



JAYNELL'S WOLF

A WIZARD'S TOUCH SERIES

AMBER KELL

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JAYNELL'S *WOLF*

A WIZARD'S TOUCH, BOOK ONE

AMBER KELL

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Dedication:

To my blog buddies who always give me that little bit of
encouragement when I'm feeling down.

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Chapter One

Jaynell Marley looked at the tall lions flanking the doors and let out the breath he'd been holding. Students ran up and down the stairs, rushing off to classes or wherever busy students went. This was where his father wanted him, the last request of a dead man who had given Jay everything, including his very life. Despite not wanting to be here, Jay wouldn't deny his father's wishes.

Nerves firing like ricocheting bullets zapped through his system as he realized soon he would be one of those students. At twenty-four years of age, Jay was older than a lot of the freshmen at the Mayell Wizard Academy, but life had kept him too busy to start formal training until this point.

"Are you lost?"

"Hmmm." Jay pulled himself out of his thoughts to see a girl about his own age standing before him with questioning eyes.

"Are you lost? You look like you're not sure where to go."

"Headmaster's office. I have to go to the headmaster's office," Jay said. Although he had a pretty good idea of where to go, it didn't hurt to have someone show him.

"I'm Lira," she said, holding out her hand. "I'm a second year. Did you transfer?"

"I'm Jaynell. No. I didn't transfer. I'm starting late. Family illness."

"Oh." Her face reflected pity, but she didn't comment further. In Jay's experience, most people didn't know what to say. "Come with me. I'll take you to Headmaster Vreel. He's really amazing. You'll like him."

Jay hoped it was true. Always nervous about meeting authority figures, he'd spent all of his life with private tutors. This was his first time coming to a place of group education. Granted, the education was done in an exclusive wizarding college, but it was still not the usual one-on-one tutoring he was used to.

Nervously following the friendly girl, Jay climbed the long stairway, momentarily distracted when the lions' eyes glowed blue.

"Why do they glow?" Jay asked, pointing at the lions.

Lira frowned. "What are you talking about? They don't glow."

Maybe it was just one of those things that only he saw. Wouldn't be the first time.

"I guess I'm imagining things."

Except he knew he wasn't. Lira seemed happy with that explanation and continued to lead him through the marble halls, to a gleaming wooden door.

"Here you go."

"Thanks."

With a small smile, Jay opened the door and stepped through. A gnome sat behind a large wooden desk. Her gray skin gleamed dully beneath the natural sunlight. He could tell she was a female by the earring in her left ear, indicating a mated female. Males wore them in their right ear.

Jay gave a short bow to the receptionist and said in perfect Gnome, "I have an appointment with your master."

Most people didn't know gnomes only worked for their masters. In order to stay out of their hills, they had to be owned. Free gnomes were only allowed underground because of their rages. Their anger could only be controlled by the one who owned them. It was a high honor to be owned, and oddly, an owned gnome had more status in their tribe than a free one.

The gnome's eyes sparkled when she spotted Jay. "Greetings. You must be Mr. Marley. Someone has trained you well. You speak Gnome beautifully. I will tell my master that you can skip Gnome linguistics."

One less class to take

Jay gave another bow. "Your help is appreciated."

The little creature beamed, flashing her pointed teeth in a frighteningly sharp smile. "You are most

welcome, gnome friend. Go right in."

Jay smiled and went to the door the gnome pointed to. Not bothering to knock, he opened the door and walked through.

A tall, thin man with long white hair sat behind a silvery metallic desk. He gave Jay a nod as he walked into the room.

"Good afternoon, Master Jay. It is nice to see you. My secretary told me great things about you."

The gnome must have a telepathic link to her master. Jay realized his entire interaction was probably relayed to the white-haired man as it happened. "That is kind of her."

"Indeed." The wizard pierced Jay with a stare. "She doesn't like very many people so I'm always fascinated when she takes a shine to one."

It wasn't a question so Jay stayed silent. He didn't want to interrupt the dean.

"Now sit and we'll go over your schedule."

Jay perched at the edge of a straight-backed wooden chair, his nerves swirling around his stomach like a tornado.

The wizard shifted some papers around on his desk. "I see that you've been privately tutored so I don't have any of your talent scores available. You will have to meet with

the testers to see where you have the greatest talents. You are scheduled to do your talent tests tomorrow at noon. Today, you can get settled in your room and familiarize yourself with campus."

"The lions out front?"

"Saw that, did you?" The headmaster gave him a companionable smile. "Security system."

"Ah." Jay nodded. He continued nodding until he was sent out of the office with a room number, a map and a test schedule.

* * * *

Jay gave the gnome a respectful nod on the way out and received another sharp-toothed smile in return. Hiding his shudder, he walked out of the room. Looking down at his map, he headed to where he thought his dorm was.

His room was on the second floor and, from the sound of the music pounding through the door, wasn't empty.

Jay hesitantly knocked on the door.

A tousled blond head peeked out, half-elf if Jay was any sort of judge.

"Hey. You must be the new kid."

"I'm Jay."

"Kevin. Nice to meet you, come on in."

Jay walked through the door and into a large room. Five beds were spaced out with desks between them.

Three dark-haired men, identical in appearance, stared at him with glowing blue eyes.

"These are the Stewartson triplets. Devin, Dean, and Dan. We just call them all D."

"Guys." Jay scanned them with his magic and imprinted their differences into his mind. He didn't want to get stuck calling them by the wrong names. Names were important and carried power.

"Where's your stuff?" Dean asked, shaking his dark shaggy head at Jay's bare hands.

"Oh. Right here." Jay pulled a sheet of paper out of his pocket. Unfolding the paper, he placed it on the only empty bed in the room.

All four of them stared at the picture of the steamer trunk.

"Funny, dude," Kevin said. "But, really, where's your stuff."

"Haven't you ever seen a compression spell?" Jay slid his right index finger across the photo. "Reveal."

A flash of purple lightning crackled in the room, and a full size suitcase appeared on Jay's bed.

"Whoa." Devin stared at the luggage like it might

bite him. "How did you do that?"

Jay shrugged. "I used magic to compress my luggage until it was paper thin."

"Man, that's way advanced magic. Are you sure you're a freshman?"

"I've had a lot of private tutoring," Jay confessed. "My father didn't like me to be away from him for too long."

All four sets of eyes stared at him like he'd performed a miracle. "I think you might be ahead of the rest of us," Dan said.

Jay hoped his new roommates weren't going to think he was a showoff. He didn't know what they taught in public schools so there was no way for him to judge a normal level of experience and magical power. His father couldn't stand the separation, not since he'd bound his magic to Jay's, but he didn't think he needed to go into those details.

"How about you put your stuff away and we'll take you out for pizza?" Kevin said with a smile.

Jay didn't really want to have pizza, but he knew the guy was trying to make him feel welcome. "I'd like that. Thanks."

He quickly pulled out his clothing and put everything in the dresser set aside for him. He piled his

books tidily on top.

"Look at this," Dean said, picking up a spell book.

"It's autographed by Michael Dragonspawn."

"Wow, do you know him?" Dan asked.

Jay didn't know what the big deal was, but he thought it was best to come clean. "He was one of my tutors."

"That must have been incredible," Dean said, carefully placing the book back on the dresser as if worried about damaging it.

Jay nodded. "He was a good teacher. I didn't know he was famous until later."

"Wow. You can tell us all about it at dinner," Kevin said.

Jay shrugged. "Whatever."

* * * *

The pizza place was obviously a favorite with the college crowd. Jay saw a lot of students doing minor spells across the tables while chomping pizza. His roommates took the first table they found. A female gnome approached and asked what they wanted to drink.

Jay automatically answered in Gnome. "I'll have a soda."

The gnome's dour face lit up. "You speak gnome really well."

"Thank you. My father taught me it was important to learn the language of all peoples. Today is my first day here," Jay confessed.

"Welcome. Pizza for you and your friends today is on the house."

Jay gave a seated bow in the traditional gnome acknowledgement. "My house thanks yours."

"I'll be right back with your pizzas."

The little gnome ran off.

"What did you say to her?" Kevin asked.

Jay looked at them, puzzled. "None of you speak gnome?"

"Dude," Kevin said. "I'd be surprised if anyone on campus who isn't a gnome or in linguistics can speak gnome that well. We all have to take beginning gnome, but hell, I don't remember more than a couple words. You know things like 'thanks' or 'you're welcome'." "Really?"

"Really," all four of them said in unison.

"Huh. Well, she thanked me for speaking gnome and said she'd be right back with free pizza."

"I'm never going to eat pizza without you again," Devin said, batting his eyes with fake adoration.

Jay laughed. He'd been worried they would think he

was showing off again.

A pert redhead walked past them. "Hi, Dan," she said, waving as she went.

"That's Dean," Jay corrected, without thinking. The triplets stared at him with their mouths open.

"How did you know that?" Kevin asked. "They're identical, Jay."

"In appearance sure, but they all have different magical signatures."

"Only master wizards can see magical signatures," Dan protested.

"No." Jay shook his head. "It's really easy. Here," he held his hand out to Kevin, "place your hand palm down on mine."

Kevin searched his face for a moment before setting his hand on top of Jay's. "Now take a deep breath and look at the triplets. I'll guide you."

While Kevin breathed, Jay twined his magic with his roommate's. The blond jerked for a moment. "You're really, really strong," Kevin said in a breathless tone. Good thing Jay was using his lightest touch.

"Focus on the triplets."

Kevin turned to the trio. "Shit." He jerked his hand away from Jay's. "Is that what you see?"

Jay nodded.

"What?"

"What did you see?"

"How did we look?"

Kevin's eyes were wide, and he panted to catch his breath. "It was like there were different colored lights flowing around you. He's right. You don't look anything alike under the surface. Dean has more red bits swirling around, and Dan had more blue, and, Devin, you have a kinda white glow."

Gnomes appeared out of nowhere and placed steaming hot pizzas on the table in front of them along with pitchers of soda. Jay thanked them all in gnome. They quickly disappeared again with beaming smiles.

"This looks great," Jay said, inhaling. "I'm starved."

He ate three pieces before he realized none of his roommates were eating. They were staring... at him.

"What?" he asked with his mouth full.

"How powerful are you?" Dean asked.

Jay shrugged. "They're testing me tomorrow."

"Who's the new guy?" A group of four girls walked up to the table and stared at Jay as if they'd never seen a male before. Jay rolled his eyes and grabbed another piece of pizza. He hadn't thought he was hungry, but the pizza was really good.

"This is Jay," Kevin said. "Jay, this is Lisa, Sara, Mara, and Farra."

Jay nodded and went back to eating. He couldn't remember the last time something tasted so good. It took him a moment before he realized Lisa was saying something to him.

"I'm sorry, could you repeat that?"

Her pretty face blushed. "I was asking if you wanted to go out some time."

Jay wiped his mouth with a napkin. It was probably best to get this out in the open. Having been home schooled, Jay was generally uncomfortable when it came to women coming on to him, especially since he preferred men. "Lisa, could you do me a favor."

"Sure," she said, leaning forward and exposing her cleavage.

"Could you pass the word around that I prefer men."

Lisa stood up straight. "You mean..."

"I'm gay, Lisa. Sorry."

"Oh." Lisa blushed but then nodded. "Sure, I could do that."

Jay gave her a sympathetic smile. "Thanks, Lisa. I'm very flattered you thought of me as date-worthy."

Lisa laughed, the tension visibly leaving her. "You're welcome." She lowered her voice. "I'll make sure

to spread the word so other women don't get any ideas.

You're very handsome, you know."

"Thank you." This time it was Jay's turn to blush.

After a few more words exchanged between the two parties, the women ran off.

Jay looked up from his pizza to see all four of his roommates staring at him again. "What is it about you four? You're always staring like I'm some sort of freak."

"She's the hottest girl in school," Dean said, wide-eyed. "I've been trying to date her for weeks.

"Want me to set you up?"

Dean laughed. "I guess it's a good thing you aren't interested in women. I don't think I could stand the competition."

Jay was relieved to see none of his new roommates seemed to give a crap about his sexuality. It could've become uncomfortable if any of them were prejudiced against gays. Jay shrugged. After pizza, he begged off doing anything else. He knew he needed his energy if he was going to be awake for his testing tomorrow.

"I'll catch you guys later," he said then turned and slammed into a mountain. It took him a moment to realize mountains probably didn't wear tight denim and cotton shirts.

"I've got you," a deep voice said above him, and Jay

looked up into the greenest eyes he'd ever seen, spring green like summer grass.

The man was gorgeous in an I-can-rip-your-head-off-Neanderthal way. Muscles bulging beneath a fitted shirt, the man towered at last half a foot above Jay's five feet ten. Jay resisted the urge to rub his quickly hardening cock against the man like a dog in heat. He let out a strangled moan when the man grabbed his arms to steady him.

"H-hello." Jay's ability to speak completely evaporated before the hotness of the man in front of him.

"Hello there." Interest sparked in the man's brilliant eyes.

* * * *

Thomas Sparks looked down at the man in his arms and barely resisted the urge to howl. Magic all but glowed off the man, but it was his brown eyes with shards of blue that had him entranced. Thomas leaned down and sniffed the man's neck. The sexy creature tilted his head back and let him.

Sex and magic filled his nostrils until he couldn't stop the growl rolling through his chest. Unable to resist, he licked a long line up the sleek neck of the extremely sexy

man. It took him a moment to realize two groups of people were trying to part him from the gorgeous creature in his arms.

"Hey, man, he didn't mean to run into you. He's new," a dishwater blond said in a coaxing voice like he was dealing with a lunatic.

"Tom, you gotta let the pretty wizard go." His younger brother, Larry, tugged at his arm.

Tom snarled. His wolf was close to the surface and willing to hurt anyone who pulled him away from his mate.

He saw his pack getting ready to spring and take him down and the wizards pulling wands from their pockets.

"We can't yank him from the wizard. He might hurt the man," James, his oldest brother was saying. "I've never seen him like this. Maybe he's going feral."

"I'm not going feral." Thomas growled. "He's my mate."

The wizard jerked in his hold. "I can't be anyone's mate."

"You're mine."

"Shit." He wasn't sure which side said it, but he was pretty sure all the people around him reflected the sentiment.

"Bring him back to the pack," James said in a

resigned voice.

"I can't go to the pack. I have tests tomorrow," the beautiful wizard said, his soft mouth firming in a stubborn line.

"I'll make sure you get back in time," Thomas said soothingly, stroking a line up the wizard's back.

Those stunning eyes pinned him with a look.

"Promise."

"I vow on my shifter soul." The beautiful wizard searched his gaze for a moment, and Tom thought maybe he *was* actually examining his soul.

"All right. Tell Kevin where I'll be so that if I don't return he'll know where to start looking."

Thomas laughed, but no one else in the place smiled, not even the other wolves. He carefully spelled out his location to the wizards. Not that they could find it even if they tried. It was hidden except for pack and their mates.

Leaning down, he rubbed his cheek across the top of his mate's silky hair, spreading his scent across his head.

"Let's go home." Not giving the wizard a chance to come up with any other excuses, he was about to usher him out the door when a pair of gnomes zapped into view loaded down with pizza.

They handed the boxes to his brothers, exchanged a few words in what he assumed was their native language

with the gorgeous wizard, and then popped out of sight.

"What did they say?" James asked.

The wizard blushed, a charming thing that almost made him not care what the question was. "They said to feed me so I can keep up my stamina."

Thomas laughed. "Wise gnomes."

He kept a hold on the back of the wizard's neck and led him out to the limos.

"You took limos to get pizza?"

"We take limos for everything. We need someone else to drive in case we have unexpected shifting."

The wizard nodded. "Makes sense."

"What's your name?" James asked. Thomas wanted to smack himself in the face. Here was his mate, and he couldn't collect enough brain cells to ask the man his name.

"Jaynell Marley. People call me Jay."

"I'm Thomas Sparks, and I will call you mine,"

Thomas growled. He opened the limo door and ushered the wizard into the vehicle.

When James tried to get in after him, Thomas flashed his fangs.

"You don't want to challenge me, little brother."

Thomas felt power fill him as he stared down his brother, his alpha. "Today I will challenge anyone who tries to take what is mine."

"Fuck. His eyes are glowing," Larry said. "Must be the wizard's influence."

"Because of your mating, I will defer and ride in another car."

Tom tried to look grateful but mostly he was resisting the urge to rip off his brother's head and beat him with it. He forced himself to give his brother a polite nod before climbing into the limo and sliding next to his mate.

* * * *

Jay wondered how he went from eating pizza to being kidnapped by a werewolf pack. Not that he minded if it involved sex with the gorgeous creature beside him.

"We are going to have sex, aren't we?" Jay asked, blushing.

"Absolutely." Thomas slid across the long leather seat of the limo. A feral light glowed in the shape shifter's eyes as they latched onto Jay like he was the world's best treat.

Thomas' kiss was like being plunged into an inferno. Heat licked at Jay like living flames, making his body hard and needy. Moaning, Jay shifted restlessly on the seat, rubbing against the larger man. The feel of the hard body above him was almost enough to make Jay come in

his pants. Frantically, he struggled to push Thomas away.

"What?" Thomas lifted his mouth, his expression puzzled and a little hurt. "Don't you want me to kiss you?"

"Um." Jay scrambled to grasp at his thoughts but they scattered like leaves tumbling with the wind. "Oh," he moaned as Thomas bit his neck. Shivers of need rippled up and down Jay's spine, making his skin feel too tight for his body as prickles danced across his skin.

Thomas licked Jay's neck with his rough tongue, ripping a whimper from the depths of his soul.

"Please," Jay begged desperately, his hands clutching Thomas. In a passionate fog, Jay was certain the man above him was the only thing grounding him to reality. Nothing was more important at that moment than the taste, feel, and scent of Thomas.

"Anything you want, my one. Anything at all."

"Touch me," Jay gasped, rubbing his body against the gorgeous man above him.

Thomas dipped his head and bit down on Jay's jugular. "Mine," he growled.

Jay cried out as wetness spread across the front of his pants. "Fuck."

"I will," Thomas said, nipping Jay's ear.

"Unfortunately, it will have to wait until later."

For the first time, Jay realized the limo was slowing

down.

Thomas gave him a shy smile, completely at odds with the aggressive man of moments ago. "Sorry about making you come without a change of clothes."

"No problem." Jay waved his hand as he whispered a word of power. The scent of flowers filled the air as Jay's pants cleaned and dried beneath a quick whirlwind that came and went within seconds.

Thomas flashed his canines, his eyes going feral. "What was that?" he asked when the breeze faded.

"I'm not going to go into a group of shape shifters soaked in cum," Jay said with a glare. "I'm sorry if you don't like magic."

Thomas lifted his hands in a placating gesture. "I wasn't criticizing, love. I just wasn't expecting it. I'm not used to people doing magic. Werekin are magic, but we can't do magic."

"Huh." Jay didn't know what to say. It never occurred to him that magic would be strange to a person who could turn into a completely different creature.

Before he could pursue this line of questioning, the limo came to a complete stop and the driver opened the door.

Thomas climbed out, turning to hold out his hand to help Jaynell from the vehicle.

"I'm not a girl, you know."

"Don't argue," Thomas growled. "It's in my nature to take care of my mate."

"We need to discuss this mate thing."

Jay had just gotten free of a bond with his father. He had no wish to ever be bonded to another person again. Dating sure, maybe living together, but not bonded.

"There's nothing to discuss," Thomas said with a frown. His expression dared Jaynell to argue.

Biting back words he might regret, Jaynell let Thomas help him out of the car.

Thomas retained his grip on Jay's hand and led him up the steps of a sprawling mansion.

It wasn't what he expected of a pack house.

The house was a Victorian monstrosity, which looked more like something vampires would inhabit, not a pack of wolves. His opinion changed once he was inside. For such a large interior, it had a cozy feel with overstuffed leather furnishings and natural wooden floors. Jay dragged his attention away from the exposed rafters to find a dozen wolves, shaped like men, staring at him with a startling intensity. Unconsciously, he stepped closer to Thomas, gripping his hand a little tighter.

Despite his onset of nerves, Jay didn't look away. He met each wolf's stare with one of his own. His father's

advice whispered through his mind. *Never back down. You're strong enough to match anyone.* The last man's eyes he met growled low at him. He recognized him as Thomas' brother. Shit, he was probably the alpha. It was too late to look away. He'd already accidentally challenged the guy. The alpha's words confirmed his thoughts.

"Your mate is challenging me," the alpha said in a gravelly voice.

Tom tilted Jay's head up to him so his gaze filled with the werewolf's face.

"He is my mate," he said proudly. "He is a powerful man in his own right."

"So with him by your side you seek to be alpha?" the other werewolf demanded.

* * * *

Tom broke his gaze from his beautiful mate and turned a puzzled look at his brother. "No, but I can't ask him to be less than he is. I will always defer to you, but he isn't pack. He is Other."

"He's going to get his Other ass kicked if he doesn't learn his place."

Tom saw Jay's eyes glow. As the smaller man started a gesture he was certain would toss his brother on

his ass, Tom quickly grabbed Jay's hand.

"I'm taking him upstairs," he said quickly. "We'll be back down for dinner." Before his alpha could object, he dragged his mate upstairs. It would be a balancing act to keep his beautiful wizard from hurting his brother. The thought both amused him and scared him to his core.

"I could've taken him." The quiet confidence in his mate's voice told Tom he'd gotten Jay away from his brother just in time.

Tom pulled Jay up the stairs and into his suite. He locked the door behind them so no one would interrupt. Privacy wasn't a big deal for pack mates, but he had a feeling his wizard would take a dim view of a wolf wandering into their bedroom while they were being intimate. The close proximity of his mate and his bed was enough to completely derail Tom's thoughts as his cock hardened and begged for attention. With a great deal of effort he focused on their conversation.

"It wouldn't be good for pack politics if you pounded my brother, even if he did deserve it." Tom pulled his lover close and lapped at Jay's throat, imprinting the flavor of his lover onto his soul. He knew in that moment, if he lived for a thousand years, he would never forget the taste of his mate. "I have to live with him for a while yet," he murmured against Jay's neck, reluctant to loosen his

grip. "A wolf can't live without a pack." Clutching Jay close, Tom swept Jay's sweet mouth with his tongue, hoping to derail his lover's line of questioning.

Jay leaned back. "Why is he alpha?"

"Because he's oldest," Tom said. That was how it worked in packs unless the oldest was weak. His brother might be an asshole sometimes, but he wasn't weak.

"You're stronger," Jay said.

Tom shrugged. "Maybe, but I don't have the need to be alpha." Struggling to get his mate to understand the delicate intricacies of a pack might be more difficult than he anticipated. It was hard to explain to an outsider something instinctive to a wolf. "You have to hunger for power to be an alpha. Be willing to sacrifice everything for the good of the pack. James has that hunger. I have never wanted to be top wolf."

Tom stepped forward and brushed Jay's hair away from his beautiful face. "The only thing I've ever wanted was to find the mate of my dreams and settle down."

Jay's smile was quick and bright, like lightning that dazzled and left the impression of its brilliance imprinted on the eyes. "So now that you found me, your life's complete?" The wizard's voice was teasing, but for Tom this wasn't a laughing matter.

He took Jay's hands in his own and looked into his

beautiful mate's eyes. "Yes. Now that I met you, my life's complete."

Jay blushed a brilliant rose color Tom found utterly enchanting.

* * * *

Looking around the room, Jay frantically tried to think of something to say. Things were getting too serious, too fast. Jay was far from ready to settle down. Freedom was a new, hard won experience, and Jay was going to cling to it for as long as he could. However, it was one thing to know that he didn't want to be bound to another person and another to tell it to this man who'd waited his entire life for Jay to wander by.

Tom gave him a smile that brought new meaning to the word wolfish.

"I can smell your panic, my mate. Don't worry. I'm not quite ready to keep you for myself. An untrained wizard can be a dangerous thing, and I want you to be fully in control of your powers before you become one of the pack."

"One of the pack? I'm going to become a werewolf?" Jay couldn't keep the panicky tone from his voice. He had enough on his plate without worrying about

becoming a wolf.

Tom laughed, for a long time. Really, the tears weren't necessary.

"You can't become a were any more than I can become a wizard. You're either born one or not."

"It was just a question." Jay pouted. Although his father had ingrained languages and culture into his brain since birth, it occurred to Jay that his knowledge of werekin was strangely empty.

"Aww. Come here." Tom wrapped his long arms around Jay. He wondered if the cleaning staff would mind mopping up his puddle of goo. It was hard to keep his irritation when he was being snuggled like a favorite teddy bear. "You know that I would never laugh at you, my mate," Tom said, his deep voice low and intimate in Jay's ear.

"We don't know each other well enough yet for me to be aware of what you would or wouldn't do," Jay said snappishly.

Tom held Jay away a bit so he could look into his eyes. "I would never do anything to harm or humiliate you. That is my vow from one mate to another."

"Do most werekin find their mate?" The question was gnawing at him. None of the other weres in the hall looked to be mated, but none of them expressed any

objections when Thomas said Jay was his mate either.

"No." Tom's smile was wondrous. He looked at Jay as if he'd found the best treasure ever. "Most werekin never find the one fated to be theirs. I was one of the lucky ones."

"What makes you think I wasn't the lucky one?" Jay was pleased with that statement. It didn't commit him to anything, but let Tom know that Jay found him attractive. Jay wasn't quite ready to help Tom pick out curtains, but he didn't want to crush the guy either, especially if he might finally get some hot sex. Living with his father had been inhibiting in more than one way.

* * * *

Tom watched his mate for a long while. There wasn't a werekin in the pack who wasn't jealous of him at this moment. Not only had he found his mate, but Jay was also an extremely hot wizard. His mate had so much power that Tom could feel it prickle across his skin like a live wire. How much of that was the mating connection and how much was pure Jay, Tom didn't know, but he was willing to dedicate the next sixty years trying to figure it out.

Jay leaned forward and kissed Tom, short-circuiting every thought in his brain. Heat poured down his spine as

the lip-to-lip contact spread warmth throughout his body. Reluctantly, Tom broke the connection.

"We can't."

"What do you mean we can't? Of course we can." Jay stroked a hand through Tom's hair, and he damn well almost came from the contact.

He loved being petted.

No! He had to focus. Shaking his head, he pulled away from his lover. Tom took a deep breath. "We can't have sex until you promise to be mine forever."

"What!" Jay stood up. "But we just met!" he shouted. "And you promised." He pointed an accusing finger at Thomas.

Tom shook his head. "If I have sex with you, we will be mated for life because you are the one destined to be mine. However, if you decide you don't want me later, I am doomed to spend the rest of my life alone. I won't be able to have sex with anyone else for the rest of my life because my body will always be yearning for you."

Jay frowned. "And if we don't have sex?"

"I can eventually match with another mateless werekin and, although I will always yearn for you, I can have a semi-normal life."

"So if we fuck and I dump you, I've literally ruined your life."

Tom nodded. "Yes."

Jay let out a shaky breath. "Well, as long as there isn't any pressure."

"I don't mean to make you feel bad," Tom rushed to say. "I'm telling you this so you know, when I say we shouldn't have sex right away, it isn't because I'm not insanely attracted to you. I think you're the most beautiful man I've ever seen. I'm saying we can't have sex right away because, when we do, it will be permanent and I will never let you go."

Jay looked at Tom for a moment, his face a study of concentration. "Since you are putting all your cards on the table, I guess I should too."

Without warning, Jay stripped off his shirt and turned around.

Tom sucked in his breath at the sight.

Jay's back was completely covered with raised symbols. Symbols branded into his skin. Someone had burned this beautiful man over and over. Thomas couldn't even think of how much pain was caused by those repeated brandings.

"Each wizard is born with a Diviner in attendance, a magic user who can read the wizard's future. My mother had a bad heart and died at my birth, passing her magic to me. The Diviner told my father I would die, due to magic

sickness, if he didn't perform the Rite of a Hundred Flames. Determined not to lose me, like he'd lost my mother, my father agreed. Every third month of my life, since birth, my father branded me with a piece of his magic, binding his life force with mine so I would be strong enough to live. At age twenty-four, I reached one hundred brands, and my father's life force gave out."

"By the goddess." Tom blinked back tears as he thought of the tremendous pain his beautiful mate had gone through already in his life. He reached out to touch Jaynell, only to have the wizard step back. Jay turned to face him, his face so sad that Tom could almost feel his pain strumming between them.

"What I'm trying to tell you with my story is that two people have already given their lives so I might live. It would kill me if you were to be the third. I'm a bad bet, Thomas. I know you're excited to find your mate, but I'm dangerous. I don't have the magical power of one person. I have the magical strength of three. I could lose my temper and kill you."

Tom couldn't take the separation any more. He stepped forward, wrapping his arms around his sweet mate.

"They willingly gave their lives because they wanted to, Jay, not because you made them. Do you know what that story tells me?"

Jay shook his head.

"The story tells me you had two amazing parents who knew you would grow up and do great things. I'd like to be the person to stand at your side while you do them."

Tom leaned down, kissing Jay on the lips, keeping the embrace sweet and light. "We'll take it easy, my mate. As much as I yearn to claim you and keep you as my own, I don't want you to stay with me out of obligation or pity. When I claim you, it will be because you have decided that I'm the only one for you, not because you want to spare me a lifetime of pain. I won't be one more burden on your soul."

With one last hug, he released the man he was certain already held his heart. "Just promise me that while you're deciding our fate you won't go to another. I can understand waiting, but I might not be able to handle another man touching you. I don't want to leave the campus strewn with the bodies of promising wizards."

The smile he got was breathtaking for its sweetness.

"That I can promise," Jay said. "Right now, I just want to concentrate on my studies and we'll see where we stand after some time together."

This was going better than Tom could have hoped. His mate hadn't run screaming. He considered that a promising beginning.

"Let's go down and tell the driver to take you home.
I hear you have an early morning class."

"I have my entrance exams tomorrow," Jay
confessed with a sheepish smile. "I have to find out what
level they want me to start at."

"I'm sure you'll do well." After all, didn't he just say
he had the magic of three people?

Chapter Two

Jaynell looked at the three people there to judge him and almost called the whole thing off. If he hadn't promised his father he'd attend this particular school, he would've walked out, but he couldn't break a promise to the man who gave him life.

"It's an easy enough request, young man," the white-haired witch, Meela, said with a sneer. "We want to see if you can mix a persuasion potion. If not, we will put you in beginning potions."

Jaynell had created his first persuasion potion when he was seven, but he saw no reason to tell these people that fact. Without a word, he walked up to the table and assembled the correct ingredients. When the potion turned the proper purple, he lifted the beaker with his gloved hand and walked over to the council.

"Drink it," said the redheaded wizard, Syler, who sat in the middle beside a blond haired wizard who'd introduced himself as Pella. Syler had cold grey eyes that reminded Jay of a snake he'd seen in the wild right before it ate a mouse.

"No."

The three wizards looked at him in surprise.

Pella, the previously silent wizard of the trio, spoke

up. "Why not?"

"There is no force in heaven or earth that will have me take a persuasion potion before three powerful magic users I just met." Jaynell's self-preservation was stronger than that.

"It is part of the test."

"Then it is a test to see if I'm an idiot," Jaynell said, standing his ground.

The witch burst out laughing. "You are completely right. It is a test to see your backbone. If you had taken the potion, you would've failed."

"We do have to see if it was correct. For that, one of your roommates has volunteered," Syler said, waving his hand at the side door.

Jaynell was surprised to see one of the triplets walk into the room.

"Hello, Dean."

Dean smiled. "It's so cool that you can tell me from my brothers. It makes me feel like a single."

Jaynell laughed. "You are a single in your own way."

"Are you ready to be persuaded?" Syler asked. There was now some humor in the man's eyes that was missing before.

"Sure." Dean shrugged. He took the drink from

Jaynell. "You're not going make me dance like a chicken or anything, are you?"

"No. I'll save that for later."

Dean smiled. "Thanks."

The brunet tossed back the potion like he was doing shots and the bartender just gave last call.

Jay watched Dean's eyes dilate and knew the potion had taken hold.

The committee members watched with interest.

"Strong potion," the witch said, watching Dean.

"Dean, I'd like you to hop on one foot," Syler said.

Dean stood there, waiting.

"Why isn't he moving?" Pella asked.

Were these people kidding?

Jay stared at the trio and realized they weren't kidding. "I mixed the potion so that I am the only person who can persuade the drinker. Another reason I didn't take the potion, as I can't command myself. If I didn't put in that specific compulsion then anyone could persuade the one who drank it to do anything and that would be irresponsible."

Why did everyone stare at him?

"How did you learn to do that?" Syler asked, his eyes gleaming with interest.

"My father taught me. You put a little of your will

into the potion while it's brewing. It helps with the persuasion."

"That's amazing."

"Incredible."

"Why didn't I think of that?"

Jaynell shook his head. Why was he even here? Did these people even have anything to teach him?

"Hop on one foot," Jay told Dean.

Dean hopped on one foot.

"Stop," Jay said, once he'd established his will.

Dean stopped.

"You could get anyone to do that," Meela said. "A student would do that for a joke."

Jay had an idea. "Can I get all of you to agree that Dean is a ladies man?"

The three professors laughed.

"Yes."

"Definitely."

"Without a doubt."

He stepped closer to his roommate until they were almost touching.

"Dean, kiss me."

Placing his hands on Jay's shoulders, Dean leaned down and pressed his lips to Jay's.

It was a nice, if platonic, kiss.

A low growl behind him had Jay freezing in place. Turning his head slowly, Jay saw the biggest, angriest wolf he'd ever seen. Fangs bared, the beast looked at Dean like he was the weakest gazelle of the herd and the lunch bell just rang. The beast's eyes gleamed evilly as it watched Dean. Jaynell could see the cold calculation in the animal's eyes.

"Thomas, no!" Jay shouted.

The wolf gave a hair-raising growl as he circled the pair.

"Dean, walk slowly towards the professors." Jay knew the teachers could protect his roommate, but if Dean ran, Thomas would instinctively see him as prey and attack. He didn't want to be the one responsible for making the triplets into twins.

Placing himself between the wolf and the wizards put Jay in a sensitive position, but he was almost certain that, if he was the werewolf's true mate, the animal wouldn't attack.

"It was just a demonstration, Thomas." Jay said, walking towards the wolf. "It wasn't a real kiss." He went step by slow step closer to the animal as he talked, hoping to distract him from Dean. The wolf's eyes looked past Jaynell, towards Dean, but the growling stopped.

"He's just my roommate," Jay said as he reached the

beast. Leaning down, he petted the wiry fur. For the first time, the animal took his eyes off of Dean and gave his full attention to Jaynell.

"What are you doing here anyway?"

I wanted to see you. See how your test was going.

The words floated into Jay's mind. He recognized the words as not his own even if the sound was different then the spoken voice of his lover. It was more that he could feel the essence of Thomas rather than hear the sound of his voice.

"My test was going well before a big wolf intervened."

Thomas lay on his stomach and let his tongue hang out, the perfect picture of wolfy friendliness.

"It's a little late for that," Jay said, dryly.

Thomas gave a soft bark.

"Jaynell, who is this wolf?" Meela asked.

Jay turned to see all three of the professors stood there with their wands out. Dean stood behind them, his eyes wide.

"This is Thomas Sparks, brother to the local pack alpha. He claims I'm his mate."

The wolf growled at this, but Jay ignored him. He was screwed anyway. He couldn't even say he was sorry. His test was ruined since he almost got a fellow student

killed.

"Your mate?" Syler asked. His eyes gleamed with interest. "I've never heard of a werewolf and wizard mating."

Jay shrugged. "I don't know much about werewolf mates except that they mate for life."

"I think you will make an excellent addition to our team," Pella said.

"Your team?" Jay was almost disappointed he didn't get kicked out. At least then he could tell his father's spirit that he tried.

"Yes," Pella said. "We recently promoted an assistant professor to a full professor so we have an opening. It is obvious we have nothing to teach you in potions so it would be best to have you teaching your fellow classmates while you learn more advanced spell casting. Fortunately, one of your former teachers was in town so we have a good idea of your other capabilities. We'll put you in your senior year with special advanced training. After this year, we believe you will be fit to test for your mage levels."

Jay didn't know what to say. He'd never heard of anyone testing for mage levels just out of college. Generally, it took a minimum of five years post schooling for anyone to even attempt the mage tests.

Thomas stood up, sliding beneath Jay's dangling hand as if to support him. Fur slid through Jay's fingers as he stared at his teachers.

"Which of my old professors did you consult?"

"Me." Michael Dragonspawn walked into the room. "I had to come check on my favorite student."

Thomas started growling beneath Jay's hand.

"Shh," Jay whispered. He gave a nod to his old professor, not that anyone could call Dragonspawn old. He might be twenty or he might be two hundred, but the man was handsome. Jay had more than one fantasy as a young boy about his teacher, but there was something off about the man's eyes that bothered Jay more and more as he got older.

Dragonspawn's eyes had an iridescent quality that was both eerie and entrancing, like watching a beautiful reptile and wondering when it was going to strike. During his training, Jay always thought that his teacher was waiting for something, but after years of being tutored by the famous wizard, he still didn't know what.

"Greetings, Professor Dragonspawn," Jay said, giving the man a respectful bow. He might not be comfortable in the man's presence, but there was no doubting that he had helped train Jay a great deal of his life and shared many of his magical secrets. Dragonspawn was

one of the reasons Jay was so adept with what he could do. Even though he might have resented so many lessons in his youth, now that he was older, he was thankful that he'd learned so much.

* * * *

Thomas couldn't stop the growl that built up in his throat. He didn't like how this Dragonspawn person looked at his mate. The man's eyes glowed with more than affection. It was more like avarice, like he wanted something that Jay had or maybe Jay himself.

His beautiful wizard might not realize his own appeal, but Thomas was more than aware others coveted his mate. Others that might not recognize a cross-species mating and think they had a chance. There was something wrong with this new man. He smelled wrong. The other professors in the room smelled of books and magic and intellectual pursuits. Dean smelled like a healthy young male full of testosterone and power. Jay smelled of sunshine, magic and the indefinable essence of all the best things in the world, a sure sign that he was Thomas' mate. Dragonspawn smelled of power, secrets, and ribboned through his essence was a wide swathe of evil.

This was a man to watch.

This was a man to protect his mate from.

Thomas stepped protectively closer to his Jaynell.

The bad man was a threat, but he stopped growling because he didn't want to embarrass the young wizard.

Dragonspawn was an important wizard. Even shape shifters knew his name. Important didn't equal safe.

Jaynell's hands came down to scratch him behind the ear. If it didn't feel so glorious, he'd object to being treated like a dog. He'd have to have a long talk with his mate about shape shifter rules. Of course, the feel of those wonderful fingers through his fur might be worth the occasional mocking of his peers.

"Thank you for vouching for me, Professor Dragonspawn." Jaynell's voice sounded oddly calm like he was using his soothe-the-beast voice. Since his mate's fingers continued to pet, Thomas didn't think the tone was for him. "Now, if you don't mind, I'll go get my schedule from the registrar and take my boyfriend home before he loses his temper and bites someone."

"That's a good idea, my boy," Dragonspawn said in a caressing tone that made Thomas want to bite him. If he didn't think it would get his lover expelled, he'd leave a nice set of teeth marks on the man's ass.

"Come on, Thomas," Jaynell whispered.

The pair left the room together. When they reached

the green space, Thomas darted behind a bush and retrieved his bag. A quick change had him shivering. With shaking hands, he quickly dressed and threw the backpack over his shoulder.

"Do you ever get arrested for indecent exposure?" Jaynell asked, wonderingly.

Thomas laughed. "Only once, but luckily the judge was a shifter so I was let loose with a warning to pick my spots better. This is the unglamorous part they never show in movies. I've heard of a few shifters who can keep their clothes when they shift, but I think that's just a story some wizard made up to make us feel inferior."

Thomas regretted the words as soon as they were out of his mouth.

"I didn't mean *you*, love."

"Is that the general attitude of shifters towards wizards?"

"A lot, yeah." Thomas held up his hands. "But you know how it goes with any group. It's always us against them."

"What about with us? Are we going to be able to make it work with us being so different?"

Thomas linked his fingers through his mate's.

"We will make it work because of two things. One, we are mates. Which means even if you were a three-eyed,

green-skinned troll I would still want to claim you as mine, and two, you're too stubborn to quit. You wouldn't let a group of shape shifters scare you off, now would you?"

Thomas hoped like hell that his lover wouldn't say yes. He didn't want to go to jail for stalking. He wouldn't be the first shifter that happened to, but he didn't want to be the latest.

"It's not a matter of quitting." Jaynell said, his fingers firmly entwined with Thomas'. "It's a matter of whether we can make a life as a couple. I don't even have disapproving parents, but you have an entire pack."

Thomas leaned down and pressed his lips against the beautiful man, quieting his words. Jaynell's lips were warm and soft. Little pulses of desire sparked down Thomas' body as a growl rolled up his chest.

When he finally lifted his head, Jay's eyes were filled with lust and his gorgeous mate was leaning on him for support.

"With werekin, relationships are easy. You have your mate and your pack. Everyone else is either food or friend. All I have to do is tell everyone you're my mate and they will accept you. I can't promise there won't be the occasional wizard joke, but for a werekin, a mate is sacred. I can no sooner not pick you as I can remove a limb. Trust me when I say wizard or not, you will be accepted."

Jaynell nodded. "That's all that matters. I don't want to get between you and your pack."

"The only thing that might get between me and my pack is my brother as pack leader. As much as I love my brother, I can't stand him sometimes, but I know he supports me in claiming you as my mate."

"If you're sure." Jaynell still didn't sound confident, but his eyes were steady as he looked into Thomas' eyes. "I'd like to see where this relationship goes."

Thomas held back a laugh. How did you explain to someone that their relationship wasn't a trial? Mates didn't check to see if things would work. Mates connected and then stayed together for the rest of their lives. The only way to rid yourself of a werekin mate was through death, and even then, it was thought that their souls connected in the afterlife.

Thomas didn't even try to explain it to his beautiful, powerful man. He'd find out on his own. In the meantime, Thomas would watch Jaynell and keep him from harm. His wolf instincts told him that danger was just around the corner, and it was his job to prevent it from finding his love.

"Come on, sweet, let's go get some lunch," Thomas said, flinging an arm around his mate. "You'll feel more settled with some food."

"Somehow I doubt it," Jaynell said dryly, but he let Thomas lead him towards the student union to get something to eat.

* * * *

Jaynell entered the cafeteria with Thomas at his side. After spending so much of his life alone, it was strange to have someone walking beside him. Jaynell's father had been ill for most of his life so the young man was used to doing things by himself.

Knowing Thomas believed they were mates gave Jaynell a confidence that the other man would stay with him even if he was a bit strange or, as one tutor said, "a scarily powerful wizard."

Thomas didn't care what Jaynell could do. The werekin didn't think of Jaynell as anything except his mate who happened to do magic.

It was a refreshing change.

Looking up, he was amused to see Thomas' head whipping back and forth as if he scented something.

"What do you smell?" Jaynell asked. The curiosity was eating him up. "Do things smell different when you're a human?"

Thomas gave him a sweet smile. "Honey, I'm never

human. I might look like a man on the outside, but I'm always a wolf at heart. Which means, no matter where you go, I'll be able to find you."

There should've been something sinister about the way Thomas' eyes glowed with fervor, but Jay found it reassuring. It was difficult going from a completely sheltered life to a rudderless existence. Total freedom was only fun in concept, and he'd dreamed of that concept for years. As much as he loved his father, he'd felt the weight of his father's sacrifice with each loving look and every burning brand. Jaynell had survivor's guilt in spades for both parents. Guilt he knew neither of them would've wanted him to carry. It didn't change the fact that he missed his father and longed for the mother he never knew. His father had shown him pictures and told Jaynell stories of the wonderful woman that gave birth to him, but it was hard to bond with a picture, no matter how beautiful it was.

A large hand cupped Jaynell's shoulder, pulling him from his past.

"Troubles are lighter if they're shared," Thomas said. He should've sounded like a cheesy post card, but the caring expression on the werekin's handsome face went straight to Jaynell's heart.

He shook his head. "It's nothing that can be helped, but I appreciate that you want to try."

Thomas' expression remained troubled. "You let me know when you're ready to talk. As your mate, I know when you're worried, and I don't like the pain weighing down your soul."

Jaynell couldn't stop the smile breaking out. "Thank you, but my soul isn't going to get any lighter even if I put all my troubles on your big, strong shoulders." He went to his toes and gave Thomas a kiss on the cheek. "I do appreciate the thought though."

The pair went through the line where Jaynell put extra veggies on Thomas' plate just to watch his disgusted expression and Thomas put more meat than three people could consume on Jaynell's plate.

Jay looked at the bloody blob on his plate. "I think I'm going to turn vegetarian."

Thomas laughed. "Nonsense. No wolf would ever have a vegetarian as a mate. Besides," he said with a leer, "you'll need to keep your energy up."

Shaking his head at Thomas' antics, Jaynell led them to an unoccupied booth. Settling in, he slid his feet on either side of Thomas', comforted by the werekin's company.

They were halfway through their meal when a gnome materialized beside them. It was a boy gnome from the look of his black leather jacket and torn up jeans.

After giving a surprisingly graceful bow, the boy gave Jaynell an uncertain smile. "Word is that you might be looking for a house gnome," he said in his native tongue.

Jay knew this was coming, but he hadn't realized it would happen so soon. Gnomes were attracted to magical power, which was why they worked mostly at or around magical universities and corporations where magic was studied. Jaynell was his own magic supernova, so it was only a matter of time before gnomes started lining up to be owned. Visions of the mess that could be created with five men in a dorm went through Jaynell's mind. Once they graduated, his roommates could get gnomes of their own. Unfortunately, at this level of training, they didn't have the power structure to support a gnome.

"I might be. What are your qualifications?" he responded in English.

"I thought you spoke gnome," the creature said with accusing eyes.

"I do," Jaynell said, "but my four roommates don't. If you're going to work for me, they need to be able to communicate with you."

Before the young gnome could speak, a teenage girl gnome popped up beside him. She was wearing a hot pink dress and had spangles in her hair.

"Good afternoon, master. I would like to be your

house gnome."

"Buzz off, Calla. I was here first," the leather clad gnome said with a scowl.

"But I'm sure he'd rather have someone who knows how to be a house gnome, Thorn." Calla blinked her eyes at Jaynell. "I was trained by my mother who has been a house gnome for four hundred years."

Another flash brought a gray-haired matron who gave Jay a sweet smile.

Jay looked at his lover. "Do you need any gnomes at the were house?"

"Werekin can't keep gnomes," the matron said in her sweet, grandmotherly voice. "They are magic but can't channel it."

Jaynell shrugged. "I can maintain the magic for him."

All three gnomes stared at him.

"What?"

"How far can you support a gnome?" the matron asked, her voice now more stern than sweet.

Jaynell shrugged. "The farthest I've ever tried was for my grandmother and it was only for a month. She died so I released her gnome to find a new home."

"What do you mean support a gnome?" Thomas asked.

"Gnomes usually live with their owners because they need to be close to their owner's power. Most homes absorb the magic of the people who live there, helping keep the gnome grounded to its owner. I can create a power base and let it feed off my magic without the gnome living with me but only through a limited distance."

"How far away was your grandmother?" Thorn asked. His metallic grey eyes were lit with interest.

Jay thought back to the location of his grandmother's house. "Maybe twenty miles."

There was a collective gasp, and Jay started to get a really bad feeling.

"That would mean I could apprentice at that garage in town," Thorn said.

Thomas frowned. "I thought you wanted to be a house gnome."

Thorn lowered his head. "It's the only job human masters are willing to give a gnome and mechanics can't support a gnome. There aren't any wizard mechanics," he said with a smirk.

"Tell you what, Thorn," Jay said, looking the youth over in a new light. "If you find a place to give you a job in a garage, I'll support you taking it, but you have to work on the pack house cars for free." Jay didn't have a car, but he knew the gnome would feel indebted if he didn't offer a

trade of services. It was their way.

Thorn's smile was as beautiful as it was unexpected. "You've got yourself a deal." The gnome held out his arm.

Jay wrapped his long fingers around the young gnome's wrist. "You are bound to me. I accept your service and accept your care."

Light flashed beneath Jay's fingers as Thorn burst out laughing.

"What's so funny?" demanded Calla.

"It tickles."

The matron looked at Jay with surprise. "When I was bound, it burned like fire."

"The bond can feel the intent of the bearer. Did your master wish you ill?"

The matron's face darkened. "He was an evil man who I was happy to leave."

Jay felt a jolt of shock. For a gnome to want to be free, the man must have been evil indeed. Gnomes spent a great part of their lives searching for their master and killing any other gnome that dared to try and take their position. Territorial wars were common and often bloody.

"I'm sure my roommates and I would be honored to have such experienced gnomes to care for our quarters."

Jay carefully repeated the binding words for each gnome. "Please tell the others I can only support about

fifteen gnomes, and I don't need any more in my rooms. If someone wants to try something different, I'd be happy to sponsor additional training."

The matron, whose name turned out to be Tulip, gave him a sweet smile. "I knew you were the one Rose prophesized about."

"Who's Rose?" Jay asked, not sure he really wanted to know.

"Our foreseer. She said one day a man would come and free the gnomes."

"I'm not freeing you," Jay argued. "I'm just finding you new occupations. You are still bound to me."

"But the freedom to choose our destiny is the greatest freedom of all," Tulip said. "We don't mind being bound to a master. We like belonging to someone. My last master was an unfortunate exception. To be able to choose our duty, that is real freedom."

The three gnomes vanished, and Thomas shook his head. "There's never a dull moment around you, is there?"

Jay shrugged. "Not one that I can find. I wouldn't mind experiencing boredom for a moment or two just to lighten up the string of catastrophes."

Laughing, Thomas patted Jay's hand. "Do you think your roommates will like the gnomes?"

"Well, they won't have to clean or make their beds

so I'm guessing they'll be all right with it."

"Good point. Besides, you won't see much of your room so I don't really care how clean they make it."

After finishing lunch, Thomas walked Jay back to his dorm, stopping at the bottom of the entrance steps.

"I've got to get back to work."

Jay looked his lover over with interest, letting his eyes graze all his favorite parts. "What is it you do exactly?"

"I'm my brother's second-in-command. I listen to people who have problems and decide which ones are worthy of his attention and which ones I can handle. I'm the first line of defense for the alpha, like a gatekeeper. I'm also the strongest, so I'm sometimes called to mitigate territorial wars between houses."

"I thought the alpha was always the strongest."

Thomas gave him a strange look. "For someone who knows a lot about different cultures, how is it that you have such a gap about the werekin?"

Jay scanned his memory. "I don't know. It's not like werekin were ignored or skimmed over, but my father didn't have any books about them." Jay frowned. "Now that you mention it, that is strange, isn't it? I mean he had books about everything. My father's collection is considered by

many to be the most extensive library about the supernatural in the world, but I don't remember a single book about any shape changer."

"That is strange," Thomas agreed, wrapping his arms around Jay. "Maybe he knew something and didn't want to give you preconceptions about the werekin."

A flicker of memory flashed through Jay's mind but vanished just as quick. Something about his father and a visitor but not clear enough for him to understand. Maybe it would come back to him in a dream. Jay often dreamed his memories and broke them down when he regained consciousness.

Jay shrugged. "Maybe he was prejudiced about your kind and I never noticed."

"Did he ever say anything against werekin?" Thomas asked.

Jay shook his head. "My father never said anything bad about anyone. He was just that kind of person."

"I would've liked meeting him."

"Yeah, you would've." The memory of his father made Jay's eyes water. He manfully blinked them back so his lover wouldn't see. Most men didn't appreciate having a watery boyfriend or at least he assumed. He'd never had a boyfriend before. A quick thought had him snapping his gaze up to his mate.

"What's the longest you've ever had a boyfriend?"

"I've never had a boyfriend," Thomas said with a smile.

"Never?"

Thomas shook his head. "Werekin don't have boyfriends or girlfriends. We just have sex."

"I'm just a sex toy for you?" Jay shouted, drawing the eyes of more than one amused onlooker.

Laughter shook Thomas' large frame. "No. You're my mate."

Jay's panic receded. He was surprised at the amount of pain the thought of being Thomas' casual fuck had sent through him. "So you lied. I am your first boyfriend."

The big were stroked Jay's head with one massive hand. "You humans over complicate things. Werekin have it easy. Once we hit puberty, we fuck everything we can find and then we find our mate and settle down."

Panic returned.

"I'm not ready to settle down."

Thomas' smile was sweet but didn't calm Jay down a bit.

"I'm not asking you to settle down. I'm just asking you to save lives and not let another guy touch you sexually."

"How does that save lives?" Jay asked, though he

thought he already knew.

The sweet smile vanished, and in its place were a pair of impressive canines. "Because then I would have to kill him," he said in a gravelly voice two octaves deeper than his natural speaking tone.

Jay stroked Thomas' wide chest. "Calm down, wolf boy. I get the idea."

Thomas wrapped Jay's hand in his, completely engulfing the entire thing. "Good," he said in his usual voice. "Although I'm ready to get a place of our own and settle down, I understand if you want more time to go out and have fun. Just include me if you're going any place where there might be men drinking. I don't want you to get into any situations you can't handle."

It was Jay's turn to laugh. "In case you haven't figured it out, I can pretty much take care of myself."

Thomas tilted his head like a dog listening to a sound pitched out of human range. "Just because you can take care of yourself doesn't mean you should have to, and besides, it's easier to explain away a rabid dog than a man who zaps someone with magic."

"True."

The pair exchanged kisses before Jay left to go up to his dorm.

He had barely made it to the floor his room was on

when a door slammed open and Kevin and the three D's came barreling out. All four of them were in various stages of undress.

"What's up, guys?" Jay asked. He couldn't ignore his curiosity as to why his roommates were rushing out of their room.

"Jay, there you are, man," Kevin said. "It's gnomes. There's like an army of girl gnomes, and they're fighting over who gets to clean our toilets and wash our clothes. They even threw out yesterday's pizza, and I was going to have that for breakfast." Kevin crossed his arms and pouted like a five-year-old.

"It's three in the afternoon," Jaynell said, looking at his roommates.

"And?" Kevin said with a glare.

"Sorry, Kev," Jaynell said. "I just bonded a few gnomes to clean our rooms. There should only be two in there."

"Dude, you bonded gnomes? That so rocks," Devin said with a smile. He was the most dressed one of the bunch. His hair was a little tousled, but he had his shirt and jeans mostly on. A second look made Jaynell revise the thought. Devin's pants were probably supposed to be like that.

Dan spoke up. "But there's like eight gnomes in

there."

"Eight? I only bonded two for our house." Jay looked at the dorm door. There were definite sounds of a fight. "I'll take care of this. You guys go and get some breakfast."

"They threw out my breakfast," Kevin said in a disgruntled tone.

"Here." Jay gave Kevin a wad of cash. "Take everyone out on me. I'll talk to the gnomes."

Kevin's eyes went wide. "Cool. I'll bring you back the change, man." As he walked away with the triplets, Jaynell heard him say. "Gorgeous, loaded, and powerful. It's just not fair."

The triplets made noises of agreement as Jay opened the door.

"He's a good kisser," he heard Dean mutter on the way out.

Maybe his roommate wasn't as heterosexual as Jaynell had thought.

* * * *

Jay opened the door and walked into chaos. If chaos could be a dorm room cleaned within an inch of its life. However, the pristine room wasn't the problem. It was the

plethora of gnomes. Kevin was right. There were eight gnomes there. The two gnomes Jay had bonded and six other gnomes that were complete strangers.

The two bonded gnomes faced the other six, and it looked like a battle was about to begin.

"What is going on here?" Jay demanded. He made sure he put the note of command he'd heard in his father's voice more than once when addressing unwanted intruders.

Eight sets of eyes turned to stare at him.

Calla and Tulip dipped him curtsies. "Master, welcome home," they said in unison.

It was kind of freaky, but Jaynell didn't let that show on his face. "Afternoon, Calla and Tulip. Who are your friends?"

"These aren't any friends of mine," Calla said with a defiant toss of her head. "They're intruders, and with your permission, I'll toss them out."

Jay looked over the six gnomes standing politely at attention. "What are you doing here?"

The boldest of the six was a pixie-tailed blonde with a blue dress. She looked about eight but was probably closer to eight hundred. He could never tell with gnomes.

She dipped Jaynell a curtsy. "I'm Dahlia. We heard you were looking for gnomes, and we've come to apply. We were giving a sample of our cleaning when these two

jumped in and started with the attitude."

"He bonded with us, not you," Calla said with a snarl. There was a whistling noise, and the pixie-tailed blonde ducked as a broom sailed through the air at her head.

Dahlia screamed in anger and jumped at Calla. Only Jaynell's grip on the back of her dress stopped her leap.

"Settle down. I'll not hire any gnomes who can't behave."

Immediately, the crowd settled down. Jaynell noticed for the first time that all the gnomes were females.

"Weren't any male gnomes interested in coming?"

The gnomes looked amongst themselves. Finally Dahlia spoke. "The men folk like gardening over housework."

Jaynell nodded. It made sense that the male gnomes might not be interested in cleaning houses, but he didn't realize there was such a division between the sexes.

"I'll need some yard work done also."

Calla smiled. "Is it for your boyfriend's pack?"

"Yes. I'm sure it's a lot of work to keep the grounds up. Tell the men that I'll provide power for up to six of them if they're interested in working for a werewolf house. Anyone with prejudice against werewolves or gay males isn't invited."

Tulip laughed. "With as much power as you carry around, Master, they're not going to care who you sleep with."

There was a general consensus of murmuring amongst the group until Dahlia spoke up.

"Does that mean you don't need us?"

"I don't need you for this dorm. However, I could use you at my boyfriend's house."

"And we can bring our husbands?" Dahlia asked. Her smile was so wide it almost split her face.

"Yes. I can support you and your husbands, but that is probably it until I can bind you to the land and make you self-sustaining."

The gnomes gave Jaynell a look he was becoming quite familiar with. "Yes, it is possible to link you with the land directly, and yes, I have the ability to do that. However, you have to be able to live on the land for at least a month."

"But we would be bound to the land and not a person?" Dahlia asked. The other gnomes looked just as puzzled.

"Yes. But at first you'd have to be bound to me."

"We'll take it," Dahlia said, holding out her wrist.

A few minutes later, Jaynell had bound six more gnomes, and deep down, where he felt the truth of things,

he just knew this was going to come back and bite him in the ass.

Jaynell walked into his advanced magical theory class and was surprised to see only four kids in attendance.

"Where's the rest of the class?" he asked a thin blond boy.

"This is it," the blond said with a sniff. "They don't let just anyone in here." He looked Jaynell up and down.

"Though, it looks like they've lowered their standards."

"Not if he's Jaynell." A dark-haired girl jumped up out of her seat. "I'm Mallory, but you can call me Mal. I'm a water wizard. That's Frank." She pointed to the rude blond. "He's a fire wizard, and that's Jax and Amy." She indicated a boy and girl sitting together. "They're both part earth troll."

The pair had dirt-colored skin and craggy brows that looked like they were made out of stone. "Nice to meet you."

They nodded in a friendly manner but didn't speak.

"What do you mean about fire wizard or earth wizard? I don't understand those designations." Jaynell knew he had gaps in his studies, but sometimes the basic stuff completely eluded him.

"It means, numbskull, that I am superior in fire and

she's superior in water. You, apparently, are inferior in everything."

Jay was contemplating how far he would bury the snotty bastard when the instructor walked in. According to his schedule, this was Professor Firestorm.

The wizard was tall with fiery red hair and an easy smile. Jaynell saw him looking over the class and focusing on Frank. "Frank, I would ask that you choose your opponents more wisely," the professor said with a chiding tone. "Jaynell has been on campus three days and, during that time, has been awarded wizard class potion teaching, mated with a werewolf, and bonded with enough gnomes the headmaster is starting to feel inferior. I live in anticipation of what he will do for the rest of the week. Please be seated, Mr. Marley."

Jaynell bowed slightly to the professor and took a seat next to the friendly girl.

Frank slunk down in his chair, but Jaynell knew this wasn't the end of it. Some people just liked to be difficult.

"Now, students, I'd like you to turn to page fifty of your magical studies book." A textbook appeared on Jaynell's desk and flipped to the correct page. "Who can tell me the five theories of magic?"

The class went on forever. Jaynell didn't answer any questions unless asked directly. For an advanced class, the

work was really remedial. Finally, the lecture part was over, and they were led over to the lab.

"Here is where you separate the wizards from the weenies," Frank sneered. He kept his voice down so the professor didn't hear him.

Jay took a deep breath and told himself that his father wouldn't have approved of Jay snapping the kid's neck, but it did help to know that Thomas would not only have helped, he'd applaud him afterwards. He did have a bloodthirsty boyfriend.

"Today, we are going to do a much anticipated spell. We are going to find your avatar."

Jay already knew what his avatar was. Avatars were born from a wizard's magic, and everyone had one that showed their magical essence. Jay glanced nervously around the room, hoping the desks were stronger than they looked.

"Frank, why don't you start?"

Frank closed his eyes and started a low chant that Jay couldn't hear. What the hell was he chanting for? All you needed to call your avatar was a focus ball and your will. Deciding it was going to be a long class, Jay settled comfortably in a chair beside the wall.

Mallory sat beside him. "Frank can't perform any spells without trying to make it look fancy. Everyone

knows you just need a focus ball and your will."

"Thank you," Jay said. "I thought it was another one of those things that I did differently."

Mallory gave him a friendly smile. "Nope. Frank's just an ass."

After a lot of chanting, a small ball of fire unfurled and a respectably sized phoenix landed on Frank's shoulder.

"Nice," Jay said. He didn't clap because it looked like Frank was having difficulty keeping control of the creature. After a few minutes of sweat dotting the man's brow, the fiery animal vanished.

Professor Firestorm gave an approving smile. "Good first time, Frank. Not everyone can call their avatar. Now, Mallory, if you don't mind?"

Mallory's avatar was an enormous jellyfish. It floated through the air with an eerie grace until she finally banished it.

Considering how much damage it could do if it stung, Jaynell was impressed and told her so.

Mallory flushed with the praise.

The earth wizards called up a pair of powerful Rock creatures that each stood five feet high.

"Now, Jaynell, if you don't mind," Professor Firestorm said.

Jay looked at the room again. "I don't know that it

would be a good idea to call my avatar in here, Professor."

Professor Firestorm stared at Jay for a moment as if trying to read his mind. A fruitless gesture since Jay's mind shields were stronger than steel.

"Let's take it outside then," he said after a long moment.

"Thank you, sir."

Frank smirked. "I bet he doesn't even have one."

Jay could've told him it wasn't a matter of having an avatar. It was a matter of controlling it. Some creatures weren't so comfortable to call.

The group went outside. Jay made sure they were on an area that was covered with flagstones and not too many people were around.

"Well, we're ready for your avatar." Frank said. "If you can even call one."

Jay pulled out his key ring.

"What are you going to do, key us to death?" Frank laughed along with the earth wizards.

Shaking his head, Jay pulled a small stone in a metal cage off of the ring and slid the rest of them back into his pocket. Closing his hand around the stone, Jay focused his energy.

Concentrating all his energy, Jay said, "Gideon, come to me."

The ground shook beneath their feet. The air went from still to rushing like a whirlwind around them. A loud boom crackled the air, and everyone but Jay was knocked from their feet as a three-headed dragon landed on the flagstones before him.

Jay greeted the beast. "Good afternoon, Gideon." Jay didn't turn around to see who was screaming. He needed all his attention for his avatar. Gideon has been Jay's avatar since he was ten, but the dragon was still highly dangerous. Jay still had an acid mark on his shoulder from the last time he'd called his avatar and didn't greet it right away.

Greetings, Master

Gideon's words filled Jay's mind. He didn't know if other avatars talked to their masters, and he was cautious at this point in asking his fellow students. There were things he knew that others didn't and to keep bringing it up would alienate the few he was interested in becoming friends with. He wondered how the dragon would deal with a wolf.

By barbecuing him, Gideon whispered in his mind.

"Not this one. He's mine."

Jaynell was surprised at how certain he was of that. It was as if all his doubts and concerns vanished beneath the need to protect his man. Clarity took over his mind, and an image of him and Thomas standing in a clearing

surrounded by wolves flashed before him. The picture was so clear and bright that for a moment he thought he could feel the other man's touch.

Warm breath snapped him out of his vision, and he looked up to see Gideon's three heads aligned and examining him.

He's your mate.

"Yes, yes he is," Jaynell said. For the first time, he realized it didn't matter how much time passed or how long he knew him. Thomas was his mate.

The sounds behind him finally broke through Jay's concentration.

"Would whoever's screaming please stop. You're going to spook Gideon."

There was the sound of a slap, then silence.

"If you could please release your avatar, Jaynell," Professor Firestorm said in a shaky voice. "I think you've proved you can call it."

"Yes, Professor."

Keeping a hand on two out of three heads, Jay closed his eyes and focused on banishing his dragon.

Most wizards had to work to call their avatars. Jay always had to work harder to banish his.

Gideon rubbed his scaly head across Jay's chest, removing a layer of skin beneath his shirt.

"Ouch." Jay laughed, shoving the dragon away.

I will go and guard your mate, the dragon announced right before it disappeared.

Generally, avatars were more of a spiritual guardian of wizards that came when they conducted battles or strong spells. Unfortunately, with his amount of power, his avatar was always solid. Usually Gideon lived at the manor. Now, apparently, he was looking for a new place to nest. Shit. He wondered how Thomas was going to take the unexpected visitor.

"That's quite an impressive avatar you have, Jaynell," Professor Firestorm said. "I don't think I've ever seen one that large before."

Jay turned to speak to the professor and was shocked to see Frank lying on the ground.

"What happened to him?"

Mallory gave him an angelic smile. "You said you wanted him to be quiet."

Jay liked that girl more and more.

"Well, class, I think that wraps up our studies for the day. Everyone practice calling their avatar. Except you." The professor pointed at Jay. "I don't want to start a panic on campus. If you need to practice calling your dragon, warn me, and I'll have the athletic field cleared."

"Yes, sir," Jay said. He was relieved the class was

over. The excitement of the last few days was getting to him. All he wanted now was a nap.

Halfway across campus a long shadow crossed his path. Looking up, he saw Thomas' brother approaching.

Great. Just what he needed, another complication.

The alpha wolf stood before Jay and crossed his arms.

"Would you care to explain to me why my pack house is infested with gnomes?"

At least he didn't yet know about the dragon.

"Do you not like gnomes?" When in doubt, work the innocent angle. More than one person had told him that he did angelic really well.

The big alpha took a deep breath like he was working hard not to reach over and strangle Jay.

Jay flashed him an innocent smile.

"It's not a matter of not liking gnomes. I have nothing against gnomes except that they've invaded my house. They said you sent them."

"They needed a place to go. You should have lawn workers coming soon."

James' eyes glowed, and Jay wondered if the alpha was going to shift right there on the school lawn.

"Why are they at the pack house?"

"Because my mate is there, and I thought it was a

big building that needed a lot of care."

"You claimed Thomas as your mate?" James frown changed to a brilliant smile. "Have you told him yet?"

Jay shook his head. "Not yet. I just realized it a moment ago."

"We need to celebrate," James said.

Delighted the gnome issue was dropped for the moment, Jay readily agreed. "Whatever it is you guys do is fine with me."

"We usually have a big party where we invite both of the pack members' families."

A hollow feeling gripped Jay's chest. "I don't have any family."

"You can invite your roommates. They can represent the wizard side of the match."

"I'll ask if they're interested."

James laughed. "Trust me. We don't open our home to otherkin often. They'll be thrilled."

The two men smiled at each other. James' phone rang at the same time as Jay's.

Jay reached into his pocket and pulled out his cell. Thomas' name flashed on the caller ID. Pleased, Jay snapped it open. "Hi, honey."

There was a pause on the other end as if Thomas wasn't sure how to take the greeting. "Hello, love. Is there a

reason a dragon has nested on our roof?"

Oops.

"Um. That's Gideon, my avatar. When I told him you were my mate, he said he'd go and watch over you. He doesn't mean any harm."

"He has three heads."

"Yes. Yes he does."

"Is there anything else that's going to appear? So far we've had gnomes and a dragon."

"No. I think that's about it."

"Okay. Don't think I didn't hear you say we're mates. I plan to do something about that." Thomas' voice turned deep and seductive.

"Does it involve you, me, and copious amounts of lube?" Jay asked with a smile.

Thomas laughed across the line. "I didn't know mind reading was one of your skills."

"It's not. I just have advanced intuition and an active appreciation of your body."

"You can appreciate it in person later tonight. I'll swing by your dorm and pick you up at five."

"It's a date."

With a wide smile, Jay closed his phone only to meet James' cold, hard gaze pinning him in his spot.

"A dragon?" He was holding a phone of his own,

and Jay knew James wasn't taking the news of a three-headed dragon as well as his mate.

"Gideon is my avatar. He doesn't mean you any harm. He's looking out for Thomas."

"Some might think this is a challenge to my leadership, a statement that I can't look after my pack alone. Challenging an alpha is tricky business, my friend. Make sure you know what you're doing."

"Thomas already told me he didn't want to be alpha," Jay said. "And, frankly, all I want right now is my bed and pillow."

"Jay, my boy." Michael Dragonspawn's voice reached Jay as the man came up behind him.

Jay instinctively turned to see the older man approach. "Professor."

Michael gave Jay a sexy smile that made him a little queasy. "I was hoping for the chance to speak with you alone."

"I'm sorry that's not possible." James stepped forward, wrapping his hand around Jay's arm. "I need him to come to the pack house and deal with my brother."

"Ah. You must be Thomas' brother. A fine wolf, that one."

There was something fake about Michael's smile, like if he scratched the surface, he'd find something

unpleasant underneath, like the really creepy doll in those scary movies just waiting to drag the hapless hero to hell.

"Professor, this is James Sparks. James, this is Michael Dragonspawn, one of my tutors."

"Nice to meet you, Professor," James said politely. He didn't let go of his grip on Jay the entire time or offer to shake his hand. "Sorry, we've got to leave, but Thomas has been separated from his mate too long. It makes wolves cranky."

Without waiting for Dragonspawn to say anything, James dragged Jay off. He waited until they were traveling in the limo before he spoke. "There's something seriously off about that guy. How long have you known him?"

"Most of my life, but I have to say, it has only been in the last few weeks that he's been sending off the creepy vibes."

"Don't ever be alone with him," James said, his expression serious. "I still don't know if I approve of a wizard as my brother's mate, but I know he would lose it if anything happened to you. I may come across as a power hungry alpha who's only concerned with my position, but I love my brother and will do anything to help him. Besides," James said, settling back in his seat, "those gnomes really know how to clean a pack house. I didn't even know there was that much hair in the carpet."

Laughing, Jay let the alpha take him to meet his mate a little earlier than planned. He could nap later.

Chapter Three

Thomas met Jay at the door, lifted him up, and swung him around in his strong arms.

"Mine, all mine," he thought he heard the other man whisper before Jay was placed gently on the ground.

"You did agree to be my mate?" Thomas asked, cautiously. Hope burned in the werewoman's eyes. The need in Thomas' eyes was painful to see. Jaynell felt ashamed that he'd brought such a strong man to his knees. He knew, in that moment, he had the ability to hurt Thomas far more than anyone else on the planet.

He swallowed the lump in his throat and answered with his heart on his sleeve.

"Yes, I agreed to be your mate."

What other answer could he give? If Thomas was right and fate chose them as mates then he would become Thomas' mate eventually. It didn't make sense to put off the inevitable when doing so only made them both miserable. The time he spent away from the affectionate werewolf felt like an eternity, and as much as Jaynell wanted to be independent, the universe had a different idea.

A female gnome popped up and gave Jay a bow. "Hello, Master."

Jay returned the greeting. "How are things going

here?"

"The werekin are nice and dirty," the gnome said with a wide grin. "It gives us much to do."

"Glad we can oblige," James said in a dry voice from behind Jay. "I'd hate for us to be too tidy for the gnomes."

* * * *

"I'm taking Jaynell upstairs," Thomas said. He brushed past the gnomes. He didn't mind the creatures, but he was determined to make Jay his before the night was over. Just the thought of losing his mate was enough to make him howl.

"Slow down, honey. I'm not going anywhere, except with you."

Thomas realized he was dragging his mate up the stairs. He slowed his stride so Jay's feet actually hit the stairs when he walked.

Finally, they were in Thomas' room. He was surprised when Jay broke his hold and went to the door. The slim wizard slid his fingers over the door and said an incantation in a language that Thomas didn't understand.

"What are you doing?"

Jay blushed adorably. "Blocking the room so the

gnomes can't flash inside. I don't want them popping in during an intimate moment."

Thomas smiled. "Good thinking, baby. Now come over here so I can strip off your clothes."

Jay gave Thomas a brilliant smile before walking within reach. Thomas didn't waste any time. He yanked off his mate's shirt and stripped off Jaynell's shoes and pants before the wizard could say anything at all, ripping the cloth in the process.

"I was going to wear those again," Jay said, once he stopped bouncing from where Thomas threw him on the bed.

"You have magic. You can repair them if you need to go."

Jay gave his clothes a rueful look. "I'm not sure even I can repair that much damage."

"I guess I'll have to keep you here, naked, in my bed," Thomas said. The large man stripped off his clothes and crawled across the bed until he was right over Jay. "Shame."

Jay smiled back at him. Fuck, his mate was gorgeous.

Unable to resist that mouth, Thomas leaned down and kissed the wizard. Now that Jay had admitted they were mates, he had no intention of ever letting the man get

away again. He wondered how long it would take to move Jay into the pack house.

Leaning over, he licked a long line up Jay's neck, pleased when the smaller man gasped. "I can't bear to be apart from you any longer."

"I'm all yours," Jay said with an inviting smile.

Scrambling for the side table, Thomas pulled out a battered tube of lube. Squeezing a generous amount on his fingers, Thomas slid first one, then two fingers into Jay's hole, pleased when the other man moaned and rubbed against Thomas' hand, encouraging more movement.

"Relax, baby. We have all evening."

"I don't have all evening. I need to be fucked right now," Jay demanded, lifting his hips for deeper penetration.

"Patience."

The lights in Thomas' room flickered wildly. Thomas smiled as he felt the electricity tingle along his lover's body.

"Fuck me now," Jay insisted.

"Pushy wizard," Thomas said fondly. "Turn over so I can mate with you properly."

"But I wanted to see your face," Jay complained.

"Next time, sweetheart. I need to fuck you from behind for a proper mating."

With only a little pout, Jay rolled over and got on

his hands and knees. "This what you want?" he teased, looking at Thomas over his shoulder.

Thomas let out a low moan. "You have no idea how much I want that." Thomas needed Jaynell more than he'd ever needed any other man in his life. The combination of sweetness and power was a strong aphrodisiac.

Letting his instincts take over, Thomas wrapped a hand around Jaynell's cock as he slowly pushed inside. Unable to resist the feel of his mate wrapped around him, Thomas' hips convulsed as he plunged into the tight heat of his mate. His need to dominate his lover took over. Unable to resist the urge, Thomas let his incisors grow. After biting into the fleshy joint of Jay's neck, he lapped up his lover's blood. A tingle of power rushed through Thomas with the speed of a tornado.

He stilled his movement so he wouldn't spill his speed before he'd given his oath.

"I claim you as my mate. From this day forward, you are mine to love, mine to protect, and mine to command. No action or thought will be taken without your welfare in mind. With this exchange of fluids, forever we will be bound."

Thomas started moving again, letting his body take over as his mind filled with images of the two of them sharing their life together.

"Under the eyes of my ancestors, I claim you."

Thomas bit down again on the same spot, sucking on the bloody hole he left in his lover's skin. Jay arched his back, and Thomas could feel Jay's cock pulse in his hand.

Disengaging his fangs, he whispered in Jay's ear, "Let go, love. I'll catch you."

Jay came with a cry, his ass clenched around Thomas' cock, wrenching the werewolf's orgasm from him.

With a sigh and another kiss on the back of the neck, Thomas pulled out of his lover. Taking internal inventory, Thomas let out a relieved sigh. He could feel the pull between them.

"We are bound," Thomas said with a happy sigh.

* * * *

Jay would've enjoyed wallowing in the warm embrace of his mate but his ringing cell phone pulled him out of his haze of happy contentment.

Waving his hand, he floated the phone from his pocket to his hand.

"That's handy," Thomas muttered against his arm.

"Sometimes," Jay admitted. "Hello."

Kevin's panicked voice came over the line. "Jay,

you gotta get back to the dorm. Someone was in here. The gnomes are all dead, and it looks like whoever it is used their blood to write on the wall."

Terror froze Jay's heart. For a moment, it completely stopped functioning.

Thomas snatched the phone from Jay. His enhanced hearing must've picked up Kevin's voice.

"This is Thomas. What did they write?"

There was a long silence before Kevin spoke again. "Wolf whore, you're next."

"We'll be right there."

Thomas hung up and wrapped his arms around his mate. "It's going to be okay, baby. I'm here to protect you. No one is going to get to you on my watch."

"Those poor gnomes," Jay said. He'd sent them to their death. He gave a sad laugh. "I guess I won't have to worry about too many gnomes asking to be in my service now."

Thomas held him tighter until Jay could almost feel his ribs reshaping under the pressure.

"Release me."

"Never," Thomas vowed.

"I can't breathe."

"Oh, sorry." Thomas relaxed his hold enough for Jay to catch his breath. "Let's get dressed and see how

everything looks. Maybe I can figure something out from the person's magical signature."

"What makes you think the person is magical?"

Thomas asked. "It could just as easily be a regular person."

Jay thought it over for a moment. "No. You'd need some sort of magic to subdue gnomes before killing them. Gnomes might be of limited magic, but they're strong. They can defend themselves against attack." Jay pulled on his jeans while he considered the angles. "Someone had the ability to stun them before using them as ink."

Within minutes, the pair was dressed and heading out the door.

Jay came up short. There were at least a dozen gnomes lined up at the door. Their faces were solemn, and there were tears in more than a few gnomes' eyes.

Guilt churned Jay's stomach. "I'm so sorry about your friends. I'll do whatever I can to find out who did this horrible thing."

A male gnome stepped forward. "You mistake our purpose, Master. We're not here because we are upset about the other gnomes, though we are."

The other gnomes nodded their agreement.

"We're here as protection. Someone means our master ill, and we aren't going to let anything happen to you." The gnome handed over a small silver whistle on a

delicate silver chain. "If you feel yourself in danger, blow this whistle, and the gnomes closest to you will come."

Jay accepted the gift with a bow. "Thank you. I appreciate the support, and if anyone would like to back out of our agreement, I will be more than happy to release you from service."

There was a general buzzing of disagreement.

The gnome who had stepped forward as speaker looked around at the other gnomes. "It is unanimously agreed that no one wants out of service, but thank you for the offer. It isn't often that we are given the chance to be true protectors. Most people forget that we were once the original bodyguards of the fey before they all died out. It is only in the past four hundred years that we've been relegated to household chores. We feel privileged to get the opportunity to protect such a powerful wizard."

Jay swallowed the lump in his throat. "Thank you for your offer of protection. Hopefully, we can find out who did this before he has a chance to strike again. I'd appreciate it if you could watch over the pack while I'm gone and send a few more people to my dorm room after it has been inspected."

"Consider it done."

Jay looked at the gnome for a while. The creature looked vaguely familiar. "What's your name?"

The gnome gave him a sharp-toothed smile. "My name's Briar. You bonded with my boy, Thorn. He's been a handful for the past few years, and I was worried he was going to fade. Now, he's bursting with energy and has convinced some humans to let him intern with them. I'd like to return the favor."

"Welcome, Briar," Jay said. "I wish we could've met under better circumstances."

"Me, too, Master."

After bidding the gnomes goodbye, the pair grabbed a limo back to school.

It was time to hunt a killer.

* * * *

The ride back to the dorm was made in silence. Thomas cuddled his mate close. Even though Jaynell wasn't speaking, he could feel the distress pouring off the wizard.

"Shh. We'll catch whoever did this."

"And make them pay." He'd never heard that tone from his mate before. When Jay turned to face him, his mate's eyes glowed with a golden fire that promised retribution.

For the first time, he realized that his beautiful lover wasn't all about a gorgeous face and pretty magic tricks.

His mate was a dangerous man who was as much of an alpha as any wolf.

Thomas swallowed back a moan.

It was sexy as hell.

Luckily, they pulled up in front of the university before Thomas could do anything inappropriate. Now wouldn't be a good time to jump his mate.

"Are you coming?" While Thomas was daydreaming about a naked Jaynell, the real thing was looking at him like he was an idiot.

Thomas' cheeks flushed red.

"Sorry," he muttered, sliding out of the limo.

It was a short walk from the street to reach Jay's dorm. The hard part was wading through the crowds of students blocking the entrance. Finally, with some growling and shoving, Thomas cleared a path for his mate.

Jaynell's roommates were huddled outside the dorm room looking pale and sick. The triplets had identical expressions of shock and horror. Kevin rushed over to Jaynell and wrapped him in his arms before bursting into tears. Thomas resisted the urge to rip the kid's head off and toss it out the window, but the wolf part of him let out a low growl. He didn't think it could be heard over all the noise, but Jay carefully eased out of his roommate's arms.

"I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry," Kevin cried. Gripping

Jay's arms, he continued to sob. "I didn't think he'd do anything. He said he was just going to leave a note."

"Who?" Thomas asked, even though he was certain they both already knew.

"Dragonspawn," Kevin said, through his tears.

"Michael Dragonspawn was here. I was on my way to class, and no one else was home. He asked if he could step inside and leave you a note." Kevin sniffled back tears. "I told him it would be fine if he locked the door after him. I didn't know he'd kill them."

"Of course you didn't," Jaynell said, rubbing his friend's back.

Thomas knew he should feel sympathy for the distraught young man, but all he could think about was how *his* mate's hand was running over another man's body.

He didn't realize his was growling until Kevin stepped carefully away from Jay, lifting his hands in a placating gesture. "Relax, Wolfy, I don't have designs on your man."

"Good, then I won't have to rip out your throat," Thomas said conversationally.

"Thomas!" Jay shouted. There was a spark of amusement in the wizard's eyes so the werekin didn't worry too much.

Before he could say anything else, Headmaster

Vreel appeared. The elderly wizard gave Jaynell a concerned look as he handed over an embossed envelope with Jaynell's name written in swirly ink.

"You have been challenged by Dragonspawn to a match of your avatars. The winner will have to give up his power to the other." The headmaster gave Jaynell a sad smile. "If you don't accept the challenge, Dragonspawn said he will kill two more gnomes every day you put off the match."

Thomas stepped forward to confront the headmaster. "Jaynell is still a student. Shouldn't there be someone who can stand up for him? What kind of place is this that you not only let a murderer get off after killing two other beings but it lets him challenge a student to a match so he can suck Jaynell dry of his magic?"

Headmaster Vreel looked embarrassed. "There is no written protection for gnomes and, frankly, the person strongest and best able to take on Dragonspawn is Jaynell himself. His father left him a great deal of power, and I've heard rumors that his mother passed on her abilities also. Dragonspawn used to tutor Jaynell, so he knows of his magic. Has he ever met your avatar?"

Jay shook his head. "I trained with my avatar with another tutor. Dragonspawn never saw him."

Vreel smiled. "That may be your saving grace."

Dragonspawn's avatar is a griffin, but as far as I know, he only has one head."

As the pair made plans for the battle, Thomas made plans of his own.

This might be a battle among wizards, but werekin looked after their own.

* * * *

The battle wasn't scheduled until the next day, so Jaynell went home with Thomas and brought his roommates with him. Uncertain if Dragonspawn was going to return, he didn't want to leave his friends at the dorm when even the headmaster couldn't guarantee their safety.

When they got out of the limo, James met them on the steps. For the first time, Jaynell realized maybe it wasn't such a bright idea to bring a bunch of wizards to the pack home without asking the alpha.

"I'm so sorry, James. I should've called and asked you first. I invited my friends to stay here until tomorrow when I battle Michael."

To Jay's surprise, the alpha didn't look the least bit put out. "You're a member of the pack now Jay. You're allowed to invite people into your home if you like. If I don't want them here, I'm not shy about telling them to go."

Jay nodded. It was all he could do with the knot lodged in his throat.

"What else aren't you shy about?" Kevin asked, walking up to the alpha. He slid a hand up James' chest, and Jay held his breath.

Kevin was going to get his ass kicked.

To Jay's surprise, the alpha leaned down and sniffed Kevin's neck before letting a low growl pour from his throat. "Why don't you come inside and I can show you where you're going to sleep?" The large alpha wrapped an arm around Kevin and led him into the house.

"Huh," Thomas said. "My brother never showed much interest in men before."

Jay shrugged. "Maybe he's bisexual. I didn't know Kevin liked guys either." Of course, he didn't really know his roommates very well. His life had been up and down since he came to the school. He just knew they seemed like nice guys who didn't deserve to be mixed up in his problems. The death of the gnomes still weighed heavily on his heart. They'd been nice people who had wanted to serve him, not be smashed by a power-hungry wizard.

"Hey, it wasn't your fault." Thomas' big hands pulled Jay into his embrace, rubbing his back up and down in a soothing pattern.

"Are you two coming?" Dean asked, looking back

with concerned eyes. The triplets hadn't spoken much since leaving campus, but there was a new sadness in their eyes that Jay felt responsible for putting there.

After making sure everyone had a place to spend the night, where Kevin was surprisingly absent, Jay and Thomas went upstairs.

They undressed in silence. Jay had reached down to pull back the covers when Thomas gently turned him to face the werekin.

"Is there any chance that you might be injured tomorrow?"

"Of course." How could he explain to a magical creature the unpredictability of magic? "Thomas, come sit by me."

He patted the space next to him on the bed as he sat down. For once, he was more interested in talking to his naked mate than jumping his bones.

"There are a lot of things that could go wrong tomorrow. Dragonspawn is an extremely strong wizard. I don't know how old he is, but I do know he's one of the best in his craft. I have the magic of three people coursing through my body, but my greatest power is my love for you. I wasn't going to ask you to do this right away, but since I'm going into battle tomorrow, I wanted to bond with you in the wizard way."

Thomas licked his lips like they were parched, and his eyes were moist as he leaned closer to his lover.

"What's the wizard way?"

"The trinity of blood, magic, and sex."

Thomas' smile was slow and tender. "Baby, I'd give you my soul if I thought it would keep you safe."

Jay stroked his lover's face. "I like your soul just where it is. Inside the most wonderful man I know."

A single tear slid down Thomas face, but his smile didn't disappear.

"Tell me what I need to do," he whispered.

Taking a deep breath, Jay nodded towards the carpet in the middle of the room. "Kneel on the rug and I'll collect the supplies."

Thomas placed a soft kiss on Jay's cheek before going to sit on the floor.

Jay reached into his backpack and pulled out his pocketknife, a piece of gold cord, and his wand. In general, he didn't use a wand for his magic. He had no need for the traditional focal piece of magic that others of his kind used, but for this ceremony, he needed to use anything he could to his advantage.

Nothing could go wrong with this bonding. Whether or not the wizard bonding worked, he knew that he was

bound to his lover in the way of the werekin. One way or another, he would always be at Thomas' side. Instincts screamed at him that he needed to have as many ties binding them as possible. He didn't know why, but he'd never gone against his instincts, and he wasn't going to start now, when he had everything to lose.

He looked back at his lover who watched him with loving eyes. The werewolf's body was strong and muscular, and he was a fine man who would do anything to help his mate. Jaynell didn't even have to ask himself if Thomas was the one meant for him. There was a soul connection between them that Jaynell couldn't deny even if he wanted to. Leaving Thomas wasn't an option, so it was up to Jay to find the best way to keep the gorgeous werekin safe. This ceremony was the safest he could get. It would bind them together, so even if Jaynell was close to death, Thomas could pull him back from the brink. It was a safety net for his lover. The little he knew about werekin told Jay that his death would mean the death of his beloved Thomas, and nothing in heaven or earth was going to end that werekin's life before its appointed time. Jay had lost enough people in his life to know he had no wish to lose another one.

He returned to Thomas, kneeling on the floor before him. "This will hurt a little bit," he warned the other man.

Thomas gave him a sweet smile. "No amount of

pain would be enough to stop me from keeping you at my side forever."

Jay blinked back tears.

His wolf was so damn sweet.

Sucking in a deep breath, Jay straightened his spine. They could do this. He unfolded the knife blade and clutched the handle in his fist.

"Hold out your arm."

Without hesitation, Thomas held out his arm.

Quick sure strikes left both of them with a gash in their right wrists.

Pressing the wounds together, Jay gave the binding rites.

As our blood mingles, so do our souls.

As our blood binds us, so does our magic.

As our blood flows together, so will our lives.

"Now repeat after me," Jay said to his lover.

Thomas nodded solemnly.

"I vow to always share my heart, my soul, and my thoughts with the man before me."

"I vow to always share my heart, my soul, and my thoughts with the man before me," Thomas repeated.

"To watch over him in safe or troubled times."

"To watch over him in safe or troubled times."

"To love him with magic or none."

"To love him with magic or none."

"Until the goddess takes his soul from me."

"Until the goddess takes his soul from me."

Jay wrapped the length of gold cord around their connected wrists.

"Now we bind through magic," Jay said, widening his knees so he could brace his stance.

Lifting his wand awkwardly with his left hand, Jay held it over their bound wrists.

"As we are bound in blood, let us be bound in magic. May this man always know the harbor, the strength, and the protection of being bonded with my soul." Jay waved the wand in a clockwise circle. "With this spell, I bequeath to my love half of everything I am. Half of my heart, my soul, and my magic."

A scream tore out of Jay's throat as the magic obeyed his command. Clouds of sparkling power ripped from his chest, floated in the air for a brief shining moment, then slammed into Thomas. Thomas howled as his back bowed from the energy racing through his veins.

It was several minutes before either man could speak. Jay tasted blood in his mouth from where he bit his lip. Looking at his lover, he saw Thomas' eyes glowed with his newfound magic.

"What did you do to me?" Thomas whispered.

"I gave you half of everything I am," Jay said. "If Dragonspawn gets close to killing me tomorrow, you can pull me back from the brink."

"When I said I'd give you my soul, you didn't tell me that you were going to give me yours."

"Only half," Jay said. He felt surprisingly light. Seeking inside, he could feel all of his magic was still his to call. The magic now residing in Thomas' body was still accessible, but if Dragonspawn tried to yank all of the power out of Jay's body, he could only get half.

"Can I do magic now?" Thomas asked in a hushed voice.

Jay saw the panic in his mate's eyes.

"No, honey. You are only a vessel for magic. You don't have the ability to use it. However, it should be able to protect you from harm. You're my backup plan."

Thomas smiled. "I feel really strong. Are we mates now?"

"Not until we have sex," Jaynell told his mate.

The look Thomas gave him was hot and feral.

"Then what are we waiting for? I have energy to burn."

Jay was relieved the werewolf wasn't upset. He gave his mate a smile of his own. "We can't have that now, can we?"

"No. I want to make sure we are bonded!" Thomas declared.

Jaynell saw a fire in Thomas' eyes that wasn't there before. Claiming the wolf had opened up something inside his lover.

"I thought we'd bonded in the wolf way before."

Thomas gave Jaynell a sheepish grin. "We had, but my wolf wanted a stronger bond from you. You could've walked away, and I would still be linked to you forever. Now that I feel your commitment, my wolf is calm."

"I hope he's not too calm," Jay said with a laugh. "We still have a battle to win."

The werekin stepped up to Jay, gripping his arms in a firm hold. "Never fear my mate. I won't let you down. If Dragonspawn thinks he can take you away from me, he doesn't understand anything about mates. I would follow you into the depths of hell and fetch you back out again."

Thomas' eyes were intense, the pupils blown with the force of his passion.

Stepping closer into his lover's embrace, Jay rubbed Thomas' back. "I'd like to think I wouldn't go to hell." He laughed, trying to lighten the situation. "But I appreciate the sentiment. We'll get through this and then we'll decide where we want to go from there."

Thomas pulled away enough to look into his eyes.

"What does that mean?" he asked, frowning.

"It means whether I go back to school or decide to go directly to taking my magical study exams. I have a feeling my father sent me here to meet you. I can't think of any other reason. These people don't have anything to teach me."

Tension drained out of the werewolf. "I thought you meant about us."

Jay shook his head. Capturing Thomas' face in his hands, he placed a soft kiss on his mate's lips. "We are bound forever, Thomas. I might not be werekin or even understand all of your ways, but I am yours as you are mine, and neither man nor fate will ever permanently part us."

Thomas' smile was slow and predatory. "Good."

Before Jay could get his bearings, Thomas' fingers were sliding inside him. Moaning, it took a minute for Jay to realize he had to stop his lover.

"Wait."

Thomas' fingers stilled inside him. "What?"

"I have to be inside you."

"What?" Thomas' eyes were wide with shock.

"Why?"

Reluctantly, Jay slid away from his lover's questing fingers, moaning when he was left empty and bereft.

"I have to spill my seed inside you for the bonding to be complete."

Jay could see Thomas nervously swallow. "I've never had another inside me before. In wolf culture, it would mean I was the lesser wolf." Seeing Jay's expression, he rushed to explain. "Not the lesser man but the less strong wolf. As you don't even have a wolf side, I'm not sure how my wilder side will react."

"The bonding isn't complete until I am inside you in all ways." Jay had to be firm despite his need to take the panicky expression away from his mate.

Thomas took a deep breath and slid next to Jaynell to lie on the floor. "If my wolf starts to snap, use your magic to restrain me. I'd never forgive myself if I harmed you, my mate."

Jay kissed Thomas with all his pent-up love and passion. Trying to convey his depth of feeling for the other man through touch, Jay kissed his way up and down Thomas' body until he got level with his lover's cock. With a swipe of his tongue, Thomas bucked beneath his touch.

"More," Thomas demanded.

"In good time." In order for the binding to work, the werekin would have to be on the edge of passion. Licking and nipping his way across Thomas' wide expanse of skin, Jay mouthed the werekin's pebbled abs, nibbled on one hip,

licked at the crease between hip and thigh and sucked his lover's balls in his mouth until he felt Thomas pant and moan beneath him.

"Please, Jaynell," Thomas cried out. "Please."

Jaynell reached across his lover's body and grabbed the lube. Popping the cap, he made sure his fingers were covered in the slick lubricant before breaching the werekin with one finger.

"More."

Another finger pressed inside. The silky heat of his lover almost made Jaynell come from that sensation alone.

A soft whimper brought his eyes up to look at Thomas' desperate expression.

"Shh. Soon. I don't want to harm you." He would rather cut off his own arm than tear his lover.

"I want you, now!" Thomas demanded. For a brief second, his eyes went wolfish.

Fuck, that was a turn-on.

"Easy, love," Jaynell said, soothing Thomas.

Removing his fingers, he pressed inside, keeping his motions slow and easy.

Thomas' face contorted a moment with discomfort.

"Relax."

Fangs popped out of Thomas mouth. "Restrain me," Thomas growled in a voice much deeper than normal.

With a word, Jaynell called forth long bands of golden power. They wrapped around Thomas wrists, pulling them up and binding them to the headboard. Fangs receded, and Jay could feel the tension seep out of his lover. Now that he was certain he couldn't hurt Jaynell, Thomas' eyes were clear.

"Fuck me like you mean it, mate."

After a slow glide inside to ease the way and make sure his mate was ready, Jaynell pounded into Thomas, pouring all the love and passion he felt for the man into his lovemaking. Sending out more bands of power, he slid his arms beneath Thomas' knees, lifting them higher so he could peg his lover at just the right angle.

Thomas howled beneath him, filling the space between them with spurts of sticky moisture. Unable to resist the constriction around his cock, Jay followed his lover's orgasm with one of his own.

Jay's golden bands dissolved as he felt stronger, invisible ones stretch between them, binding the pair together for eternity.

"It's done," Jay said, gasping in surprise at the strange sensation of their bonding.

"No," Thomas said as Jaynell slid out of his body. "It's only just beginning."

Chapter Four

The air was cold as Jaynell approached the dueling field. There was a good chance he was going to die today. Despite his big talk to Thomas, it was often cunning more than force that won the day. Dragonspawn knew Jaynell's tricks, having taught him most of them. Jay was at a disadvantage because Michael had hundreds of years of dueling experience behind him and Jay had none. Although he knew in theory what to do in a duel, he'd had very little actual experience.

A rush of wings brought Jay out of his daydreams. An enormous griffin landed in the field. Dragonspawn's avatar was a gigantic creature with beady eyes, an enormous beak and claws as sharp as knives. It whipped its lion tail in an angry frenzy as it stared at Jaynell. Tilting back its head, it let out an ear-splitting screech.

Battle cry.

There was no sign of Michael around.

Jay sifted through his mind for the dueling rules. Damn, the avatar could combat him by itself. There was no rule that stated the owner of the avatar had to be present during a duel.

As the griffin reared back on its hind legs, Jay took a step back warily, keeping an eye on the claws slashing the

air before him.

He needed Gideon.

Gideon, come to me, he called in his mind.

A scream warned him in time to dodge to the side.

He ducked to avoid the swipe of claws.

He could feel his avatar coming closer, but he doubted he would come in time.

"How does it feel to be prey, little one?" Michael's shout distracted Jay. The avatar took that moment to slash its claws across Jay's cheek. Blood sprayed in a warm sticky shower across his ear and neck.

Pain knifed through him. Jay gasped for breath, trying to regain his focus. Gideon's voice whispered across his mind. *Master, I come.*

Jay felt Thomas' anger flash through him. His lover was connected to him on the psychic plane, following the battle as it happened, a supportive shadow in his mind. Jay hoped the temperamental wolf didn't lose control and rush onto the field. Thomas was strategically placed, but Jay would only use him as a last result. With a wave of his hand and a few words of power, Jay propelled himself across the field. A scream filled the air as Gideon answered the griffin's challenge, landing on the field between them.

Gideon spat a stream of acid across the griffin's face, blinding the beast. The noise was incredible. The

sound of agony filled the air as the creature screamed out its pain. So intent on what the avatars were doing, Jaynell didn't sense his real danger until it was too late.

"Finally, I have you," Michael said. Grabbing Jay with a cruel grip, the master wizard pulled Jaynell through a spinning purple vortex.

The howl of a wolf echoed in Jay's head as he lost consciousness.

* * * *

His cheek burned.

Everything else hurt. The material he laid on felt like wood flooring, but his vision was foggy, and he couldn't make out his surroundings.

"Did you think I was going to let you stay with that mangy wolf?" Dragonspawn's voice crackled with power.

Jay blinked, trying to clear his vision as the other man ranted.

"I didn't spend those years convincing your father to let me teach you to have you throw it all away on the first shifter you found. You are mine. Mine! I have trained you, molded you, and now that you are old enough, will mate with you."

"You used the challenge as a ploy," Jay accused.

Dragonspawn laughed. "Of course I did. Your dragon will kill my griffin. I have no doubt of that. I was done with that avatar anyway. I just needed you distracted enough so I could spring my trap and pull you away from your stupid wolf. Why would you want a shifter anyway when you could have the world's best wizard as your mate? We will rule the magical universe with our power."

Exhaustion beat at Jay like a drum. His head hurt from the vortex travel, his cheek burned from the dragon's claws, and his body ached all over from the shaky landing. With a groan, he pulled himself to his feet. For the first time, his vision cleared as if a spell was ripped from his eyes.

"Sorry, love, I had to bespell your vision to keep you from getting sick on the journey."

"Um, thanks." He didn't know what else to say. Did you thank a man for kidnapping you?

"You're welcome."

Blinking, Jaynell looked around the place in surprise. The room was warm and intimate. It should be. It was his family home.

"I thought you'd be most comfortable at your home. You don't need to go back to that school. Those morons couldn't teach you anything anyway. I, and your other teachers, taught you more than most of the people at that

college. The only reason you went there was because your father had a stupid vision you'd meet your soul mate. I told him I would take care of you, but he wouldn't listen. That's why he had to die." Dragonspawn shook his head sadly.

"I-I thought I killed him."

Michael laughed. "No, honey, it wasn't the lack of magic that killed him. I finished him off because he was dragging you down. I knew you hated the thought of him wasting away." The older man patted his shoulder. "I've always looked out for you."

Jay froze under Dragonspawn's touch. He casually stepped away, both to avoid the other man's hands and to try and figure out a way to get out of the situation. He didn't mind killing the master wizard, not after he'd killed Jay's father, but he didn't want to end up dead. Despite his safeguards, he wasn't positive Thomas would survive his death.

"What do you see us doing in the future? What are your plans?"

There was a long pause before Dragonspawn spoke. "You are taking this really well."

Jay shrugged. "I wondered why father sent me to that stupid school. The teachers weren't very knowledgeable." He gave the other wizard a knowing smile even though he was certain it cost a piece of his soul. "Not

like us."

Michael trailed his fingers across Jay's arm.

Jay swallowed to keep down the bile.

"What of your wolf?"

Jay shrugged. "Just because he's bound to me doesn't mean I have to stay with him. He was good in bed, but he has no magical ability. He's fun, but I need more in a permanent match." He was glad Thomas wasn't there to hear him tell such horrible lies. His wolf would be heartbroken if he thought that was really Jay's opinion.

"That's just what I wanted to hear," Michael said with a wide smile. The wizard stepped closer to Jay until they were almost nose-to-nose. "You are the one I waited years for, but there is only one problem."

Jay swallowed the hard lump in his throat.

"What's that?"

Michael sank his fingers into Jay's hair and gripped it tight. "You're a terrible liar."

Gasping, Jay's fingers scrabbled to pull Michael's hand away. "Let me go."

"Certainly, sweetheart. As soon as I drain you of all that lovely power." Dragonspawn licked his lips. "I thought to mate with you, but I see you're foolishly devoted to your stupid wolf. The only thing more appealing than your beautiful body is the amount of power harbored inside.

Power I intend to have for myself."

At the look in Dragonspawn's eyes, Jay lost his fear. He forgot to be afraid of the man who was stronger, bigger and knew more about magic than Jay probably ever would. This was the bastard who murdered his father, killed innocent gnomes, and pulled him away from the man that he loved.

"The less you struggle, the easier it will be on both of us," Dragonspawn said in a coaxing voice.

"There's something you never really understood about me," Jay said in an equally calm voice.

"What's that?"

"I'm a difficult man." For the first time in his life, Jaynell pulled upon the total strength of his magic. For a single sparkling moment, his soul brushed across Thomas' as he was flooded with the power. "You want my magic. Here you go!"

Focusing on the other man, Jay collected his power until it glowed like a shining brand, and then shoved it into Dragonspawn.

Michael fell to the ground, screaming and clutching at his chest.

Before Jay's cold gaze, the older man started smoking as all the power forced inside started eating its way back out again.

"What did you do?" Michael gasped.

Dragonspawn's skin glowed fiery red like a sun burned from inside. Jaynell's only warning was a whisper of smoke drifting from the wizard's steaming eyes.

Michael's body exploded in a shower of ash.

Before he could do more than stare in amazement, Jaynell fell to his knees as all the power he sent into Dragonspawn returned to him, along with all the magic from the master wizard.

"Fuck," Jay screamed. His body burned, and for a bright, light-blinding instant, he thought he would follow Dragonspawn's fate.

Share your burden with me, Thomas' voice whispered through his head. *As we are bound, so must we die. Choose our destiny.*

"No!" Jay shouted. Never would he let his beloved mate die over his incompetence. Jaynell's abilities were tested as he tried to concentrate while every molecule of his body was burning. Knowing his lover was strong, Jay poured magic into his mate over their mating link. Jay leaked the magic as slowly as he could so he wouldn't overwhelm Thomas. Convulsing on the floor, Jay kept his mind tightly bound with his mate.

You don't get out of eternity with me so easily, Jay sent back through their link. He could feel the stress

Thomas was under, then suddenly there was a snap, and he felt his magic spread.

"What the hell happened?" Jay asked out loud. The magical pressure was over, and he could feel the power bubbling happily through his veins. Extending his magical senses, he could feel his magic was spread across miles, still accessible, yet living in other hosts.

The gnomes!

He could feel the creatures reaching out to him to share the burden. Dozens of creatures who could hold magic but couldn't use it. Quickly, he bound them to the earth so they were free.

Jay's cell phone rang, causing him to let out a startled shout.

"Some kind of big, bad warrior I am," he muttered deprecatingly.

Reaching into his pants pocket, he pulled out his phone. "Hi, lover," he said, flipping it open.

"What the hell were you thinking?" Thomas shouted over the line. "He could've killed you!"

"Sorry. I'll try to keep my abductions to a minimum in the future."

"See that you do," Thomas said in a quieter voice. "You have a bunch of gnomes here who are glowing like candles. What did you do?"

"Are they hurt?" Concern filled Jaynell. What if he did something to hurt the kind creatures?

"They say not. Apparently the gnomes you bonded with were able to share your power along with all the members of my pack. How much magic did you siphon off this guy?"

"Absolutely all of it," Jay said bitterly, looking at the blackened spot on the floor. "I took every last drop."

There was a long silence before Thomas said in a quiet voice. "Can you teleport like Dragonspawn and get back to me?"

"No. That spell takes a lot of preparation, and although I might have the power, I don't have the skill to make sure I end up at the right place. I'll have to take a plane to get back to you and I don't have any identification."

He was pondering the obstacles to catching a plane when a loud scream outside broke into Jay's conversation. Walking to the window, he reached it in time to see Gideon land on the grassy yard outside. Besides a scratch on the middle neck, Jay didn't see any damage.

That reminded Jay of his own injury. Reaching up, he felt smooth, unblemished skin. Catching his reflection in the window, he saw that there was no longer any damage, and the pain was gone.

"You still there?" Thomas' voice growled over the phone.

"Never mind, honey. I'll see you in a few minutes. I'll be taking the dragon express."

Not letting his lover argue, Jay hung up and opened the outer door. It was time to get back to the life he was supposed to have as the magical mate of an amazing werewolf. Now, all he had to do was make sure his magic hadn't harmed the other creatures he'd unknowingly shared his abilities with, hope no one wanted to charge him with homicide, and spend happily ever after with his grumpy mate.

Life was looking up.

With a smile of anticipation, Jay went outside to catch a ride to his lover.

The End

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About the Author

Amber Kell lives in Texas with her husband, two sons, two cats and one very stupid dog. To learn more about her current books or works in progress, check out her blog at <http://amberkell.wordpress.com>. Her fans can also reach her at amberkellwrites@gmail.com.

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