she wondered what he would look like if this stoic man ever relaxed

enough to fully smile.

Chapter 5

As Margot packed what she would need for the first days together, Adam prowled her tiny house. He examined the knick-knacks and pictures on display and several stacks of books around the room. He smiled as he sorted through a pile of erotic romances with naked or nearly naked bodies on the front covers hidden in a basket under the coffee table.

“So, my little mate is into dirty books,” he murmured as he put them back.

In the dining room he found a stack of mail, which he flipped through after glancing to make sure his mate was still busy and out of sight. He frowned when he realized they were all bills waiting to be paid.

“Margot, what bank do you use?” He walked to the bedroom door. She was zipping a suitcase closed.

“The credit union. Why?”

“It’s a surprise,” he said responded with a grin. Pulling out his phone, he speed-dialed Sarah.

“I want you to do whatever magic you do and transfer two million dollars into Margot’s bank account at the credit union.”

Sarah gasped before asking, “Do you have an account number? Knowing which account to put the money in would make things a lot easier.”

“Hang on,” he lowered the phone. “Margot, what’s your account number?”

Margot appeared in the doorway with the suitcase in one hand and a large shopping bag in the other. “Why?”

"I'm transferring some money into your account. What's the number?"

"No, Adam, don't."

"Why not? You need to have access to it. After all, it's our money now. Also, I want you to take Sarah those bills on the table so she can take care of them."

Before she could argue, Adam turned away and put the phone back to his ear. "Margot's not cooperating. See what you can do without the number. Call back if you need to."

"I heard her. Are you sure you want to do this?"

"Sarah, she's my mate. I've claimed her. She's mine forever. Call whichever legal beagle who takes care of such shit and add her name to everything." Adam hung up before Sarah could argue.

He knew he probably sounded crazy, but he'd found his mate. She needed money, he had money, and two million wasn't much. He was worth a thousand times that much, but he didn't want to overwhelm her all at once. Someday he would tell her the true extent of their wealth.

Turning, he found Margot standing with her feet planted wide and arms crossed. Uh oh, she did not look happy.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" she ground out. One bare foot began to tap. She'd changed into faded jeans and a pretty pinky-orangey sweater that looked really good on her.

Adam couldn't help grinning as her temper flared. "I'm making it so that my mate has money in her account. If two million isn't enough I can call Sarah back." He lifted the phone.

"Two million? You're giving me two million dollars?" Her voice continued to rise. "Just like that? You really are crazy, aren't you?" Her voice squeaked.

He winced at the high note. "Baby, I've been looking for you my entire adult life. Along the way I learned how to make money. I'd always planned to use this money to make my mate very, very happy. I don't ever want you to have to look at another pile of bills and worry

about how you're going to pay them." He picked up the stack from the table and slid them into an inside pocket of his jacket.

"What are you doing with those? Put them back." She crossed the room and tried to reach the papers in his jacket. "Those are my bills."

Adam caught her hands and pulled them behind her back, which forced her body up next to his. "Yes, I know. Sarah will pay them tomorrow. Where's that list we made? We need to add calling your landlord, turning off the utilities and getting you a cell phone. How much of this furniture do you want to keep?"

Margot looked around the combination living and dining room. "I doubt any of it will fit in your house. It's all fourth hand anyway. But I want to pack up my books and pictures and stuff. I don't want anyone else to touch my things. The furniture can go to charity."

Adam nodded. "We'll come back tomorrow or the next day and pack up whatever you want to take with you. Then we can arrange for movers to take the rest of it to whatever charity can use it. How's that sound?"

* * * *

Margot blinked back sudden tears and dropped her head to his chest in defeat. "Why are you being so nice to me?"

"You're my mate. It's my honor and privilege to be nice to you." He kissed her hair before squeezing her tight.

Lifting her head, she stood on her toes to kiss him back. When his lips parted, her tongue pressed deep. He greeted her tongue with his own, and they danced back and forth between his mouth and hers.

Her body prepared for sex, and soon kissing wasn't enough. Pulling her hands from his hold, she reached between them and unzipped his leather jacket. Next, she attacked his shirt buttons. Needing to see what she was doing, she broke the kiss. "Want you. Right now."

"Then you'd better get those clothes off before I rip them off

you,” he threatened with a sexy grin. “First one naked and in bed wins.”

He pushed his shirt and jacket off his shoulders as he stepped around her and headed to the bedroom. He hopped as he pulled off his boots in the short hallway. A moment later his jeans flew out the bedroom door.

It took Margot a moment to make sense of his words. She followed, dropping clothes in her wake as well. By the time she stepped into the bedroom, Adam was stretched across her full-size bed. He covered the mattress with his legs splayed wide, and one hand lazily stroked his thick, hard cock.

Dropping her bra and pushing down her panties, Margot took the three steps between doorway and bed. “No fair, I had on more clothes.”

“So stop wearing underwear. I won’t mind a bit. Maybe I’ll even demand it. No panties and lots of short skirts. That way you’re always ready to play,” he said with a grin.

“So what does the winner get?” she asked as she crawled onto the bed and between his legs.

“The winner gets you,” he growled.

Sitting up, he pulled her forward until they were breasts to chest then rolled so that he now lay between her legs.

“Now, Adam,” she breathed as she bent her legs and planted her feet. The tip of his cock brushed against her clit, sending a shiver of need through her. “Fuck me now.”

With a sound that was a cross between a satisfied moan and a happy howl, Adam shifted higher on the bed. He pushed straight into her, not stopping until they lay pelvis to pelvis. Kissing her, he pulled back and then returned again, beginning a slow, easy motion.

Margot reached for his hips, but he stopped when only his head remained inside her.

“More, dammit. Faster. Harder.” Margot reached for his nipples and began to scratch at them with the nails of her middle fingers.

Adam's pace picked up only marginally. "I don't want to hurt you, my sweet mate."

"I'm not fragile. I need more." Her demand became whiney.

She gasped when Adam slammed deep before beginning a hard, fast pace. Then he reached around her hip and brushed a single finger against her back hole. Margot screamed as her climax immediately rolled over her. A moment later, she heard Adam cry out as his cock jerked. Then she felt hot seed pulse into her womb as he collapsed on top of her.

Though she couldn't breathe due to the large body pressing her into the mattress, Margot didn't mind. It felt so good to have a man filling her. She felt complete in a way she never had before. This mating with Adam felt so right.

When she began struggling for breath, Adam wrapped his arms around her then rolled so they both lay on the bed, still connected. Margot took a deep breath and smiled as more of the tension she'd carried for years rolled off her shoulders like a crepe off a pan.

"Shh, baby. Rest a bit." Adam murmured when she shifted in his arms.

Closing her eyes, she relaxed and let her mind drift.

* * * *

"Are you ready to go shopping?" Adam asked an hour later after they'd rested, cleaned up, and redressed. Instead of jeans, he'd talked her into the only above-the-knee skirt in her closet. He also demanded she go without panties though relented on a bra.

"Maybe it would be best if I didn't go tonight," she offered as he picked up her suitcase and headed for the door. She grabbed the shopping bag and her purse before following.

"I need you there to protect me from all those crazy society women who want to buy a bachelor."

Margot checked to make sure all the lights were out before

following him out the door. "If you don't want to go then why did you say you let yourself be auctioned off?"

Adam didn't answer until her things were in the trunk and they were seated inside the limo. "The auction is raising money for a good cause, and my mother's on the organizing committee. I can't get out of it, even though I've now found you. So, you'll just have to buy me tonight, and everyone wins. The charity gets its money, I do my good deed, and you get me."

Chapter 6

By the time the limo pulled into the convention center where the auction would take place, Margot wondered when she would be waking up from what had to be every single woman's Cinderella dream. Surely being mated to a billionaire who had given her two million dollars because he wanted her to never worry about money again was a dream. Or a stress-induced delusion.

The afternoon had been spent as she imagined many rich women spent their time before a society event. After lunch with Adam in a real sit-down restaurant where the waiters hovered, she'd found the perfect dress at the first store they visited. The satin, dark teal-blue strapless gown that made the most of her generous curves while disguising her pudgy belly and fleshy thighs was the third dress she tried on. It needed no alterations, which surprised Margot almost as much as the news that the boutique carried dresses in her size. When she'd stepped out of the dressing room, Adam growled deep in his throat as he circled her.

"You're exquisite," he said as he kissed her cheek, though by the heat in his eyes she could see he wanted much, much more.

"What else will she need?" He turned to the sales clerk before acting on the lust she knew that filled him.

When they left the store, she was fully outfitted for the evening with the dress, black pumps that were high, but not so tall she couldn't walk in them, and a tiny, silver clutch handbag and silky silver shawl. When she tried to look at price tags, Adam pulled her hand away and kissed her fingers while the clerk pulled the tags off the clothes and disappeared into the back room with Adam's credit

card.

Once back at the limo, Adam told Sam to disappear. The man nodded and walked away as Adam guided her into the back of the car. After locking the doors, Adam closed the front glass then turned to Margot. Blue fire shot from in his eyes. That single look sent her senses directly to sex. She reached for the fastenings of his jeans. She couldn't explain what it was, but in the hours she'd known him, Adam Thomasson had become an addiction. Was it because of her years of celibacy? Or the mating thing? Or was this just one of those intense sex relationships that would burn itself out almost before it began? Would she be back in her little house, alone and jobless, in two weeks? A month? Or would it take less time for him to grow tired of her?

"Will it always be like this?" she asked as he shoved his jeans to his knees once she released the button and zipper.

Seconds later her skirt was up around her hips, and he was sliding deep into her wet heat. They both groaned at the connection.

"God, I hope so, though it might be difficult to find privacy at the office. Maybe I'll turn the office next to mine into a bedroom so we can play anytime we want."

"Maybe you should start working from home," she offered, as she grabbed hold of his shoulders. With a saucy smile, she began to ride his cock. She wasn't sure she wanted everyone in his office to know their business.

Her lower lips parted, and her clit rubbed in the hair around his cock. The movement quickly drove her out of her mind, and all she could do was feel.

"Maybe I'll put Sarah in charge of the company. Then we can spend the rest of our lives traveling the world and making love. Would you like that?"

Flying over her orgasmic peak, Margot leaned forward and muffled her cry in his skin where shoulder met neck. It was the same place as her mating mark. Though she didn't break skin, she sucked a

bruise into it, marking Adam in her own way. As she did, Adam growled deep in his chest. He held her hips steady then drove up into her cunt, going deep. Three strokes later, she felt hot semen pulse deep inside her.

It took a few minutes before she came back to herself. Then she remembered they sat in a public parking lot in the middle of the day, having sex. Lifting off of Adam's lap, she smoothed her skirt down as her lover watched with a shit-eating grin.

"What?" she asked when he began to chuckle.

"You're just so damn cute."

Adam pulled wipes from a hidden compartment. After cleaning them both, he pulled up his jeans. Once they were both decent, he lowered the dividing glass. A few minutes later Sam slid into the driver's seat, and they were off again.

Their next stop was the most exclusive beauty spa in town. Adam carried the two bags from the boutique as he escorted her inside. Once in the reception area, he turned her and the bags over to Stephanie, the owner.

"Relax and enjoy. I'll be back at six." He kissed her forehead and walked out before she could say a word in protest.

With an exasperated huff, she turned to Stephanie. "I guess I'm in your hands."

After a facial, manicure, pedicure, and new hair style, a woman, who introduced herself as Gina, arrived carrying a small suitcase. Margot was sent to dress in her gown while Gina prepared. After carefully putting on her dress, Margot emerged from the salon's dressing room feeling like the fairy tale princess she'd always dreamt of being. The entire staff *oohed* and *ahhed* as Stephanie primped where the dress had mussed her hair. Then she draped a clean towel around her shoulders and Gina went to work.

Margot was not allowed to see herself until the final touch of lipstick was applied. Then Stephanie spun her around, and Margot found herself looking at a near stranger.

"Is that really me?" she whispered, lifting a hand to touch her cheek.

Her hair was styled in a sexy, messy, curly hairdo she'd never be able to recreate on her own. The makeup glossed over the flaws and stress and made her look years younger.

"Ah, ah, no smudging. And no crying," Gina scolded as she began to pack up her things.

Just then Adam entered from the reception area. He wore a perfectly tailored tuxedo with a confident air. His teal-blue cummerbund and bow tie matched her dress perfectly. When he caught sight of her, he froze mid-step. His eyes widened, and his smile grew until she was certain she could count every tooth in his mouth.

She turned slowly as he approached. "You like?"

Adam had to clear his throat twice before he could croak, "No, sweet baby, I love." He tried to pull her close for a kiss, but the stylists all screeched "*No!*"

Margot laughed at his startled expression as he looked around the room at their audience. She patted one recently shaved cheek. "Sorry, lover, but you'll have to wait until after the auction to mess me up. These ladies worked too hard to have you screw this up before I meet your mother and make my debut into society."

Adam dropped his chin to his chest. After taking a deep breath, he grunted. "I've created a monster."

"No, you've created a princess," Stephanie corrected him as she draped the shawl around Margot's shoulders. She then handed Adam a bag containing Margot's other clothes. "Have a wonderful time tonight."

"Thank you for everything," Margot said as Adam took her hand and led her out to the limo.

Sam waited on the sidewalk, ready to deal with the door. He whistled with an approving half smile when he saw her. When she smiled her thanks, his cheeks reddened. Clearing his throat, he looked

away and turned gruff once again.

They arrived at a convenient moment so that Sam could park at the end of the walkway leading to the convention center entrance. The few people outside stopped and gawked, first at the car, then at the couple who emerged. Adam offered his arm, and she smiled at him as she wrapped her hand around the muscular limb.

Once in the ballroom, the mostly young, attractive, female crowd forced Margot to let go of Adam's arm. Before anyone could separate them, he took her hand and laced their fingers together. Then he headed toward the far wall where an older woman spoke with a server.

Gwen Thomasson was tiny in stature, but appeared large and in charge. She wore a burgundy gown. The color set off her silver-white hair, which was pulled back in a four-strand braid that fell over her shoulder to her waist. When she saw Adam, she smiled as he bent and kissed her cheek, careful not to smudge her makeup.

"So tell me about this mate you've found. Is she worthy of my beautiful boy?" She smiled and patted his cheek .

Margot watched, intrigued as Adam blushed. He ducked his head and shifted. "Mother, please. I'm thirty-five years old, not five."

"You'll always be my baby, no matter how old you get," Gwen assured him as she patted his chest before turning her attention to Margot. "Hello, I'm Gwen Thomasson, Adam's mother. You must be Margot."

"Yes, ma'am," Margot said, fighting the urge to curtsy. She felt as if she were in the presence of royalty. Would she ever be able to carry herself with such grace and assurance?

"I wasn't sure how to handle the seating, so you'll be sitting with me. Adam and the other bachelors will be eating together, though I think they should have spread the hunkiness around the room. But I'm not in charge of seating, so what can you do? Here's your bidder's paddle. I understand you'll be bidding on Adam tonight?"

Before Margot had the chance to process everything Gwen had

just said, a woman wearing a mid-thigh-length black sheath, which clung to every toned and tight inch, swept up. She pushed Margot out of her way and wrapped herself around Adam. "Here you are. I was just telling Mama that I was willing to go to as high as it took this year to win you."

Margot cocked an eyebrow at Adam's uncomfortable expression. The woman ignored both Gwen and her, focusing all her gold-digging attention on Adam. "Excuse me, I don't believe we've been introduced. I'm Margot Jackson."

"Leigh Kincaid-Thorne," she said without a glance in her direction. "I'll see you later, sweetie," she cooed at Adam before pulling his head down and kissing his cheek as close to his mouth as she dared. She left a blood-red lip print behind as she waltzed away in a cloud of overwhelmingly sweet perfume.

When Adam stepped closer to her, Margot gestured toward his cheek, wrinkling her nose in distaste. "I don't like her. She left her mark on you. You said I was buying you, what's my limit?"

Adam used the tissue his mother handed him to wipe away the smear of lip color that reminded Margot of blood. "A thousand dollars higher than anyone else's," Adam said, bending to brush a kiss on the tip of her nose. "I've got to go check in. I love you, mate of mine."

Margot froze at his words. He'd said it so easily, without blinking, as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

Looking in his eyes, she didn't see deceit in them. She saw love. She also saw sexual heat, which once again ignited her own lust.

"I love you, too," she responded, leaning closer to speak so only he heard her. "And I can't wait to get you alone again, preferably with a bed nearby and no appointments or events scheduled."

Adam choked and began to cough. "My thoughts exactly, but for now, duty calls."

"Yes, it does. Stacy is heading this way," Gwen interjected, "and she doesn't look happy."

"Well, we can't have that. Her face might freeze that way." Adam

looked at his mother. “Be nice to Margot.”

Chapter 7

By the time the bidding began, Margot's head throbbed. She just wanted to go home and wasn't even sure she cared whether it was Adam's home or her own.

She had also come to the conclusion that she was not meant to be a society woman. She didn't care about the latest designers. She didn't go to Raleigh, Atlanta, or New York every few months to shop for her wardrobe. She also didn't give a hoot about whether or not Botox could stop the lines developing around her eyes and mouth or whether the local plastic surgeon could rid her of any pockets of fat she might have. She had nothing in common with the women she sat with. Except for Gwen, who happened to be related to the man she was quickly falling in love with, she had nothing to talk about and had decided they were all shallow social climbers, and she didn't like them very much.

Margot zoned out during the bidding, watching with disinterest as each man was brought forward, and his planned date was talked about in the most suggestive terms before the bidding began. She needed to go to the ladies' room, but was afraid to miss Adam's turn onstage, so she crossed her legs and tried to think dry thoughts.

"And now, our last bachelor this evening from right here in New Bern. His company has its interests in every aspect of the entertainment industry, from video games to movies and television to the cutting edge of e-book technology. Please welcome Mr. Adam Thomasson to the stage."

Applause thundered as Adam crossed the stage. Some women even whistled. Margot watched Adam sweep the room with a smile,

giving each woman the impression he smiled just for her.

When he reached their table, he met her gaze, and his smile warmed. She knew he no longer thought of the next few minutes, but of later, of when they would be alone. Feeling devilish, she grinned as she used two fingers to trace across the top of her breasts which were exposed by the strapless gown.

Adam looked away suddenly. Though he continued smiling, she saw his jaw clench and his cheeks color a bit.

She jumped when Gwen took her hand and placed her bidding paddle in it. "Don't tease him. This is hard enough as it is," the older woman murmured. "He really is a very private man and hates to be in front of crowds."

"But I'm not teasing," she responded.

Onstage, the auctioneer described Adam's planned date. An afternoon cruise on his yacht followed by dinner and the current production of a romantic comedy at the Civic Theater.

Margot was stunned as a furious bidding war began. Five women raised their paddles, including Leigh what's-her-name who countered every bid someone else made.

Adam kept looking at her with a slight frown as the bidding went on, but Margot had yet to raise her paddle the first time. She smiled when his expression darkened even further when the first woman dropped out with a loudly muttered curse.

Margot waited until three of the bidders dropped out before raising her paddle at the twenty-thousand-dollars mark. After three more five-thousand-dollars raises, it was down to Leigh the society bitch and her.

Tired and really needing to relieve her bladder, Margot decided to end it. Pushing to her feet, she waited until Leigh made a twenty-seven thousand dollar bid. The auctioneer turned to her, along with every other person in the room.

"I bid one hundred thousand dollars," she said, meeting Adam's eyes before glancing at her opponent.

Leigh tried to raise her arm, but her mother grabbed the paddle out of her hand with an emphatic shake of her head.

“Going, going, gone. Sold to the beautiful lady sitting with Adam’s mother, Gwen Thomasson.” The gavel banged, and then the murmuring and questioning began as everyone turned to ask their neighbor if they knew the identity of the woman who’d just made the highest bid of the evening.

“Well done, my dear,” Gwen said. “Cut that gold-digging floozy off at the knees while giving away an outrageous amount of Adam’s money. He’s sure to be proud. You will make my boy a fine life mate.”

Margot leaned close, ignoring the closing comments coming from the stage. “Where’s the restroom?”

“Shall I come with you?”

“No, thanks, I’m a big girl. Tell Adam I’ll be right back.”

Without a thought to how it would look to others, Margot stood and hurried from the room. Once in the bathroom, she took her time using the facilities. It had been so long since she’d spent so much time with so many other people. Especially people who looked down their nipped and tucked noses to judge her every move and seemed to find her lacking in one way or another. Though she had worked in a bank, she rarely worked directly with customers. After an afternoon of beauty and an evening of catty comments on her weight, her hair, and her skin, she needed a few minutes alone.

By the time she finished washing her hands and making sure she had not messed up her makeup, several women had come and gone. She was just heading to the door when Leigh walked in with two friends.

“Look who it is ladies, the old bitch with bucks,” Leigh sneered. The three surrounded her, forcing her into a narrow alcove that ended in a window that overlooked the bridge.

Taking a deep breath, Margot reminded herself that she was an adult, and Adam belonged to her. This young woman was not worth

her time.

“You do realize you’ll never see him again after your date, don’t you? Adam never dates the same woman more than twice. For him, life is all about his work and making money, not women.”

“In the past maybe, but he’s claimed me forever,” Margot said, keeping her voice low. For some reason she pointed to her neck, wanting to show Adam’s mark, though these woman would not understand its significance. “If you’ll excuse me, my date is waiting.”

Leigh frowned as she looked at the mark. Margot thought she heard her growl, but then she blinked and her expression went smooth again. Then the younger woman sneered.

“You brought a date to a bachelor’s auction?”

Margot shook her head and felt sorry for her for being so dense. “No, actually Adam brought me.”

As the three women gasped, Margot pushed her way past them and walked away. She kept her back straight, head high, and tried not to giggle in triumph. She heard a cry of animalistic rage but didn’t stop walking. Adam waited.

Margot was several steps into the hallway when someone tackled her from behind. She cried out as she was slammed to the floor. Her hands were trapped beneath her. She couldn’t do anything to defend herself as the person on top of her began to hit her again and again.

“What the hell?”

She recognized Adam’s voice as it silenced the murmuring of the shocked spectators.

A moment later, her attacker was pulled from her, but not before she’d inflicted a few heavy blows to Margot’s ribs. Shocked by the attack, Margot didn’t fight the hands that gently rolled her over. Opening her eyes, she found Adam kneeling over her. He helped her to sit up then sat down beside her before pulling her into his lap.

“Are you okay?” he asked, smoothing her hair from her face as his other hand rubbed up and down her bare arm.

She ignored everyone pressing around them, asking questions and

talking. Nothing mattered except getting away from this pack of bitches and getting her mate alone.

“I’m fine. I spent an obscene amount of your money and met your mother. Can we go home now?”

Chapter 8

“Welcome to *our* home,” Adam said as he opened the front door. He wanted to give her the grand tour, but she looked exhausted. He was as well and couldn’t wait to feel her next to him in bed, even if it was just to sleep with her in his arms.

Wrapping his hand around hers, he led her through the grand foyer and down the darkened hall to the kitchen. “I don’t know about you, but I’m hungry. Fundraiser dinners never fill me up. Tomorrow I’ll give you the full tour, and we’ll see about getting the rest of your things moved over here.”

When she didn’t answer by the time he flipped the kitchen light on, he turned to check on her. She looked too pale and shocked. “Baby? What’s wrong?”

She blinked, and her eyes glittered with tears. “You want me to live here? With you?”

When she began to visibly tremble, he pulled her close to his chest and wrapped both arms around her. Kissing the top of her head, he smiled. “Of course I want you to live here with me. We’re mates. Where else would you live except with your mate?”

She shrugged and buried her face deeper in his chest.

“Margot? Talk to me, baby. I may be insanely rich and a shape shifter, but I am a man, and I don’t read minds.”

Easing his hold, he tried to step back. She followed, keeping her face buried in his chest. With a sigh, he relented and cuddled her closer. When hot tears soaked through his shirt, he began to rub her back.

“Sweet Margot, you are mine forever. If you don’t like this place,

we can find another. Or we could build a new one. I can call the architects in the morning.”

“No, don’t do that. It’s not that I don’t like the house, it’s just,” she sighed before continuing, “I’m tired and overwhelmed and... and...oh God, I think I’m going to be sick.” Pulling away, Margot covered her mouth with one hand while her other covered her stomach. She ran across the room to the sink where she threw up.

By the time she finished expelling everything she’d eaten that day, Adam found a bottle of ginger ale and a clean cloth. After wetting it, he wiped her face. Then he offered her the drink. “I’ll find some crackers.” He led her to the corner of the room to a butcher block table with several wooden chairs around it.

He returned a few minutes later with two glasses and a box of crackers. Without a word, he picked her up from the chair she occupied. He sat down then settled her in his lap.

“Now, would you please tell me what’s got you so stressed that it made you sick?”

* * * *

Margot looked into his face and read only concern and love there. Closing her eyes, she took a deep breath. He didn’t smell like fancy colognes, but like clean, healthy male.

“What am I supposed to do now?”

“What do you mean?”

Margot felt more tears pressing and wasn’t sure she could control the wild emotions blasting through her. “This morning my biggest concern was securing a job that paid enough that I don’t have to move to Santa Fe to live with my brother. Now I’m sitting in what has to be the biggest house in the county with a man who just offered to tear it down and build me a new one. You have an empire to oversee. What am I supposed to do? I’m not a doll to sit on a shelf waiting until you decide you have time to take me down and play with me.”

She watched as his confusion cleared, and he nodded. “For now I think we should take a few days to get to know one another better, in bed and out. You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to, but I also don’t want you doing anything just to please me. If I do start ignoring you, tell me. You can even slap me upside the head like on that military cop television show. For now, relax and stop worrying. Okay?”

Margot nodded into his chest. She smiled when his cock stiffened and pressed into her hip. The feel of his growing hunger ignited her own. “I can’t believe you’re horny again. Have you always been this way?”

“Never. Truth is, I’m not the sexual beast the paparazzi make me out to be. In the past, most of my dates usually ended with a kiss on the cheek before Sam drove me home. I think this is all about you and our mating bond.” He shifted under her and tightened his hold around her body.

A moment later, she squeaked when he stood with her in his arms. “What are you doing?”

He carried her around the table. After setting her in the chair there, he returned to the one they had just shared. “I’m trying to take care of you. You need to eat without me spreading you across this table and ravishing you,” he said, picking up a knife and a cracker. “Now eat something.”

“Yes, sir, mister mate of mine. Anything you say,” she said with a cheeky grin.

“Ha ha.”

After their snack, Adam took her hand and led her back to the foyer and then up the main staircase. At the top he turned left and they headed down a long, wide wall lit only by several knee-high nightlights placed at regular intervals.

“How big is this place?” Margot whispered.

“Baby, you don’t have to whisper. We’re all alone. The staff stays only until about eight each night.”

“Staff?”

“Yes, baby, staff. This is a big place. Twelve bedrooms, each with its own private bathroom, two living rooms, a formal dining room—though I prefer to eat in the kitchen—a media room, an office, a conference room, kitchen, a staff area, and some other rooms that I’m not even sure I know what their function is.”

By the time he finished the recitation, they had reached the end of the hall and a set of floor-to-ceiling double doors. “This is the master suite,” he said, turning both handles and pushing the doors inward.

He stepped aside, allowing Margot to enter first. He tried not to grin as she walked in and looked around. “There’s nothing in here.”

“Nope. The structural stuff is all finished, but the decorating hasn’t been touched. In fact, a bunch of the rooms are unfinished. About half the bedrooms and the rooms in the business wing are finished. Oh, and of course the media room and kitchen.”

“Of course,” Margot snarked as she returned to the doorway. “So if the master suite isn’t ready for occupancy, which room is? I’d really like to change into something a little more comfortable.”

“Or maybe nothing at all?” Adam offered as he guided her back down the hall to a room near the center of the house. “This is where I’ve been sleeping.” He opened the door and flicked on the light before stepping back.

Margot walked in and froze. “This is beautiful,” she breathed.

The walls were painted a soft shade of blue-green that reminded her of Adam’s eyes. The furniture was of light wood in a simple Mission style. A nightstand stood on either side of the king-size bed. A huge fireplace with a flat panel television above it occupied the wall across the room. Just in front of the fireplace, a pair of club chairs sat on either side of a low table piled high with magazines and books. A table across the room under several windows was covered with papers, as well. The cream-colored comforter matched the carpeting, which was covered with several woven rugs in browns and deep reds that added to the Southwestern feel of the room.

“If you don’t like this room, there are others to choose from. There’s the red room that looks like it came straight out of a New Orleans bordello, a jungle room with vines, animal prints, and a hammock, and one the decorator called kid friendly, but it has bunk beds. There’s also one that’s all white and light purple. She called that one shabby, but the price was anything but.”

“Shabby chic,” Margot corrected. “This room is fine. It’s more than fine. It’s perfect.” Turning, she threw herself at him, certain he would catch her. He did. She wrapped her arms around him and kissed every inch of skin she could reach.

“Wow, and you haven’t even seen the bathroom or closet yet.”

“Don’t need to. I’m not as high maintenance as the women you’re used to. I don’t spend hours primping. I don’t own a lot of clothes. I prefer jeans to dresses, and you’ll probably need to sign me up for an etiquette class before we try the high society thing again.”

“Don’t worry, baby. I’m not much of a high society guy myself. I prefer jeans to suits, beer to wine, and my mother is forever correcting my table manners.” He kissed her nose as he searched for the zipper on her dress. “I’ll tell you a secret. You are now so rich that people will forgive you for using the wrong fork. They’ll be too busy kissing up to notice any mistakes in etiquette. Now where’s the zipper to this damn dress?”

With a grin, Margot lifted her right arm and pulled the zipper down with her left. “That way it doesn’t spoil the line of the gown,” she explained as she pushed the dress to the floor.

“Why Miss Jackson, you’re nekkid ’neath your ball gown,” Adam teased as he tossed his jacket over one of the club chairs. He then started on the gold studs holding his shirt together.

“I guess I win this time,” Margot teased back as she circled the room.

She’d just found the bathroom, decorated in the same Southwestern desert theme, when Adam joined her. He wrapped his arms around her, cupping her breasts.

“Want a bath before bed?” he offered in the sexy growl that set her juices to collecting between her legs.

“No, just want to brush my teeth and pee.”

“Okay. I’ll use the bathroom next door and meet you in bed.” He kissed her neck just below her earlobe. After licking the mating mark, he grabbed his toothbrush and disappeared out the door.

By the time Margot finished in the bathroom and climbed into the beautiful bed, exhaustion from the overwhelming day outweighed horniness. Closing her eyes, she smiled as Adam’s scent on the linens surrounded her.

Just before she slipped into sleep, she thought she heard the question, “Baby, what do you want?” Only it wasn’t in that toneless voice any longer. This time it sounded a lot like Adam.

She sighed before murmuring, “Just you.”

* * * *

“Baby, what do you want for breakfast?” Adam asked as he walked in from the hallway. “Margot?”

Approaching the bed, he heard her murmur something, but he couldn’t make out the words. But the contented smile she wore brought a similar one to his lips. “Oh, sweet mate, it was a hell of a day, wasn’t it?”

Trying not to disturb her, he crawled in next to her, easing closer until his front spooned against her back. With a contented sigh, he wiggled one arm beneath the pillow under her head and draped the other around her middle, pulling her even closer. Closing his eyes, he breathed deep of her honey-cinnamon-vanilla essence and smiled.

All was well in the world tonight. He had found his mate.

Chapter 9

Margot woke feeling rested and more relaxed than she could ever remember. She didn't feel any dried tears on her cheeks and the knotted muscles of her shoulders and back that had grown progressively tighter over the past weeks were loose and pain free. Taking a deep breath, she felt warm skin of an arm not her own slide against her middle. A moment later, the arm moved up until a large hand covered her breast.

"Good morning, sweet mate of mine."

Margot moved forward then rolled to her back, so she could look at the man in the bed with her. "I fell asleep, didn't I? Oh God, I'm so sorry."

"Hush, baby. You were exhausted. We both were." Adam leaned down and gave her a gentle good-morning kiss. "Today is a new day. We have all day to play."

As soon as his turquoise eyes began to glow, Margot felt her core melting, preparing for sex. "Are you sure I won't wear you out?" She caressed a path down his muscled chest and six-pack abs to find him already hard. Wrapping her fingers around him, she brushed the pad of her thumb back and forth over his slit, her smile growing when her thumb came away wet with his juices. "I'd hate to be the reason Thomasson Enterprises loses money this quarter."

* * * *

"You could never wear me out," he growled as he moved over her and licked her mating mark.

“That feels so good. It’s like there’s a direct line from the bite mark to my cunt. I need you in me. Right now.” She spread her legs, lifting and wrapping them around his waist. His hard length traced down between her lower lips until the tip reached her entrance.

“You’ve got me,” he groaned.

His hips pushed forward as he licked the mark where shoulder met neck. This joining was slow and easy, a slow wakening of lust and love and need. When he felt her muscles ripple around his length, massaging him, he called forward his inner beast, and his canines dropped.

“Come for me, baby,” he ordered. He thrust deeper and harder until they reached their pinnacle. As she cried out her climax, he claimed her again, drinking deep of her life blood, savoring the sweet taste of her before licking the wound closed again.

He rolled over so they remained connected, but he wouldn’t crush her. Then he stroked her spine from neck to ass and back.

“You bit me again.”

“No,” he said. “I didn’t bite you. I marked you again. It’s a sign to other shape shifters that you now have a mate. It’s a sign to other humans that your man loves you in his own kinky way. Don’t you like it?”

“I do, though it’s another of those don’t know if it is because I’m crazy or because this is all a dream. Will I wake up and be back in my little rented house with no job, a stack of bills, and the sheriff knocking at the door?” Margot admitted softly.

Instead of answering with words, Adam ran his hand down her spine then pinched her left ass cheek hard.

“Ow! What was that for?” Margot rolled away and sat up.

“I just wanted to prove that you’re not sleeping. You are wide awake. You are the life mate of a billionaire shape shifter who loves you more today than he did yesterday and will love you even more tomorrow. Why don’t you go back to sleep? I need to go for a run, and I’ll wake you when I come back.”

“Can I go with you? No, never mind, I’ll never be able to keep up.” She looked at his long legs as he climbed from the bed.

“Especially since I’ll be running on four feet and not two. If you don’t want to sleep, get dressed and go down and meet Mrs. Nicholas. I’ll meet you in the kitchen for breakfast in about an hour, okay?” He leaned over the bed and brushed a kiss over her lips.

Margot paused before saying, “Does Mrs. Nicholas know about your furry half?”

“Yes, she’s been taking care of me since I made my first million. She knows all my secrets. She also knows which ones to share and which ones to forget. Love you, mate of mine,” he said with a grin as he opened the door to the hall.

In an instant, a big black wolf looked at her with Adam’s blue-green eyes. He gave a soft woof before trotting out the door and disappearing down the hall.

Margot shook her head before lying back down, but she couldn’t go back to sleep. Once she was awake, she was up for the day. Throwing back the covers, she rolled from the bed and began to explore, for the first time in her life not self-conscious that she was naked.

Forty minutes later, she headed down the stairs. She had explored her new bedroom, finding her clothes neatly put away on one side of a closet that was almost as big as the bedroom in her tiny house. Adam’s filled the other side, proving he did prefer jeans to suits.

After indulging in an extra long hot shower, which soothed the muscle aches she’d discovered after starting to move, she dressed in her favorite jeans. The old, soft fabric always made her feel braver than she was. The plum-colored sweater she wore with them did good things for her too-pale complexion.

As she dried her hair she decided that she would need to spend some of Adam’s money on new clothes. A moment later, she grinned at herself in the mirror. She really was a fairy tale princess who’d fallen for the handsome prince. Only in her case, the prince had the

ability to turn into the big, black wolf.

Once she'd cleaned up the bathroom, she made the bed then wondered if she would get in trouble for cleaning up after herself. She'd never had a housekeeper before and didn't know what the protocol was. After slipping on her sneakers, she grabbed her purse. She felt silly carrying it with her around the house, but she also didn't want to have to trek up and down the stairs a dozen times because she'd left something upstairs.

Just as she reached the bottom of the stairs, someone began pounding on the front door.

Looking around, she half expected an ancient liveried butler to pop out of the woodwork and open the door. When no one appeared and the knock sounded again, she shrugged. After draping her purse over the post at the bottom of the banister, she went to answer it herself.

Opening the door, she wasn't sure who was more surprised, her or Leigh what's-her-name. Looking the younger woman up and down, Margot had the suspicion she was up to something. Looking past her, she noted it was another beautiful North Carolina day with deep blue skies and comfortable temperatures. So why was the society bitch wrapped up tight in an ankle-length black fur coat?

"Good morning. Can I help you?" Margot vowed to remain pleasant, at least until she couldn't any longer. Then all bets were off. She just wished Adam would show up soon.

"What the hell are you doing here?" Leigh growled as she pushed Margot aside and stalked into the foyer.

Margot counted to ten as she closed the door. "I live here. Is there something I can do for you?"

She watched as the other woman swung around to stare daggers at her. "You've got to be kidding. He moved you in?" Her words grew louder and sharper.

She began to stalk back and forth across the foyer in her bright red stiletto heels, muttering to herself. She cursed her mother for her not-

so-brilliant brain fart and her friends for goading her to follow through with the insane idea.

Margot crossed her arms and leaned back against the front door, at a loss as what else she should do.

With Adam out for his run and not sure if anyone else was within shouting distance, she decided to let Leigh have her tirade and get it out of her system before she told her to get the hell out.

Problem was, Leigh didn't calm down as she ranted. Instead she grew more and more agitated. With each pass across the foyer, her steps grew faster and her turns more dramatic. On the last turn, she slipped on the marble tile, squealing as her feet flew out from under her. Her coat flew open as she landed on her ass, exposing the skimpy red teddy she wore underneath.

Not surprised, Margot strolled over. "Are you all right?"

"No, I'm not all right. I'm supposed to be Adam's mate, not some backstreet, no-class old tramp who can't even dress herself properly. I can't believe he marked you and moved you in and everything. This was supposed to be my house."

Margot was about to offer the woman a hand to help her up when Leigh disappeared. In her place stood a tawny-brown wolf dressed in a red teddy.

"Oh, shit," Margot swore as she began to back away from Leigh, the crazy shape shifting bitch.

The wolf shook off the fur coat, then stepped out of the teddy and began to stalk Margot across the foyer.

Adam, where the hell are you?

Margot continued backing away, moving around the perimeter of the foyer in a circle until she reached the hallway that led to the kitchen.

The wolf continued stalking her, making grumbling, growling sounds as if continuing her earlier tirade. Margot watched the wolf lick her lips and knew that she was dead meat. With that, panic set in, and she turned to run. She'd taken two steps when something big and

furry hit her between the shoulders blades, pushing her to the floor.

“Adam!” she screamed as she fell.

It felt like large pins pricked her back as the beast continued snarling and snapping just above her head. A moment later, she heard a deeper growl, and the weight holding her down was gone. Pushing to her knees and then to her feet, Margot ran without glancing to the fight going on behind her.

Run to the kitchen, sweet mate. I'll deal with Leigh.

Not sure if it really was Adam's voice or just her vivid imagination at play, Margot did as instructed. She ran. Bursting into the kitchen, she found Sam at the kitchen table as well as an older woman whose appearance seemed to personify the word grandmother. Her salt-and-pepper hair was pulled back into a low bun, and she wore a brightly flowered chef's apron over her sweater and jeans.

“Stop them, she's going to kill him,” she screamed as the sounds of animals fighting filled the silence of the room.

She made it halfway across the room before her knees gave out. Sam caught her and helped her to a chair across the room.

“Who is it, Margot?” he asked.

“Leigh something or other. The bitch who attacked me at the auction last night. Says she's supposed to be Adam's mate. She was wearing a teddy and spike heels with a full-length fur coat. Isn't it an oxymoron or something for a shape shifter to wear a fur coat?”

She didn't notice Sam pull out a gun and disappear into the hall. She kept talking though she had no memory of it later. She didn't notice the cup of coffee Mrs. Nicholas put in front of her or that the older woman lifted the back of her sweater to check for wounds. She didn't even hear the fight end with several high-pitched yelps followed by a long, deep-throated howl.

“I didn't even get a chance to tell him that even though we've know each other less than a day, I love him more than I've ever loved anyone. It doesn't even matter that he's younger and prettier than me.”

“Shh, baby. I love you, too. And you’ve got to stop talking about yourself like that.” A pair of strong arms wrapped around her as the scent of Adam’s musky male sweat filled her nostrils.

“Adam? Are you okay?”

“I’m fine.” Adam lifted her, then took her seat and settled her in his lap. He cradled her close and kissed her hair.

Margot ran her hands over his bare chest and arms to the top of the gray sweatpants he’d put on.

Though tempted to ask if he’d killed the crazy woman, she decided she really didn’t want to know. “Leigh what’s-her-name is not a very nice lady,” she murmured as she buried her face into his neck and rubbed her cheek against his damp skin.

“No, she’s not. She’s gone, so you don’t need to worry about her bothering us anymore.”

“You didn’t kill her, did you?” The words were out before she realized she’d opened her mouth.

“No. I just reminded her that I am the alpha, and she is not. She also understands that her life is forfeit if she ever comes near you again.” Adam licked at the dried tear tracks on her cheek as he hugged her close.

“Oh, okay. How was your run?”

“It was fine until I saw Leigh’s car parked in front of the house. I ran around to the kitchen as fast as I could, afraid I might be too late. I half expected she’d try something like this, but I figured she’d wait another day or two.”

“Yeah, it was a close call. Next time, could you warn me which of your crazy, jealous ex-lovers are shape shifters and are going to try to kill me?”

“Leigh and I were never lovers. She wanted, but I can’t stand the bitch. I was waiting for my mate. My beautiful mate who is now going to come upstairs with me and wash my back. Then she’s going to tell me again that she loves me and is going to stay with me forever. After that, I’ll show her how much I love her. Then maybe

we'll get around to planning the rest of the day."

Standing, Adam tossed her over his shoulder and started toward the staircase tucked in the far corner of the room next to the door to the pantry.

"Mrs. Nicholas, we'd like a full breakfast brought upstairs in an hour, please."

THE END

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cooper McKenzie always thought she had been born a hundred years too late, but appreciates air conditioning, computers and other conveniences of modern day living. She enjoys the slower pace of New Bern, North Carolina as well as the history and small town community found there. In addition to dreaming up her next story, Cooper enjoys reading everything except scary books, singing in her church choir and needle-weaving.

Also by Cooper McKenzie

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