

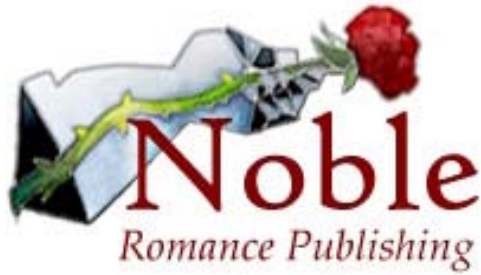
Noble Romance Publishing



WOLVES OF EAST ANGLIA

MATE FOR A KING

Marisa Chenery



www.nobleromance.com

Wolves of East Anglia: Mate for a King

ISBN 978-1-60592-099-3

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Book Blurb

Lexi Weller's vacation in England doesn't exactly start off all that great when she almost ends up getting into a car accident. But when the driver of the car she almost hits steps out to speak with her, she finds herself practically drooling over him. And before it's all over, Mr. Tall, Muscular and Good-looking asks Lexi out on a date.

Raedwald he hopes he hasn't made a mistake by asking the sexy American out to dinner. Charged by the Anglo-Saxon god, Tiw, to protect mortals from the werewolves sired by Fenris the wolf, Raed knows he can't put Lexi before his duty. But when Lexi comes to mean more to him than he ever imagined, Raed must find a way to explain what he is without scaring off the woman he never wants to let go.

Chapter One

Feeling more than a little jet lagged, Lexi pushed open the door to the flat she had rented for a month in Norwich, England and wearily dragged her luggage out of the small hallway. After a ten-hour flight from Tampa International Airport in Florida, which included a stopover before landing in Manchester International Airport then another hour flight from Manchester to Norwich International Airport, Lexi was pretty much done in. All she wanted to do was fall into bed and not wake up for a week. The five hour time difference sucked. But she couldn't sleep just yet. She still had to pick up a few necessary items from a grocery store before she crashed. Lexi headed out of the flat that sat above a small bookstore and down the single flight of stairs leading to the building's front entrance then she made her way to the parking lot at the rear of the building where she'd parked her rental car.

As she pulled away, Lexi reminded herself to drive on the left hand side of the road. She headed for the street where she'd seen a grocery store on the drive in. It wouldn't take her long to pick up the small amount of groceries she needed. Feeling more jet-lagged as time went on, once she got to the store, Lexi decided it best to get a few essentials then come back later for the rest of the food she would need for the week.

She was almost back at her flat when she just narrowly missed hitting a car in the oncoming lane. Tires screeched as she and the other driver slammed on their brakes. Lexi's heart jumped into her throat as she realized how close she had come to being in an accident. She had gone around a corner and stupidly turned into the wrong lane. Knowing the almost-accident had been entirely her fault didn't help her nerves any. Her first day in England and she almost killed herself. *Way to go, dumbass.*

Lexi pried her hands off the steering wheel and got out of the car. She felt pretty sure she had stopped in time, but decided she'd better check to make certain there hadn't been any damage. She glanced at the expensive-looking Mercedes, sitting with its front bumper almost touching her rental's. The driver's door opened.

With an apology already formed on her lips, Lexi instead felt her mouth fall open as she watched a very large, very muscular, drop-dead gorgeous man step out and make his way over to where she stood. Unable to look away, she let her gaze run over him. The man was her own personal walking wet dream. Everything about him was a turn-on. He had longish dark blond hair, blue eyes and a body so muscular she bet she wouldn't find an ounce of fat anywhere underneath his tight-fitting blue jeans and black long sleeved t-shirt. She ran her gaze over his square jaw, straight nose and firm lips. Lexi licked her own lips as her gaze became riveted to his.

When he came to stand in front of her, Lexi had to crane her neck to look up at him. He had to be at least six foot five. He towered over her five foot seven. His brows had been drawn together in displeasure as he had made his way over to her, but now that he stood in front of her, they evened out. Lexi hoped his current expression meant he wasn't too pissed off.

She cleared her throat. "Ah, sorry about that. This is my first time in England, and I still haven't gotten the hang of driving on the left hand side of the road." Lexi swallowed as he looked her up and down. She shifted from foot to foot, not knowing what else to say.

"You're an American?"

Lexi had to bite back a moan at the sound of his deep voice. She even found his British accent attractive. "Yes. Like I said, I apologize. I'm a bit jet-lagged as well."

His nostrils flared slightly as he took a deep breath. "I think we should continue this discussion in the parking lot across the street. We're blocking traffic."

She looked where he indicated and nodded. As she got in her rental car and drove the short distance to the parking lot next to a quaint looking tea house, Lexi took a deep breath to settle her nerves. Her heart raced. She knew her accelerated pulse had more to do with the man who parked his car beside hers than the close call she'd had. After cutting the engine, she got out and met the man whose mere presence set her body on fire.

Lexi gave him a small smile. "Did I damage your Merc? If I did, I'll pay for any repairs you need to have done."

He shook his head. "There was no damage. I was just concerned because you look a bit unsettled. Are you all right?"

A wave of relief washed through her. "I'm okay. I guess I should have caught up on some sleep before I decided to do some grocery shopping."

"You aren't staying at a hotel?"

"No. I rented a flat not too far from here. I'm here for a month so I figured it would be cheaper in the long run."

"What's your name?"

"Lexi. Lexi Weller." She licked her suddenly dry lips as his gaze settled on her mouth.

He stuck out his hand. "Nice to meet you, Lexi. I'm Raedwald. Raed for short."

Lexi took his outstretched hand. His much larger one closed over hers as he rubbed his thumb back and forth across the top. A shiver of awareness shot through her as she swallowed audibly. "Nice to meet you as well, Raed." She tried to pull her hand away, but Raed kept hold of her.

"Are you free this evening, Lexi?"

"Wh-what?" She couldn't have heard him right. Men who looked like Raed did not usually give her the time of day much less ask her out on a date. *If* that was what Raed was doing.

Raed gave her a half smile. "I asked if you would be available this evening. Since this is your first time here in Norwich, I would like to take you out for supper and show you around a bit."

Lexi nodded. "Ah, sure." The longer she stayed in Raed's presence the lower her IQ seemed to become. He must think she was an idiot, but she had a hard enough time keeping her mind out of the gutter as it was. Thoughts of stripping Raed naked so she could lick and kiss every inch of his hard body were turning her brain to mush. She

blamed it on jet lag and not her overactive imagination. *Yeah, right, Lexi. Keep lying to yourself and you might start to believe it.*

"Great. I'll pick you up at six this evening. Where's your flat?"

"Six will be fine." She quickly rattled off the flat's address.

Raed lifted their joined hands and pressed his lips to the inside of her wrist. His tongue flicked across her skin before he released her. "Then I'll see you at six."

Lexi had to lean against the trunk as she silently watched Raed get in his Mercedes and drive away. Her legs shook as she slowly got back into her car. That one small kiss had been enough to send her body into overdrive. Her nipples were still pebbled beneath her blouse. She squeezed her legs together hoping to alleviate the throbbing ache of arousal pounding in her pussy, but it only seemed to increase the intensity, causing wetness to pool.

Pulling herself together, Lexi left the parking lot and headed back to the flat. She really needed to get some sleep, especially if she didn't want to make an ass of herself this evening. She would show Raed she wasn't this ditzy all the time. Who was she kidding? She would be lucky if she didn't do something completely asinine like ask him to slowly strip naked so she could lick every hard inch of him.

* * * * *

Raed drove to the large manor house where he and his men lived. He shook his head as he thought about Lexi. He had been prepared to blast the driver of the car that had suddenly veered into his lane. His anger soon died away when he realized the other driver was a woman, and it wasn't just because she was a woman. As soon as he clapped eyes on her, his body had come to swift attention. He found her more than pretty with light brown hair hanging loose around her shoulders and her dark blue eyes; add a figure that appeared to be slim and fit under the black dress pants and pale pink blouse she wore, and he found he'd had a hard time tearing his gaze off her.

But what really got to him was her scent. One whiff and her enticing fragrance seemed to swirl inside his head, intoxicating him. His cock went instantly rock hard as the wolf inside him threw back its head and howled with longing. Because Lexi affected him in ways no other woman had in the past, before he knew what he was doing, he'd asked her out for the evening. Had he done the right thing? Usually when he met a woman he found attractive, his wolf stayed out of the picture. Not so with Lexi. He didn't know if this was good or bad. All it would take would be one slip and he'd have her running from him in terror. A werewolf, as well as an immortal were two aspects of himself he never wanted to reveal to mortals.

Raed parked his car in the large detached garage and headed for the manor. Once inside, he followed the sounds of his men's voices to the kitchen at the back.

Raed walked over to the counter to pour himself a cup of coffee. All his men sat at the kitchen table, good naturedly arguing about the outcome of the football match they had watched the night before. He'd never really been interested in the whole football thing, but his men had taken to the sport.

As he sat at the head of the table, he let his gaze skim over his five large companions. Every single one of them was loyal to him, and had been for centuries. Even though he could no longer claim to be the King of East Anglia, they all held to the vow of allegiance they had given him so long ago. When the Anglo-Saxon god, Tiw, the Sky Father, had come to Raed with his offer of immortality in exchange for his help in protecting mortals from the werewolves sired by the wolf, Fenris, they had quickly vowed to join him. Each of them had also been granted immortality as well as the ability to shift into werewolves, to give them equal footing when they fought their prey. Tiw had also marked each man as his when he placed The White Wolf emblem on the cap of their left shoulders. Anglo-Saxon in design, the black mark depicted a figure of a stylized man, Tiw, flanked on either side by two stylized wolves standing on their hind legs.

Now here they were, over thirteen hundred years later, trying to pass themselves off as normal men during the day only to fight werewolves by night. Even though they

were werewolves themselves, they were nothing like those spawned by Fenris, who only found pleasure in killing and turning innocent mortals.

Fenris was the eldest child of the god, Loki, and a giantess. Even though he had been born as a wolf, unable to shift to human form, he was no ordinary wolf. He had grown so large, the other gods of Asgard had worried he would turn on them. To protect themselves, they bound Fenris. The one time he managed to free himself, he'd escaped to the mortal realm, to East Anglia, where the very first werewolf was sired. Tiw had managed to capture Fenris once more, but the damage had already been done. A single bite from one of Fenris' get was all it took to turn a mortal into a werewolf.

Raed loudly cleared his throat. His men stopped talking as one and looked at him. Algar, his second-in-command, spoke first. "You're back early. I thought you said your errands would take a while."

"I got a little . . . sidetracked."

"That's not like you." Algar's hazel-eyed gaze latched onto Raed. "What happened?"

"Nothing really."

"Are you sure?" Garrick asked. "You looked distracted. The kind of distracted that takes over a man when he meets a woman and he wants to screw her brains out."

Figured Garrick would be the one to guess what had sidetracked him; the man sometimes knew too much for his own good. And as soon as he realized he was right Garrick would never let him live it down, especially given the fact his favorite pastime was to see how far he could push someone until he totally and absolutely pissed them off.

"Can we change the subject?" Raed said.

"Yup, it's a woman," Brand said from his place at the table.

Raed knew that would be *all* Brand had to say on the subject. Brand was a man of very few words, and only spoke when he had something to say. Hoping to change the topic of conversation, Raed said, "Are you all prepared for tonight? Since it's a full moon, we should have more prey to hunt than usual."

A turned mortal shifted for the very first time on the first full moon after being bitten by a werewolf. The change would not be something they could control. After their first shift, they could shift to their werewolf forms at will, the same as he and his men. With blood lust riding them, the newly turned would be compelled to seek out victims. Usually an older member of the pack accompanied the new one, watching over them as they made their first kill.

Wulfric rubbed his hands together. "You know this is Dolf's and my favorite time of the month. We'll try to leave some for the rest of you, but we aren't promising."

Where he sat beside Wulfric, Dolf crossed his arms over his large chest and nodded. Though the two of them were close friends, Raed and the others had to break up fights between them many times. There was never any ill will between them afterward. They just enjoyed seeing who could beat the other to a bloody pulp first. Being natural born warriors, it didn't take much to set them off.

Raed shook his head. "I'm sure there will be more than enough prey to keep us all busy." He turned to find his second-in-command giving him a strange look. "Okay, Algar, what's on your mind?"

"I just think it's a little weird you're already asking us about tonight when it's not even noon. You tend to wait until the evening to give us our pep talk."

Raed shifted in his chair. "I won't be here this evening."

"Why not?"

He could feel his men's eyes boring into him. "I have some place else to be."

Garrick shook his head. "You're not going to get off that easily. You do realize if you don't tell us where you'll be, we'll just follow you. You are our leader, our king, and it's our right to know where you are in case you have need of us."

Raed let out a low growl that rumbled out of his chest. Damn, his men weren't going to make this easy, but if he didn't tell them his plans they would indeed follow him. "I'm going out for dinner with someone, not that what I do with my free time is any of your business."

Garrick slapped his hand down on the table. "I knew it. You have a date."

"It's not exactly a date. She's an American here on holiday. I just offered to show her around Norwich."

"Sure you did. And I'm sure you have no interest in seeing what she looks like naked as well."

Raed had to resist the urge to snap his teeth at Garrick. He knew his friend only wanted to yank his chain, but Raed didn't like Garrick insinuating Lexi would only be a quick tumble in bed. Not that he had decided to sleep with her. "Enough, Garrick. I'm not going to discuss my plans for this evening with you. I'm just taking her out for a meal. Maybe show her around a bit. I'll be back in time for the hunt."

"Whatever you say," Garrick said as he tried to hold back a smile.

Having had enough of being examined under a microscope, Raed picked up his cup of coffee and stood. "I have a few things I have to do. I'll be in my study if you need me."

As he walked out of the kitchen, he heard his men already starting to make bets on how his evening with Lexi would turn out. Of course Garrick bet Raed would have her in bed and under him even before he took her out for supper. With a shake of his head, Raed headed for his study on the second floor.

Chapter Two

After she returned to her flat, Lexi only took the time to put the groceries away and strip out of her clothes before she fell into bed. In a matter of seconds she was fast asleep.

Hours later, she stretched as she slowly came awake. She glanced over at her travel alarm clock on the bedside table and groaned. She'd slept the entire afternoon away. She felt better for the long rest, but the hours of sleep wouldn't help her adjust to UK time. With her luck, she would now be up for most of the night.

She pushed back the covers and headed for the bathroom. She had two hours to get ready before Raed came to pick her up; a shower was definitely in order. Lexi

thought about her supper date as she stood under the water. She didn't think she was ugly by any means, but Lexi knew she wasn't exactly drop-dead gorgeous either and she certainly didn't stand out in a crowd.

Her shower finished, Lexi dressed in a pair of jeans and a dark blue long sleeved blouse that matched the color of her eyes. She then went to the living room and made a quick call to her parents back in the States to let them know she had arrived safely.

Her father's grandfather had originally come from Norwich before immigrating to Florida. Her father would have loved to make this trip with her, to see where his ancestors came from, but with his heart condition, overseas trips were out of the question. Lexi had decided to make this trip mostly at her father's suggestion. As a teacher's assistant at an elementary school with the whole summer off, she hadn't exactly had to worry about the ramifications of booking a four week holiday.

After she hung up, Lexi went to the small kitchen and put on the kettle to make herself a pot of tea. Once made, she sipped on her tea and turned on the television to wait for Raed to arrive.

At exactly six, a knock sounded on her door. Lexi's heart started to pound as she crossed the room. She pulled open the door and smiled at Raed. "Come on in. I just have to grab my purse then we can go."

Raed stepped inside, making her small flat seem even tinier. He smiled as he looked around. "Nice flat."

"Thanks. I'm happy with it. I'll just be a sec."

Lexi hurried to the bedroom to get her purse. Once inside, she waved her hand in front of her face to cool her heated cheeks. Raed was even better looking than she remembered. Dressed in snug-fitting black jeans with a dark burgundy button down shirt, he'd presented an image she'd had a hard time not ogling. The man had a great build. Grabbing her purse off the dresser, she hurried back to Raed.

He turned toward her when she stepped back into the room. "All set?"

Lexi felt a shiver go through her at the sound of his deep, British accented voice. "Yes."

Raed pulled open the flat's door and stepped aside for her to walk out first. "I thought we could go to one of the pubs, if you're all right with that suggestion?"

"I'd love to. Going out for an evening at a pub is one of the things on my 'To do' list while I'm here."

"Well, I'm glad I can help you out."

Raed placed his hand on the small of her back as they walked down the flight of stairs to the entrance. Through her blouse, Lexi felt the heat seep into her skin. Her heart started to beat faster. She knew she was reacting to Raed like a teenager out on her first date, but she couldn't seem to get herself under control. She needed to pull herself together. She was an adult. Just because a gorgeous man had asked her out for supper did not mean anything would go beyond that. Knowing her, she would be lucky to get a goodnight kiss out of Raed, let alone a second date.

Raed's black Mercedes-Benz sat parked on the street across from the flat. He helped her into the passenger seat before he went around and climbed behind the wheel. The drive to the pub, The White Swan, took no time at all. Once they sat down at an empty table, a waitress came over and took their drink order. When Raed ordered a pint of dark ale, Lexi did the same.

As they looked over their menus, Raed asked, "So you'll be here in Norwich for a month?"

Having already decided to have the fish and chips, Lexi closed her menu and looked at Raed. "Yes. I have the time off so I thought I might as well come and see where my father's side of the family came from."

Raed closed his menu and met her gaze across the table. "Do you still have family here?"

"Not that I know of. My great-grandfather moved to Florida at the age of seventeen after he lost both his parents. He was an only child and didn't have any other family."

"What happened to his parents?"

"We don't really know for sure. He never talked about them, though there is a family story about what *supposedly* happened. The tale is a bit . . . out there." Lexi leaned in and said in a low voice, "The only time he said anything about how they died was when he lay on his deathbed. My dad figures he must have been more than a little out of it at the time, considering all the pain meds they had him on. He supposedly said one night his father turned into a werewolf and killed his mother. My great-grandfather was about to suffer the same fate when a man kicked in the door to his house, swinging a broadsword, and killed his father." She sat back, shook her head and laughed. "Like I said, he must have been completely out of it."

Raed looked away. "I guess he had to have been." In a serious voice, he added, "Werewolves don't exist so there is no question your great-grandfather must have imagined the story about his parents."

His tone had Lexi studying him more closely. He still refused to meet her gaze as he looked around the pub. It almost seemed as if he felt uncomfortable with something she had said, or guilty. Lexi laughed. "Of course he made the whole thing up. And of course werewolves don't exist, everyone knows that."

Lexi had to kick herself. When would she ever learn not to bring up the subject of her great-grandfather's story? Not everyone was so tolerant; some thought she must be crazy when she told the tale.

The waitress returned with their ales and took their food order. After she left, the silence stretched between them. Lexi took a sip and looked around, unsure of how to get the conversation started again. She turned back to Raed, intending to say the first thing that came to mind, but she lost the ability to speak when her gaze locked with his. Raed was staring at her as if she'd become something he wanted to devour. His expression held the promise of a night filled with hot, sweaty sex. No man had ever looked at her like that. She swallowed as her mouth suddenly went dry. Her blood surged through her body as an ache started to build between her legs and wetness pooled. With just one look, Raed revved her body into overdrive.

Lexi shifted in her chair, unable to pull her gaze away. His eyes drifted downward as he followed the line of her throat to her chest. Her nipples tightened beneath her blouse. She bit back a moan as he lifted his gaze to her face. Raed's nostrils flared slightly as he took a deep breath. His eyelids lowered to half mast as he stared at her lips. She licked them, noticing how Raed followed the movement.

As if he suddenly realized where they were, Raed's gaze became less intense and he took a sip of ale. He then asked, "What do you do in Florida?"

Lexi had to clear her throat before she spoke, and it took a few seconds to get her brain to start working again. How could Raed go from acting as if he wanted to devour her one minute, to Mr. Calm, Cool and Collected the next? Her body felt as if it would burst into flames any minute. "Ah, I work as a teacher's assistant in an elementary school. I guess it would be called a primary school here in the UK."

"Do you enjoy teaching?"

"Yeah, I do. I like working with kids. What do you do?"

Raed gave her a half smile. "I have no need for a job."

"So you're one of the idle rich, are you?"

He chuckled. "Not exactly. I would hardly call myself idle. I may not have to work, but I do have other pursuits that keep me busy enough."

"Like what?"

"Nothing very interesting. Stocks, bonds, those types of things."

Their waitress returned with their food, bringing a pause to the conversation once again. Lexi ate as she racked her brain to think of something witty to say. The only benign topic of conversation they hadn't touched on so far was the weather. She really didn't want to go there. That would take her from being a boring date to a mind-numbing and possibly crazy one instead.

After she finished eating, Lexi excused herself and went to the restroom. Once she used the facilities, she stared at her reflection in the mirror above the sink. It looked as if this evening was going down south real fast. She didn't blame Raed. She put the blame entirely on her shoulders. This wouldn't be the first date she had been on that

ended with awkward silence. Her mother was forever telling her to be a bit more outgoing. Lexi tried, but outgoing she was not and never would be. Until she got to know a person better, she had a hard time coming up with interesting, witty conversation. She just hoped her shyness didn't cost her Raed. He was one man she definitely wanted to get to know better.

Raed watched for Lexi to come out of the loo. Hearing about her great-grandfather's parents had been the last thing he'd expected. Lexi had no idea how much truth rather than fiction was in her tale. What were the chances of his meeting the descendant of the teenage boy he had saved so very long ago? It had to be an ironic twist of fate; it also made him a tad uncomfortable. Lexi may not believe the story, but he would have to be doubly careful around her. He didn't want to give her the proof that would have her believing every word her great-grandfather had said on his deathbed.

He found it difficult thinking straight around Lexi, which resulted in him not being able to carry on an intelligent conversation. Born in 580 A.D., he hadn't exactly gone out on any dates while he had still been mortal. And now, if he craved the touch of a willing woman, he went to a nightclub to find one who wanted nothing more than a night of pleasure. But with Lexi, a one-night stand held no appeal.

Raed quickly downed the rest of his ale. He had to do something to turn this evening around. He wasn't usually this much of a stick-in-the-mud. He blamed his behavior on the intense attraction he had for Lexi. Just sitting across from her, with her scent wafting around him, had his body coiled tighter than a spring and his cock as hard as a rock. When their gazes had locked, it had taken all his willpower not to lunge across the table and take her right there. He wanted to rip her clothes off so he could lick and kiss every inch of her body. The need to take her, claim her, made his wolf howl, especially when the smell of Lexi's arousal mixed with her scent.

He ran his hand through his hair as he tried to tamp down the intense desire that threatened to overtake him. He'd never lusted after a woman like this. Not even his wife had stirred his body the way just being in Lexi's presence did.

Spotting Lexi as she made her way back to their table, Raed sat up straighter. If he didn't want the evening to continue on as it had, he knew he had to get them out of the pub. He'd never been comfortable around a crowd of mortals, and the strain of being around so many would make things much worse.

Before Lexi could sit, Raed slapped some money on the table to pay for their meal and stood. "How about we get out of here? The pub is starting to get a little too crowded for my taste." All the tables around them were now full and the noise had increased to a level uncomfortable for his sensitive werewolf hearing.

Lexi nodded. "Okay. Where would you like to go?"

Raed took hold of her hand and led her outside. "How about we go back to your flat?"

"Sure, I guess."

Once he helped Lexi into the car and took his place behind the wheel, Raed said, "If you don't want to invite me in, don't feel as if you have to. We'll just talk."

"Oh, okay."

Did he hear disappointment in Lexi's voice? By Tiw, she would be the death of him yet. If only she knew how badly he wanted her, but he didn't have the time tonight to do all the things he wanted to do to her. And with his wolf riding him to take her, Raed didn't know if he would be able to control that side of himself. All Raed needed was for his eyes to change, or for his claws to come out while he made love to Lexi. Either, no doubt, would send her running from him in terror.

In the confines of his car, Lexi's scent filled his head. His hands tightened on the steering wheel until his knuckles turned white. Raed knew he should be trying to draw her out with some intelligent conversation, but he didn't think he could get the words past the wolf's growl that threatened to break free. Never before had his wolf reacted to

a woman in this way. The beast's behavior only pushed Raed's arousal, increasing his need.

He cast a quick glance at her as he pulled onto her street. She had her head turned, looking out the passenger window. She probably thought he was a jerk. Raed parked across the street from the flat and came around to help Lexi out of the car. As his hand closed over hers, he knew he was in trouble. Being alone with Lexi inside her flat would be a bad idea; what little control he had seemed to be slipping.

Raed walked her to the door that opened into the stairwell. He opened it so they could pass through, but didn't close it behind them. In response to Lexi's questioning look, he said, "I think I may have to take a rain check for the rest of the evening. There is somewhere else I have to be tonight. I'm sorry I have to cut our evening short. I really would like to see you again, perhaps sometime soon?"

Once they reached the flat's door, Lexi gave him a small smile as she reached inside her purse and pulled out her keys. "Thanks for supper." She took a deep breath. "Look, Raed, don't feel as if you have to see me again. I can tell you didn't exactly enjoy yourself at the pub. You wouldn't be the first date I've bored to tears."

Raed crowded Lexi with his body until he had her backed against the door. He bent his head so he could look her in the eyes as he placed his hands on the door on either side of her head, caging her in. "Is that what you think? That I found you boring and I only said I wanted to see you again to be nice?"

Lexi swallowed as her gaze locked with his. "Well, yeah. We didn't exactly have a lot of stimulating conversation. I'm boring; I know that."

He crowded closer and pressed the bulge in his jeans against her. She sucked in a sharp breath, and he smiled. "You stimulated me very much. I haven't found you boring at all. If anything, you stir me more than you should."

As the scent of Lexi's arousal grew stronger, Raed knew he either had to taste her, or die from longing. He wrapped one hand around the back of her neck as he lowered his mouth to hers. He ran his tongue along the seam of her lips before he pushed inside and groaned as he got his first real contact with Lexi. The taste of her

went straight to his head. He stroked her tongue with his as Lexi reached up to fist her hands in the front of his shirt. The keys she still held dug into his chest, but he barely felt them as intense arousal thrummed through his body.

Raed rocked his erection against her as he cupped her breast. He stroked his thumb across her pebbled nipple. Lexi moaned and sucked on his tongue. She pressed closer, rubbing up against his hard cock.

Lost in a sexual haze, Raed kissed Lexi deeper and he brought his hands down to her ass, lifting her off her feet. Positioning her so his aching cock was lined up with her pussy, he ground against her. Lexi moaned into his mouth. Her arms came up and wound around his neck as she pushed down on him.

The howl of a werewolf in the distance broke through Raed's lust-clouded brain and he stiffened. He let Lexi slowly slide down his body as he pulled away from her lips.

Lexi looked up at him, her eyes full of desire, her lips swollen from his kisses. "What's wrong?"

Raed knew she hadn't heard the werewolf's howl; the sound had been too far away for a mortal to hear at this distance. "I have to go. What's your phone number?"

She blinked as if she were still in a daze. Slowly, she said, "I can't remember."

The howl came again. Raed knew he couldn't linger much longer, no matter how much he wanted to stay and continue what they had started. "Never mind. I'll find it."

He gave Lexi one last quick, thorough kiss before he bounded down the stairs. He hoped he could find more than one werewolf tonight. Frustrated beyond words, he would gladly take his agitation out on the ones he hunted.

Lexi had no idea how long she stood in the small hallway staring at nothing after Raed had left. The man had kissed her senseless. She was lucky to even remember her own name. She slowly turned and unlocked the door to the flat. After she closed and locked it behind her, she leaned back against its wooden surface.

Her body had yet to cool. Arousal still surged through her, and her panties were wet with her desire. She shook her head. If Raed hadn't stopped when he had, she felt certain she would have let him take her right out there in the hallway where technically anybody could have caught them in the act. If her landlady who owned the bookstore below had caught them, that would have been too embarrassing for words.

At least she knew Raed had more than a passing interest in her. She could still feel the pressure of his hard cock against her pussy. The mental images made her want to moan. She pushed away from the door and headed for her bedroom. After the long afternoon nap and with her body still on fire, sleep was the last thing she wanted. She changed into a pair of pajama bottoms and a matching t-shirt and returned to the living room. A few hours of TV would help take her mind off Raed. As she settled on the couch, she had a feeling the night was going to be a very long one indeed.

Chapter Three

Raed drove in the direction the werewolf's howl had come from. He parked on a quiet street, alighted and went into hunting mode as he tried to pick up the werewolf's scent. Using powers granted him by Tiw, he willed a black t-shirt to replace his button down shirt. A broadsword and scabbard appeared on his back, strapped in place across his chest. It didn't take him long to pick up the fresh scent as he took off at a run, keeping to the shadows as much as possible.

The trail led him to a small park. Raed grabbed the hilt of his broadsword and slowly pulled the weapon free of the scabbard as he cautiously walked through the iron gates. Even though the night was practically pitch dark, he had no problem seeing, thanks to his acute werewolf sight. Looking left and right, Raed stalked his prey.

Raed froze at the sound of a loud growl coming from behind him. He brought his broadsword up as he swung around. Standing at almost seven feet tall in its half-human, half-wolf form, the werewolf lunged for his throat. Raed jumped back, bringing

his broadsword down to slice across the beast's brown-furred chest. The werewolf howled in pain and staggered back as the gash Raed made sizzled.

The blade of his broadsword had silver mixed in with the hard steel, making it deadly to werewolves. A strike to the heart with a silvered blade ended the beast's existence, as did the loss of its head. Only Raed and his men had no need to fear that particular metal. Tiw made sure his warriors couldn't be destroyed by the weapon they used to take out their prey.

As the werewolf recovered and lunged for a second time, Raed hit the beast again, and this time he didn't wait for a counterattack. Forcing the werewolf farther into the park so they were no longer close to the entrance, Raed hacked and slashed, easily blocking its sharp claws with his sword as the beast tried to tear at his face and neck. Judging by his opponent's lack of skill, Raed figured it had to be one of the newly turned, which meant there had to be a second werewolf lurking somewhere nearby.

Just as Raed came to that conclusion, a heavy weight slammed into his back, pushing him into the range of the claws of the werewolf in front of him. Damn, he was off his game tonight. Grunting with pain as sharp nails raked down his back, he quickly dodged under the claws of the first and sank his sword through the beast's heart. The newly turned werewolf fell dead to the ground as Raed spun around to face its pack mate.

Older and more experienced, this werewolf knew to keep out of reach of Raed's broadsword. The beast snapped its teeth and snarled as it circled him, striking out with sharp claws when it saw an opening only to jump back when Raed's blade came too close. Raed knew this one would be no easy kill.

Determined to finish the fight as quickly as possible before the werewolf's howls and snarls drew some unsuspecting mortals, Raed willed his broadsword and clothes away and prepared to shift. A moment later, he stood in his half-wolf, half-human form. Now just as big and strong as the werewolf that launched itself at him, Raed let loose a growl and leaped forward.

They met mid-air. Raed grappled with the beast, sinking his sharp teeth into the werewolf's shoulder as he sank his claws into its side. He used his weight to drag his opponent to the ground. Moving out of reach of its hind legs, which had come up to claw at his soft belly, Raed held on tenaciously until he had the werewolf pinned beneath him. Still in his half-wolf, half-human form, he willed his broadsword into his hand. He sank the blade through the beast's chest, straight through to the heart.

Panting, Raed stood as he wiped the werewolf's blood from his muzzle. "Two down," he said in a deep, gravelly voice. He pulled his broadsword free.

The ability to speak in his half-shifted form and to retain higher mental capacity while shifting completely also set Raed and his men apart from the werewolves descended from Fenris. After he cleaned the blade of his broadsword on the dead werewolf's fur, Raed shifted back to full human form and sheathed the weapon in the scabbard. He pulled his cell phone out of his jeans' pocket and hit one of his speed dials. When Algar picked up on the other end, Raed said, "Is everyone out on the hunt?"

"Yes. I had a feeling you wouldn't make it back in time, so as soon as darkness fell, I sent them out. I'm just about ready to head off myself."

"Good. There's plenty of prey out tonight. I just took two down in a park not far from Lexi's flat."

"Lexi, huh?"

Raed purposely chose to ignore Algar's question. "Tell the others I'm out on the hunt now as well. If they need me, they can get me on my cell."

"Will do. And hint taken about Lexi, by the way. Happy hunting."

Snapping his cell phone closed, Raed looked down at the bodies of the two dead werewolves. They had yet to shift back to human form. He sighed. Such a waste of life, but there was no cure to give them back the human lives that had been taken from them by a werewolf's bite.

Raed looked up at the night sky. The bodies couldn't be left for mortals to find. "Tiw, I call upon you. I have need of your fire."

Blue god-fire engulfed the corpses; Raed stepped back as the flames burned hotter. In a matter of seconds, the bodies were no more. An unnatural wind blew the ashes away, leaving behind not even a scorched patch to mar the green grass and mark their passing.

Instinct told him this would not be the only time he would have to call down Tiw's god-fire; the night promised to be long and exhausting. He rolled his shoulders. He felt no stiffness; shifting had healed the claw marks down his back.

Once inside his car, Raed drove by Lexi's flat. The lights were still on above the bookstore. Remembering the kiss they had shared, he longed to be with her, but his duty had to come first. If he was smart he would let Lexi go. He had no room for a woman in his life, but the mere thought of how she had come alive in his arms made his cock stiffen. No, he couldn't give her up yet. He had four weeks then she would leave and go back to the States. He just hoped a month would be long enough to get her out of his system.

* * * * *

At ten, the sound of her alarm dragged Lexi out of a deep sleep. She shut off the annoying sound then groaned when she saw the time. Since she hadn't fallen asleep until four in the morning thanks to having slept most of the previous afternoon away, the six hours of sleep she had gotten felt like nothing. More than anything, she wanted to roll over and catch up on the rest of the hours she had missed, but determined to get herself on UK time, she forced herself to get up instead.

Once she showered and dressed in the first pair of jeans and shirt she could find in her suitcase, Lexi went to the kitchen and put on a pot of coffee. She needed lots and lots of coffee. As she stood at the counter waiting for the pot to brew, she made a mental list of all the groceries she still needed to buy – the first outing on her agenda. She had planned to do a bit of sightseeing as well, but with Raed expected to call at some point

today, Lexi had second thoughts. There was no answering machine at the flat and she didn't want him to think she was rude by not being around to take his call.

She shook her head. Who was she kidding? She just didn't want to be gone when he called. If he called. What little sleep she had gotten had been filled with dreams of Raed. Hot, sex-filled dreams with him doing wicked things to her body that left her whimpering for more. The kiss they had shared in the hallway had awakened her passion. She now wanted Raed buried deep inside her. Her pussy hungered for the big cock she'd felt through his jeans. Pushing thoughts of a naked and aroused Raed away, Lexi decided she had tortured herself enough for one day.

After downing two cups of coffee, she headed out. This time her trip to the grocery store turned out to be uneventful. She even managed to stay on the left hand side of the road too. After she brought the groceries up to the flat and put them away, she decided to go down to the bookstore and introduce herself to her landlady, who had simply left the key under the mat in front of the door the previous day.

A bell chimed over the bookstore's entrance when she opened the door and stepped inside. Though the store wasn't very large, rows and rows of packed bookshelves lined the walls and stacks of books piled high on tables. Behind a counter at the back of the store sat a woman who appeared to be in her late fifties, presumably her landlady.

Lexi made her way toward her and smiled. "Are you Charlotte?" At the woman's nod, Lexi held out her hand. "Hi, I'm Lexi. I rented the flat upstairs."

Charlotte shook her hand. "Nice to finally meet you in person, Lexi; I hope you found the flat acceptable."

"It's perfect."

"I'm glad. If you have any problems, you can find me here in the bookstore during the day, except for Sundays. But you can always call me at home. You still have my number?"

She nodded. "Yes, I do. I'll be sure to get in contact with you if anything comes up." Lexi looked around the store. "At least I know where to come if I need to buy a book to read."

Charlotte smiled. "I'm sure you would be able to find something of interest. I try to stock a little bit of everything."

An oversized hardcover book sitting on a nearby table caught Lexi's eye. She picked it up and read the title that had been printed across the cover in bold letters. "The History of East Anglia and the Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial." Lexi looked over at Charlotte. "Norwich is part of East Anglia, correct?"

"Yes. The counties of Norfolk and Suffolk, along with Cambridgeshire, are considered East Anglia."

Lexi nodded. "And the Sutton Hoo burial was found in Suffolk?"

"Correct again. Do you know much about the burial?"

"No, not really," Lexi said with a chuckle. "My dad is a bit of a history buff, especially when the subject is this area of England. I think this would be the perfect gift to take home for him."

Charlotte rang up Lexi's purchase. "I'm sure he'll enjoy the book. It has a lot of pictures of the burial goods found at Sutton Hoo. There's even some history about King Raedwald of the East Angles. They suspect he was buried inside the ship."

Lexi had to wonder if Raed's parents had named him after the king. Raedwald wasn't exactly a common name. After she paid for her purchase, she headed back up to the flat. She sat on the couch in the living room and carefully flipped through the pages. As Charlotte had promised, there were quite a few pictures of the ship-burial artifacts. The gift would keep her dad occupied for hours.

Putting the book down on the coffee table, Lexi found her thoughts drifting back to Raed. He seemed to be in them more often than not. For some reason she couldn't stop thinking about him. She actually *missed* him. Strange, considering she barely knew the man. And yet, the thought of not seeing him again . . . well, Lexi just didn't want to

go there. Raed would really think her a nutcase if he knew how close to an obsession he had become.

Lexi caught herself as she stared at the phone. She gave herself a shake. *Staring at the phone is not going to make Raed call any sooner, idiot.* Just like a watched pot never boils, a watched phone never rings.

To distract herself, Lexi picked up the book again and started to read from the beginning. The genre wasn't exactly her favorite, but she soon found herself drawn into the history of East Anglia.

* * * * *

When the phone rang, Lexi just about jumped out of her skin. She quickly put the book down and reached for the handset sitting on an end table next to the couch. She suddenly felt nervous as she picked it up and said, "Hello?"

"Hello, Lexi. It's Raed."

She bit her lip and shivered deliciously at the sound of his deep voice. "Hi. I guess you were able to find my phone number all right."

Raed chuckled. "Not exactly. I ended up ringing the bookstore below the flat to see if they had the number. I figured whoever owned the place must also own the flat above it. Your landlady was nice enough to give it to me after I concocted a little white lie and explained we're related."

Lexi owed Charlotte big time for that. "Very resourceful of you."

"When I want something, I tend to do whatever it takes to get it," he said huskily.

She took her bottom lip between her teeth. No mistaking the sexual innuendo in those words. "Lucky me."

"Are you going to be home this afternoon? I know I left rather abruptly last night. I would like to make it up to you."

"I'm free. I don't have any plans. You're welcome to come over any time you want." All the ways Raed could make it up to her flashed through Lexi's head. Most of them required them both naked and preferably in her bed.

"Good. Then I'll see you in a few hours."

"I'll be here waiting." With bated breath, she added to herself.

Lexi hung up the phone and resisted the urge to jump up and down and yell, 'yes, yes, yes'. Obviously she hadn't scared Raed off last night; he seemed genuinely interested in seeing her again. Knowing she had a long wait ahead of her, she picked up the book and forced herself to read.

* * * * *

Raed tried not to bound up the stairs to Lexi's flat; he needed to get a hold of himself. It didn't matter that she had haunted his dreams when he had finally fallen asleep after a full night of hunting werewolves. It didn't matter that he could still taste her on his tongue, or that the memory of her scent left him hard and aching. If he didn't watch himself, he would be on Lexi as soon as she opened the door. The need to have her under him, to sink his cock between her legs as she moaned his name, rode him hard as he knocked on the flat's door. He took a deep breath when he heard Lexi moving around on the other side.

Lexi opened the door and stood back to allow him to step inside. He let his gaze run over her snug-fitting jeans and grey t-shirt, which barely covered her midriff. That tantalizing bit of skin made him want to reach out to see if it felt as silky soft as it looked. Instead, he walked past her and waited for her to close the door.

She turned and smiled. "Can I get you something to drink? I have a pot of coffee on. Sorry, I don't have any beer to offer you."

Raed had to swallow as Lexi shoved her hands in the back pockets of her jeans. The motion pulled her shoulders back, lifting her full breasts slightly. He had to force his eyes back up to her face. He smiled. "I'm fine. I don't need anything to drink."

"Are you sure? I don't mind getting you something."

"No. I'm okay."

"All right. Well, we don't need to stand at the door. Let's go sit down."

He was far from okay. Not only had he become painfully aroused, his wolf had started clawing at his insides for him to take Lexi. As he followed her to the living room, his gaze lowered to her butt. Her jeans hugged her to perfection. Raed had to fist his hands at his sides to stop himself from grabbing her around the waist and pulling her shapely ass against his erection. His cock jerked in his pants with the thought of how good she would feel. A low growl of need slipped past his lips as Lexi bent over to pick up a book from the couch and place it on the coffee table.

She turned and gave him a questioning look. "Are you all right?"

"Yes. Why do you ask?" He stepped closer as he drew in a deep breath and filled his lungs with her scent. His gaze locked on her lips.

"I . . . I thought I heard you make a funny sound," Lexi stammered.

He had to kiss her or lose his mind. He didn't understand this overwhelming need to claim Lexi as his own, but he found himself unable to ignore the impulse. Raed lifted his eyes until their gazes collided. Lexi sucked in a sharp breath as he moved even closer, until their bodies touched. Her chest rapidly rose and fell while the scent of her arousal filled his head.

Another low growl rose out of his chest. He threaded his fingers through Lexi's hair at the back of her head and slowly lowered his mouth to hers. She sighed softly as he claimed her lips fully. He wrapped his other arm around her waist to hold her to him and shoved his tongue inside her mouth. He pressed his engorged cock against Lexi as he tasted her. The feel of her helped ease some of the raging need inside him, but it was far from enough.

Raed released his hold on her hair and cupped one of her breasts through her t-shirt. He stroked his thumb across the taut peak. Lexi moaned into his mouth when he plucked her nipple between his thumb and index finger. She rubbed herself against him and brought her arms up and around the back of his neck.

He increased the pressure of his lips, slid his hand under Lexi's shirt and pushed her bra aside. He cupped her bare breast with his hand, and releasing her lips, he kissed his way across her jaw and down the side of her neck. Lexi bent her head to the side to give him better access as he dragged his tongue along the column of her throat.

Needing the feel of her skin next to his, Raed grabbed the bottom of her t-shirt and yanked it over her head. He reached behind her and undid her bra. As she slid the straps down her arms and let that article of clothing fall to the floor, Raed roughly yanked off his shirt. He then pulled her back into his arms, groaning as her hard nipples pressed against his chest.

He pulled back slightly and dragged his tongue along her collarbone and down, then he shifted her, putting his thigh against her pussy. He pressed his leg upward as he bent his head and circled her nipple with his tongue. Lexi moaned as she ground her pussy against him. She gripped his shoulders, digging her nails into his skin, as he opened his mouth and sucked her nipple deep.

Raed skimmed a hand down Lexi's side to the waistband of her jeans. He ran the tips of his fingers across her stomach until he reached the button. Quickly, he undid the button and pulled down the zipper. He shoved his hand down inside her panties and cupped her pussy. Pushing a finger between her folds, Raed found Lexi already wet.

He shifted his attention to her other breast and sucked her nipple deep. He pushed a second finger in her pussy and pumped them in and out. Lexi gasped as her hips jerked. Releasing her nipple, Rae straightened and met her heated gaze. As she watched him, he pulled his hand out of her panties and sucked the two fingers he'd buried inside her into his mouth. He held her gaze as he licked her juices.

Lexi shivered and started to pant. Raed kept his gaze riveted to hers as he took hold of her jeans and panties and pulled them down. She kicked them the rest of the way off. He pressed on her shoulders until she sat on the couch, then he knelt on the floor in front of her. "That's just the appetizer. Now I get the feast."

Running his hands up the inside of her thighs, he spread them apart. He looked down at her open pussy. Her sex glistened with her juices. He bent and ran the flat of

his tongue along her slit, lifting her legs and put them over his shoulders. His cock hardened even more as he got his first full taste of her pussy. She tasted better than the most expensive wine. Raed swirled his tongue around her clit before he licked her from bottom to top.

Lexi's moans filled the room. Her hands came up and buried themselves in his hair. Holding him to her, she rocked her hips against his mouth. Her smell and taste, along with the moans she made, heightened his arousal. He resisted the need to bury his aching cock inside her. He wanted her to come against his mouth first. He wanted to taste her desire as she cried out in pleasure.

Raed inserted two fingers inside her slick opening, moving them in and out as he sucked on her clit. Her hands tightened in his hair and her movements became jerky. She whimpered with need as he pushed her closer to climax. He pumped his fingers faster while he sucked harder. He could tell she was almost there.

"Come for me, Lexi," he panted. "Let yourself go."

With a keening moan, Lexi fell over the edge. When her pussy started to rhythmically clamped around his fingers, Raed replaced them with his tongue. He licked and sucked, wringing every last shudder of pleasure out of Lexi.

Raed laid his head on Lexi's belly and tried to pull himself back under control. When her climax had overtaken her, his wolf had risen up inside him. He closed his eyes so Lexi wouldn't see them. Given how his vision had grown much sharper, he knew his eyes had turned, and his blue irises would have taken over the white. The tips of his fingers itched as his claws threatened to break through his skin. He had slept with more than a few mortals over the years, but not once had they had this kind of effect over him. The wolf inside him had never come to the surface during sex. Only with Lexi.

As he forced his body to cool, he knew he had to figure out what the hell was going on before they made love. He needed answers and he needed them quickly. The more time he spent with Lexi, the greater the need to have her grew.

Feeling his eyes shift back to normal and his claws recede, Raed stood. The sight of Lexi sprawled naked on her couch, her face flushed with arousal, almost had him back on his knees again. Determined to get some answers, he said, "Let's go to my place for a while."

Chapter Four

A few seconds passed before Lexi could understand what Raed had just said. He had to be kidding? Right? "You want to go back to your place? Now?"

He nodded. "Yes."

She glanced down at the large bulge in the front of his jeans. From the looks of him, Raed was more than up to continuing what they had started. He may have given her the best oral sex she had ever had, but she wanted his cock where his tongue had been. The sight of his bared, muscular chest made her want to run her hands and lips all over him. His washboard abs practically made her drool. Even the black tattoo which covered the entire cap of his left shoulder added to his yum factor. Lexi couldn't make out the details, but she still thought the mark made Raed look even hotter.

Realizing she was still naked on the couch with her legs spread open, Lexi took a deep breath to calm her nerves then stood. Unable to resist, she ran her hand across Raed's hard chest. "I thought we were doing quite well here."

Raed brought his hand up and covered hers. "Yes, but isn't there a saying about it being so much better for those who wait?"

"But what if I'm not the patient type?"

"I can make it worth your while to try to be."

From the determined look on Raed's face, Lexi knew there would be no changing his mind. She sighed with disappointment as he picked up his shirt and pulled it on. She gathered her discarded clothes and dressed. She still didn't understand why Raed had abruptly decided to take her back to his place, but she wasn't about to say no.

Once she got her purse, Raed ushered her outside. He helped her into his Mercedes and then they were off. Lexi watched some of the scenery go by before she turned to look at Raed. "So are you going to tell me why we have to suddenly go back to your place? Or are you going to leave me in the dark?"

He gave her a quick smile before he returned his attention to the road. "I just thought I would be better able to make things up to you for last night there instead of at your flat."

"Okay, but I still think we were doing fine at my flat."

He glanced over at her with a heated stare. "I intend to finish what I started. This brief encounter only whetted my appetite. I'm going to put the rest of the afternoon, and part of the evening, to good use. That being the case, I should at least cook you supper. I'll feel more comfortable doing that at my place."

The temperature inside the car seemed to suddenly spike. The thought of spending hours in bed with Raed made her feel boneless. If the oral sex had been any indication, she was in for a wild ride. She suddenly wished Raed would drive faster.

She cleared her throat. "You're going to cook for me?"

"Don't worry, I can cook."

"To be honest, your ability to cook or not doesn't worry me in the slightest. I've just never had a guy make a meal for me before."

"I'm glad I can be your first."

Lexi looked out the window to see Raed had pulled onto the graveled surface of a long driveway leading to a large manor house. The lawns and flowerbeds appeared to be professionally landscaped; in fact everything about the property screamed extremely well-to-do. She had known Raed had money, but she hadn't realized he was this rich. No wonder he wanted to come here instead of staying at her place. Her entire flat would probably fit inside one room of the manor.

Raed parked the Mercedes in front of a large, detached garage. After he turned off the ignition he shifted in his seat until he faced her. "I guess I should probably warn you I don't live alone."

"You still live with your parents?" There went her fantasy of having hot, wild monkey sex with Raed.

He shook his head and chuckled. "No, I don't live with my parents. I guess you could sort of call them roommates, but my men are more than that. They're more like family. The only ones I have left."

"Your men?" Lexi asked slowly. Was Raed so rich he required bodyguards?

Raed took hold of her chin and gave her a hard kiss. As if he had known what she had been thinking, he said, "I call them my men, but they really more like part of my family."

Lexi swallowed. "Oh."

He released her chin and stroked the back of his hand down her cheek. "Let's go inside."

Raed took Lexi's hand as he led her up to the entrance to the manor. He pushed open the door and stepped aside for her to enter first. Lexi looked around the large, open-concept foyer. The floor had been done in light-blond hardwood. The walls had been painted just a shade darker than the floor. A heavy oak banister wound all the way up the curved flight of stairs to the second floor. A crystal chandelier hung from the center of the high ceiling. This was definitely a rich person's house.

Lexi turned to face Raed. "You have a nice place."

"Thanks. I'm glad you like it. Come on, I'll introduce you to my men. Just a word of warning, Garrick gets a kick out of making people feel uncomfortable. Ignore him if he starts in on you. Not that I expect him to, but just in case."

"Okay. I've been forewarned."

Raed placed his hand on the small of her back as he walked her across the foyer and down the hall. Lexi heard the sound of a blaring television before they came to the entrance of the large living room. A huge, wide-screen HD television hung on the back wall, broadcasting a game of soccer. Two large couches were placed not too far from the television, one directly opposite the TV, the other against the wall, kitty-corner to it. Seated on the couches were five of the largest men Lexi had ever seen.

Leaning in, Raed whispered in her ear, "Don't worry, they don't bite."

Lexi doubted his words, especially when a couple of them started to yell at the TV, cursing up a storm. Another one chucked popcorn at the screen. "Are you sure?"

"Positive. When they watch football, they tend to really get into the game."

It took Lexi a few seconds to remember the British called soccer 'football'. "So I see."

Raed started across the room. Lexi let her gaze run over his men. All five of them had the same large, muscular build as Raed. Each had a face that would drive women wild. Lexi figured there was enough testosterone in the room to choke a horse.

Raed's men didn't take too long to notice them.

"Well, well what do we have here?" One of the men flashed Lexi a sexy grin as he stood. He shook his shaggy, light brown hair out of his eyes as he looked her up and down. He stood about an inch taller than Raed, meaning she had to crane her neck to look him in the face as well.

Raed put his arm around her shoulders and pulled her up against his side. "Lexi, this is Garrick."

Lexi stuck out her hand. "Nice to meet you, Garrick." If Raed hadn't already told her to watch out for the man, she would have known he was a bit of a trouble maker anyway. He had a glint in his brown eyes that said he found this a perfect opportunity to stir up things.

Before Garrick could take her hand, Raed made a low rumbling sound in his chest. Garrick gave her a cocky smile and nodded once in her direction.

The football game forgotten, the rest of Raed's men stood and gathered around them. If Lexi didn't know better, she would think this was the first time Raed had brought a woman home. Most of them seemed eager to meet her.

"Are you going to introduce the rest of us, Raed?" asked the man standing next to Garrick. He was a couple of inches shorter than Garrick, had collar-length brown hair and friendly looking hazel eyes. He gave her a genuine smile.

"I guess I don't have much choice in the matter with all of you crowded around us. Lexi, meet Algar. Beside him is Wulfric, then Brand and lastly, Dolf."

Lexi smiled at each man. Wulfric, the tallest of the men, had to be at least six foot seven. He had straight, light blond hair that reached the top of his shoulders and emerald green eyes. He also gave the impression you wouldn't want to be trapped in a dark alley somewhere alone with him. Then he smiled and his face lit up, chasing his frightening demeanor away. "Lexi."

She looked over at Brand next. He'd be about six foot five, she estimated. His straight, black hair fell past his shoulders and his dark blue eyes gave the impression he was bored. Brand may not have been the tallest, but he appeared to be the biggest, muscle-wise. He didn't smile as he grunted a hello. Obviously a man of very few words.

Lexi moved on to Dolf. Just as tall as Brand, he had short, wavy, reddish-brown hair and brown eyes so dark they almost appeared black. He gave her a lopsided grin. "Pleased to make your acquaintance, Lexi."

"Nice to meet you all," she said.

"The introductions are over," Raed said. "Algar, I need to talk to you for a minute." Algar nodded. Raed turned to look at Lexi. "Do you mind if I leave you here with the others while Algar and I confer about something?"

She shook her head. "No, I'll be fine."

Garrick offered his elbow to Lexi. "Of course she'll be fine with us, Raed. We'll take care of her." He gave her a wink. "Do you watch football?"

"Sadly, no." Raed's gaze flicked between her and Garrick before he let Lexi go. She gave him a reassuring smile then placed her arm through Garrick's. He led her over to one of the couches. As she sat, she watched Raed and Algar step out of the room.

Once they were out in the hallway, Algar asked, "What's up? I can tell by the look on your face something serious is going on."

Raed ran a hand through his hair. "Something happened when I was with Lexi at her flat."

"Like what?"

"Something kind of personal, but I need you to give me an honest answer. When you're intimate with a woman, does your wolf come out?"

Algar gave him a hard stare. "No. Never. Is that what happened to you?"

"Yes. My eyes went wolf and my claws nearly came out."

"Obviously Lexi didn't see or she wouldn't be here with you now."

"No, she didn't. But my sudden need to come here instead of continuing what I had started at her flat . . . confused her a bit."

Algar couldn't quite hide his smile. "Yes, I can see she would find the situation strange. Having the person you're with get all hot and heavy then have them suddenly decide they need to leave in the middle could make a person second guess themselves."

Raed yanked at his hair. "I'm glad you can see the humor in all this, because I can't. There's something about Lexi that draws me to her, that draw *my wolf* to her. That part of me wants to claim her as my own as much as my human half does."

Algar grew serious. "What are you going to do?"

"I haven't a clue. I thought I would ask the rest of you if you had this problem before, but I have a feeling none of you have."

"As far as I know, you're the only one. Garrick for sure would have said something. You know how much he thinks of himself as a lady's man. He's pretty vocal when it comes to his conquests. I doubt he would keep something like that from us."

Raed peeked into the living room. Garrick was sitting beside Lexi, talking animatedly. Raed scowled. "Speaking of Garrick, I had better get back in there soon before he tries something with Lexi."

"He knows better," Algar said with a chuckle. "Not hard to miss the possessive hold you had on her when you introduced us."

"When it comes to Lexi, I find myself to be a jealous man."

"Which is out of character for you."

"I know. I haven't even slept with her yet and I can't get her out of my head. I even dream about her at night."

Algar gave a low whistle. "What are you going to do when she goes back to the States?"

"I'm hoping when her four weeks are up I'll have worked her out of my system."

"And if you haven't?"

"I have no bloody idea."

Deciding he'd left Lexi in Garrick's clutches long enough, Raed headed back into the living room. He had no idea what he would do about his inability to control his wolf while with Lexi, but he did know one thing—he wouldn't let his reactions stop him from making love to her. Somehow he would have to find a way to hide what she engendered in him. His need to have her seemed to increase the longer he denied himself. Given the way she had melted in his arms at her flat, he knew she wanted him as much as he wanted her. The time had come to put them both out of their misery.

Chapter Five

Lexi watched Raed close and lock his bedroom door behind them. After he had returned from his talk with Algar, he'd taken her by the hand and led her upstairs to his room. Now that they were alone together, her heart started to beat faster. Especially when Raed came to stand in front of her with a look of hunger on his face.

She licked her lips. "You and Algar didn't talk for very long. Why didn't you just call him from my flat?"

Raed put his arms around her waist and slowly pulled her flush against his body. "I could have, but it was a conversation I wanted to have face to face with him. Coming here also gave me an excuse to get you into my bed."

Lexi took a quick look behind her at the king-sized bed. "It's huge; much bigger than mine."

"Then I guess I made the right decision to bring you here. I'll have more room to work," he said huskily.

She took her bottom lip between her teeth as Raed pressed his erection harder against her. An ache built between her legs. Wetness pooled. With her body already primed from what they had done at her flat, she became quickly aroused. The feel of his hard length against her belly made her ache to have his cock buried deep inside her.

Deciding she wanted her turn to lick and kiss Raed's body as he had done to her, Lexi took hold of the bottom of his shirt and pulled the garment over his head. She went up on her tip-toes and nipped at his bottom lip before she angled her mouth over his. Raed shoved his hands up the back of her shirt and unhooked her bra as she kissed him hungrily.

Raed gathered the hem of her shirt in his hands and lifted. Lexi released his mouth only long enough for him to yank her top over her head, taking off her bra at the same time. She sucked on his tongue as she ran her hands across his muscular chest. She bit his bottom lip gently before she made a path with her lips and tongue along his jaw to his ear. Raed shivered as she swirled her tongue inside.

Letting her hands drift down to the waistband of his jeans, Lexi kissed a path down his neck to his chest. She undid his button and zipper as she pressed her lips across his wide chest. His cock sprang free when she pulled the front of his jeans apart, and she wrapped her hand around his hardness. Raed's hips jerked as she pumped up and down his length. He made a low moaning sound, animalistic in nature. The sound heated her body even more.

Lexi continued to stroke Raed's cock as she inched her way down his chest to his washboard abs. She dragged her tongue across them, going down on her knees. Now level with the treasure she held in her hand, she gazed at Raed's cock. He was big there just like the rest of him.

She shifted her hold so she could grip him at the base of his shaft. She bent her head and licked the bead of pre-cum sitting on the very tip. She swirled her tongue around the flared end, making sure to stroke the sensitive spot under the head. Raed groaned loudly as he rocked his hips against her. Wetness leaked into her panties as

Lexi opened her mouth and sucked on the tip of his cock. She kept a tight hold on the base as she slowly took more of him inside, sucking hard.

Lexi looked up at Raed as she sucked. His eyes were heavy lidded as he watched her pleasure him. His hands were fisted at his side. When their gazes met, he closed his eyes and let his head fall back. He pumped his hips as his large chest rapidly rose and fell.

All too soon, Raed pulled out of her grasp and brought her to her feet. He claimed her mouth, kissing her like a starved man. He undid her jeans and shoved them down her legs. Her panties quickly followed. Raed picked her up and carried her to the bed. He laid her in the center of the mattress then stripped out of his jeans.

Lexi gazed at his hard body. Raed didn't have an inch of fat on him anywhere. His long legs were well padded with muscle. She ran her gaze over his cock, which stood out straight from his body. His erection jerked under her regard.

Raed got on the bed and came down on top of her. Lexi wrapped her arms around his back as he settled between her spread legs. The tip of his cock brushed up against her pussy. He rested most of his weight on his bent arms and buried his face in the side of her neck. He nibbled at the sensitive flesh beneath her ear, making her shiver.

"I can't wait any longer, Lexi. I need to be inside you," Raed said in a husky voice.

Lexi lifted her hips in invitation. "I'm more than ready."

With one thrust, Raed buried himself inside her pussy to the hilt. They both moaned as he pulled out then pushed back inside. Lexi wrapped her legs around his waist and he set a slow pace. The feel of him stretching her, filling her, caused her body to coil tighter. He pumped his hips between her legs, moving in and out, and she squeezed her inner muscles around his hard length. It had been so long since she'd last let a man inside her body, she knew it wouldn't take much to push her into an orgasm.

She ran her nails down Raed's back as he pumped into her faster. He made that strange noise again, a mixture of a moan and a growl, against her neck. Lexi vaguely

heard a sound that sounded like sharp nails being dragged across the sheets on either side of her head. Too lost in the pleasurable sensations running through her, she ignored the sounds as she matched Raed's strokes.

Lexi clutched at his back as he angled his thrusts. His thick shaft rubbed her clit with each stroke. She squeezed her inner muscles harder around his cock and her body coiled tight. He pumped faster, entering her with hard strokes. With a keening moan, she held onto Raed as her orgasm washed over her. Her inner walls squeezed his cock in a tight fist, milking him as she came.

Raed rode her faster. When he started to come, he bit her where her shoulder and neck met. He held onto her with his teeth as his cock pulsed deep inside her pussy.

She gasped. Even though he had come, Raed's cock swelled even more. She rocked her hips against his. His cock seemed to be locked inside her. She gasped again as she felt another splash of warm liquid fill her.

Raed released her neck as he rolled to his side, taking her with him. He draped her leg over his hip and tucked her head under his chin as he held her against his chest. The feel of him still buried thick and deep caused little tremors to rock her body. Lexi fought to catch her breath. Her eyes started to drift shut as Raed ran the palm of his hand up and down her back in caressing strokes. Satiated, and drowsy from lack of sleep, Lexi fell asleep in Raed's arms.

Raed looked down at Lexi as she slept. Making love to her had been incredible, but their coupling hadn't gone exactly as he had expected either. He had managed to hide his eyes when they had gone wolf, and his claws when he hadn't been able to hold them back any longer, but what had happened after he had climaxed had been unexpected to say the least. His cock had swelled to the point where he had been unable to pull out of Lexi's body. He'd also come longer than he had ever done in the past. He'd felt his sperm continue to shoot out of him in half minute intervals even after Lexi had fallen asleep.

Now, fifteen minutes later, his cock had finally softened enough for him to pull free. If he didn't know any better, he would swear his body had acted like a wolf's when mating. He had seen more than his fair share of documentaries about wild wolves to know the male's erection swelled, locking him to the female, during intercourse. Raed had no idea if he was capable of that when taking his wolf form, but he didn't think it should have happened while making love in his human one. *What the hell was going on?*

Lexi mumbled something unintelligible in her sleep as she snuggled closer against his chest. Raed held her tighter and kissed the top of her head. Unlike the other times he had taken a woman to bed, Raed's hunger had only increased, despite his recent release. He wanted to have her again, but he was more than a bit worried about how she'd react if he were ready for again so soon. And maybe she hadn't noticed the first time, but she would notice eventually if he continued to swell each time they slept together. The swelling wasn't exactly normal.

Even though Raed felt somewhat reluctant to make love to Lexi again, he knew he would. He yearned for her touch. He was quickly becoming addicted to her scent and the taste of her. The feel of her body against his as her welcoming heat surrounded his cock had given him more pleasure than he had ever experienced in a woman's arms. They fit perfectly together. It was almost as if Lexi had been made for him and him alone. He didn't know if he wanted, or could, let her go in the end.

This left only one option—he would have to tell her what he was. *If* he could bring himself to reveal the truth. He'd never told a mortal about his being a werewolf, or what he did during the night. None of them had. Tiw hadn't told them they couldn't, but they had all agreed to keep what they were a secret from those they had been charged to protect. Plus there really hadn't been any need to tell. He and his men mostly kept to themselves. They made no mortal friends as a human's short life span made lasting relationships an impossibility. Raed had already watched those who had been close to him grow old and die while he had stayed virile and strong. The hardest had been watching his wife and sons all grow old and leave him. He'd made a vow to himself never to have feelings for another mortal again.

Now Lexi had come into his life.

Raed had no idea what he wanted to do about her, or what seemed to be happening to him. He gently eased away, climbed out of bed and stared down at her. He hadn't woken her so he gently covered her with the sheet and quickly pulled on his discarded jeans. He had promised to make her supper. The food wouldn't get made any faster if he stayed up his bedroom making love to her for the rest of the day.

He quietly opened the bedroom door and slipped out into the hall. Before he closed it behind him, Raed looked over at Lexi. The sight of her asleep on his bed with her long, light brown hair spread across his pillows made him long to go back and join her. Instead, he pulled the door closed. There would be plenty of time to make love to Lexi again.

Downstairs in the kitchen, he found Algar sitting alone at the table drinking coffee as he read the newspaper. Raed headed for the fridge.

"I didn't hear Lexi screaming with terror, so I guess things went okay?" Algar said as Raed walked by.

Raed opened the refrigerator door and looked inside. "Well enough, I suppose." He started to pull out ingredients to make a stir fry.

"You suppose? From the red marks on your back, I would say things went better than 'well enough'."

He looked over his shoulder at Algar. "That part exceeded all my expectations."

"But?"

"I couldn't keep my wolf at bay. I hid the changes from Lexi. I may have shredded the sheets with my claws a bit, but she didn't notice. I just hope she doesn't remember how I became locked inside her afterward."

Algar came to stand beside Raed. "Locked? How?"

Raed reached inside the freezer and took out a package of chicken breasts. He turned and gave Algar a hard stare. "Let's put it this way — I went too much wolf at the very end."

Algar's eyes widened for a split second before he shook his head. "That isn't normal."

Raed grunted. "Yeah, tell me about it."

"I think you should tell Tiw what's going on. He made us the way we are. Maybe he has the answer as to why you can't control your wolf around Lexi." Algar looked at the food on the counter and the package of chicken Raed held. "What's with the food?"

"I promised Lexi I would cook for her."

"What about the rest of us?"

"You can fend for yourselves," Raed said with a grin.

"Gee, thanks."

As Raed turned back to the counter, he decided he would do as Algar suggested and talk to Tiw. Surely his god would be able to explain what was happening to him.

* * * * *

Lexi woke up alone in Raed's bed. She stretched then looked around the room. She'd been too busy before to notice anything but the king-sized bed. The walls had been painted a deep, royal blue. The rest of the furnishings were solid pieces made out of dark wood, just as the bed's headboard. The floor was also dark hardwood. Very much a man's bedroom; there wasn't anything feminine about it.

She rolled over onto her side and stuck her face in Raed's pillow. She smiled as she drew in his musky scent. Her smile didn't disappear as she thought of what had taken place in his bed. Not that Lexi had *that* much experience, but Raed had managed to blow her socks off. He'd given her more pleasure than she had ever found in another man's bed. The others she'd slept with just didn't compare.

Lexi ran her hand along the mattress where Raed had lain beside her. *Strange*. Pulling back the sheet, she looked at the four straight lines that had been ripped into the fitted sheet. They almost looked like claw marks. She ran her fingers down them. The

royal blue sheets didn't appear that old. They didn't have a soft, been-washed-over-and-over-again feel to them. Lexie shrugged and rolled onto her back.

When the minutes ticked by and Raed didn't return, Lexi decided to search for him. She didn't want to lie around naked without Raed being with her. Also there was the off-chance one of his men would walk in looking for Raed. She would rather be fully dressed if that happened.

Dressed once again, Lexi poked her head out the door. She didn't see anyone in the long hallway. Where had Raed gone? She walked down the curved staircase and headed for the living room. She only found Wulfric and Dolf, playing a video game. They didn't seem to notice her as they took turns cursing at each other.

Lexi moved farther down the hall. Raed had to be inside this large house somewhere. As she neared a closed door at the end of the hall, she sniffed the air. Her nose crinkled at the smell of something burning. She pushed opened the door and stopped short just inside. Lexi had to bite her bottom lip not to laugh.

Raed stood by the sink with a baking sheet held in an oven-mitted hand. Two pieces of something blackened and charred beyond recognition sat smoking on the sheet. Algar, wearing an expression of disgust, waved a tea towel at the open oven door, dispersing the smoke.

"I told you not to set the oven so hot," Algar said as he waved the towel furiously. "Open the kitchen window wider or we'll never get the smoke out of here."

Raed threw the baking sheet into the sink with a clang then pushed the window over the sink. "It's open all the way now. The chicken was frozen. I didn't think the meat would burn so quickly. I just wanted it to thaw out a bit at the higher temperature before I turned it down."

"It may have worked if you had only left it that way for a couple of minutes not for almost a half hour."

Lexi loudly cleared her throat to get Raed and Algar's attention. When they turned to look in her direction, she asked, "Problems?"

"You could say that," Algar said as he threw Raed another disgusted look.

Raed glared at Algar.

Lexi's lips twitched as she fought back a smile. "Let me guess, that was to be supper?"

Raed threw the oven mitt on the counter. "Yes. Part of it anyway."

Lexi crossed to Raed's side and studied the charred remains of the chicken in the sink. "I thought you said you could cook?"

"I can. That's what I get for trying to take shortcuts. At least the stir fry is still good."

"Only because you haven't started cooking it yet," Algar said drolly.

She then noticed the pile of chopped vegetables on a cutting board on the counter. She looked over at Raed. "Would you like me to take over?"

He shook his head. "No. I promised to cook for you, and cook for you I shall." Raed went over to the freezer and pulled out a package of frozen burgers. "We'll just have to settle for these instead of the chicken. I'll cook them on the barbeque out back."

"I can help if you want."

Raed put the package of burgers on the counter, then led Lexi over to the table. "Sit." He pushed her down onto one of the chairs. "I can handle this myself. I want to do this for you."

"Okay, if you insist."

Raed picked up the burgers and walked through the double doors that led to an immaculately landscaped back yard.

Algar stopped his towel waving and shut the oven door. He sat next to Lexi. "Raed does know how to cook. We all do. He just doesn't get his turn very often."

"You guys should make him cook more often if he needs the practice."

"It's not like that. We feel it's beneath . . . it's just that old habits are hard to break."

Lexi wondered what old habits Algar referred to, but she let the subject go. "So you guys always eat together? I would have thought mealtime would be a free-for-all here."

Algar smiled. "It can be at times for the midday meal. Supper is another story. Long ago, Raed commanded we have the evening meal together. It's a good time to talk and make plans."

Commanded? "I see. If all of you guys can cook, then who is the best?"

"Brand."

Lexi blinked. "Brand?"

"Yes, Brand," Algar said with a laugh. "I know. You would never guess to look at him, but he can cook up a storm. I think it's partly because he likes to eat, and eat well. It took us a while to learn, but it wasn't as if we had any choice in the matter. We all had flown the coop, so to speak, and we had to fend for ourselves." Algar shuddered dramatically. "Our first attempts make the chicken over there look like a master chef cooked it."

Lexi laughed. "Food Poisoning R Us?"

He chuckled. "No, but if we weren't imm —"

"Algar," Raed interrupted in a stern voice as he stepped back into the kitchen.

Algar stood. "I guess I'll leave you two alone." He turned to Raed. "Shall I tell the others we'll get together later as usual?"

Lexi didn't miss the meaningful glance Algar shot her way before he looked back at Raed.

Raed nodded. "It may be a little later than normal, but I'll make the meeting once I take Lexi back to her flat."

"Alright." Algar turned to face Lexi. "I hope to see you again soon. Enjoy your meal."

Once Algar left, Lexi watched Raed move over to one of the cupboards and take out a large frying pan. He put the pan on the stovetop and turned on the burner. She hadn't noticed until now that he only wore a pair of jeans. As he put oil and the cut-up vegetables into the frying pan, her gaze ran over his bare back where the muscles bunched. Lexi flushed slightly at the sight of faint red marks running down the wide expanse. She'd been the one to put them there.

When he finished starting the stir fry, he leaned back against the counter, crossed his arms over his broad chest and gazed at her. The stance caused his large biceps to bulge. Lexi still found it hard to believe she had made love to a man like Raed. Staring at him only half-clothed made her body heat.

"If you don't stop looking as if you'd like to eat me I'll burn the food again."

Lexi licked her lips. Raed groaned.

"You can't expect me not to when you're dressed like that. Or not dressed." She ran her gaze up his left arm to his shoulder. With his arms crossed, she could clearly see his tattoo. In black, the image of two stylized wolves stood on either side of a figure of an equally stylized man. The design seemed vaguely familiar, but she couldn't quite put her finger on where she had seen it before. "Nice tattoo."

"Thanks."

She went to stand before him and ran her hand up his arm to the tattoo, trailing her fingers over the mark. "Is there a story behind why you picked this design?"

Raed pulled her hand away and brought her fingers to his mouth. He swirled his tongue around her index finger before he sucked it into his mouth. By the time he released her finger, Lexi's knees had gone weak while her body had liquefied. "No."

He slowly lowered his head, about to kiss her, when the sound of a wolf's howl echoed outside from the back of the manor. Raed stiffened. Lexi looked around him and through the window, but she couldn't see anything outside. "Was that a wolf? I thought there weren't any more wild wolves in England?"

"There aren't." Raed stepped around her and yelled, "Algar!"

Algar quickly ran into the kitchen. "We heard. This is new. Darkness hasn't even fallen yet."

"I don't like this," Raed said. "Tell the others to split up. I'll join you in a minute."

With a nod, Algar left. Raed turned and took Lexi by the shoulders. "I'll be back. Stay here."

Why had the sound of a wolf's howl caused this kind of anxiety? Even if there really had been a wolf out there, the men's reactions seemed a bit extreme. She nodded and watched Raed run out of the room.

Chapter Six

Lexi was about to sit at the table when the sound of food sizzling in the frying pan brought her up short. Obviously Raed had forgotten about it in his hurry to leave. She pulled open drawers until she found one with cooking utensils and fished around until she found a spatula. She stirred the vegetables before she lowered the heat under the pan.

The smell of barbeque smoke wafted through the open window. The burgers! Lexi knew Raed had told her to stay put, but she didn't think he would want her to let the burgers burn. She crossed over to the outside door and stepped out onto a flagstone patio, then followed the smell of the barbeque to the back corner. Smoke billowed out from under the gas grill's lid.

Lexi shook her head when she saw how high Raed had set the heat. She opened the lid and waved a hand in front of her as smoke swirled around her face. She held her breath until it cleared, then reached for the barbeque spatula hanging from the side of the grill. She flipped the four burgers. Great, they hadn't burnt yet. That task done, she closed the lid and turned to go back inside to check on the stir fry.

She froze in place when she saw a large grey wolf standing only a few yards away. The side of the animal's upper lip curled as it growled. Lexi slowly took a step back until she felt the heat of the grill behind her. The wolf started to close the space between them.

Lexi groped behind her until she found the long-handled barbeque spatula. She held the cooking utensil out in front of her like a weapon, not that she thought she could do much with it if it decided to attack. "Shoo," she said as she waved the spatula at the wolf.

The wolf growled louder and took another step closer. Lexi's heart started to pound with fear. She had always thought wild animals were supposed to be more afraid of humans than humans were of them. For a wild wolf, if it *was* wild, it didn't seem to scare easily. Lexi took slow, even, sideways steps as she tried to get the barbeque clear of her back. If she had to make a run for it, she didn't want it in her way.

She waved the spatula at the wolf again as the animal bunched its back legs under itself. Just as she was sure the wolf was about to spring, a streak of dark blond fur slammed into it. Even though she knew she should be running back inside the house as fast as her legs could carry her, Lexi found herself unable to move. She silently watched as the second wolf fought the first. Their snarls and growls filled the air. It soon became apparent the dark blond wolf was stronger. He — Lexi could now see both wolves were male — forced the grey wolf back. Before the dark blond wolf could take the other one down, the grey wolf managed to twist free and take off running.

The dark blond wolf looked over at Lexi, then in the direction the other wolf had gone, and then back to her again. He loped over to her, appraising her with his blue-eyed gaze. Lexi froze and held back a whimper as he came even closer. The wolf sniffed her leg before he turned and loped away, obviously in pursuit of the other wolf.

Lexi sagged in relief. That had been a close one. Not wanting to meet up with either wolf again, she quickly moved back to the barbeque and returned the spatula to its place. A large hand landed on the top of her shoulder and spun her around. Lexi let out a yelp. When she saw it was only Raed, she smacked him in the chest. "Don't do that. You scared the crap out of me."

"I thought I told you to stay in the kitchen," Raed said in a stern voice.

"I only came out here to flip the burgers."

Raed took hold of her by the upper arms, gave her a little shake and bent down until they were almost nose to nose. "Next time you do what I tell you. Do you know how close you came to being the wolf's next meal?"

Lexi's back came up at his bossy tone. She wasn't about to stand here and let Raed order her around as if she had no brain in her head. "You aren't the boss of me,

Raed; so stop ordering me around as if you were. If you saw the wolves, why didn't you do something to scare them away?"

Raed gave her another shake. "I'll order you around when I deem the situation necessary."

Lexi became really annoyed with that comment. She tried to wrench her arms free, but Raed held on. "Who the hell died and made you king? Just because we slept together does not mean you can tell me what to do. That kind of thing died out in the Dark Ages, buddy."

"Times like this, I wish I could go back to them. At least women knew their place then."

Lexi's mouth fell open. Had she actually thought Raed could be everything she wanted in a man? Now that his true colors had come shining through, she knew there wouldn't be a repeat performance of what had taken place in his bedroom earlier. He would be lucky if she didn't smack him a good one upside the head for thinking she should 'know her place'.

She glared at him. "You know what? I think today may have been a mistake. If you want some woman who will do your bidding, you've chosen the wrong one. I may come across as timid, but I'm no pushover. I don't have to take the bullshit coming out of your mouth. I think it best I go back to my flat."

Raed's face lost the stern look he wore as he slowly released her. He ran a hand through his hair. "Look, Lexi, I'm sorry. I didn't mean it like that."

"The hell you didn't."

Raed took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Let's go back inside. We'll eat our supper and talk." He tried to reach for her, but she shook her head, walked around him and headed for the back door. Raed followed behind her. "Can you at least give me a chance to explain?"

"You've done enough explaining already. Will you take me back to the flat or do I have to find my own way there?"

Back in the kitchen, Raed walked over to the stove and shut off the heat under the frying pan. He turned and gave her a pleading look. "I don't want you to go, Lexi. Not like this. I have to turn off the barbeque and have a brief talk with the others. Maybe once we have both settled down you'll be in the mood to listen."

Lexi crossed her arms over her chest. "Whatever."

"I promise I won't be long."

As soon as Raed went back outside, Lexi left the kitchen and headed for the front door. She picked up her purse where she had left it on a small table in the foyer. She was in no mood to hear what Raed had to say. She'd dated a man like him once before who had thought a woman's place was in the house, barefoot and pregnant. At least *that* time Lexi hadn't been stupid enough to sleep with the male chauvinistic pig.

Hoping she didn't run into any of the others, she opened the front door and hurried down the stairs to the long drive. After she got far enough away from the manor, she jogged to the bottom of the driveway. She started to walk along the side of the road in the direction she thought would take her back to her flat.

At the sound of a car coming up behind her, she stuck out her hand to flag the vehicle down. As if fate was on her side, it was a taxi. She waved frantically to get the driver's attention. The car slowed and stopped beside her. She bent and looked through the open passenger door window. "Are you free?"

"Sure," the driver said. He reached behind him and opened the back door.

Lexi got in. Once they were on their way she told him the address of her flat. She looked out the back window, but didn't see anyone appear at the end of the drive. Another car followed them, but the vehicle wasn't familiar, and she didn't think it was Raed. He probably didn't even know she was gone yet, but once he figured it out he'd probably be pissed at her for running, but she didn't really care.

She paid the taxi driver then headed up to her flat. So much for her first full day in England. Determined not to let this one day get her down, Lexi decided starting tomorrow she would do the sightseeing she had planned. She wouldn't waste her entire vacation thinking about Raed. What was done was done.

* * * * *

The driver of the car who had followed the taxi watched Lexi as she entered the door next to a bookstore. He waited a few minutes to make sure she would be upstairs in the flat before he got out and crossed the street. He leaned back against the door as he pretended to tie his shoe then he brushed up against the brick wall beside it, marking it with his scent. He smiled as he crossed back over to his car and drove away.

His evening just kept getting better and better. He'd thought he'd done well to have discovered the hunters' home base, but to find a mortal with those immortals had been an added bonus. Earlier, when he had cornered her in his wolf form, she had the scent of the shifted warrior he had fought all over her, the scent so strongly mixed with her own, he knew she had to have slept with him.

He pulled up to the front of a non-descript farmhouse and got out. To passersby, the property looked like any small farm in the area, but the building was much more than that. It was the den of his werewolf pack. They'd dug a series of tunnels and a large cavern under the farmhouse. Not even the servants of the Anglo-Saxon god, Tiw, knew about this place.

He went inside the farmhouse, then down to the root cellar and opened the door that led to one of the den's tunnels. The dark earth walls and ceiling closed around him as he went deeper underground. When he reached the large central cavern, he walked by members of his pack and headed to the back of the open space. Some still inhabited their wolf forms, while others had taken on their human or half-human and half-wolf forms. Their numbers changed frequently, added to by the newly turned who instinctively found their way to the pack, and reduced by those the immortal warriors took out during their nightly hunts. At the moment, the pack had twenty members, including himself and their pack leader, Nathan. They were all male.

At the very back of the central cavern an opening led to a smaller cavern, Nathan's private quarters. He poked his head inside and waited for Nathan to

acknowledge him. His pack leader shifted from wolf to human and signaled him to enter with a wave of his hand.

"I didn't expect you back so soon," Nathan said. "I hope you haven't come back unsuccessful. I would be greatly disappointed."

None of the pack wanted to disappoint Nathan. When Nathan became upset with one of them they usually ended up torn to pieces, literally. Nathan ruled with an iron fist, and had claimed the leadership by being the toughest and cruelest werewolf in the pack, killing everyone who stood in his way.

He shook his head. "You won't be disappointed, Nathan. I was more than successful. I found the home of the immortal warriors as promised, but what I found there will interest you even more."

"And what would that be?"

"A mortal woman, who had the scent of one of the warriors all over her."

Nathan's grey eyes focused on his face. "Now, that *is* interesting. If they have a mortal in their midst, she could be quite useful. Even if we can only use her to eliminate one of the warriors, it's one less out hunting us each night."

He nodded. "That is what I thought. And as luck would have it, when I drove by their manor to return here, the woman was outside on the road. She flagged down a taxi and I followed her back to her flat. So now we know where she lives as well. I even managed to spread my scent around her building. What I did should piss her warrior off when he smells and recognizes my mark," he said, pleased with himself.

Nathan crossed his arms over his chest and scratched his chin. "Where can I find the warriors' manor and the flat of this mortal?"

He rattled off the two addresses as he watched his pack leader circle around him once before he came to stand in front of him again. He would have thought Nathan would have been more than pleased with him, but a look of disgust never left his face.

Nathan moved closer. "Now tell me why the warrior would recognize your scent?"

He swallowed as a shiver of unease ran down his spine. "I only thought to have a little fun with the mortal. I cornered her in the warriors' back garden. Her warrior chased me away."

"I never told you to think," Nathan growled.

That was all the warning he got before Nathan's razor sharp claws slashed across his throat. As his blood sprayed, Nathan said, "You're a fool. Now the warriors know we have found their home. I may be able to salvage this by using the mortal, but sadly you won't be around to see."

The last thing he saw was Nathan, in his werewolf form, lunge for him and finish what he had started with his claws.

* * * * *

After talking with his men, Raed returned to the kitchen only to find the room empty. Where was Lexi? He headed for the living room; she wasn't there either. He took the stairs two at a time to his bedroom. Empty as well.

Back downstairs, he met Garrick, who had just come in the front door. "Did you see Lexi out there?"

Garrick shook his head. "No. I thought you said she was inside."

"Bloody hell."

Raed rushed outside. Even though they hadn't been able to find the werewolf that had invaded their property, it didn't mean he couldn't still be hiding somewhere nearby. Raed came to a stop when he reached the top of the long drive. He sniffed the air, trying to zero in on Lexi's scent. There. Faint, but the scent was definitely there.

"She ran, didn't she?" Garrick asked as he came to stand next to Raed.

"Yes." He followed Lexi's scent down to the end of the drive.

"I guess the werewolf scared her off."

Raed turned his head left and right until he picked up her scent again, heading up the road to the left. He followed it until it abruptly ended. "Damn. She must have

managed to get a lift from someone." He headed back toward the manor. "No, a werewolf didn't make her run. I did."

"You?" Garrick scoffed. "I thought the two of you hit it off pretty well."

"I angered her when I told her the next time I told her to do something she had better do it."

Garrick laughed. "Yeah, that would piss off any modern woman."

"I acted on my gut reaction. Seeing her cornered by the werewolf . . . the sight scared the shit out of me. I got angry at her for putting herself in danger."

"But she didn't know danger lurked outside the house."

"I realize that. I overreacted."

As they walked back into the manor, Garrick asked, "So what are you going to do now?"

"I'll give her until tomorrow then I'll go see her."

"And if she won't see you?"

"She's mine. I'm not going to let her go so easily." Raed headed down the hallway, but turned back to Garrick before he went very far. "Tell the others we're going to start the hunt earlier tonight. I want to find the bastard who dared threaten my woman."

Raed caught the look of surprise that flashed across Garrick's face before he continued down the hall. He knew he sounded possessive of Lexi, but he couldn't help himself. Seeing her cornered by the werewolf had conjured images of her mangled body lying in a pool of her own blood. The images scared him.

* * * * *

Even though he and his men did an extensive search of the property around the manor, they couldn't find any trace of the werewolf they hunted. The absence of signs as to his whereabouts didn't sit well with Raed. That this one had been able to sneak in and out of the grounds so easily had Raed coming to believe their prey had started to

get smarter; the werewolf's ability to be out in wolf form in broad daylight only added to his unease. If Raed didn't know better, he would think the beast had been on a reconnaissance mission, sent to find where they lived. The werewolf had given up the fight far too easily.

More than halfway through the night, and unable to find any prey, Raed decided to swing by Lexi's flat. He parked his car halfway down the street and traversed the remaining distance on foot. At this time of night, the street was quiet. No one else moved but him.

Raed lifted his head to look up at the windows above the bookstore as he neared the flat's entrance. They were completely dark. The urge to go to Lexi and hold her in his arms once again became almost overwhelming. His body grew heavy with need as he remembered the small cries Lexi had made as he had plunged his cock in and out of her. He knew she probably would still be mad at him, but he wasn't about to let her just walk out of his life. Somehow, she had managed to worm her way under his skin. He felt protective, possessive of her. All the feelings he hadn't felt for a very long time. Ones he had promised himself never to have again. He did not want to fall in love only to lose the woman he loved to old age and death.

Raed's nostrils flared as he picked up the scent on the brick wall next to the flat's entrance. His upper lip curled and he growled quietly, deep inside his throat. It was the scent of the werewolf who had cornered Lexi. Rage and fear for her warred inside him when he found the scent on the entrance door as well. Fear won out.

Their argument now forgotten, Raed yanked open the door and took the flight of stairs in a couple of bounds. He turned the flat's doorknob, but found the lock engaged. Fear of what he would find on the other side allowed his wolf side to take over. Raed turned the handle until he heard the lock's tumblers break. As he stepped through the doorway, his eyes went wolf and his claws came out.

Chapter Seven

One minute Lexi had been in a deep sleep, and the next, she found herself pulled out of bed and wrapped in a strong embrace. As she tried to figure out what the hell was going on, she pushed at the hard chest under her cheek, which only resulted in her being held tighter. She felt something sharp prick through her pajama top at both shoulders.

"Let go of me, Raed." Lexi didn't know how she knew the intruder was him, she just did. A part of her recognized the feel of his large body pressed to hers.

"Just give me a minute to calm down." His voice sounded strained, as if he only held on by a thread.

"What are you doing in my flat?" She shoved at his chest again. "You have no right to break in here in the middle of the night. I know I locked the door before I went to bed. If you damaged it, you'll be paying to have it repaired."

"Be still, Lexi. You aren't exactly helping here."

"Why should I be still? I didn't invite you to come over and rip me out of my bed while I'm asleep. Let go of me and get out." She managed to pull her head back far enough to look Raed in the face. Not that she could see much of it in the dark. That was also when she felt his erection pressed against her belly. She started to struggle. "Let. Me. Go."

A low growl rose from Raed's throat. "I can't do that. You're mine. And I protect what is mine. You're in danger."

Lexi smacked him on the arm. "I'm not yours. And for your information, the only danger I can see is you. So, as you British say, sod off."

Raed took a deep breath. "I can see you aren't going to be reasonable about this. You leave me no choice." He scooped her up in his arms and headed out of her bedroom.

"Put me down this instant, Raed."

When he didn't, she grabbed a fistful of his hair and gave a hard yank. Raed stopped in the middle of her living room, but he didn't put her down. He threaded one hand through the hair at the back of her head and brought his mouth down on hers. His

kiss was by no means gentle. His lips were hard and possessive. Much to her utter shame, Lexi found herself responding. Her traitorous body melted against Raed as he shoved his tongue inside her mouth and thoroughly tasted her. She still felt angry at him, but it didn't stop her from growing wet. Her fingers tightened in his hair as she kissed him back with equal fervor.

With his lips still devouring hers, Raed crossed the room and slammed the open front door shut. He had her back up against it a split second later. He literally ripped her pajama bottoms off. Lexi bit his bottom lip as his fingernails, which felt a bit on the sharp side, ran down her thigh.

Raed lifted her legs around his waist then fumbled with the front of his jeans. He pushed them down only far enough to free his cock before he rammed into her, sheathing himself to the hilt. Lexi knew this would be no gentle lovemaking as Raed pumped into her hard and fast. The door at her back banged with each of his thrusts. His kisses became harder and he used his teeth more than his tongue. Something wild burst to the surface inside Lexi. She squeezed her inner muscles around his hard shaft as she met his hips with her own. She pulled on his hair, ground her teeth against his mouth, all of which seemed to excite Raed even more.

His cock grew even harder as he continued to ram into her. He cupped her bottom, and Lexi felt her climax edge closer. His sharp nails dug into her flesh. She pulled away from his mouth and yanked his head to the side. Remembering how Raed had bitten her, Lexi dragged her tongue down his neck then bit him where his shoulder and neck met. He rammed into her faster, harder. When she felt his cock swell even more as his shaft pulsed deep inside her pussy, Lexi fell over the edge. She moaned against Raed's neck as wave after wave of pleasure surged through her. Her inner muscles clamped down on his cock in a tight fist.

The sounds of their harsh breathing filled the room. Raed remained thick inside her. He slowly sank down onto the floor with her straddled across his lap. Lexi moaned as she felt another jet of cum splash against her inner walls, causing them to contract.

She lifted her head and looked at Raed's face. In the darkness, his eyes looked different, but the lack of light made it hard for her to see why. She shifted on his lap and found his cock had swelled to the point where they were locked together. She also felt another splash of cum. "Raed? Are you still coming? Your cock . . . why is it swelled like that?"

He kissed her gently. "I promise to answer your questions in the morning. Just give me the rest of the night to make love to you. That's all I want. Just you, with nothing coming between us."

With Raed still lodged so deep inside her, Lexi knew she couldn't say no. When he touched her, her body went up in flames. They may have their differences, but when it came to sex, they were explosive. Each time they came together, the sex just got better and better.

She leaned her forehead against his and nodded. "I won't ask any more questions tonight, but come morning, all bets are off."

Raed kissed her again until he left her breathless. They sat on the living room floor until his cock finally softened enough so he could pull free. He then picked her up and carried her to the bed. He stripped naked and got in beside her. Raed then proceeded to make love to her again. When his cock became locked inside her as it had before, Lexi asked no questions. The strange sensation relaxed her, made her feel safe and secure. She cuddled against his chest and fell asleep.

* * * * *

The muffled sound of ringing brought Lexi awake early the next morning. Before she could nudge Raed, he jumped out of bed, scooped his jeans off the floor, reached inside the front pocket and pulled out his cell phone. As he answered it, she let her gaze run over his naked body. She had licked and kissed every inch of him during the night. As she watched, his cock started to lengthen and harden.

Lexi brought her gaze up to find Raed's eyes filled with heat as he spoke. "I'll be there shortly. Tell the others not to touch anything." Raed snapped his phone shut then reached for his jeans again. "I have to go. Something came up at home."

She gave his erection a meaningful look as he shoved his cock inside his jeans. "Are you sure you can't stay a little bit longer? It's still early. And you did promise to answer all my questions in the morning, which is now."

Raed pulled his shirt over his head and sat on the bed next to her. "I can't. You'll still get your answers, Lexi. They'll just have to wait a bit longer."

"You promise?"

"I promise." He leaned over and kissed her until her toes curled. Raed stood and looked down at her. "Call a locksmith to come and replace the lock on the flat's door. You can tell your landlady I'll pay the bill."

"There you go again, ordering me about."

"Please? Is that better?"

Lexi chuckled. "I guess. I can see I'll have to work on your bossiness."

"I promise to work on it. I'll come back as soon as I sort things out at home."

"I'll be here waiting, but I hope it isn't anything too serious."

"No, nothing that bad."

Raed gave her another quick kiss then he was gone. She heard the flat's door shut behind him. It was still early enough to roll over and go back to sleep if she wanted. She settled deeper into the covers, but sleep eluded her. Now she was awake, thoughts of Raed and the night they'd spent together wouldn't leave her head. Each time they had made love, Raed's cock had swelled to the point where he had become locked inside her. She may not have had too many lovers, but she knew the swelling was anything but normal. Then there were the animal-like growls he made. She had no idea what to make of them. But his touch left her coming back for more. Lexi stretched. Since she couldn't sleep, she decided to get up and take a shower. After she finished she would call the locksmith.

Thirty minutes later, she stepped out of the shower and grabbed a towel. As she lifted her right arm to dry it, something on her back, high up near her shoulder, caught her eye in the bathroom mirror. She wiped the steam off then bent her shoulder toward her reflection to get a better look. An area about the size of her hand appeared to be bruised. She reached over her shoulder to touch the blackish marks, but they didn't hurt like she expected, even though the mark couldn't be anything else but a bruise. And she had a feeling she knew how she got it, too – when Raed had taken her against the door. She'd always bruised easily. Not that she would be complaining any time soon about how she had gotten that particular mark.

As she dried the rest of her body and went back to her bedroom to get dressed, Lexi remembered how desperate Raed had been to have her. She smiled. The mark on her shoulder had been worth it.

* * * * *

"Who found him?" Raed asked.

He looked at the mangled body lying on the ground among a thick stand of trees at the rear of their property. Even though the man was in human form, his scent gave him away as a werewolf. Not only that, the scent told Raed this had been the werewolf who had been here the day before . . . the one who'd gone sniffing around Lexi's flat, as well. He couldn't say he felt sorry to see the bastard's dead carcass.

"I did," Brand said.

"And you didn't see anyone else?"

"Nope. Just him. He'd already been dead for a while."

Whoever dumped the body – presumably another werewolf – had taken measures not to leave traces. A slight acidic smell combined with the dead werewolf's scent irritated Raed's sensitive nose.

His brows drew together as he stared down at the body. "Why dump him here if he wasn't killed here? Seems like extra work to me."

"Maybe he's supposed to be some kind of message," Algar suggested.

"Maybe." He shoved the body with the toe of his shoe. "I found this bastard's scent outside Lexi's flat. Whoever did this saved me from having to hunt him down."

Dolf chuckled. "So that's why you didn't come home last night? Did you and Lexi make up?"

Garrick, who stood beside Dolf, elbowed him. "Of course they made up, and probably had sex for most of the night as well. Ow!" Garrick shouted when Raed smacked him in the back of the head. "Touchy, aren't we?" He ducked the second smack.

Raed gave Garrick a warning stare. "If we can keep on subject? Somehow this one found Lexi's flat. They're getting smarter, or just better organized. I don't like the thought of Lexi being alone. I'm going to bring her back here. This is where she belongs anyway."

Wolfric held up his hands. "Whoa. Hold up. What exactly do you mean by Lexi belongs here?"

Raed sighed. "I mean I'm not giving her up."

"You just can't keep the little American," Dolf said. "For one thing, you would have to tell her exactly what we are."

"That's what I intend to do."

Wolfric shook his head. "No. Are you crazy? You've known Lexi for how long? You wouldn't even tell your wife. You went so far as to make it look as if you were aging before you faked your own death so you wouldn't have to tell her. Remember Sutton Hoo?"

"Lexi is nothing like my dead wife. She's stronger. She'll be able to handle what I am. And it doesn't matter how long I've known her, I want her at my side."

Brand snorted. "Won't work."

Raed turned to him. "Why?"

"She's mortal."

Raed hadn't had time to think that one through yet. Lexi's mortality was a bit of a problem, but it still didn't hold him back from wanting her as his own. Last night had shown him just how well they fitted together, at least in bed. His hunger for her seemed endless. She had somehow become as vital to him as the air he breathed, never straying far from his thoughts.

"Do you love her?" Algar asked.

Did he? He didn't know. He had loved his wife, but he had never been as attached to her as he was to Lexi. His wife had been the mother of his children, ran his household and had been good company. But she had never engendered this all-consuming need that pounded in his body whenever he was around Lexi.

"Honestly, I don't know," Raed answered. "All I know is I want her." He looked each of his men in the face before he continued. "Enough about my personal life. One of you call Tiw's fire to get rid of the body. Since they now know where we live, we're going to have to be extra vigilant. Starting tonight, while the others are out hunting, one of us will stay at the manor and patrol the grounds. I don't want any more surprises such as this. I'll take the first shift."

When his men nodded, Raed turned and headed back toward the manor. He heard the sound of god-fire consuming the body as Algar fell into step beside him. "Are you serious about telling Lexi about us?"

"Yes."

"You are my king; you know I would never gainsay you, but think carefully before you do this. You're asking a lot of her."

"I know, but I think Lexi can handle it."

"For your sake, I hope you're right."

* * * * *

Once she figured the bookstore would be open, Lexi went downstairs to talk to Charlotte. When she explained about the lock being damaged on the flat's door, her

landlady's eyebrows rose in astonishment. Lexi quickly explained Raed would cover the cost to replace the door. To Charlotte's credit, she didn't ask how the lock had become damaged in the first place. She told Lexi she knew of a locksmith who made emergency calls and that he would have the matter attended to in a couple of hours.

Lexi thanked Charlotte and headed back up to the flat. Not sure when Raed would be able to return, she put on the kettle to make a pot of tea and sat down in the living room to wait for the water to boil. She picked up the book she had bought for her father and started to flip through the pages.

When she reached the section about the Sutton Hoo burial ship, a picture of a purse lid drew her attention. The kidney shaped lid, which would have at one time covered a leather pouch, had three geometric motifs running along the top with two stylized birds facing each other on the bottom center. The intricate metal cell work done in garnet, gold and blue attached to a sheet of horn was very ornamental. On either side of the birds was the exact same image Raed had tattooed on his left arm — two wolves with a man in between them. Had Raed picked that particular image for his tattoo because it was the design found with the items excavated from the tomb that was supposedly King Raedwald's?

Thinking Raed may have some interest in Sutton Hoo because of his tattoo, Lexi read some of the history about it. The burial ship hadn't been small, with oar-rests for forty oarsmen. The benches and mast had been removed from the central section, where they figured the body had been. Alongside had been a number of grave goods interred at the same time, amongst them a ceremonial helmet with a full face mask, shield fittings, spears, a sword, a sword-harness, silver bowls, spoons, shoulder clasps, a great buckle and the purse lid. Lexi didn't know much about these things, but the legend that King Raedwald of East Anglia had been buried with the ship rang true.

Lexi spent the next half hour reading about Sutton Hoo while she drank a second cup of tea. Lost in the history of the Anglo-Saxons, she jumped when a knock came on her door. She opened it to find the locksmith standing on the other side. After he gave the doorknob a cursory look, he assured her he would have it replaced in no time.

The locksmith had just finished when Raed arrived. He paid the man and took the extra key, promising to give it to Lexi's landlady. Once they were alone, he pulled Lexi into his arms and kissed her senseless.

Knowing where this would lead, Lexi ended the kiss. She shook her head. "Slow down there, buddy. You promised me answers."

"How about I make you a deal? You drop the extra key off with your landlady then come and spend the rest of the week with me at the manor. After that, we can take things from there. If you say yes, then I'll answer all your questions."

"You want me to stay at your place? I want answers as soon as we arrive. And that's bribery, by the way. You're also changing the terms of our original deal."

Raed kissed the tip of her nose. "You'll get your answers, I promise. I would feel better if I knew you weren't alone."

"I do live alone back in the States, you know. It's not as if I'm not used to being on my own."

"Just say yes, Lexi," Raed said with a groan. "Please. You're only here for a month. I find myself not wanting to waste any minute I can get with you."

Lexi felt the same way, but she wasn't ready to admit how she felt to Raed. "Since you asked so nicely, and didn't order me back to your place, my answer is yes. But, I'm driving there in my rental car so I can come and go when I please. I'm going to play the part of a tourist at some point, and I'm sure you don't want to follow me while I wander around; you've probably seen the sights a thousand times over."

"You have a deal, but I don't mind going sightseeing with you. I'll get to see them through your eyes. Maybe you will give me a different perspective of them."

Lexi chuckled. "My perspective may not be all it's cracked up to be. And I'm still taking my car."

Raed brushed his lips across hers before he turned her around and gave her a shove toward the bedroom. "Well, what are you waiting for? Go pack your clothes."

In a matter of minutes, Lexi threw a few belongings into the smallest suitcase she had brought with her from the States. Once she returned to the living room, Raed

ushered her out of the flat. It only took her a minute to drop off the key to Charlotte at the bookstore. She knew moving in with Raed, even only for the rest of the week, seemed a bit rushed when it came to their relationship. But she had to go back to the States in less than a month, which didn't leave them much time. Hoping she wasn't about to make a mistake that would ruin what Raed and she had together, Lexi got into her rental car and followed his Mercedes-Benz back to his manor.

Chapter Eight

When they arrived at the manor, Raed motioned for Lexi to park her car next to the large garage. After he parked his car inside it, he deftly extracted the suitcase from her grip and led her inside.

Brand crossed their path on his way out the door. He only took the time to say to Raed, "Going out. Be back later." He gave Lexi a nod on the way past.

Lexi shook her head and smiled. "That's the most words I've heard Brand say."

Raed returned her smile. "When the mood takes him, Brand can be as talkative as the next person, though he has to indulge in a large amount of alcohol first. Needless to say, Brand doesn't overindulge very often."

With her hand in his, Raed took her up the stairs to his bedroom. He closed and locked the door behind them, put down her suitcase then wrapped her in his arms. His mouth closed over hers. In between kisses he said against her lips, "I wanted to . . . kiss you . . . all the way home."

Lexi threaded her fingers through his hair at the back of his neck. "And I've done nothing . . . since you left this morning . . . but think about how good it feels . . . to have you buried inside me. I want more."

Raed growled low in his throat as he nibbled the side of her neck. He lifted her off her feet and laid her on the center of his bed, following her down. "I can't leave the lady wanting."

He swiftly undid the buttons on her short-sleeved blouse. Once he parted the two halves, he cupped her breasts and bit down on one taut nipple through her bra. As he moved to tug at the other, Raed undid the front clasp. Pushing the bra aside, he sucked a nipple deep inside his mouth. Lexi gasped and wetness pooled inside her pussy with each pull of his mouth.

He released her nipple then moved on to the other as she squirmed beneath him. She bunched the back of his t-shirt in her hands and pulled the material up. Raed raised himself off her just far enough so she could lift the front as well. As he settled back down on top her, Lexi pulled his shirt all the way off.

Raed inched his way down her body. When he came level with the front of her jeans, he quickly undid them and yanked them down past her hips. He left her panties on as he made short work of pulling her jeans down her legs and off. Raed used his wide shoulders to spread her legs farther apart. He cupped her bottom then dragged the flat of his tongue along the crotch of her panties. Lexi moaned, a throbbing ache building between her legs.

She rocked her hips against his mouth as he continued to lap at her pussy through the thin material. Her panties grew wet, Raed's saliva mixing with her leaking juices. She yanked at his hair and groaned, needing a firmer touch.

Raed hooked a finger on either side of her panties and pushed down. Instead of pulling them down, he parted the material in half as if he'd cut them with a knife. What was left of her underwear ended up on the floor next to the bed.

Raed circled her clit with his tongue and she lifted her hips. She moaned loudly as two hard fingers delved between the lips of her wet pussy. He sucked on her clit and fingered her, driving her wild with desire. She lifted her head off the mattress. The sight of Raed's mouth on her pussy as he licked and sucked her clit was almost enough to send her over the edge.

Raed looked up and met her gaze as he pulled his fingers out and sucked them clean. Panting with need and without breaking eye contact, Lexi sat up and pulled off

her blouse and bra. Raed sat up and undid his jeans. His cock sprang free as he yanked them down and off.

Lexi pushed at Raed's shoulder until he lay flat on his back on the bed. His erection stood up from his body. She moved to straddle his legs and wrapped her hand around his shaft. His cock jerked as she pumped up and down its full length.

She leaned forward and dragged her tongue from the base of his shaft to the very tip. Lexi continued to lick Raed's cock until he groaned and lifted his hips off the bed. She sucked the tip past her lips and swirled her tongue around the head then stroked the sensitive spot just underneath. Wetness leaked onto her thighs as his cock jerked inside her mouth.

Giving his cock one last swipe of her tongue, Lexi rose up higher on her knees and positioned her pussy above Raed's engorged shaft. She took only the tip inside her and moved up and down until she had coated the head with her juices then she slowly lowered herself until his length butted up against her womb.

She closed her eyes as she sat up straight and started to ride Raed. The feel of his thick cock moving in and out made her bite her bottom lip. He filled her completely. Only with him did her body soar. Joined with Raed like this, she couldn't tell where her body ended and his began. He was becoming an addiction. Her body craved the feel of him lodged deep inside her.

She angled her hips so his hard shaft rubbed her clit with each stroke. She moaned as she squeezed her inner muscles around him, increasing her pleasure. Raed placed his hands on her hips and urged her to ride him faster, harder. She panted, working his cock in and out of her pussy. Raed's shaft started to swell as he neared his orgasm. Lexi set a faster pace as he rocked his hips to meet hers.

Lexi let out a keening moan, her climax washing over her. As her pussy started to rhythmically clench around Raed's cock, squeezing his shaft in a tight fist, she felt it pulse deep inside her as he too reached his release.

Raed sat up and cupped her face in his hands. "Open your eyes, Lexi," he said in a husky voice.

She blinked them open and met his intense gaze. Lexi gasped. Lit by the sun streaming through the open window, she could clearly see changes taking place. The blue of his eyes had completely taken over the white. His pupils were round, but they looked more like an animal's than a human's. Raed held one of his hands up to her face—a sharp claw tipped each finger. As she watched, those claws descended beneath his skin with no mark left behind to show they'd ever been there.

Lexi met Raed's gaze once more. His eyes still looked like an animal's. Her heart started to race as she shook her head in disbelief. She would have pushed him away, but his cock was still locked deep inside her as he continued to come. "What . . . what the hell are you?"

Raed tried to hold her close, but she put her hands on his chest to give her what little space she could get.

"I'm a werewolf." Raed's eyes slowly shifted back to normal.

Lexi shook her head. "I don't believe you. Werewolves aren't real." A shiver of unease ran down her spine when she thought about the story her great-grandfather had told on his deathbed about his father turning into a werewolf and killing his mother. The story couldn't be true.

Raed reached out to touch her hair, but she slapped his hand away. She tried to get off his lap, but he held onto her hips to keep her in place. "Don't. I'm still too swollen. You'll end up hurting yourself."

She started to struggle, but Raed all too easily kept her from pulling away. "Is that why your cock swells? Because you're a werewolf?"

Raed sighed. "Yes, but my cock has only done this with you."

Lexi gave a laugh which sounded this side of hysterical. "Aren't I the lucky one?" she said sarcastically.

"I don't understand this any more than you do. You're not taking this as well as I thought you would."

He thought she would take the news of his being a *werewolf*—a creature that didn't even exist—without question? Who was he kidding? "Sorry, but I tend to panic

when confronted with the news that the man I just slept with is a creature of nightmares."

"I'm not that type of werewolf."

"What, you don't bay at the full moon and thirst for human flesh?"

"No, only those werewolves sired by Fenris thirst for the flesh of mortals. I and my men were given the duty to protect mortals from their kind by the Anglo-Saxon god, Tiw. He gave us the ability to shift into what we hunt so we would be just as strong as they."

By now, the swelling in Raed's cock had gone down enough that they were no longer quite so locked together. Lexi pushed on his chest and quickly climbed off his lap. She moved away until her back hit the headboard. Her gaze skidded across his face. He didn't look like a killer, but that didn't mean there wasn't one lurking inside him.

"Your men are werewolves too?"

"Yes."

"And you are here to protect mortals from the bad werewolves because you are the good werewolves?"

"Yes." Raed inched closer. He stopped when she held up her hands to ward him off. "You have nothing to fear from me, Lexi."

"So how do you and your men fight these other werewolves? Do you turn into one and fight them to the death?"

"Sometimes. But we mostly exterminate them with our broadswords."

Lexi watched as Raed got off the bed and walked over to his closet. He reached inside and pulled out a large sheathed sword. He pulled the weapon out of the scabbard and held it out for her to see. The blade gleamed like polished silver.

Raed swung the sword expertly through the air. "There's silver mixed in with the steel. Silver is deadly to all werewolves except for me and my men." As if to prove he spoke the truth, he sliced the blade across his palm. To Lexi's shock, the wound healed

in a matter of seconds, leaving behind only the small amount of blood that had spilled from the cut.

Until that moment, she'd feared him insane. Delusional . . . caught up in some morbid fantasy he'd concocted in his warped mind. But she couldn't deny what she'd just witnessed with her own eyes. No one healed like that . . . at least, no *human* healed like that.

"Is it another werewolf thing, being able to heal like that?" Lexi knew she was asking a lot of questions when, if she really had her wits about her, she should have been running from Raed, screaming. But the questions wouldn't be silenced. A small part of her knew he could have hurt her at any time, but he hadn't. It had to mean something.

Raed sheathed his sword in the scabbard. He sat on the bed and placed the weapon on the mattress between them. "Partly, but mostly because I'm immortal."

Lexi's laugh sounded strained even to her ears. "You're immortal? Next you'll be telling me you're *the* King Raedwald of East Anglia." When Raed didn't so much as chuckle or deny what she'd said, she furiously started to shake her head. "You can't be. That would make you well over a thousand years old. King Raedwald died in 627 A.D. The ship burial at Sutton Hoo is supposedly his."

"It's mine. I faked my death. After my wife died, I wanted to permanently end that chapter of my life, make a new start. I'd already lost a couple of my sons. My body may not have been in that ship, but, for all intents and purposes, I died that day none the less."

Lexi wasn't ready to examine the reasons behind the stab of jealousy that shot through her at Raed mentioning he'd had a wife. Nor did she like the fact he'd had sons with her as well. She had to be losing her mind. Here Raed was telling her he had been a king from the Dark Ages and she was jealous of a woman who had been dead for over a thousand years.

She ran a shaking hand through her hair. "This is too much for me to take in all at once. The story I told you about my great-grandfather seeing his father turn into a werewolf was true, wasn't it? The tale wasn't part of some drug-induced dream?"

"No, he told the truth. I remember your great-grandfather as a teenager. I'm the man who cut down his father with my sword before he could attack him. I'm also the one who gave your great-grandfather the money to start a new life in Florida."

Black spots began to flash before Lexi's eyes as she started to hyperventilate. "I think I'm going to faint."

Raed closed the distance between them and pushed her head between her knees while he rubbed her back in soothing strokes. "Slow your breathing, Lexi. Take deep, even breaths and it will pass."

Once she got herself back under control, Lexi straightened and looked Raed in the eyes. "Can you shift whenever you want?" At his nod, she said, "Then shift. Now."

Raed shook his head. "I don't think my shifting would be a good idea. I think seeing me in my werewolf form, or even my wolf form, may be a bit too much for you right now."

"What's the difference between your type of werewolf and what my great-grandfather's father turned into?"

"I don't hunger for blood like our prey. We don't live to kill and maim. We protect."

"I need to see, Raed. All of this has been a lot for me to take in, but until I see you actually shift, I'll try to convince myself you aren't what you say you are."

He slipped off the bed to stand beside it. "All right. Whatever you do, if seeing me like this does end up being too much for you, don't scream. If you do, you'll have my men in here so fast you won't have time to cover your nakedness. I would rather none of them saw you like that. Only I get to."

"I promise." Luckily for Raed, she wasn't a screamer.

Lexi fisted the sheets in her hands when Raed's body blurred and took on another form. Between one second and the next, a creature that looked half human and

half wolf stood where Raed had been. He had the face and ears of a wolf, along with a tail. His body became completely covered in dark blond fur, the same color as his hair. He also stood taller, his body stronger than before. Raed's blue eyes stared back at her.

Then he spoke, and Lexi just about jumped out of her skin. "This is my werewolf form." Raed's voice sounded rougher and a tad deeper.

"You can talk," Lexi said as she gripped the sheets even tighter.

Raed's gaze followed her hands' movements. He then gazed back up at her and gave her a rough chuckle. "Only I'm allowed to rip my sheets." When her grip didn't loosen, he said, "Are you sure you're okay, Lexi."

She nodded. "Yes. Show me your wolf form."

He put his hands on his furred hips and stared at her for a few seconds. "If you insist; I'm not going to be able to speak to you in my wolf form, but I can still understand everything you say."

As before, Raed's body blurred as he made the shift. A large wolf with dark blond fur appeared next to the bed. He jumped up on the mattress in front of Lexi. Again she looked into Raed's blue eyes. She recognized his wolf. This was the animal that had chased off the grey one that had cornered her. Her hand trembled slightly as she reached out and stroked the top of Raed's wolf's head.

She swallowed. "I can handle this form. You could almost pass for a dog." Raed shook his lupine head and sneezed. Lexi chuckled. "You don't like being referred to as a dog, I see."

Raed shook his head from side to side. He moved closer and lay down at her crossed legs with his head resting on her bent knee. Lexi ran her hand down his back. His fur felt soft to the touch. She continued to pet him until her anxiety slowly started to pass. There was nothing scary about Raed in his wolf form. Yes, it happened to be way beyond the norm that he could shape-shift, but as she stroked his fur, she started to remember the close feelings she had for the man. How she felt about Raed hadn't changed.

No longer feeling as if she were about to freak out, Lexi bent and kissed the top of Raed's nose. "Thanks for letting me pet you, but I think I'm ready for the man to come back."

Raed's wolf body blurred and shifted. Now in his human form, he pulled her onto his lap. "Maybe I should have shown you my wolf before my werewolf."

"It may or may not have helped. The concept of you being a werewolf, as well as immortal, isn't exactly easy to accept."

"Well, I haven't had much practice at this. I've never told another mortal what I am."

Her gaze met Raed's. "Surely you told your wife and sons?"

"No, I didn't. I kept it a secret. I knew my wife wouldn't have been able to handle what I had become. She wasn't as strong as you."

"But she had to have noticed you didn't age as the years went by."

"To her, I did. You would be amazed how a few well placed streaks of charcoal on your face will make you look older."

Lexi chuckled then placed her forehead against Raed's. "Then why did you tell me your secret?"

Raed cupped her face and pulled back until he could look her right in the eyes. "I told you because I want you as mine. I want you to stay with me, Lexi. I don't want you to go back to the States when your four weeks are up."

"What are you saying, Raed?" Lexi asked quietly.

"I think I'm trying to tell you I've fallen for you. I know it's too soon for declarations of love, and I'm not ready to do that yet, but I don't want to give you up."

"I have feelings for you as well, but you're asking a lot. My parents are back in Florida, and I have my job to go back to."

"Can you at least think it over? You don't have to make your decision right this minute. There's plenty of time before you have to go back. Just promise me you'll consider it."

Lexi sighed. "I promise. Remember, you aren't just asking me to move in with you. I would be moving in with your men as well. They may not like the idea of me insinuating myself into their home."

"They won't have much say in the matter. I am their king, after all."

Lexi laughed. "Now I get why you can be so bossy at times, and why Algar told me old habits are hard to break. King or no king, you won't be ordering me about. Remember, I come from a country with no monarchy."

Raed kissed the tip of her nose. "I'll try, but I may slip up from time to time."

"That's all I can ask."

"So are we good now? You believe what I am?"

"Yes. I can't refute the proof I saw with my own eyes. It's going to take some getting used to, but I'm over the freaking-out stage."

"Good." Raed grabbed Lexi around the waist and pulled her down on the bed. "Because right now, all I can think about is having you again. Maybe if I keep you in my bed long enough you'll decide you want to stay after all."

Lexi moaned as Raed bent his head and nuzzled the side of her neck. "Mmm, maybe. I have a feeling it will take a lot of sex to do it, though."

"Then I better get to work."

And get to work, Raed did. By the time he let her up for air, night had fallen.

Chapter Nine

Nathan stood just inside a stand of trees at the back of the large manor's grounds. The house sat off in the distance, but not so far away he couldn't watch the back of the building. He'd had to move deeper into the trees so as not to be seen a few times when Raed, the warriors' king, had done a quick sweep of the area. Thanks to a mixture of certain flowers, bark and leaves he carried in a cloth bundle tied around his neck, he'd managed to mask his presence. To a mortal, the scent wouldn't be detectable. To a werewolf, the combination of herbs had an acidic smell that camouflaged his true scent.

Having seen Raed out on his patrols, Nathan now knew for sure the werewolf he had sent out to find the warriors' home base hadn't lied about where to find it. Nathan had made a point as soon as he became pack leader to learn the identities of each of the warriors. The task had taken some time, considering they didn't usually hunt together, but he persevered until he knew each of their names and what each man looked like.

He'd only waited until now to find where they went at the end of the night. It had taken him some time to clear the unwanted baggage out of the pack and rebuild it the way he wanted. No longer did they turn mortals indiscriminately. He handpicked the ones he wanted as members, usually mortals who had a reputation for success in the shadier side of life. When it came to kills, he gave the pack free rein.

Nathan cursed under his breath as Raed stepped out the back door of the manor and headed toward the trees for the third time since he'd arrived. Nathan had intended to stay and watch the manor for the entire night with the hope of maybe catching sight of the woman, but Raed's continued patrols weren't going to make it feasible. He found them to be more than a nuisance.

He'd found the woman's flat empty when he had gone there earlier, but he had been able to pick up her scent, and the scent of the warrior she had slept with. The bitch had been spreading her legs for the king himself. It also explained why Raed had stayed behind to patrol his property instead of going out to hunt with the rest of the warriors. The woman had to be somewhere inside the manor. And if the idiot he had chosen to do reconnaissance hadn't shown himself to the warriors, Nathan knew Raed would have probably felt safe enough to leave her there alone.

Just thinking about what the fool had done made him want to kill him for a second time. He'd worked for too many years to reach this stage to have one fuck-up almost ruin everything. As Raed came closer, Nathan lingered a little longer then stepped deeper into the trees and silently made his way through them. Knowing now the manor was indeed the home base of the warriors, he would have to send one of his werewolves to watch the building. He had plans for the woman. He just needed to get her away from the warriors. Nathan already had a werewolf in mind for the job.

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Raed stopped at the edge of the stand of trees and took a couple of deep breaths. There it was again, the same acidic odor that had been on the dead werewolf's body. He'd caught a whiff of the faint scent on his other passes, but this time it smelled a bit stronger. He looked past the tree line and scanned the area around it. Nothing moved. If Lexi hadn't been inside the manor, he would have investigated further, but he didn't like leaving her alone, even for the small amount of time he needed to run his patrols.

Raed looked from side to side as he left the trees and resumed his circuit. Lexi had not taken the news of his being a werewolf well; in fact, the telling had come pretty close to being a disaster. He counted himself lucky she had been able to accept what he was in the end. He had no idea what he would have done if she hadn't. The connection between them each time they made love seemed to be growing stronger, to the point where now he couldn't picture his life without her. Somehow he would have to convince her not to go back to Florida.

Raed headed for the back of the manor. At least his men hadn't balked at the idea when he had told them there could be a chance Lexi would be moving in with them. Of course Garrick turned out to be the only one to make a crack about it. He'd told Raed to start thinking with his head and not his dick, which earned Garrick a hard slap to the back of the head by Dolf.

He hadn't been too sure how Lexi would act around the others now that she knew what they all were, but having accepted him, she seemed to have accepted them as well. She'd told them if they could trust her with their secret, then she could do no less than accept them for what they were—a bunch of ancient werewolf warriors. The ancient part had caused more than a few grumbles with quick reassurances that they were far from old and decrepit.

Stepping into the manor's kitchen, Raed decided he would run a couple more patrols later then call it a night. The others would be returning from the hunt soon

anyway. Lexi had fallen asleep before he had left to do this last one. The idea of her in his bed, warm in slumber, made his cock harden. No matter how many times he made love to her, his body craved more. One touch of her hand, and he hardened almost to the point of pain. Now he didn't have to hide his eyes or claws when they came to the surface while making love, their joining was so much better.

He pulled a bottle of beer out of the fridge, took a big swig before he left the kitchen and headed for the living room. Time seemed to be dragging by. Instead of doing patrols while Lexi blissfully slept upstairs, he wanted to be up there with her, making love to her again. But he couldn't leave the place unmanned before the others returned. He collapsed on one of the couches and turned on the television. He needed the distraction, because if he didn't stop thinking about Lexi he knew he would throw caution to the wind and race upstairs to be with her. After warning his men they needed to be more vigilant than usual, that would make him a hypocrite. Raed sighed. If only the time would pass faster.

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Lexi quietly slipped out of Raed's bedroom and shut the door behind her. He needed to sleep longer as it had been extremely late when he had finally joined her in bed. He'd also made love to her again. The man was insatiable, not that she turned out to be any better. Every time they came together the sex seemed to get hotter and hotter. At this rate, Lexi knew it wouldn't take much on Raed's part to convince her to stay.

After a quick shower in the en-suite, Lexi dressed and decided to head for the kitchen to look for something to eat. Given the amount of calories she burned in Raed's bed during the night, she'd worked up quite an appetite. As she headed down stairs, she frowned. She examined the bruises on her back again before she'd gotten dressed. Strangely, they seemed to be getting darker, not lighter.

She found only Brand inside the kitchen. He stood at the stove cooking fried eggs. Lexi smiled when he looked in her direction then headed for the cupboards to find a mug. A full pot of freshly brewed coffee sat on the countertop.

Lexi opened two cupboard doors before Brand silently opened one closer to him, pulled out a mug and handed it to her. She quietly thanked him, poured herself some coffee and sat at the table to wait until he had finished making his breakfast.

A few minutes later, a plate with two fried eggs and two pieces of toast was plonked down in front of her. Lexi looked up to find Brand standing next to her chair. She shook her head. "You made this for yourself. You don't have to feed me. I was happy to wait until you were done before I got something for myself."

She tried to shove the plate over to him, but Brand only pushed it back. He then placed a fork next to the plate. "Eat. I heard your stomach growling."

Without another word, Brand returned to the stove and cracked two more eggs into the hot frying pan. Knowing Brand wouldn't take no for an answer, Lexi picked up the fork and started to eat. A short while later, Brand sat beside her at the table to eat his eggs and toast. Silence stretched between them, the only noise in the kitchen the sounds of their forks hitting against their plates.

Lexi glanced over at Brand a few times as she ate. He pretty much ignored her as he consumed his food. A bit uncomfortable with the silence, she figured she might as well at least try to start a conversation. If she ended up living here, she needed to make a concerted effort to get to know Raed's men better.

Lexi put her fork down and picked up a piece of toast. She cleared her throat. "So, Brand, how come you're up so early? I thought you would still be in bed like the others after your late night out hunting."

Brand looked over at her and shrugged his massive shoulders. "I got enough sleep." He focused his attention back on his plate.

Okay, now what? Trying to have a conversation with Brand was like having your teeth pulled – slow and painful. "Oh. I guess you guys do pretty much whatever you want during the day."

"Uh, huh." Brand didn't even bother to look up this time.

Since he wasn't supposed to be very talkative in the first place, and she didn't know him well, Lexi couldn't tell whether he was only tolerating her or being his normal self. "I'll shut up now and let you finish your breakfast in peace."

She ate the rest of her eggs and toast. Before she could get up to put her plate in the sink, Brand clamped a large hand around her wrist.

Lexi gave him a questioning look and he met her gaze. "I think you should stay with us. Would be nice to have a woman around. Raed cares for you a great deal. I thought I would let you know how I felt before you made your decision to move in with us or not." Brand gave her wrist an affectionate squeeze before he released her.

Lexi found herself shocked speechless by the amount of words Brand had said, and by the fact he had basically told her he wanted her to move into the manor. She quickly pulled herself together. "Well, thank you, Brand. I won't lie; I was worried you guys wouldn't want me here. Your approval does help with my decision."

Brand nodded. "Good."

She stood and crossed the room to the sink. After she rinsed her plate, Lexi left it to drain and walked out of the kitchen. She had thought Brand would have been the hardest out of Raed's men to win over. Obviously she had been wrong. He may not talk much, but it didn't mean he wasn't a nice guy. One warrior down. She only had four more to win over.

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Lexi quietly opened the door to Raed's bedroom and poked her head inside. He was still dead to the world. She tip-toed inside the room, retrieved her purse, then tip-toed back out. Raed sighed in his sleep as she soundlessly shut the door behind her.

She went back downstairs and headed for the front door. Left to her own devices until Raed woke up, she decided this would be the perfect time to do some of the sightseeing she had planned to do.

She had just put her hand on the door handle when a deep voice boomed.
"Where are you going?"

Lexi turned to find Brand standing right behind her. She wouldn't have even known he was there if he hadn't spoken. She smiled. "I figured since everyone else is asleep I would go see some sights."

"You should stay here. Not safe to be alone."

"No offense, Brand, but I'm a big girl. I don't need a babysitter. I'll only be gone a few hours. You can tell Raed I'm going to the cathedral then I'll be back."

"What if you run into a werewolf?"

She shook her head. "It's still morning. Raed told me they don't move around during this time of day. So I should be perfectly safe."

Lexi turned, unlocked the front door and stepped outside before Brand could try to stop her again. She knew he only thought to look out for her, but she wouldn't let herself be cooped up in the manor just because she promised to stay the rest of the week with Raed.

She got into her rental car and drove down the long drive. Once she reached the street, she headed for the city center where the Norwich Cathedral was located.

There weren't too many tourists milling around when she arrived, which pleased Lexi. She went inside and stared up at the high arched ceiling of the 11th century cathedral. She pulled her digital camera out of her purse and started to take some pictures. Before she had left for England, her dad had made her promise she would take a lot of photos.

Lexi wandered around, admiring the architecture. She found it hard to believe Raed had been there to watch the large cathedral being built. He would have already been four hundred years old by then. Just the thought blew her mind.

She headed back outside and toured around the cathedral's grounds. The day had turned out to be sunny and warm, the perfect English summer day. Lexi had to admit she didn't miss the hundred degree weather Florida got during this time of year.

In some ways, being in England almost felt like coming home, as if a part of her deep down inside knew this was where her roots were.

She sat on a bench and gazed up at the cathedral. England's history was so much older than the States, and here she was sleeping with a man who was part of Britain's ancient past. She shook her head. When she first started to plan her vacation to England, never in a million years would she have expected to fall for a thousand year old immortal werewolf, who used to be an ancient King.

Could she stay permanently with Raed? Give up her home, her job, in Florida and live happily ever after with him? The idea wasn't as scary as she had first thought. She had a feeling she'd started to fall head over heels for him. Yes, she would miss her parents terribly, but her living here didn't mean she couldn't go home to visit them from time to time. Raed hadn't asked her to give up her family. He just wanted her to give their blossoming relationship a chance.

Lexi sighed. This would be a hard decision to make, but if she wanted to make the right one, she would have to learn more about the man Raed used to be. For a start, his fake burial at Sutton Hoo, as it marked the end of his old life. She could find some of the information in the book she had bought for her father. All she needed to do was make a quick stop back at the flat before she returned to the manor.

She took a few more pictures of the cathedral's exterior then headed for her car.

Chapter Ten

Lexi ran up the stairs to the flat and let herself in. She shut the door behind her and went to the living room to collect the book. When her gaze landed on the telephone, she thought of calling her parents to tell them she wouldn't be at the flat if they called, but then she realized what time it was in Florida. It still would be way too early in the morning. Her parents were morning people, but even they wouldn't be up yet.

As she picked up the book, a knock came on the flat's door. Lexi crossed the room and opened it. A man, almost as large as Brand, stood in the small hallway. "Yes? Can I help you?"

A wicked-looking grin spread across the man's face. "Indeed you can."

He made a lunge for her. Lexi jumped back as she tried to slam the door in his face. He easily blocked her effort. Using the only weapon she had in hand, she threw the heavy hardcover book at his head and made a run for the bedroom. He batted the tome away as if it weighed nothing. A deep growl issued from his throat as he crossed the room in and grabbed her by the back of her shirt. He picked her up until her feet left the floor and gave her a few hard shakes. Lexi's heart thundered with fear as he snarled in her face. It didn't take much guessing to realize the man had to be a werewolf. His next words proved her correct.

"My pack leader is going to be very happy to see you. When he sent me to watch the warriors' manor to see if you ever left by yourself, I didn't think I would be lucky so soon. Nathan will be very pleased you didn't keep him waiting."

Lexi tried to kick him in the shins, but he easily side-stepped her feeble attempts to hurt him. He set her back on her feet and manacled a large hand around her upper arm. She dug in her heels as he started to pull her toward the flat's door. All she achieved was him dragging her behind him.

She smacked at his arm. "Let me go or I'll scream."

He stopped and put his nose to hers. "Do and I'll show just how strong a werewolf can be. A few deep scratches on your face should teach you to keep your mouth shut when you're told."

Lexi didn't doubt he would go through with his threat. Unable to get free, she could do nothing as he dragged her out of the flat and down to the street below. The street was empty with no one around to respond to her pleas for help as he pulled her behind the building and shoved her into the driver's side of a beat-up sedan before he followed her in. She crawled onto the passenger side and made a grab for the door handle, but he painfully took hold of her other wrist.

He cast her an evil grin and started the car. "There will be no escape for you."

She watched his other hand pull back just before his fist slammed into her jaw. As she slumped in the passenger seat, her world went black.

* * * * *

Raed woke to find the spot next to him on the bed empty. Figuring Lexi had to be somewhere downstairs, he took his time in the shower. After he pulled on a pair of jeans and a black t-shirt, he headed down to look for her.

He found Algar, Dolf, Garrick and Wulfric eating in the kitchen. No sign of Lexi. "Have you guys seen Lexi this morning?"

Wulfric shook his head. "Nope, but I haven't been up for very long. Brand probably has. He's already been up for a while and eaten."

Raed looked at the others; they shook their heads, indicating they hadn't seen her either. "Thanks."

He headed for the living room where he could hear the television. Brand sat on a couch, remote in hand, flipping through the channels. He turned his head to Raed and said, "If you're looking for Lexi, she went out."

"What do you mean, she went out?"

"She said she wanted to do some sightseeing."

"Didn't you try to stop her?"

"Yes, but she didn't listen. You never said she wasn't allowed out on her own."

Raed sighed. It was true. He hadn't told his men to make sure Lexi didn't go out by herself, but that didn't stop the sense of unease shooting through him at the mention of her out sightseeing. "Did she at least say where she would be?"

"She went to the cathedral."

Raed left Brand and headed upstairs to grab his car keys. He only took the time to tell the others where he would be before he went outside to the garage. As he drove

toward the cathedral, he hoped Lexi would still be there and not off somewhere else. He couldn't shake the feeling something was wrong.

He arrived at the cathedral, parked his car and started to look for Lexi. He did a thorough search inside the building without finding any sign of her, though he could detect her scent. He then went and did a systematic search of the grounds outside. Still no sign of her. There weren't many tourists around for Lexi to become lost in the crowd so he hadn't missed seeing her.

His sense of unease increasing by the minute, Raed got back in his car and headed for the only other place Lexi could most likely be — her flat.

As soon as he stepped into the stairway leading up to the door, Raed picked up the fairly fresh scent of a werewolf. Nerves jangling, he burst into the flat through the still-open door, instantly realizing something had to be wrong. Not only did the door stand wide open, but he saw a book lying face down with the pages bent underneath it as if someone had thrown it.

He took a deep breath. The smell of the werewolf, mingled with Lexi's scent, hung in the air. Hers held the unmistakable tang of fear. Resisting the urge to throw back his head and howl, Raed pulled out his cell phone and dialed the manor. He agitatedly paced the floor as he waited for someone to pick up on the other end.

Dolf answered after the fourth ring.

"It's Raed. Please tell me Lexi has come back."

"I was about to call you. We have a bit of a situation. You need to haul ass and get back here. Now."

"What about Lexi?"

"She's part of the situation." Dolf paused. "Raed, she's being held by a couple of werewolves."

Raed snapped his cell phone closed and took off at a run. He felt his eyes go wolf and his claws push through his skin as he thought of Lexi in the hands of his prey. Not caring if any mortals saw him, he put on a burst of preternatural speed when he hit the street and ran to his car.

As he sped toward the manor, Raed sent up a silent prayer to Tiw that nothing would happen to Lexi before he could get to her. He couldn't lose her now. He'd just found her. The worry made his chest ache. She'd made him feel more alive than he had felt in centuries. Even though they had only known each other for such a short period of time, Raed felt as if she had always been a part of his life. She made him whole. She filled a space inside him he hadn't even known needed to be filled. He loved her. Raed blinked in surprise. He *really* did love Lexi. He felt like kicking himself in the ass. With her in danger, he now could admit how much she really meant to him. As he turned sharply onto the manor's long drive, Raed decided when he fixed the werewolf situation she had found herself in, he would get down on his knees, tell her he loved her, then *beg* her to stay with him if he had to.

He ran into the manor as he bellowed his men's names. Garrick strode into the foyer and motioned for Raed to follow him. Garrick led him to the kitchen and out the back door. The others were standing by the stand of trees at the back of the property.

As he and Garrick ran across the back garden, Raed asked, "Is Lexi hurt?"

"Other than a bruise on one side of her jaw, she looks unharmed."

Raed growled with rage. They would pay for harming the woman he loved. "Did they just show up and wait for one of us to find them?" He could now make out the two werewolves who stood on either side of Lexi as the rest of his men faced them down.

"Pretty much, the arrogant bastards. Wulfric and Brand found them when they decided to do a sweep of the grounds. Brand and the big one have been sizing each other up."

As Garrick and he drew almost even with the others, Raed could see why Brand had singled out the larger of the two werewolves. He looked to be almost as big as Brand, and had a mean look about him. A cruel intelligence seemed to lurk behind his eyes. This was no ordinary werewolf, that only lived to maim and kill.

Raed's gaze locked with Lexi's. He could smell her fear, but she had done a remarkable job of hiding her emotions. He took a step closer, but froze in place when

Lexi's eyes widened and she whimpered in pain as the smaller werewolf cruelly twisted her arm high behind her back.

"That will be far enough, Raed," the werewolf who held Lexi said.

Raed curled his upper lip and growled. He had no idea how this werewolf knew his name. "Let her go."

The werewolf shook his head. "I'm not ready to do that just yet."

"What do you want?"

"Hmm, what do I want? What I would really like is for all of you warriors to drop dead, but I know that won't happen any time soon. So for now, I'll settle for giving you a warning."

"Don't threaten me, werewolf. You won't like the consequences."

The beast chuckled and shook his head. "Such idle threats, Raed. As long as I have your woman, your mate, I hold all the power here. And since I already know you, I might as well introduce myself. I'm Nathan, the pack leader."

"Who gives a shit," Raed snarled.

"You should," Nathan said with all humor gone from his voice. "You and your men's days are numbered. Under my leadership, the werewolves sired by Fenris will reach their full potential. And once I have eliminated you, there will be nobody to stop us."

"Stop you from doing what? Turning every mortal into what you are?"

"Only those I deem worthy. I'm going to free Fenris, of course."

"You would bring about Ragnarok? It would destroy life as we know it."

"A small price to pay. With Fenris freed, werewolves will rule."

"Even if you manage to take out all of us, Tiw will never allow you to free Fenris."

Nathan snorted. "What is one puny god compared to an army of werewolves? I don't fear your god."

Two things seemed to happen at once. Nathan let loose a howl as the larger werewolf launched himself at Brand. Behind Nathan, five more beasts in werewolf form

ran from the trees to attack the rest of the warriors. The ambush came so quickly his men had no time to will their swords into their hands. Shifting to his werewolf form as the rest of his men did, Raed met one of his prey head on. He grappled the other werewolf to the ground and used his sharp teeth to rip out the beast's throat. He then willed his sword into his hand and shoved the blade through the werewolf's heart.

Raed shifted back to human form and tried to find Lexi amidst the small but vicious battle that had erupted. She stood on the edge of the fighting with Nathan still holding her. Nathan locked gazes with Raed and smiled evilly. As Raed tried to push through the others to get to her, Nathan roughly pulled Lexi into his arms so she stood in front of him. He cruelly yanked her head to the side as he used his other hand to pull away the collar of her t-shirt. Nathan opened his mouth and his teeth grew longer, sharper. He then sank them into the top of Lexi's right shoulder. She cried out in pain. He licked her blood from his lips, gave her a hard shove to the ground and took off deeper into the trees.

With a bellow of rage, Raed forced his way over to Lexi. Nathan was long gone. Lexi had pushed herself into a sitting position with her hand covering Nathan's bite mark. Tears streaked down her cheeks as he lifted her and held her to him. His body started to shake.

"He bit me," Lexi said, wrapping her arms around his waist.

"I know." Raed looked up to find the fighting had ended. Werewolf bodies littered the ground as his men stood panting in human form. They all looked at him with pity. They all knew what a bite from a werewolf sired by Fenris did to a mortal.

He met each of their gazes. "Get rid of the bodies. I'm taking Lexi. Algar, come with us."

As the others started to call down the god-fire to get rid of the dead, Raed picked Lexi up in his arms and carried her back to the manor with Algar at his side. He sat Lexi down on one of the kitchen chairs and soaked a tea towel in the sink. "I need to see the bite, Lexi."

She sat with her arms wrapped around her waist. Algar stood at her back.

"What's the point?" she asked. "You told me what a werewolf bite would do. Come the next full moon, I'll turn into one."

"No!" Raed bellowed. He took a deep breath, and then said more calmly, "No, you won't. I won't let it happen."

Lexi looked up at him with tear-filled eyes. "How are you going to stop it? Are you going to put me out of my misery before I turn?"

Raed squatted in front of Lexi as Algar took the wet tea towel from him and set to work cleaning the bite mark on the top of her right shoulder. "No. Never. I would turn my sword on myself before I harmed on hair on your head. I'm going to fix this. I'll talk to Tiw. He may be able to reverse the bite."

"Ah, Raed," Algar interrupted, "you have to see this. Tiw may not have to do anything."

"What are you talking about?" Raed asked as he moved to stand beside Algar.

Algar pulled the collar of Lexi's t-shirt away from her back on her right shoulder. Raed looked at the mark on her back. It looked identical to the one Tiw had placed on his left arm. Tiw had marked Lexi as one of his own? Raed looked at Algar, who shook his head and shrugged.

"What's the matter?" Lexi asked. "What do you see? The two of you have gotten awfully quiet. Is it something bad?"

Raed came around to face Lexi. "When did you get that mark on your back?"

"You mean the bruise? I noticed it the morning after you broke into my flat and we had sex against" She let her words trail off.

"It isn't a bruise."

Raed helped her up and led her to the main floor powder room. Algar followed. Raed turned Lexi slightly so her back faced the mirror hanging on the wall above the sink and pulled her t-shirt down. She gasped when she turned to look at her reflection.

"Like I said, it isn't a bruise."

Her shocked gaze met his. "What does this mean? It's like your mark."

"I know. Tiw is the only one who could have done that to you. If he has marked you as one of his own, you may be immune to a werewolf's bite the same as we are."

Lexi looked at the mark on her back one more time. The design was an exact match for the one Raed and his men carried. The same stylized man with two stylized wolves on either side of him done in black. "I don't understand. Why would Tiw mark me?"

Algar blew out a breath. "I think the bastard got it right, Raed. Lexi is your mate. It makes sense, what with the mark and the other things that have happened to you since you've been with her."

Her gaze shot to Raed. "Your mate?"

Raed searched her face. "I don't know for sure, but I've never felt this way toward a woman before. While in bed with you . . . the sex is different as well. I have to talk to Tiw."

"What are you trying to say, Raed?"

He pulled her into his arms. Lexi watched Algar leave the powder room before she looked at Raed.

"What I'm trying to say is that I love you, Lexi. I want to have forever with you."

She looked at him suspiciously. "Is it because Tiw marked me that you now, all of a sudden, have this need to proclaim your love for me?"

"No. When Dolf told me two werewolves held you captive, I knew then I couldn't lose you. I would lose a piece of myself if I did."

Lexi's heart thudded against her ribs. Raed loved her. While she had sat on the bench at the cathedral, she knew she had been close to admitting to herself that she had fallen in love with him. She hadn't allowed herself to feel committed to him mostly because she'd been afraid if she told Raed she loved him first he would feel obliged to say he returned the sentiment. Now that he had told her he did love her, it felt as a weight had been lifted off her shoulders. She no longer had to fear it would be a mistake to leave her life in Florida and move in with him.

She went up on her tip-toes and threw her arms around his neck. Bringing her mouth a hairsbreadth away from his lips, she said, "I love you too."

Raed closed the space between their lips and took hers in a heated kiss. He kissed her hungrily, as if he couldn't get enough of her. Lexi threaded her fingers through the sides of his hair, and he angled his lips across hers. They quickly pulled apart when a deep voice filled their heads.

I only waited to hear you both say those three little words.

Lexi looked at Raed. "Did you hear that?"

He chuckled. "Yes. Tiw, is it true? Lexi is my mate?"

Yes. You, and the rest of my warriors, have been alone for far too long. I decided the time had come for you to find your mate, the one who would stand at your side for the centuries to come.

Lexi cleared her throat. "But I'm mortal."

Tiw chuckled. *If you accept Raed as your mate, Lexi, I will make you as immortal as he. As Raed and Algar already figured out, my mark has made you immune to a werewolf's bite. If you want the rest, all you have to do is say, yes.*

"You're going to turn me into a werewolf too?"

No. Your job won't be fighting werewolves. Your job will be to look after the new life growing inside you.

Lexi gaped at Raed. He wore an equally shocked expression on his face. "I'm pregnant?"

Yes. Now what say you, Lexi? Do you want to live forever with your king?

She looked down at her still-flat stomach and then back up at Raed. She smiled broadly. "I couldn't ask for more. So my answer is yes. Definitely yes."

Then so it shall be.

Lexi stiffened as what could only be described as a surge of energy shot through her body. Her bruised jaw stopped aching, and the bite mark on the top of her shoulder stopped throbbing. She yanked aside the collar of her t-shirt and gasped. The bite mark

slowly healed, leaving no trace of it having ever been on her skin. She laughed with happiness as she jumped up into Raed's arms and kissed him for all she was worth.

Raed closed the powder room door and locked it. Then he pulled her into his arms and kissed her, while working feverishly to undo her jeans. He yanked them and her panties down with a hard tug before he placed her on the edge of the counter.

Lexi pulled away to pant in his ear, "The others. They'll hear us."

He fumbled with his own jeans. Once he had his cock free, he stepped between her legs. "They'll stay away if they know what's good for them. I can't wait. I need to be inside you now. You're forever mine and I intended to show you how much I love you, starting right this minute."

Lexi turned her head to the side as Raed nibbled her earlobe. "And the baby? You don't mind that we've already started a family?"

Raed pulled back and shook his head as he took hold of her hips. "From my mortal life, that is the one thing I've missed — having a family. Now I have a wife and a child on the way. I'm blessed, indeed."

He surged forward and buried his cock inside her already wet pussy. Lexi moaned as he moved deep inside her. The feel of him filling her to capacity shot waves of pleasure through her. She wrapped her legs around his waist as his hips pumped in and out. She felt her body coil tighter, and his cock swelled. Then she was there. Her inner muscles clamped rhythmically around Raed's thick shaft, a keening moan pushing past her lips. His shaft swelled even more, locking them together as he came. He shouted her name as his cock pulsed deep inside her pussy.

When she could catch her breath, Lexi cupped Raed's face in her hands and lightly kissed his lips. She held him tight. This immortal warrior, this king, was all hers and she had forever to love him.

~The End~

About the Author

Marisa always loved to read, but once her kids started coming the number of books she read a week increased. The books varied from science fiction to historical fiction. After reading a historical romance novel she found herself hooked. She couldn't get enough of them. Her love of historical romances soon evolved into wanting to write one of her own. Along with historical, she's tried her hand at paranormals, her latest obsession.

Marisa lives in Ontario, Canada with her husband and four children. Between looking after her kids and going to the gym a couple times a week, she writes about passionate women and the compelling men who love them.