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WOLVES OF EAST ANGLIA

RELUCTANTLY HIS

Marisa Chenery

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Wolves of East Anglia: Reluctantly His

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Book Blurb

When Nika had emigrated from California to Norwich, England to run a pub with her then British-born boyfriend, she'd never expected him to leave her for another woman when the going got rough. Now gun shy when it comes to men, she's sworn them off for a while. Until a hunky man comes to the pub one night and asks if she's on the menu. Not ready to start a new relationship, she fights her attraction for him. Garrick knows Nika is his mate when her scent stirs his wolf. Having never really cared if he found his mate or not, now that he's found her, he wants her as his. Trying to tell her he is an immortal werewolf warrior is something he wants to put off until she gets to know him better. But Nika forces his hand when she tells him to reveal his secrets or lose her. But telling her the truth may cause him to lose her anyway.

Chapter One

With a swipe of the towel, Nika Ryder wiped the wet mark off the top of the bar. That done, she moved down to the customer who stood on the other side.

"And what can I get you to drink, Mike?" she asked the man, one of her few regulars.

"A dark ale would go down good right about now, love."

Nika smiled. "One pint of dark ale coming up."

She walked over to the tap and pulled a pint of draft. After she placed it in front of Mike and took his money, Nika put it in the register behind her. She gazed about the open room and sighed. She'd hoped the pub would have been a lot busier than this tonight.

The pub, The Old Sow, was Nika's, and her only source of income. When she had immigrated to the UK from Sacramento, California just a little over nine months ago, she hadn't expected to find herself the sole proprietor of a pub in Norwich. No, the whole *owning a pub* had been her then boyfriend's idea. She'd met David in California. He'd originally been from Norwich, and after being together for a year, he'd talked her into the grand plan of returning to his hometown and opening a pub of their own.

Nika snorted to herself as she served another customer who sat on one of the barstools. Letting David talk her into moving to the other side of the world had been her first mistake. The second – when she'd believed he'd actually loved her enough to want to stick it out with her, even when things had started to become rough.

After six months of running the pub – hard damn work that didn't pay off with the amount of profits they had hoped for – the bastard had up and left her for another woman, moving in with said woman in London. So there Nika was, stuck in Norwich with a pub that was barely making enough money to stay open let alone provide enough for her to move back to the States.

More often than not, Nika pictured herself strangling her rat bastard ex-boyfriend. She would get a lot of satisfaction listening to the asshole struggle to take his next breath.

Since there weren't too many customers, Nika went back to the kitchen to make sure everything was all right with her cook. She'd inherited Lee when she and David had bought the pub from the original owners. In his late forties, Lee had worked at The Old Sow for a number of years. If not for him, Nika had no illusions to the fact that she would have fallen apart after David had hightailed it out of her life. Lee was her rock to lean on. The man knew how to run the pub better than she did. Back in the States, she'd worked in a few bars, but that had by no means given her the experience she needed to run her own establishment.

Pushing the swinging kitchen door open, Nika stuck her head around it and smiled when Lee looked up from preparing one of the few food orders they'd received. "How is it going in here?" she asked.

"Good. How goes the front?"

"Four tables and a few sitting at the bar."

"So in other words, not nearly what you want for a Friday night."

Nika sighed. "No. I wish I knew what to do to draw in a bigger crowd."

"Just give it time. All it takes is a few more regulars and business will get better."

"Lee, the ever optimistic one. I wish I could keep your positive attitude. It's been over eight months since The Old Sow re-opened under new management, and they only trickle in. I just wish I hadn't listened to David when he suggested we close the pub down for that first month to do some remodeling."

Lee pulled a small pan out of the oven and plated the steaming food. He then put the plate on the stainless steel counter under the warming lights. Since Nika couldn't afford to pay another employee, she worked the bar as well as served the food.

Stepping inside the kitchen, Nika went and picked up the plate on her side of the counter. She then asked, "What table is this for?"

"Table three," Lee replied. "I know I've said this before, but I'm going to say it again. You could always try to sell the pub."

Nika shook her head. "No, that isn't an option. I wouldn't be able to sell it high enough to pay off all the debts, and have any money left to rent a flat while I looked for a job. At least keeping the pub I get to live upstairs rent free."

Lee held up his hands in surrender. "I know, I know. Go serve the food before it gets cold."

Carrying the plate in both hands, Nika used her hip to open the swinging door, and delivered the food. That done, she returned to the bar.

Just as she walked behind it, the pub's door opened, and a man stepped inside. Nika stared when he looked around before slowly walking to one of the empty tables at the back of the room. Her gaze followed him. He was huge, at least six and a half feet tall with a weightlifter's body. His shaggy brown hair just barely touched the top of his very broad shoulders. Nika lowered her gaze to his jean-clad ass and sucked in a breath. The man had a hard, muscled butt she'd love to get her hands on.

Giving herself a mental slap in the face, Nika told herself to snap out of it. After David, she'd sworn off men for the time being. In no way did she want to find herself in the same situation—dumped for something better. And besides, running the pub five days a week didn't exactly leave her enough time to actually date, even if she wanted to. It was all right to look, but that was as far as she wanted to go.

Garrick slipped into the chair at a back table and scanned the pub. He'd had no luck hunting his prey tonight; Fenris' werewolves appeared to be lying low, so he'd decided to stop by The Old Sow for a pint before he returned to the mansion. He hadn't been inside the pub since the new owners had re-opened for business. He noted the newer paint on the walls and the updated décor. Definitely an improvement, and a lot less drab from what he remembered. Obviously they'd done some upgrading in the hopes of attracting more customers, but the pub wasn't even a quarter full. If tonight

was indicative of the amount of business they normally did, he had to wonder how long the new owners would stick it out before they called it quits.

His gaze landed on the woman serving drinks behind the bar. He took in her long, light blonde hair that fell around her shoulders. She looked young, but compared to his well over a thousand years, all mortals were young. Garrick watched her for a few more seconds before turning to scan the rest of the pub, looking for a waiter or waitress. He was ready for a beer. When he didn't see anyone else attending the few customers occupying a scattering of tables, he figured the blonde must work the taproom by herself.

Sure enough, after drawing a pint for another customer, she walked around the bar and headed toward him. Now able to view her head-on, he liked what he saw. She was more than pretty with her high cheekbones, small nose, and full lips. Being a werewolf, he was able to see the color of her eyes from the distance that separated them. They were violet blue. He ran his gaze up and down her slim yet curvy build that her tight blue jeans and form-fitting, grey T-shirt did nothing to hide. His grin grew bigger the closer she came. Would she be up to giving him a bit of fun before the night was over?

When she reached his table and her scent washed over him, Garrick stiffened as his cock went instantly rock hard, straining against the zipper of his jeans. He drew in another lungful of her heady aroma and had to fight from going wolf, fisting his hands on the tabletop to stop his claws from breaking through the tips of his fingers. Inside him, his wolf threw back its head and howled with longing.

The woman smiled and asked, "What can I get you to drink?"

The sound of her American accent had Garrick wanting to hear more of it, preferably, as she called out his name while he pounded into her. His cock jerked inside his jeans when his gaze landed on her mouth, and he pictured her using it to suck him off.

"Hello? Do you want to order now, or do you need a few more minutes?" she asked.

Garrick squeezed his hands tighter, feeling the tips of his claws just beneath the surface of his skin. He had to pull himself together before his eyes went wolf. "I'll have an ale," he managed to say stiffly.

She nodded, then turned to walk back toward the bar. He followed her with his eyes. By Tiw, the Sky Father, he was lost. Having watched two of his brothers-in-arms, Raed and Algar, find their mates, Garrick knew the signs. And having a woman's scent stir his wolf was the first. The blonde had to be the one woman meant for him.

He didn't know how he felt about that. The idea of him finding his mate had left him kind of blasé about the whole thing. Garrick enjoyed women, but he'd just never had the urge to want one bad enough to stick with her. He had his fun while it lasted, then walked away when it ended. With a mate, there would be no walking away, ever.

The blonde returned to his table carrying his pint of ale. After she placed it in front of him, Garrick fished out enough pound notes from his front jeans' pocket to pay for it and handed them to her.

Before she walked away, he said, "Your boss should hire you another pair of hands to help. I noticed you're working the bar and serving the tables."

She chuckled and shook her head. "I *am* the boss. I own the pub. I'd love to have some more wait staff, but for now you'll just have to put up with me."

"I didn't realize an American had bought the pub. What part of the States are you from?"

"California. Sacramento, to be exact, but I call Norwich my home now. If you want another pint, just wave me over."

She went to walk away, but Garrick stopped her once again, wanting to keep her near. "What's your name?"

"Nika."

"I'm Garrick."

He stuck out his hand and waited for Nika to take it. When she did, he closed his hand around hers, skimming his fingers over her soft skin. Touching her made him want to yank her onto his lap and see if her lips were as kissable as they looked.

As if she'd seen something in his expression that clued her in to what he was thinking, Nika tugged at her hand until he released it and took a step away from the table. Garrick didn't miss the slight flush of her cheeks, or the deep breath she took.

"It was nice meeting you, Garrick," she said. "But I really should get back to the bar."

Nika turned and wove her way around the tables to the bar at the other end of the room. Garrick picked up his pint of ale and took a sip. He watched her, following every move she made. As if she sensed his gaze, Nika looked his way every once in a while.

Garrick sat there, nursing his beer, until the rest of the customers slowly left, leaving him alone, sitting in the taproom. Knowing what Nika would be to him, he was reluctant to leave the pub and her. By now, he had memorized every single one of her features, and her scent had burned itself into his brain. He wanted – no, he *hungered* for – one taste of her before he left her for the night.

Now that they were basically alone – except for the one mortal male he scented closed away in the kitchen – Garrick intended to get his taste. When Nika walked out from behind the bar, heading in his direction, he got up from the table and met her halfway.

"I was just on my way over to tell you it's closing time," she said with a smile.

He let some of the hunger he felt for her show in his eyes. The smile she wore faded as her violet-eyed gaze latched onto his. He heard her heart beat a little faster. The sight of the tip of her tongue coming out to lick her lips just about undid him. His cock throbbed, and he ached to pull her into his arms to show her just how much she affected him. Instead, he moved a little closer. Much to his pleasure, she stood her ground.

"I guess if you're closing I should be on my way," he said as he crowded even closer. "But I'll be back. I've found something here that I'm more than interested in." He now stood so close Nika had to crane her neck to look him in the face.

She swallowed audibly, and then said in a breathy voice, "Oh. And what would that be?"

He bent his head until there were a few scant inches between their lips. Garrick pulled more of her intoxicating scent into his lungs. "Something that I want very much. Something I hope will want me just as much too."

Nika's lips parted on a sharp, indrawn breath. Garrick went to lower his mouth to hers, expecting to finally get his first taste of her. She'd given him all the signals that she would let him kiss her.

Just before their lips met, her hand shot up to cover his mouth, and she pushed him away. She then put some distance between them. Garrick blinked in surprise. She'd refused him. Why would she do that when her body was telling him yes? Besides her rapid breathing, her nipples had grown taut beneath her T-shirt, and the smell of her arousal had mixed in with her scent.

He tried to close the distance between them again, but she held out her hand toward him and shook her head. "Sorry, Garrick, but I'm not one of the items on the menu here."

Undaunted, he asked, "Would you make an exception for me?"

"No."

"I'd definitely make it worth your while. All. Night. Long." Garrick made his voice huskier as he said those last three words.

Nika shivered, and the scent of her arousal grew stronger. He thought he had her then, but she shook her head, a scowl forming on her face. "Nice try, Garrick, but I'm not biting."

Before Garrick managed to say anything else that might entice Nika to see things his way, the kitchen door swung open and the male mortal stepped into the taproom. He looked at Garrick and then at Nika. To her, he asked, "Everything all right in here, Nika?"

"I'm fine, Lee," she said. "Garrick here was just leaving. Weren't you, Garrick?"

Garrick had to resist the urge to growl and snap his teeth at the other man. He and his wolf didn't like the idea of Lee trying to protect the woman who could be his mate. Garrick wanted to be the male only accorded that privilege.

Fighting to keep his wolf at bay, knowing if his control slipped and Nika saw his eyes change or his claws come out she more than likely would run from him, he decided to let things go for now. He'd give up his chance to taste her lips, but that didn't mean he was giving up completely. He'd just keep coming back to the pub until he somehow managed to get Nika to change her mind about him.

On his way to the door, Garrick paused only long enough to caress Nika's cheek with the back of his hand. As he walked outside, his sensitive hearing picked up her almost-silent sigh. Stepping out onto the sidewalk, he smiled. She may have told him no, but she wasn't immune to his advances as she'd like him to believe.

Chapter Two

Nika managed to act as if nothing had really happened after Garrick left the pub. She washed the remaining dirty glassware and put them back in their place behind the bar. She even ran the vacuum after she put up all the chairs and stools while Lee cleaned the kitchen. In no way did she betray how hot and fast her blood surged in her veins.

It wasn't until after Lee had left, and she'd gone up to her flat above the pub, that Nika stopped hiding her chaotic emotions. She closed the flat's door, leaned back against it, and let the memory of Garrick rise to the surface.

Holy hell. Nika waved a hand in front of her face to try to cool her heated cheeks. Garrick was walking, talking sex. When she'd gone to tell him it was closing time, and he'd crowded close, her knees had turned to jelly. She'd gotten intensely aroused, her pussy growing wetter the longer she'd stared into his hungry gaze.

At least an hour had passed since he'd left, and her body had yet to cool. She could have easily drowned in his brown eyes, let him touch her, taste her, as he'd come

so close to doing before she'd stopped him. Damn David for making her gun shy when it came to men she was attracted to. If not for him deserting her, she more than likely would have taken Garrick up on what he was so obviously offering.

Nika pushed away from the door and crossed the flat to her bedroom. Even though it was late, she'd change into her pajamas, watch some TV, and have a glass of wine. She needed to distract her thoughts from Garrick, or she'd never be able to get to sleep. With another full day of running the pub to look forward to, she couldn't afford to be exhausted come morning.

* * * * *

Rolling onto his back, Garrick looked at his bedroom window and the stream of sunlight shining through the crack where his curtains didn't quite meet. He swung his head toward his bedside table and looked at the digital clock. Just after 11:30 a.m. He had plenty of time to set *Operation Nika* into motion.

The night before, he'd managed to get inside the mansion where he lived with the rest of Tiw's warriors and up to his room without encountering any of the other residents. Something he was thankful for, because he'd still been sporting the hard-on from hell. He'd been in no mood to explain why he was walking around in that condition to any of his brothers-in-arms or the two women who were the first of the mates to come into their lives. If the other warriors realized he'd found the woman meant for him, and learned she'd rejected his advances, they would never let him live it down. They would consider it payback for all the crap he'd done and said to them over the years. Not something Garrick wanted to be on the receiving end of.

So after sequestering himself behind his closed bedroom door for the rest of the night, he'd come up with a plan to win Nika over. He'd go to the pub each day, as he'd originally planned, but he'd also make sure Nika knew exactly why he was there—for her. He'd lay on the charm and batter her defenses until she finally admitted she

wanted him as much as he wanted her. And she did want him. Her scent didn't lie, no matter what she said to his face.

Stretching, Garrick felt the heaviness of his cock. His erection tented the sheet covering him from the waist down. He'd pretty much been in a constant state of arousal since meeting Nika. He closed his eyes and reached under the sheet to take hold of his cock. He stroked his hand up and down his shaft, bringing the image of Nika and her intoxicating scent to the forefront of his mind. Biting back a moan, he pumped his hand a little faster. He imagined Nika stroking him, and the fantasy made him even harder.

After a few more strokes, Garrick released his cock and got out of bed. Naked, he walked to his en suite bathroom. He turned on the shower, stepped in, and resumed stroking himself until he found his release. The orgasm took off the edge, but he wasn't going to fool himself into thinking he wouldn't be raring to go again once he saw Nika.

He quickly finished his shower, dressed, and headed downstairs. At this time of day, the others were more than likely up and about. He headed for the kitchen to see who would be there. Garrick decided he wouldn't get anything to eat. He intended to order food at the pub.

The one only there was Lexi. She sat on one of the kitchen chairs with one hand resting on her distended belly while she sipped on a bottle of water. At almost nine months pregnant, she didn't have long before she added a new addition to their "family."

"Where is everyone?" he asked as he moved farther into the room.

Lexi looked up from the parenting magazine she read and smiled. "About time you got up. Brand is out, doing whatever he normally does when he leaves. Raed, Algar and Kamryn have gone to pick up the groceries we needed. As for Wulfric and Dolf, they're in the living room getting ready for the football game to come on. Why? What's up?"

"Nothing," he said. "I'm going out, and I more than likely won't be back until it's time to hunt."

"Yeah, you don't want to miss tonight," Lexi said with a chuckle. "With the full moon, Wulfric and Dolf are already betting on who can take out the most prey."

On the first night of the full moon, newly turned werewolves shifted for the very first time. One bite from one of Fenris' get was all it took to turn them, and there was no cure. Only death. Unlike Garrick and his brother-in-arms, Fenris' werewolves lived for the kill. It didn't matter what the mortal was like before being bitten, once turned, they couldn't control their craving for human flesh and blood. It was Garrick and the other warriors' job to put them down, and they had been doing so since the early 600s.

He snorted. "Of course they are. They've done that during every full moon for over a thousand years. You would think they would stop their competitiveness since their bets usually end up in a fistfight."

Lexi laughed. "I think the fistfight is part of the thrill for them too. They pound on each other, then once it's over they're the best of friends again."

"Yeah, true. Wulfric and Dolf are nothing but a pair of blockheads."

"You'd better not say that around them," Lexi said. "They will more than likely turn on you."

"As if I couldn't take them both, but I'm not in the mood to put them in their place."

Lexi shook her head. "Before this goes any further into Garrick bragging territory, I thought you were leaving."

He smiled. "I can take the hint. Tell Raed I'll be back this evening."

Raed was Lexi's mate, and their leader. Before they took their vows to fight for the Anglo-Saxon God, Tiw, Raed had been king of East Anglia. Even though he no longer wore a crown, Garrick and the rest of the warriors still thought of him as their king.

"I will." Lexi assured him.

After giving her a nod, Garrick left the kitchen and headed out of the house. On his way by the living room, he heard the sound of a football game blaring on the tele,

while Wulfric and Dolf yelled at the players. Garrick liked a game of footie, but those two were hardcore fans.

Outside, he went to the large, detached garage and got into his silver Audi R8 Sypder sports car. The two-seater had enough power under its hood to satisfy his craving for fast things. There was nothing like it, opening it up, shifting gears quickly to get up to speed. Fast sports cars were one modern invention Garrick liked. It beat riding on the back of a horse, even a warhorse, any day.

It didn't take Garrick long to arrive at The Old Sow and find a parking space. Not that he had to look hard for an open space. There was only one other car parked in the lot, and he had a feeling it belonged to Lee. It was a Saturday afternoon; there should have been a good crowd in the pub at this time of day.

Stepping inside, it was as he'd expected. He was the only customer. He didn't see Nika, but he heard her and Lee's voices coming from inside the kitchen. Instead of taking a table at the back of the room as he'd done the night before, Garrick sat on one of the stools in front of the bar. When Nika didn't appear to have heard his arrival, he loudly rapped his knuckles on the bar's wooden surface.

When Nika walked out of the kitchen and saw him, the smile she wore slipped a bit. She froze in place and didn't start moving again until the swinging door she'd just let go swung back and hit her on the arse.

He looked her hungrily up and down, not trying to hide what seeing her did to him. She came to stand on the other side of the bar directly in front of him. Garrick gave her a smile that had lured more than one woman to him and said, "Hello, Nika. Did you miss me?"

Nika had to tear her gaze off the bone-melting, toe-curling, sexy smile Garrick had sent her way. A smile that just enhanced his killer good looks and made her traitorous body crave something she'd decided she'd do without. But that didn't stop her pussy from clenching as she drank Garrick in.

To keep from doing something stupid – like reaching out and tracing the hard line of his jaw with her fingers – Nika crossed her arms over her chest. "Hello, Garrick. I can't say that I did." Her reply had his smile shifting to a lopsided grin, which she found even more of a turn-on.

He blatantly looked her up and down again. "I find that hard to believe. I know I missed you. Dreaming about you last night just wasn't the same as seeing you in person."

Oh, shit. That had to be one of the stupidest pick-up lines, but Nika's libido decided it liked it, a lot. The idea of Garrick dreaming about her – more than likely doing the wicked things that lurked in his eyes – caused her nipples to tighten beneath her long-sleeved T-shirt. Luckily, the way she had her arms crossed, they hid them from Garrick's view.

Not wanting him to know what kind of affect he was having over her, Nika forced herself to roll her eyes. "So me telling you I'm not interested in your dreams prompted you to come back to the pub so I can tell you to your face again."

"Who says you rejected me?" he asked huskily. "No, you definitely didn't seem uninterested. In fact, you let me take you over and over again while you screamed my name."

An ache built between her legs, and wetness pooled in her pussy. Somehow, she managed to keep her breaths even and steady, even though her heart raced. She had to end this before she let on how he was truly affecting her. If she broke, Garrick would only use her weakness to his advantage.

In what she hoped was a bored-sounding tone, she said, "Yeah, that had to be a dream, since I don't plan on making that a reality for you. What do you want, Garrick?" When he opened his mouth, she quickly added, "And don't say me."

He chuckled. "All right. You win, for now. I came here to eat. What do you suggest?"

"Everything is good. Lee's an excellent cook. I'll give you a menu, and you can decide from that." She went to the end of the bar and reached under it to the stack of

menus she kept there. With one in hand, she went back to Garrick and put it front of him. "I'll give you a few minutes to decide."

In a cowardly move, Nika went back inside the kitchen. She didn't care. She had to get away from Garrick to get a grip on herself. The man practically oozed testosterone and had a body she wanted to lick and kiss; she had to be very careful around him.

"Was it a customer?" Lee stood near the stove, stirring a batch of his special recipe cream of leek soup.

"Yes. He's going to be ordering some food. I'm just giving him time to decide."

"So you came in here to hide?"

"I'm not hiding," she said, trying to dredge up some indignation.

"And who is the customer? I still say your hiding, because you don't normally come in here until you've taken the order."

With a huff, she said, "If you must know, it's Garrick, the guy from last night."

Lee chuckled. "I know."

"What do you mean, you know? If you do, why did you bother asking me?"

"I took a peek out in the taproom after I saw the kitchen door smack you in the arse. And I asked, because I wanted to see whether you would try to tell me it was somebody else. He got to you last night, didn't he?"

Nika quickly shook her head. "Garrick? No, he didn't. He's not my type."

"I would say yonder muscle-bound man *is* your type. You were practically drooling over him last night."

She gave Lee a scowl. "I was not. I don't go for the brawny, six and a half foot, sexy, gorgeous type." At his snicker, she groaned. "All right, I'll admit that I find him attractive, but that doesn't mean it will go beyond that point."

"Why not? That rotter, David, isn't coming back. You're young enough that you shouldn't be wasting away in this pub."

"I'm hardly wasting away, as you put it. I'm just not ready yet. Plus, running the pub doesn't give me much free time to pursue a social life."

"You're using that as an excuse."

"So what would you like me to do? Go back out there, throw myself at Garrick, and have hot monkey sex with him right there on top the bar?"

"If it will make you happy, I won't stop you." Lee's lips twitched. "It's your pub. You can do whatever you want in it."

They both burst out laughing at the same time. "If I did that," Nika said through giggles, "it would be the fastest way to get the pub shut down."

At that precise moment, the kitchen door swung open, and Garrick walked in. "I don't know about you, but I'd be willing to risk it if it meant you *did* have hot monkey sex with me."

Nika's face grew hot, no doubt turning a bright shade of red. She wished she could crawl into a deep, dark hole, while Lee laughed his head off like a fool.

Chapter Three

Garrick had heard the entire conversation between Nika and Lee. The door that divided the taproom from the kitchen didn't present much of a barrier for his werewolf-sensitive hearing. When Nika had made the crack about throwing herself at him to have hot monkey sex – in his case it would be hot wolf sex – he'd found the idea not half bad. He also couldn't pass up the chance to throw Nika's words back at her.

Seeing the lovely shade of red coloring her cheeks, he wanted to drag her into his arms and kiss her senseless. Listening to her banter with Lee, Garrick knew she was the type of woman he needed to have as his mate. One who would be able to give as good as she got. A woman who could be just as outlandish in speech as he could when the mood struck.

"What . . . what are you doing in here?" Nika asked with a stammer.

"Well, since it seemed to be taking you awhile to come back for my food order, I decided to come in here and tell Lee what I wanted. It isn't as if there is anyone else out there."

Nika opened her mouth to say something in return, but Lee beat her to the punch. "Then what would you like, Garrick?" he asked.

"I'll have the bangers and mash."

"Will do."

Once Lee turned to start cooking his food, Garrick took Nika by the elbow and led her back out to the empty taproom. He walked her around to the opposite side of the bar and positioned her to stand between two stools facing him. He crowded her, not leaving much space between their bodies, and placed his hands on the bar to cage her in with his arms.

"So," he said. "How about that hot sex you were talking about?"

She looked at him as her face went white. "I-I was only joking."

"Are you sure? You did call me sexy and gorgeous. And you said you find me attractive."

"What were you doing? Listening at the kitchen door?"

"No. I just have exceptional hearing, especially when my name is mentioned in a conversation."

"Didn't you ever learn it's rude to listen to other people's conversation? Get out of the way, Garrick."

She put a hand on his chest and gave him a shove, but didn't exert enough effort to move him. He captured her hand to hold it in place before she pulled it away. "You can touch me, Nika. I want to feel your hands on me." When she didn't make a move, he skimmed her hand across his chest and slowly down his abs, glorying in the sensation of her fingers gliding over him through his clothes. Reaching the top of his jeans, he said huskily, "Don't you want to see what being this close to you does to me?"

He pushed her hand slowly lower. Just as it came to rest on the bulge in his pants, Nika sucked in a breath. The scent of her arousal bloomed around them. It was too much for Garrick. Using his other hand to hold the back of her head, he brought his lips down to hers as she gently palmed his cock.

Needing more of her, he angled his mouth over hers and swept his tongue along the seam. With a sigh, Nika opened for him. He pushed inside, the taste of her filling his senses. Her tongue met his, holding nothing back. Her fingers molded to his hardness, learning the length and thickness of him. His cock jerked, and Nika softly moaned.

Kissing her with hungry need, Garrick rocked his hips against her hand, pushing his cock tighter into her grip. His wolf tried to rise to the surface, but he ruthlessly shoved it back. It whimpered, wanting to claim his mate as much as the man did.

The sound of the pub's entrance door opening had them breaking apart. Garrick gazed at Nika to find her lips swollen from his kisses, giving her the look of a woman who had been thoroughly plundered. Her eyes appeared dazed. He brushed his thumb along her plump lower lip, then went and sat on one of the stools.

Nika seemed to pull herself together, and just in time. An older couple walked through the door and took a seat at one of the tables. Garrick watched Nika become all business, easily chatting with the couple as she took their drink order. She didn't look at him when she returned behind the bar to pour them their beverages and retrieve a couple of menus, which she then brought to the couple's table.

After dropping off the menus, Nika walked back past him and into the kitchen without acknowledging his presence. Garrick bit back a chuckle. She could pretend the kiss they shared hadn't happened, but he had no intention of letting her get away that easily. They were good together. His cock was still rock-hard and throbbing. Only with Nika had his wolf tried to join with him while he held a woman in his arms. She had to be his mate. Now, it was just a question of how fast to proceed. Not only did he have to convince her he was the man meant for her, but he had to tell her about him being an immortal werewolf warrior.

Then there was the small matter of when they had sex for the first time. Not only would his eyes go wolf and his claws come out when he reached climax, but his cock would swell to lock them together. He'd continue to come inside her for a lot longer than would be normal as well. *That* was something Nika was bound to notice.

He had two choices – he could sleep with her and hope she didn't freak on him, or he could tell her what he was first, then sleep with her. Both Raed and Algar did the former. Garrick was leaning more toward following their example, but he'd let it play out whichever way came about first. Getting Nika to admit she wanted him would be the first hurdle he'd have to clear before any of that became an issue.

* * * * *

She was hiding again. At least this time, Lee wisely decided to keep his mouth shut. Nika went to the small, walk-in fridge and pretended to take stock of the food inside it. The coldness helped to cool her heated body. Man, Garrick knew how to kiss a woman silly. With his lips moving over hers, she'd forgotten where they were. Christ, she'd forgotten what day it was, let alone what country they were in. She hadn't even heard the pub door open. If Garrick hadn't ended their kiss then, she would have more than likely done more than palm his cock through his jeans. She'd been seconds away from opening his pants to get a better feel of that hard thickness she'd held. Her pussy had ached to have it buried deep inside it. Garrick was big enough to fill her completely.

"Bangers and mash are up," Lee called.

Nika took a deep breath. She could do this. She'd give Garrick his meal, then take the food order for the couple. That would give her an excuse to come back into the kitchen and stay until their food was ready. If another customer happened to arrive, she'd deal with them, making a point to avoid Garrick. As long as he kept his hands and lips to himself, she'd be okay.

She stepped out of the fridge, closed the door, and picked up the plate of food under the warming lamps. Steeling herself to be in Garrick's presence again, Nika walked out to the taproom, plunked the plate in front of him, then hurried over to the table where the couple sat. She wrote down their order and made a beeline for the kitchen door.

She'd almost made it, but just as she'd put her hand on the swinging door to push it open, Garrick called her name. Squaring her shoulders, Nika turned to him and went to stand behind the bar a little away from where he sat.

"Yes?" she asked while she kept her gaze on the plate in front of him.

"I'd like an ale to go with my food."

Without saying a word, she pulled him a pint and placed it next to his plate. Before she moved her hand away, Garrick's shot out, and his fingers gently wrapped around her wrist. She lifted her gaze to his face to find him grinning.

"I know you're trying to run from me," he said in a low voice.

"I am not," she said stiffly.

"Yes, you are. You can try, but I'm not going to give up."

"It was a mistake," she hissed. "I shouldn't have let you kiss me."

Garrick's grin grew larger. "Then I'll have to prove to you that it wasn't a mistake." He brushed his thumb back and forth against the inside of her wrist.

Nika couldn't stop the shiver of awareness that shot through her. With him touching her, hearing his deep, accented voice, the trembling seemed to go right through her to her pussy. She fought the urge to squeeze her legs together to try to alleviate some of the aching emptiness.

Knowing she had to set the boundaries before he pushed too far, she said, "Look, Garrick, it's not going to happen. Give up. So we kissed. That won't make me change my mind. Why don't you admit defeat and leave me alone." She yanked on her wrist, but he didn't release her.

He leaned forward. "There is one thing you should know about me. Once I've set my sights on something I want, I don't usually back down until I get it."

"Well, there is something you should know about me," she said as she locked gazes with him. "I don't like getting pushed around. The more someone pushes me, the less likely it is that I'll do what they want." She gave another hard yank on her arm. This time, Garrick let her go.

Sitting up straight, he laughed. "Then I look forward to seeing how far I can push."

Nika gave him a glare before she turned and stalked into the kitchen. Garrick had no idea how stubborn she could be. And he wouldn't be the one to cause her resolve to weaken, no matter how many times he tried to kiss her. She would stay strong. She would not cave. He could hold her against his hard body, kiss her as if he couldn't survive without her, press his big cock that would feel so good inside her pussy – . She cut herself off mid thought. That way of thinking led to failure.

Handing Lee the new food order, Nika repeated inside her head, *I will not fall for Garrick, I will not fall for Garrick*. Maybe if she said it enough times it would become second nature. If only her traitorous body would fall into line, then she wouldn't have anything to worry about.

* * * * *

She. Was. Going. Insane. Garrick wouldn't leave the pub. He sat there for the rest of the day, ordering beer and food every few hours. The beers, he drank slowly, dragging them out. She gave him a bill a few times, but that hadn't worked to get him to leave. He'd pay it, then turn around and order something else. Grudgingly, she had to admit, because of him, the pub's sales were higher than a normal Saturday afternoon's.

But that didn't mean Nika wanted him to hang around for hours, driving her crazy. As a few other customers came and went, she felt his gaze following her. And if she happened to look his way, the heated stares he sent her were enough to kick her libido into double time. So she spent most of the day aroused, aching for a man she should have nothing to do with. At least he didn't try to touch her again. If he had, Nika would have come very close to giving Garrick exactly what he wanted – her.

Finally, as the sky lost its brightness, Garrick got up from the stool and headed for the pub's exit. Nika followed him with her eyes. He turned to face her, giving her a knowing grin that said she hadn't seen the last of him, then walked out.

The breath she hadn't realized she'd been holding left her lungs in a whoosh. Nika didn't know how much more she could take. She hoped he wouldn't come back later that night, because if he did, she was in so much trouble. She didn't think she had enough stamina to handle round two.

Chapter Four

Garrick arrived at home just in time to meet up with the other warriors in the large foyer before they went out to hunt their prey. Due to the full moon, they all expected to be kept pretty busy. Wolfric and Dolf had already started arguing about who would get to use their sword the most, and how many prey they each would put down.

Raed didn't let them go on for very long. "All right, you two. You can carry on your competition once you're out hunting." He looked at Garrick. "Nice to see you made it back in time. I was beginning to wonder if you would."

"We were all thinking we'd have to go out without you," Algar said.

"Maybe Garrick had a perfectly good reason to be out all day." Kamryn chided them. She stood beside Algar, her mate.

"Yeah, Garrick," Wolfric said. "Where were you?"

Garrick shot him an annoyed look. "None of your business. And there was no question I'd make it back in time to hunt."

Brand—the biggest of them all and the quietest—leaned toward Garrick and breathed in deep. "A woman. I can smell her all over him."

With a loud growl, Garrick shoved Brand away. "Keep your nose to yourself, jackass. I said it wasn't any of your business." At Brand's nearly imperceptible smirk, Garrick looked around to find the others staring at him. "What?"

"I do believe Garrick has found his mate," Dolf said with a loud laugh.

"Shut the hell up." Garrick shot back.

Raed cleared his throat to gain his attention. "Is it true? Have you found her?"

He nodded. "Yes."

"If you've spent the day with her, I assume we'll be meeting her soon."

Garrick wished he could have had this conversation with Raed away from the others, but it was too late for that now. His brothers-in-arms stood there with expectant looks on their faces.

"Not exactly," he begrudgingly admitted. "She's not cooperating."

Wolfric elbowed Dolf as they started to laugh, and said, "I guess the smartass' woman isn't going to be an easy conquest. She's going to make him work for it."

Garrick flipped them both off. "Piss off, you bloody idiots. She'll come around. It's just going to take time."

"Leave Garrick alone," Kamryn said. "There is nothing wrong with fighting for something you want." She moved to stand in front of him and gave him a kiss on the cheek before she went back to Algar's side. "I'm happy for you. And if Lexi wasn't resting upstairs, I'm sure she would tell you she feels the same way. So what's her name and what's she like?"

With a sigh of defeat, he said, "Her name is Nika. She owns The Old Sow pub."

Algar nodded. "I heard new owners had taken it over. Is she from Norwich?"

"No. She's an American from California."

"Another mate from North America," Kamryn said with a smile. She was originally from Canada and Lexi was from the States, just like Nika.

"Enough about my soon-to-be mate," Garrick said. "I don't know about you guys, but I'm ready to take out some prey. And since Wolfric and Dolf want to stand here gossiping like a couple of old ladies, I guess I'll just have to step up and take out the ones they would have."

"No fucking way is that going to happen," Wolfric bellowed. Both he and Dolf spun on their heels and walked out of the house.

Garrick followed not too far behind, and Brand took up the rear. Raed and Algar were always the last to leave, since they usually took the time to say goodbye to their mates. Garrick didn't want to be a witness to that, especially now that he'd gotten a good taste of Nika. Seeing the others with their mates made him wish for things that weren't even remotely close to being reality. Yet.

Once he was inside his car and driving down the mansion's curving driveway, a smile played across his lips. Nika had done her damndest to get him to leave the pub. The looks of displeasure she kept sending his way had only added to the fun. He couldn't wait to see what her reaction would be when he showed up at the pub later that night, closer to closing time. She more than likely thought she'd gotten rid of him . . . at least for the rest of the day.

Parking the Audi on one of the side streets in the area he'd been assigned to hunt, Garrick headed for the large, fenced-in community park. That was always the first place they checked, especially during the first night of a full moon. Parks were the favorite stalking places of Fenris' get, and where the older ones took the newly turned to shift for the first time. The parks were usually empty of mortals once darkness fell, but were close enough to homes for the new werewolves to have the chance of making their first kill.

Inside the park, Garrick continued cautiously, walking deeper into the trees along a well-worn jogging path, keeping his senses open for any sign of a werewolf lurking nearby. He sniffed the air, but it was blowing upwind of him, which meant his prey would catch his scent before he caught theirs.

He froze in place when a werewolf's howl sounded somewhere closer to the middle of the park and off to his right. Then another and another, and another reached his ears. He'd hit the jackpot with at least four of his prey to be taken down. They'd probably picked up his scent and even now were hunting him as he hunted them.

Silently moving in the direction the howls had come from, Garrick willed his sheathed broadsword onto his back with the scabbard strapped across his chest to hold it in place. He reached over his right shoulder and grasped the pommel as he slowly

pulled it free. The bright moonlight flashed on the blade, which was a mix of hard steel and silver. The precious metal was deadly to all of Fenris' werewolves. A strike through the heart, or decapitation with his broadsword would end their existence.

A noise sounded off to Garrick's left. Two large werewolves leaped out of the bushes. Garrick lifted his sword and caught one across the shoulder on the way by. The wolf howled and the wound sizzled. The second werewolf charged. Garrick's sword hit home once more, this time slicing across a furred chest.

As the two wounded werewolves circled him, Garrick saw two more step out of the shadows. Obviously, the ones who had attacked him were newly turned, while these two were the older pack members. They were using him to test the newer ones.

Once again, the wounded werewolves came at him. He met them head on, skewering one through the heart while he shoved the other away. Sharp claws raked down his side as the still-standing werewolf stumbled back. Growling in anger, he swung out with his sword. The blade landed true, slicing through the neck and taking the head clean off.

As the body dropped to join the first on the grass, the older two pack members jumped in to finish what the newer ones had started. Garrick willed his sword and clothes away as he shifted. In a split second, he took on his half wolf/half human werewolf form. Taller and stronger, he attacked the two with his sharp teeth and claws.

Their snarls and growls filled the air. Blood welled from a few more claw marks. Garrick fought fiercely, until he sensed his opponents weakening. He towered over his trembling prey and willed his sword back into his hand while still in his werewolf form.

"Time to die," he said in a gravelly voice. Unlike Fenris' get, he maintained the ability to retain speech and higher thinking after shifting.

With quick stabs and slices, Garrick ended their existence. Having no more prey to put down, he shifted to his human form and quickly willed clothes onto his body. Panting, he no longer felt the sting of his wounds. Shifting had completely healed them.

He eyed the scattered werewolf bodies, then looked up at the night sky and called out. "Tiw, I call upon you. I have need of your fire."

As soon as the words left his mouth, blue god-fire engulfed the bodies. He shaded his eyes. The flames burned brighter and hotter, turning the dead to ash. An unnatural wind blew what was left of the beasts away. Not even a scorch mark remained behind to mar the grass. No trace of what had happened here was left behind for mortals to find.

A few more kills like this one and the time until he could see Nika would pass quickly. Leaving the park, Garrick set off to find more prey.

* * * * *

In his den underneath a non-descript farmhouse Nathan – the pack leader of the werewolves sired by Fenris the wolf – watched the members of his pack returning from their night of hunting. He cursed when they straggled through the tunnel opening to the large, central cavern that made up the main part of the den. Less than half of those who had gone out had returned. Most of them were the newly turned, who had instinctively found their way to the hidden den before their first shift.

The Anglo-Saxon god's warriors must have been hard at work cutting down his numbers. Since finding their base, he'd suffered too many losses. *This is unacceptable*, he fumed. His kind was far superior to those warriors. They may be able to shift into werewolves, but their lack of a bloodthirsty nature made them pitiful. A *true* werewolf craved the blood of the mortals around him. A *true* werewolf thrived on the fear of his victims.

Nathan shifted to his wolf form and secluded himself inside the smaller cavern that was his private quarters just off the central one. He hated the servants of Tiw, but so far, everything he'd tried to rid himself of at least one of the warriors had failed miserably.

He lay down and put his head on his outstretched paws. He had to think up a new plan. There had to be a weakness each of the warriors possessed that he could use against them. So far, the only one he knew of was their mates, but only two of the

warriors had claimed mortal women as their own. Kept inside their home base, the women were too well protected by their god. That only left one option – he'd have to watch and wait for another warrior to find his mate, and when he did, he'd have to grab her quickly.

Not an easy task to steal the mortal female before her mate fully claimed her, but not an impossible one, either. There would be a tiny window of opportunity after the warrior found her. They usually acted fairly quickly to get their mates safely behind the walls of their mansion.

Nathan sighed, and his wolf's body slumped. He'd have to send some of his werewolves out to watch the warriors during the day. Such a tactic had paid off before and it should work again. But this time, he'd send the ones he'd personally handpicked to turn. These men had been the scum of society even before becoming werewolves. If one of the warriors found his mate, any one of his chosen would be more than capable of capturing her and bringing her to him. With the proper incentive – like being able to have some alone time with the woman – they'd be more than happy to get the job done.

Chapter Five

Since the last customer of the night had left more than a half hour ago, and there was only forty-five minutes before she closed, Nika sent Lee home early. Even if a few last-minute customers made an appearance, they more than likely wouldn't be ordering anything to eat.

"Are you sure you don't want me to stay?" Lee asked as Nika walked him to the pub's front entrance.

"I'm sure. It's been a long day for both of us. Your wife will be happy to have you home early. She probably thinks I work you too hard as is."

Lee chuckled. "She doesn't mind. She's happy to have me out from under foot. That's what keeps our marriage going – not having to be constantly in each other's presence. Besides, you give me a couple of days off."

Nika shook her head. "Go home. I'll see you on Tuesday."

She usually closed the pub on Sunday and Monday, those days being the ones where she practically had no customers at all.

Lee now gone, Nika let the quietness of the pub wrap around her. She really did love owning the place. Buying a bar may have originally been David's dream, but the longer she stuck it out here, the more she didn't want to let it go. And in Norwich, people led life at a much slower pace than they did in California. She found it no hardship living in the UK.

She had family back in the States, but she and her mom were barely on speaking terms. Her dad had died when she was three. Nika had no memories of him. The rest of her extended family, which wasn't much, lived too far away for her to have formed any kind of tight bond with them.

Starting the nightly clean up, Nika found her thoughts wandering to Garrick. Something they had annoyingly done more than a few times over the course of the last couple of hours. She had to stop thinking about him, but for some reason, her brain didn't want to let the kiss they had shared go. It seemed to pop into her head at the most unexpected times. The memory was so vivid she swore she still felt his lips moving on hers while he tasted her. Then there was how his cock had felt cupped in her hand through his jeans. Just thinking about it made her pussy wet all over again.

Nika had just started to put the chairs up on the tables so she could vacuum, when the pub's door opened, and Garrick stepped inside. She stood frozen in place as he spotted her, and with a look of pure hunger on his face, he walked toward her. Her heart sped up. This was so not good. Alone, with no one there to distract her, she was liable to act on the hot flare of arousal that suddenly washed through her at the sight of him. She had to get rid of him, and fast.

He was about halfway to her when she finally found her voice. "I'm closing. You'll have to come back on Tuesday when the pub will be open again."

Her words didn't slow Garrick down. He kept walking toward her. "It's not quite closing time, so you can't kick me out yet."

"I . . . I decided to lock up early," Nika stammered when he stood in front of her, looking at her as if he wanted to gobble her up.

"Good. That way I get to have you all to myself."

Garrick went to wrap his hand around her nape, but she quickly ducked out from under his arm and put the table between them. "I told you what happened earlier today was a mistake." As he stalked her around the table, Nika kept moving, keeping it between her and him.

"It didn't feel like a mistake to me," he said. "If anything, it felt pretty damn right. And you felt it too. That kiss wasn't all one sided."

She jumped out of reach when he made a grab for her again. "You caught me in a momentary lapse of weakness. It won't happen again."

"I think I'll test that theory."

Moving at a speed no one should be capable of, Garrick closed the distance separating them and dragged her into his arms. Nika couldn't hold back the shiver of awareness that shot through her. The length of her body was plastered to his. Her breasts were flattened against his hard chest. Her nipples grew taut, causing them to feel sensitive against the material of her bra. She sucked in a ragged breath when she realized the hard length of his cock was nestled against her stomach.

With a gulp, she craned her neck to look him in the face. She had to make one last attempt to stop what was about to happen. Her will to resist was already starting to weaken. "Let me go, Garrick." Her voice didn't sound as convincing as she'd hoped.

"Not until you prove you aren't as affected as I am."

He kept one arm anchored around her waist and reached up with the other hand to cup the back of her head. His lips came down on hers, claiming them in a heated kiss. It was no gentle exploration. No, this was hungry and demanding, just like the man who held her.

Nika put her hands on his chest to push Garrick away, but instead, they clutched at his T-shirt and pulled him closer. With each pull of his lips, his tongue sweeping the inside of her mouth to duel with hers, she found herself falling deeper into his kiss. She

relaxed into him as her body went up in flames. She eagerly kissed him back while she rocked against his erection, her pussy clenched.

With what sounded very much like an animalistic-type growl, Garrick pushed the chairs off the top of the table, sending them crashing to the floor. He lifted her and sat her on the sturdy oak top. The table was just the right height for him to step between her spread legs and press the large bulge in his jeans exactly where she ached the most.

Garrick took hold of her hips and pulled her closer. Even with their clothes separating them, he felt so good. And when he ground his cock against her pussy, Nika moaned loudly into his mouth as her juices leaked into her panties. Lifting her hands to bury her fingers in his hair at the back of his head, she let the delicious sensations he created take her over.

Still kissing her deeply, Garrick skimmed his hands to the bottom of her shirt and slowly pushed it up until his palms covered her breasts. Arching her back, Nika sucked on his tongue, needing him to touch more of her. All the reasons why she should be denying him flew out of her head.

"More," she said in a voice gone husky with arousal.

"I'll give you more. I know what you want."

Continuing to rock his hips into her, Garrick brushed aside the bra cup covering her right breast, bent his head, and swirled his tongue around her taut nipple. He sucked it into his mouth, and Nika's grip on his hair tightened. As he suckled, she felt a corresponding pull in her pussy, causing more wetness to pool there. Her body climbed higher and higher as his hard cock ground against her core, and he moved to lavish the same attention on her other breast. She couldn't hold back the breathy moans she made.

"That's it," Garrick said encouragingly. "Let go."

Garrick sucked harder while he dropped his hands to her hips once again and rocked faster against her pussy. In the back of her head, Nika became aware of something sharp pricking through the material of her jeans, but the pleasure that quickly built inside her soon pushed that thought away.

Unbelievably, Nika felt herself on the verge of an orgasm. With no skin-to-skin contact except where Garrick sucked at her breast, she fell over the edge. A keening cry escaped her lips while her empty pussy rhythmically clenched.

Panting through little aftershocks, she let go of Garrick's hair. He released her nipple, but kept his head down and pressed to her chest. By slow degrees, his hands loosened their grip on her hips. He took a deep, shuddering breath before he lifted his head. His cock still lay thick and hard against her.

Garrick cupped her face and gave her a gentle kiss. When he pulled away, he said softly, "Now tell me you don't want me."

Nika closed her eyes. She couldn't exactly say no when he'd been able to bring her to climax just by dry humping her. She lifted her eyelids to find Garrick staring at her with that hungry look of his. No point in denying her attraction to him when to do so would be a bald-faced lie.

She swallowed. "I'll admit that I want you, but I don't know if I'm ready to start another relationship."

Garrick stiffened. "When did this other relationship of yours end?"

"A few months ago. My ex and I bought the pub together, but he left it all to me when he took off with his new fling to London."

"Was he from the States too?"

"No, but I met him there. He was originally from Norwich," she said. "Look, what I'm trying to say is, David and I had been together for a year and half. His walking out on me, leaving me with a pub that is barely getting by and not enough capital for me to go home even if I wanted to . . . well, I've sort of sworn off men for a while."

"Because you're afraid of getting hurt again." Garrick said it as a statement rather than a question.

"Yes. I had started to think my ex was *the* one. It hurt when he left."

"He left because he wasn't the one meant for you."

She eyed him. "And I guess that means you think you're the one who is?"

He ran the pad of his thumb along her bottom lip. "Of course I am. And I will never leave you."

At Garrick's words, Nika snorted. "Yeah, right. You just met me yesterday and already you have me pegged as your one and only."

His gaze locked with hers and held. "You *are* the one, Nika," he said in a serious voice. "I have proof to back it up, but you aren't ready to hear it yet." Garrick released her and took a step back. "I'm going to leave now, but I'll see you tomorrow."

"I told you, the pub is closed for the next two days."

"You live upstairs, right?" he asked as he slowly backed away.

"Yes."

"Then you'll be here."

Once Garrick left and the pub's door closed behind him, Nika sat on the table, thinking over what had happened. She was so damn confused. She wanted Garrick – oh, how she wanted him – but could she afford to take the risk? That was the big question. Could she put her heart on the line once again and let another man into her life? And it wouldn't only be great sex with Garrick. Nika had a feeling he would want it all – the whole nine yards, ending with a committed relationship.

She slipped off the table and went to lock the entrance door. She'd sleep on it and see how she felt in the morning. She didn't have to let Garrick in if she didn't want to. There was nothing stopping her from keeping the pub locked up tight.

* * * * *

The next morning, Garrick awoke a bit earlier than usual with the day looking to be a good one since he would be spending it with Nika. After last night, when she'd come in his arms, he was more than sure she was his mate. With the sound of her passionate cries echoing in his ears as she reached her climax, his claws had come out, and his eyes had gone wolf. He'd had to hide his face against her chest until he'd

brought his excitement under control. If she had been spread out naked on that table, he would have had a much harder time of it.

He showered, shaved, and then left the house without telling anyone where he was going. There really wasn't any point. Once they realized he was gone, they would know he was with Nika.

He arrived at the pub, parked his car, and got out. Since the entrance to the pub would be locked, he walked around the building until he found the side entrance. He assumed this one led to the upstairs flat. The door at the back had to be the kitchen's entrance.

Garrick rapped his knuckles loudly on the door and waited. And waited. He knocked again, but he didn't hear any movement from the other side. A twist of the doorknob showed it was locked. He headed around to the back door to try there, but met with the same result. Thinking maybe Nika had unlocked the main entrance for him after all, he walked back to the front of the pub. He pulled on the wooden door, but it was locked as well.

He backed away from the door until he saw the upper story's windows. One was open a little to let in the early spring air. "Nika!" he shouted. She didn't come to the window. "Nika, come down." Still no response.

Garrick wanted to growl with frustration. Obviously, leaving Nika alone for the rest of the night by herself had given her ample opportunity to change her mind about him all over again. *Shit*. He didn't want to have to convince her he was the one for her every time he saw her.

"Let me in, Nika!" he shouted more loudly than he had before.

This time, he heard her voice through the open window, but he couldn't see her. "Go away, Garrick."

"I told you I was coming back today. I thought we had things worked out last night."

"No, *you* had everything worked out last night. I never agreed to anything."

He growled, low and deep. Instead of moving forward, he'd lost ground with Nika over the course of the night. He wasn't going to let that happen.

"Either you let me in, sweetheart, or I'm going to make a huge nuisance of myself until you do."

Nika suddenly appeared in the window. "Why do you have to make things so difficult? And don't call me that."

"I could be asking you the same thing. Come on. Let me in. You know you want to."

Garrick stood his ground while she glared down at him through the window. To show her he was not just going to walk away because she wanted him to, he crossed his arms over his chest and calmly stared back up at her.

She threw her hands in the air. "Fine, you win. Come around to the side, and I'll let you in. I don't need you making a scene in front of my pub."

Chapter Six

Garrick smiled in triumph as he walked back to the side entrance. His mate could balk and do her best to push him away, but she would soon learn they were meant to be together.

Nika stood at the open door waiting. Before he stepped in, she put a hand on his chest to keep him out. "A few ground rules first. No touching or kissing."

He looked pointedly down where her hand rested on his chest. "It would seem you're already breaking one of your rules."

She quickly yanked her hand back. "As I said, no touching or kissing. And none of this 'we're meant to be together forever' crap, either."

Garrick sighed dramatically. "Well, there go all my plans, right out the window. Are you sure about the no touching or kissing?"

"Doubly sure. Either you agree to my rules or I'm not going to let you upstairs."

"All right. I'll follow your rules." He would agree to anything at this point.

Nika took a step back, giving him enough room to walk into the small entranceway hall. A flight of stairs at the end of it led to the flat. She shut the door behind him before brushing past him and going up the steps. He followed behind her, enjoying the view of her backside.

When they reached the flat, Nika motioned for him to go into the living room. Garrick took a seat on the couch and looked around the room. It was sparsely decorated with an armchair, coffee table, and the couch he sat on, all of which had all seen better days. A tele sat on another smaller table across from the couch. The light blue paint on the walls was a bit faded, and the dark blue carpet on the floors showed signs of wear and tear. The improvements done on the pub downstairs had not extended to the flat above.

Slipping onto the armchair kitty-corner from the couch, Nika didn't say anything when she stared in his direction. The annoyance she had to be feeling about having him in her home showed on her face. Her scowl was hardly welcoming.

"You don't have to sit way over there," he said and patted the couch cushion next to him. "There is plenty of room here."

"I think I'll stay where I am. It's safer this way."

"What's the matter, Nika? Don't you trust me not to break your rules?"

"Of course I don't trust you," she said with a sneer. "So far, you haven't really listened to me when I've said to leave me alone."

"Only because I know deep down inside that isn't what you want."

She rolled her eyes. "So now you're a mind reader?"

"No." Garrick decided it was time for them to move off this particular subject.

"Are you going to offer me something to drink? My throat is kind of dry from having to yell at you to let me in."

"Fine." Nika stood. "All I have up here is bottled water in the fridge. Is that okay?"

"Water is all right with me."

He watched her walk out of the living room and disappear down the small hallway off to his right. The sound of a fridge door being opened and then shut reached his ears. Nika returned a few seconds later.

When she moved closer to the couch to hand the bottle of water to him, he stuck out his leg and purposely tripped her. As she landed on him, Garrick fell back on the couch, twisting so Nika ended up sprawled along his body. Her breath left her lungs in a whoosh, and her lips hovered over his. She stiffened, but didn't make any move to get off.

Trying to act the part of the innocent, he said, "Don't look at me. You're the one who tripped. I just let you use my body for a softer landing."

Her gaze lingered on his lips. "I wouldn't exactly call your body soft."

"You've got that right," he said huskily and lifted his hips into her, letting her feel his hard-on. She licked her lips and Garrick forced himself to remain still.

"I thought I told you no touching," Nika said.

"Well, from where I'm lying, I would say you're the one doing the touching since you're on top of me." He held up his hands. "See. I'm keeping my hands to myself."

Nika's gaze drifted to his hands, then zeroed back in on his mouth. She took her bottom lip between her teeth. Intense arousal shot through him, making his cock even harder. It jerked inside his jeans as he pictured what it would feel like to have Nika's mouth sucking him deep.

With a quiet moan, she whispered, "Aw, fuck it."

Her lips came down on his. Garrick growled low, wrapped his arms around her, and kissed her back. He sucked Nika's tongue into his mouth and let her twine hers with his. While they kissed, he put his hands on her arse, shifting her so the apex of her thighs landed on his erection. She ground down on him as he lifted his hips into hers. She'd come like this the night before, but this time, he didn't want any of her clothes between them. The next time he made her come, he wanted his mouth on her pussy.

With the taste of Nika on his tongue and the scent of her arousal perfuming the air he breathed, Garrick fought to keep his wolf side under control. A difficult

undertaking, especially with her on top him, riding him through his jeans. His cock was so hard he was about ready to explode. Every time he touched Nika, his need to have her became stronger. She made him ache until all he thought about was burying himself in her warm body. Over and over again.

Garrick pushed his hands under the back of Nika's shirt, caressing her silky skin. When he reached the fastener of her bra, he released the hooks. She deepened their kiss as she shifted a little to the side and palmed his cock. The feel of her fingers running along his length had his shaft straining against the zipper of his jeans.

Holding Nika to him, Garrick sat up and slowly lifted her shirt up her body. He pulled back when it reached her unfastened bra to give her a chance to refuse if this wasn't what she wanted. In answer to his questioning stare, she took hold of her shirt and pulled it off over her head. Keeping her gaze on him, she let her loosened bra straps fall down her arms, then dropped it to the floor with her shirt.

His gaze fell to her breasts. They were definitely more than a handful, topped with dusky rose nipples. They were perfect, and he couldn't wait to have his mouth on them again.

"So beautiful," he breathed against her skin.

He nuzzled a breast before taking her taut nipple into his mouth. Garrick covered the other breast, tugging at that nipple, while he sucked on the other. Holding her this way felt like heaven.

Nika buried her fingers in his hair and held him to her while she rocked against his cock. He released her nipple and moved to take the other into his mouth. With caressing strokes, he glided his fingers down across her ribs and belly to rest on the top of her jeans. He undid the button and pulled down the zipper. By slow degrees, he pushed the waistband down her hips.

Garrick pulled away, lifted her off his lap, and made her stand before him. "I need to taste you, Nika. Will you let me?" To show her exactly what he wanted, he tugged her jeans farther down her legs.

Eyes heavy with desire, Nika nodded. "I want you to. I ache."

A couple of quick tugs, and her jeans pooled around her ankles. She stepped out of them, leaving her only in her panties. Garrick moved to stand beside her and picked her up. He carried her the short distance to the armchair and placed her on it. He went down on his knees in front of her and placed feather-light kisses across her stomach, swirling his tongue in her bellybutton when he reached it. While he kissed his way lower, he hooked his fingers into the waistband of her panties. He pulled them down her long, slim legs and off.

Skimming his hands up the inside of her legs, Garrick spread them apart. He lifted each one to rest on the low armrests. In this position, Nika was totally open to him. Looking at her pussy, he saw she was already wet. Her folds glistened with her juices.

"Seeing you like this, I could feast on you all day," he said. He ran a finger along her pussy, then brought it to his mouth for a lick. "I've tasted nothing sweeter."

"Garrick," she moaned.

"I know what you need, babe, and I'm going to give it to you."

Cupping her bottom in his hands, he lifted her as he brought his mouth down to her pussy. He lapped up more of her juices before he used the tip of his tongue to tease her clit. Nika's moans grew louder with each lick. His arousal beat at him, but he held himself in check. He wanted her to come first.

The tips of his fingers burned when his claws fought to come out. He curled his hands against her skin, fighting the shift. Once the sensation subsided a little, Garrick brought one hand to the entrance of her body. Sucking on her clit, he pushed one finger inside her. Nika gasped and tightened her inner walls while he moved it in and out. He pushed a second finger inside, angling them up higher to hit in just the right spot to make her pant and beg for more.

She was close. It wouldn't take much on his part to push her over the edge into release. Knowing that, his shaft throbbed even more, and a bead of pre-cum leaked from the tip. Unable to stand having his cock pinched by the front of his jeans, he undid them with his other hand.

Nika lifted her hips, riding his fingers. Just as her pussy started to clamp down on them, he quickly pulled them out as his claws burst through the tips of his fingers. He licked and sucked on her clit until she settled.

Knowing his eyes had gone wolf – since his eyesight had become more acute – Garrick tried to hide his face against Nika's stomach until he got himself under control. She didn't give him the chance. Bringing her legs down on either side of him, she pushed on his shoulders and sat up. Using her body, she knocked him over onto his back on the floor. He quickly shut his eyes.

She straddled his thighs and pushed his shirt up to his chin. "It's your turn," she said before she kissed a trail across the top of his chest.

"Nika," he said hoarsely. "If you keep this up, I'm going to make love to you."

She dragged the flat of her tongue over his nipple, and he hissed a sharp breath through his clenched teeth.

"I know."

She wanted Garrick. Right this moment, she was beyond being able to think past the demanding needs of her body. He may have given her an orgasm, but she was far from sated. He'd woken her body from a three-month dry spell, and there was no denying it wanted his cock buried inside it.

Licking his other nipple, Nika reached down to his open jeans. She parted the material, allowing his cock to spring free. With the tip of her index finger, she circled the broad tip, rubbing a bead of pre-cum into Garrick's skin. Her pussy clenched. She wrapped her hand around his thick length and pumped it up and down.

Garrick groaned as he lifted his hips and pressed his cock tighter into her fist. "I like having your hands on me."

Inching down his body, she yanked his jeans down over his muscled ass. "Take these and your shirt off, Garrick. I want to see all of you."

Only lifting off the floor far enough to drag his shirt over his head and to push his pants down, he then kicked them the rest of the way off while Nika rose on her

knees. Once he was free of them, she settled back down on his thighs. She ran her gaze over his nakedness. His body was a sculptured work of art. All hard, cut, well-defined muscles. She skimmed her hands up his washboard abs to his solid chest.

On the cap of his left shoulder, she noticed a black tattoo. Turning his arm slightly to get a better view of it, she traced it with the tip of her finger. It looked to be Anglo-Saxon in design. Having lived in Norwich long enough to have heard of the Sutton Hoo ship burial, she recognized the style from some of the items for sale in tourist shops. The tattoo depicted the figure of a stylized man flanked on either side by two stylized wolves standing on their hind legs. She'd always found a tattoo on a man sexy, and decided she'd trace it with her tongue later if the opportunity arose.

Turning her attention back on Garrick's cock, she moved a little bit farther down his legs and dragged the flat of her tongue along the underside of his shaft. Harsh breaths punched out of his mouth when she took him in a firm grasp at the base and circled the head with the tip of her tongue. Nika opened her mouth and sucked him inside. Using her other hand, she gently fondled his balls.

Her head bobbed up and down as she took him almost to the back of her throat and back out. Taking him in again, she stroked the sensitive spot just under the flared head with her tongue. Garrick uttered a strangled groan, his hips arching to pump his cock into her mouth.

He only let her pleasure him for a few minutes more before he pulled on her arm. "Enough, Nika. I can't take anymore."

After giving him one last lick, she moved up his body until she straddled his hips. Nika positioned herself over his cock, then slowly pushed down. She watched Garrick as she took him to the hilt inside her pussy. His eyes were closed, but he wore an expression of extreme pleasure on his face.

Nika braced her hands on his wide chest before she started to ride him. He was so thick and long, he filled her to capacity. Up and down, she moved on him. Their moans and harsh breathing increased in volume when she set a quicker pace. She angled her hips, and Garrick's cock hit her G-spot with each stroke. Closer and closer,

another orgasm neared, her body coiling tighter. Then she was there. With a whimpered moan, she came, her inner muscles clenching tightly around his thick shaft.

In a show of strength, Garrick rose into a sitting position and flipped her on her back, keeping their bodies joined. Holding most of his weight on his bent arms, he pumped his hips between her legs, striving for his own release. His cock grew even harder when he pushed her into another climax. He pumped once, twice, then drove into her one final time. As Garrick started to come, his cock swelled, seemingly locking deep inside her until he couldn't move. His deep moans filled the room as he came.

Nika held him tight, and much to her surprise, she felt another splash of cum hit her inner walls. And then another a few seconds later. Garrick lay still on top of her with his head pressed against the crook of her neck. She shifted beneath him and found his cock had indeed swelled to the point where they were locked together. She sucked in a sharp breath when she felt another splash of cum.

Dear God. What the hell? This isn't normal. Nika shifted once again, but this time Garrick put a hand on her hip to hold her still.

"Just wait," he said in a gruff voice. "It'll go down soon."

It took almost a full minute for the swelling to subside and for him to stop coming. During that time, Garrick kept his face in her neck. When his flaccid cock slipped free, Nika shoved him off her. She sat up and looked down where he lay on the floor next to her.

"Do you mind telling me what just happened?" she asked.

Garrick opened his eyes and unclenched his hands. A crooked grin spread across his lips. "Considering you weren't a virgin, I would have to say you already know."

She slapped his arm. "That isn't what I meant, and you know it."

His grin faded. "That's never happened before." Garrick reached up and gently stroked her cheek. "Only with you."

Chapter Seven

Garrick watched Nika's brow furrow. He didn't think she'd let him get away with that statement without some kind of explanation. Not that he was ready to give her one. Yeah, they'd made love, but from his past dealings with her, he wasn't going to delude himself into thinking she had fully accepted him. He had to get her to accept them as being in a relationship before he told her what he truly was.

And she was definitely his mate. When he'd come, not only had his eyes gone wolf and his claws come out, his cock had swelled to lock them together. His cum had continued to shoot out of him in half-minute intervals. With his other sexual partners, nothing like that had ever happened. Only with his mate had that other wolfish part of him kicked in.

"If that has never happened to you before, aren't you a little bit concerned?" Nika asked.

He shook his head. "Not really."

Her violet eyes gave him a look that said she thought he was too nonchalant about the situation. She then ran her gaze down his body, pausing when she reached his cock. He didn't bother to look in the same direction to see what she saw. His shaft had started to harden once again.

Nika jerked her gaze back up to his face and pushed some of her light blonde hair over her shoulder. "Already? How can you be when just a minute ago you were coming like there was no tomorrow?"

Garrick avoided her question with one of his own. "And what made you think I was done with you yet?" He sat up, wound an arm around her waist, and hauled her to him. "We have most of the day left, and I intend to use it."

He put his hand on her nape and kissed her until she relaxed against him. The feel of her warm, pliant body pressed against his made his cock even harder. The combined scents of their releases had his libido kicking into high gear. And the knowledge that she was indeed his made him want to possess her once again.

Gaining his feet with her held in his arms, he said against her mouth, "Your bed? I want you on the bed."

Nika put her legs around his waist, wrapping her arms around his neck. His cock ended up nestled against her shapely bottom. She only pulled away from his mouth long enough to say, "Down the hall to the left. Second door on the right."

Garrick wasted no time getting them into her bedroom. He paid no attention to the furnishings except for the queen-sized bed in the middle of the room. Taking her down to the mattress, he stretched out on top of her. She swiveled her hips, grinding her bottom against his shaft.

The need to mate with her as a wolf – to mount her like a male claiming his female – had Garrick pulling out of Nika's embrace. He urged her onto her stomach and up on her hands and knees. Kneeling between her spread legs, he bent to nip the rounded globe of her ass. He shifted closer as he kissed a trail up to the small of her back. He made no move to enter her. Instead, he rubbed his cock against her pussy until he was coated with her juices. Holding her hips, he stroked the very tip of it against her swollen clit.

Nika moaned as she tried to rock back against him. Garrick stilled her movements. He wasn't ready to take her yet. He wanted her to be so aroused she begged him to enter her. Over and over, he stroked her clit with the head of his cock. She soon gave him what he wanted.

"Garrick, please. I want you inside me. Now."

Hearing her plea, he positioned his shaft at the slick opening of her body and surged forward, seating himself to the hilt. A half moan, half growl rumbled out of his chest. He pulled back, then slid back deep inside her.

"So tight this way," he panted as he moved in and out with long, steady strokes.

His eyesight sharpened, and his claws pushed through the tips of his fingers. He balled his hands into fists so as not to scratch Nika with them. Her inner walls clamped down around his cock, forcing another loud moan out of him. Faster, harder, he took her. Her small whimpers of need told him she was close, as was he.

Nika rocked back, meeting each of his strokes. She angled her hips, taking him deeper than he had been. Almost at the point of no return, his cock started to swell. She

cried out. Her pussy rhythmically clutched at his shaft, and she started to come, holding him in a tight fist.

Garrick threw back his head, fighting the howl of satisfaction threatening to break free. His orgasm tore through him, on and on. Still locked deep inside Nika, he put an arm around her waist and rolled them onto their sides. Another jet of cum shot out of his swelled cock. Garrick sighed his pleasure.

Keeping his claws and eyes hidden from Nika, he held her close, her head tucked under his chin. This time, she didn't say anything when he continued to come. He kissed the top of her head.

Garrick wanted to look at her back on her right shoulder to see if there was any sign of Tiw's mark starting to show. Now that they had made love, it should have begun to form beneath her skin, to mark Nika as his mate. Her mark would be identical to the one he carried on the cap of his left shoulder. But he knew he wouldn't see anything yet. It would be too soon.

When Nika relaxed against him, he let his eyes drift shut. He'd give her a chance to rest, then he would take her again.

* * * * *

Nika sat on her bed wearing her bathrobe while she watched Garrick get dressed. He'd collected his clothes from the living room. It was now evening, and they had spent the day in bed making love. Her body ached in the most intimate of places, but she wasn't regretting those aches. Garrick was an insatiable lover and made sure she found her pleasure before he found his. Compared to Garrick, David's lovemaking seemed amateurish, at best.

His amazing body now clothed, Garrick took hold of her hands and pulled her to her feet. He held her close and kissed her thoroughly. Lifting his mouth, he sighed. "I wish I didn't have to go, but I have to."

Nika smiled. "You really are insatiable. I've lost count how many times we made love, and you still want more."

"And I always will." He flashed her a sexy grin.

She pushed at his chest. "Go do your job. Life hasn't ceased to exist outside this pub." He'd told her that he worked most nights.

Garrick let her go. "I know, but I'll be back later tonight."

As they walked out of her bedroom, she said, "I wish you wouldn't."

He took hold of her arm and pulled her to stop, maneuvering her so she stood facing him. "Why don't you want me to come back tonight?"

"Remember what I said about me not liking to be pushed? We spent almost the entire day together. I need a bit of breathing space. If you want this to have half a chance of working, you're going to have to let me ease into it. If you get all possessive and clingy with me, I'll feel suffocated. I recently came out of a relationship that ended badly. You know that."

"Then what happens come tomorrow? Will you use the night to convince yourself you want nothing more to do with me again?"

"That won't happen." When he looked at her with doubt showing in his brown eyes, she said, "I promise, Garrick. I just want to take things slow. And I'm not the type of woman who can take a man into her bed and turn her back on him once the sex is over."

Garrick crowded her against the wall and put his hands on either side of her head, caging her in. He looked at her hungrily and pressed his hips into hers. Nika sucked in a breath. He was hard again.

"Good," he said. "Because you're mine. We'll take it slow for now, but I can't promise I won't stop being possessive of you. You mean a lot more to me than you think."

"I do?" she asked softly as her body reacted to his closeness.

"Yes. Soon, you'll understand why."

How mysterious. She opened her mouth to question him, but he leaned in and kissed her passionately until all coherent thought fled. She leaned into him and moaned. He pulled away, taking his warmth with him, and she moaned again at the loss.

"C'mon." He grabbed her hand and walked them to the top of the stairs that led down to the flat's entranceway.

After one last kiss, he said, "I'll be here tomorrow around noon again."

She nodded. "I'll be here."

Nika followed Garrick down the stairs and locked the door behind him after he left. She went back up to the flat, then went to the second set of stairs near the kitchen that led to the pub below. Only using the light from the stairs to find her way through the darkened taproom, she went behind the bar and grabbed a bottle of white wine from the cooler. She snagged one of the wineglasses as well and returned to the flat.

After opening the wine bottle with the corkscrew in her kitchen, Nika poured herself a glass and sat down on the couch. To fill the silence, she turned on the television. As she sipped her wine, she thought about the hours she'd spent in bed with Garrick. He was everything she could ask for in a lover. Only one thing left her unsettled – what was that thing he did when he came? Each time he'd climaxed, his cock had swelled to the point it became locked deep inside her pussy. Then there was his ability to keep ejaculating long afterward. It wasn't normal. Garrick may not have been too upset by it, but she couldn't help feeling there was something seriously strange there.

Then there was his cryptic remark about her meaning more to him than she thought. She couldn't shake the feeling he wasn't telling her something, something she may have a hard time accepting. If that wasn't the case, why hadn't he just spoken his mind? Even that first night when Garrick had returned to the pub just before closing time, he'd said something about her not being ready to hear something he had to tell her.

She had no clue as to what that *something* could be. Short of his being married and lying to her about it, Nika figured she could handle whatever he had to say. She wanted things to work out between her and Garrick. Now that she'd caved and slept with him, she had to admit he was getting to her in a good way. In his arms, she felt cherished and taken care of.

Nika snorted aloud. *Just listen to yourself.* Now she sounded like one of those romance novels she'd taken up reading shortly after David had dumped her. But it was true. Around Garrick, she felt more of a woman, and a sexy one at that. A man with his good looks who wanted to spend hours making love to her until she couldn't move . . . she'd be crazy to give that up. A few more bouts of sex like that and Nika would become addicted to him.

While she'd been lost in thought, she'd finished her glass of wine. She traipsed back into the kitchen and poured herself another. She'd give this thing between her and Garrick a chance. As long as he didn't get too pushy with her and allowed her to trust him, they'd be all right. And that was the main thing she had to overcome—being able to trust a man to not lie to her and walk out when the going got tough.

* * * * *

Nathan had been getting ready to leave the pack's den when one of the werewolves he'd sent to follow the warriors arrived. Not wanting the other pack members to hear what they discussed, he motioned for the werewolf to follow him to his chamber. He ran his gaze across the other werewolves who were either in their wolf or human forms. They were all male. When he'd become pack leader, Nathan had made sure no females would be brought into their ranks. He wanted his pack strong, not fighting amongst themselves over who had the right to mate. After last night, their numbers needed to be brought back up. That was why he'd decided to go out this night to do a little hunting of his own.

Once they were alone in his chamber, Nathan turned to the werewolf. "What do you have to report?"

The werewolf – Stephen – was a brute of a man. He stood eye to eye with Nathan, at over six feet, but was more muscular. As a mortal, he'd been a drug dealer and a rapist. He wore the evidence of his former shady life in the form of a large scar that ran from his left temple down across his cheek.

"I think I found what you wanted. I followed one of the Anglo-Saxon god's warriors."

"Which one?"

"The one that drives an Audi Spyder."

"That would be Garrick. Go on."

"He went to The Old Sow pub. Even though it was closed, he made quite a scene by yelling up at a woman in the flat above it to let him in. He was rather insistent. She eventually did, and that's where he stayed until a half hour ago. The woman didn't leave with him. I think she's the owner of the pub."

In all likelihood, the woman could be what he'd been looking for. Another warrior could have found his mate, but he had to make sure before he made a move. There was a chance she could have just been a one-day fling for Garrick. If that was the case, she would be no good to Nathan.

"You've done well," he told the werewolf. "I want you to keep watching the pub during the day to see if Garrick comes back. If he shows up there tomorrow, I'll have to pay the place a little visit."

Chapter Eight

The following morning, Nika woke up a little earlier than she usually did when she didn't have to open the pub. She'd taken her time in the shower, shaving and using her favorite lavender-scented body scrub. Afterward, she'd toweled dry, then liberally applied the same scented lotion.

She now stood in her room in her sexiest pair of panties and bra – both pale pink and sheer enough to see through – looking in her closet to see what she wanted to wear. She'd already decided on her black jeans since they hugged her curves in all the right places. Nika picked out a couple of blouses, but then decided on the violet, silk short-sleeved one. The material exactly matched the color of her eyes and made them stand out.

Once she was dressed, she went and stood in front of her dresser mirror. She turned this way and that, giving herself a thorough once over. She looked pretty damn good, if she said so herself.

After applying a few squirts of perfume to the hollow of her throat, Nika went to the kitchen to take stock of what was in her fridge, food wise. There ended up not being a hell of a lot of anything. Yesterday, she and Garrick had finished off the last of her cold cuts when they'd come up for air long enough to make a couple of sandwiches. She never kept much food in her flat, because when the pub was open, she usually had Lee whip her up something to eat.

Closing the fridge door, she decided if she and Garrick wanted to eat, they would have to go out for something. Nika never cooked anything in the pub's kitchen. That was Lee's territory, and he didn't like anyone messing with it. Not that she would. She wasn't much of a cook and would rather eat Lee's food any day over her own.

That settled, she looked over at the clock on the stove. The red numbers read 11:45. Garrick would be here in fifteen minutes. Her heart picked up its pace at the thought of being able to see him again. She'd done a lot of thinking about him during the night. She'd even dreamed about him, which wasn't surprising, considering his scent still clung to her sheets.

At five to twelve, Nika went down the stairs and unlocked the door to the flat, then raced back up. She didn't want to look too anxious by hanging around the entranceway waiting for Garrick to knock. Moving to one of the windows that faced the front of the pub, she parted the curtains and stood in front of it. From this vantage point, she had a good view of the parking lot below.

At exactly noon, she watched a silver Audi Spyder pull into the lot and park. It had to be Garrick. Nika hadn't known what type of car he drove, but the flashy sports car was exactly what she pictured he'd own. She just hadn't expected it to be quite so expensive. Whatever Garrick's job was, it obviously paid well.

When he got out of the driver's side and headed toward the pub, she slid open the window and yelled down. "Come around to the side entrance, Garrick. The door is unlocked."

He waved, then disappeared around the corner of the building.

Hearing the entranceway door open, Nika crossed the room to stand at the top of the stairs. As Garrick climbed the steps, she followed his progress with her gaze. He wore a black T-shirt that stretched across his wide chest. His blue jeans pulled tight around his muscular thighs when he lifted his leg to take each stair. The man was gorgeous, and she couldn't believe he was actually hers. She'd explored that hard body to her heart's content yesterday, and she planned to do the same today.

"If you keep looking at me like that," Garrick said when he reached the top, "I'll have to put the nearest wall to good use."

"Would that be such a bad thing?" Nika asked. She licked her suddenly dry lips.

His gaze dropped to her mouth. "I thought to take you out for lunch before I strip you naked and take you until neither one of us can move. You're getting ahead of me."

Nika had no interest in eating. She was far too hungry for the man who stood in front of her, looking at her as if she was the only thing that mattered. Her pussy clenched, and wetness pooled at the thought of Garrick pounding into her as he took her against the wall.

"What if we were to have a quick appetizer here, then you take me out to eat?" she asked in a voice gone breathy. "Then after, we can come back here and have dessert in my bed, on the floor, maybe in the shower, even."

Garrick's eyes dilated, and the bulge in his jeans grew even bigger. He backed her up against the wall. "I'm all for that."

"Good, because I don't know about you, but I don't think I can wait to have you until after we get back."

"Leaving my woman wanting is something I can't have. What my woman wants, my woman gets."

Garrick dropped his hands to her hips and held her tightly to him as he pushed his erection against her belly. Nika couldn't wait to have his big cock inside her. Aroused beyond reason, hands shaking, she reached between them and opened his jeans. She shoved her hand inside and wrapped her fingers around his shaft. His cock jerked in her hand. She gave it a tight squeeze before she stroked him a few times. Her other hand, she put on the back of his neck and brought his mouth down to hers.

Garrick took her lips in a searing kiss that made her body ache even more. His tongue stroked hers as he pulled her hand off his cock and set to work on her jeans. Once he had them open, he jerked them down to her ankles. Nika stepped out of them as he pulled away from her mouth and stared down at her sheer underwear.

"When we get back," he said gruffly, "I'm going to have to see if your bra matches your panties, then slowly take them both off you."

Breathing heavier, Nika said, "They match."

He groaned. "Then we may have to settle for fast food. Maybe even a drive-thru."

Hooking his fingers into the top of her panties, Garrick pulled them down until they fell to the floor. She kicked them off while he pushed his jeans down only far enough for his engorged cock to spring free.

He placed his hands on her sides and lifted her off her feet. "Put your legs around my waist, Nika."

She did, and he shifted his hands to her bottom and plunged into her wet pussy with one stroke. She moaned at the feel of his thick cock stretching her, filling her all the way up. He then pulled back, only to plunge deep again. Nika held onto Garrick's shoulders while he pumped his hips between her legs. He thrust into her so hard the pictures on the wall rattled.

The feel of what had to be his nails digging against her ass cheeks – though a bit sharp – excited Nika as much as his powerful thrusts. Garrick licked and kissed down the side of her neck until he reached her collarbone. She tightened her inner walls around his pumping shaft, causing them both to moan. It wasn't going to take much longer for her to come. Her orgasm was already racing to meet her.

"Don't stop, Garrick," she panted. "I'm almost there."

"I won't," he replied hoarsely. "Come for me, Nika."

He angled the way his cock entered her so it rubbed more of her clit. With a whimpered moan, she let go as an intense climax tore through her. Garrick nudged the collar of her blouse aside with his nose, then clamped his teeth down onto her shoulder. He kept thrusting hard into her pussy until his shaft swelled, locking them together. Against her skin, he made an animalistic growl while his cock pulsed deep inside her.

Nika let out a quiet moan. Another jet of cum splash against her inner walls. With a nudge of her chin, she tried to get Garrick to turn his face toward her, but he didn't move. He kept her pinned against the wall while he took deep, even breaths, as if he tried to get control of himself.

"Garrick, look at me."

He shook his head. "Not yet." His cock pulsed again and he jerked.

"You're giving me the impression you're trying to hide something from me."

"Just let it go for now, Nika."

Garrick took a deep, shuddering breath and lifted his head to meet her gaze. She didn't see anything about his face that he would need to hide from her. The only thing she saw that was a bit out of place was how his eyes looked. The pupils seemed to have contracted more than they should have. While she watched, they returned to normal size.

The swelling of his cock had diminished, and he no longer climaxed. Garrick pulled out of her and slowly let her legs down until her feet touched the floor. He kissed her forehead, then stepped back to stuff himself back in his jeans and do them up. "If you want to clean up first, then we'll go eat."

Nika bent and picked up her discarded clothes, but she made no move to go to the bathroom. "Garrick, I think we should have a talk first."

"I don't know if you're ready for the kind of talk we need to have."

She frowned. "This is the second time you've said something about me not being ready to hear what you have to tell me. Your behavior is making me wonder whether this was a good idea after all. I can't help feeling as if you're holding something important about yourself back. After my ex, I don't think I can handle a man who keeps secrets from me."

"Don't compare me to your ex, Nika. I'm not like him. I told you before, I'm not going anywhere."

"All right, prove it. Tell me whatever this *thing* is you don't think I'm ready to hear."

"Can't we drop this and just go out for a nice lunch?"

Irritated by Garrick's refusal to tell her, and the sense of wariness she felt because of said refusal, Nika pushed harder. "I really want this relationship we've started to work out, but if you're going to keep things from me, I can't see it lasting. I have to have nothing between us. I wouldn't keep secrets from you, and I expect the same courtesy in return."

Garrick narrowed his eyes. "Are you giving me an ultimatum? I have to tell you or we're through?"

"Not so much an ultimatum as an insight into how I feel on the subject of keeping secrets. You called me your woman and said that whatever I want I get. Well, this is something I want. I want this out in the open."

"You are my woman. And that being the case, it's my responsibility to look out for your best interests, even if you don't agree with how I handle certain situations. This happens to be one of them. You're going to accept that I feel it's better for you to be kept in the dark."

Nika allowed the anger she felt over Garrick's high-handed words to show in her voice. "You have to be fucking kidding me. You just didn't talk to me as if I was one of

your possessions, and that you know me better than I do myself. Where do you get off on saying that? And where are you from? The Dark Ages?"

Garrick went stiff as a board. "If you're trying to piss me off, you're doing a pretty good job of it. Now get dressed so we can leave."

He obviously wasn't going to apologize for the way he had spoken. All Nika's insecurities when it came to men rose inside her. It was almost like David all over again. It started off with him not telling her the truth about where he'd disappear to, and when she'd caught him lying, he'd turned it back on her. It had always been her fault, and if she had kept her nose out of his business, none of it would have ever happened. This situation with Garrick wasn't exactly the same, but it was too close for Nika's liking. Keeping secrets from her would only have her trusting him less and less.

"I think you should leave, Garrick," she said in a tight voice.

"What?"

"You heard me. I want you to go and not come back until you're prepared to say what you're keeping from me."

He took a deep breath and ran his hand through his hair. "Don't do this, Nika. I apologize for the way I spoke to you. It's just . . . you don't understand."

"How can I understand when you keep refusing to tell me what it is?"

"Let's forget I said anything and stick with our plans for the day."

She shook her head. "No. I meant what I said; either you tell me now or don't come back until you can."

Garrick's face lost all emotion. "All right, I guess that means I'm leaving. I'll come back tomorrow night just before closing. I'm going to need that time to figure out what the hell I'm going to say to you that won't have you pushing me away even more than you are now." He grabbed her by the arms and kissed her hard, then let her go. "Just remember, I was the one who wanted to wait until we had grown a bit closer before I sprang it on you."

Garrick spun on his heel and walked out of the flat. At the sound of his car starting outside her window, Nika slowly realized she still stood half naked with her

clothes in her arms. So much for the wonderful day she'd planned to spend with Garrick in her bed.

She walked to the bathroom, the evidence of their quick lovemaking still on the inside of her thighs. How could it have gone wrong so fast? Had she been a little too bitchy with Garrick? Probably. Shit, she was screwing everything up, but that didn't stop how she felt about him not trusting her enough to lay things all out on the table.

After she cleaned up in the bathroom, Nika went to her bedroom to change out of her blouse and jeans. She pulled on a pair of yoga pants and a loose T-shirt. Her sexy under things had gone into the wash, and she'd donned a workout bra and cotton bikini panties instead.

Regretting the way she'd handled the situation with Garrick, she went to the kitchen and took out a carton of ice cream. She took a spoon out of one of the drawers and sat down at the table to drown her sorrow in the frozen treat.

Chapter Nine

Garrick slapped the steering wheel while he cursed up a storm inside his head. So much for spending the day with Nika. The situation had gone from being exceptionally enjoyable to fucked up hellishly fast. If only she hadn't pushed him to tell her the truth about himself. He had wanted to wait at the very least a few more days, preferably a week, before he told her. Now he had to tell her tomorrow or risk the chance of her shutting him out. Not that he didn't expect some kind of reaction from her when the truth finally came out.

The lousy thing about it all, he saw where Nika was coming from. Her ex had cheated on her before he'd bailed on her and the pub. No wonder she was hesitant to trust another man. He understood that, but his telling her he was an immortal werewolf warrior was far different from his cheating on her. He couldn't exactly sit her down and say he was well over a thousand years old, and that an Anglo-Saxon god had chosen him to fight the bad werewolves that liked to stalk mortals at night. And he doubted

she would react well to the news she was his mate, and that Tiw would grant her immortality as well once she fully accepted Garrick.

He drove around for a bit before he went home. The next twenty-four hours, spent without Nika, would be hell. Every time they made love, he fell for her harder. He wanted her near him, and hated when he had to leave her. For someone who had never known if he was capable of actually falling in love with a woman, Garrick was finding out he could. After over a century of being alone, he yearned to share his life with the woman who was worming her way inside his heart.

Finally arriving at the house, Garrick parked his car in the detached garage. He headed for the front door, but when he heard the sound of feminine voices coming from the back garden, he turned and walked in that direction. Both Lexi and Kamryn sat at the wrought iron patio table. They looked in his direction when he approached.

"You're back a lot earlier than I expected you to be," Lexi said.

He pulled out the chair next to hers and sat. "My plans for the day took a bit of a wrong turn." Garrick looked at the women. "I need both of your advice."

"Something happened between you and Nika," Kamryn said.

"Yeah, it did." He blew out a breath. "She knows there is something different about me."

Lexi chuckled. "I'm going to take that to mean that you've slept with her, and she's noticed some of your wolfy traits. Such as what happens when you reach your climax."

He nodded. "For awhile, I had been able to avoid answering her questions, but my luck ran out today. We ended up having a bit of a tiff because I refused to tell her the truth about me."

"And did you tell her?" Kamryn asked.

"No." Garrick blew out another breath. "I promised her I would tomorrow night, not that she has any clue as to what I'm going to say to her. She just knows I'm keeping something from her, and she doesn't like it. She told me I can't keep secrets from her or

we're through. Her ex screwed around on her, and Nika has trust issues because of the wanker."

"So you want Kamryn and me to give you advice on how to tell Nika the truth without scaring the crap out of her," Lexi said.

"Correct. You took the news fairly well, Lexi. No offense to you, Kamryn, but you completely freaked out. I want to avoid that with Nika as much as possible."

Kamryn had indeed freaked when Algar had told her what he was. Only here at Norwich for a holiday at that point, she'd screamed at Algar to stay away from her. She'd had Lexi drive her back to her hotel, where she'd stayed hidden for a week before Brand had dragged her back to the mansion to put Algar out of his misery, and everyone else's since he had been driving them all nuts with his pinning over Kamryn.

"No, I can see why you wouldn't want that happening," Kamryn said with a laugh. "I didn't take the news all that well."

"So how should I break it to Nika so that won't happen?" he asked.

Kamryn spoke first. "First of all, and I can't stress this enough, don't shift into your werewolf form to prove to Nika you're not feeding her a line of shit about you being a werewolf. Algar's doing that to me wasn't such a smart move on his part. Your wolf form is so much easier to handle."

"All right. No werewolf form until she accepts the truth, and is ready to see me like that."

"I know it may be hard for you," Lexi said, "but tell Nika what she means to you. Don't just demand she accept you as her mate without letting her know you truly want her by your side forever."

"I told her that I would never leave her the day after I met her."

"And did she believe you?"

"Well, not really, I don't think."

"I wouldn't think so. If she has trust issues like you've said, and she really didn't know you at that point, I can see her thinking you're just feeding her a line of bull."

"I tried to convince her that I was telling her the truth."

"How did you do that?" Kamryn asked.

"By telling her that I had proof that she was the one meant for me, but I couldn't show or tell her about it yet."

The women shook their heads and chuckled.

"Oh, Garrick," Lexi said. "No wonder Nika is pushing you to tell her the truth. Saying something like that would have any girl wondering what she'd gotten herself into."

"Okay, I'll admit I haven't exactly gone about this the right way," he said. "Let's face it, back when I was mortal, I didn't have to worry about dating. And the usual women I tend to associate with are only interested in a good time for a night or two. I've never had to work this hard to win over a woman. Add the pressure of having to tell her what I am, it makes it that much more difficult."

Lexi reached over and patted his hand. "You just have to get it over and done with. Like I told Algar when he was going to tell Kamryn about our world, it's sometimes better to do it quickly – like ripping off a bandage."

Lexi drew in a sharp breath, stiffened, and put her free hand on her distended belly. Garrick looked at it and watched it move while her baby shifted inside her. "Lexi, are you all right?"

She smiled. "I'm fine. Junior here decided to give me a big kick to the ribs. He or she is running out of room. The midwife thinks I may deliver a little bit earlier than my expected due date."

Since Raed was a werewolf and Lexi was now immortal, it was out of the question for her to give birth in a hospital. So they had gone the home birth route. Even then, they had to be watchful of the midwife. They all had no idea whether the baby would take after its father's werewolf side or just be immortal, a trait it would receive from both parents. Raed had told all the warriors they needed to be at home when Lexi went into labor. Tiw may protect the mansion from Fenris' get – they literally couldn't step onto the property without running into an invisible shield – but Raed didn't want to take any chances while his mate and child were so vulnerable.

Lexi sucked in another breath. "Oh, there's another good one."

She put his hand on her hard stomach, and the baby gave a kick against his palm. This wasn't the first time Lexi had let him feel the baby move. She'd let all of them do it. Since this child would be the first one born from one of the mated couples, they all felt as if it was their baby as well. All the warriors would lay their lives on the line to protect Lexi and Raed's precious new life.

"I'm glad it's you and not me," Kamryn said. "I'm not ready for a baby yet."

Algar and she had only been mated for four months. Unlike Lexi, who had gotten pregnant shortly after meeting Raed, Kamryn hadn't. But Garrick figured Kamryn and Algar would be following Lexi and Raed's parenthood footsteps soon enough.

When the baby shifted, visibly moving Lexi's stomach again, Garrick knew he wanted to see Nika in this condition, large with his child.

Gently pulling his hand out from under Lexi's, he stood. "Thanks for the advice, ladies. I think I'm going to do a little sword practice to help me figure out how to go about handling Nika."

He willed his sword into his hand and walked out into the center of the garden. Swinging his sword, he soon fell into the practiced movements. With the familiar stretch and pull of his muscles, Garrick let his mind wander. He was going to dread tomorrow night.

* * * * *

Nika served a pint to one of her regular customers and went back behind the bar. It was Tuesday afternoon, and tonight Garrick would return and tell her what he'd been keeping from her.

After a full twenty-four hours apart, she missed Garrick, a lot. She had thought she wouldn't to quite that extent. The fact she did showed what she felt for him was a lot stronger than how she'd felt for David. She'd thought she'd loved her ex, but looking

back at it now, she didn't think it had been love, love. After the short time she'd known Garrick, her feelings ran deeper than they had for David after over a year. Could she love him already? How could that be possible? They hardly knew each other. She didn't even know where he lived. They hadn't shared much of their personal lives, either.

She hoped that would change tonight. Nika really didn't want to dump Garrick, not with how she felt about him. During the long day that had been yesterday, she'd decided she would try to be understanding and not be judgmental about whatever he would tell her. This was just a small speed bump in the road to them having a closer relationship.

Nika broke out of her musings when she noticed one of the few patrons lifting his empty beer glass in her direction to indicate he wanted another. She nodded to let him know she would bring him one. Once she had the same dark ale he'd ordered before poured into a clean glass, she put it on a tray and walked around the bar to bring it to him. Just as she reached the table, the man's friend pushed back his chair and slammed into her. She jerked in surprise, and the beer wobbled on the tray. Nika made a quick grab for it, but that only resulted in her knocking it completely over. The beer spilled down the front of her shirt.

While the man apologized, Nika righted the glass to stop more of the beer from soaking into her T-shirt. "I'm so, so sorry," he said.

"It's all right. Accidents happen. I'll just get your friend another beer."

With the spilled beer soaking right through to her bra, Nika quickly poured another pint. Once she'd safely delivered it to the table, she went to the kitchen. "Lee, can you watch the taproom for a few minutes while I go upstairs to change my shirt?"

He looked at the condition of her T-shirt and chuckled. "Had a little mishap, did you?"

"Yeah, just a little."

"Go ahead. I'll go out there in a few seconds."

Assured Lee would cover for her, Nika went back out to the taproom and up the stairs that led to her flat. She went to her bedroom and hurriedly stripped out of her

soaked tee and bra. She grabbed clean ones from her dresser, but she didn't put them on. The odor of beer still wafted around her. She definitely needed to wash off.

Once inside the bathroom, Nika grabbed a clean cloth off the shelf on the wall and stuck it under the running water in the sink. She wrung it out and swiped it across her chest and breasts. Turning to reach for one of the towels, something on the right side of her back, high up near her shoulder, caught her attention.

Nika angled into the mirror and leaned in for a better look. A patch of skin about the size of her hand looked to be bruised. Gently, she touched the blackish mark, but much to her surprise it didn't hurt. She had no idea how she could have gotten a bruise that size and not remember doing something to cause it. Whatever she had done, she must have really hit it hard to have the bruise going that color.

She shrugged. She needed to get moving. She dried her off, and then put on her clean bra and T-shirt. She couldn't waste too much time up here. Not that Lee would be inundated with customers while she was gone.

After Nika returned downstairs, and Lee went back to the kitchen, the rest of the day seemed to pass a little more quickly. A few more customers came and went, with a little increase in business once night set in.

She'd come back to the bar after serving a customer when a man walked into the pub and sat on one of the barstools. As Nika went to see what she could get him, a sense of uneasiness washed over her. There was something about him that she didn't like. Outwardly, he seemed like a normal guy. His looks were pleasant enough, but then he smiled, and she noticed it didn't reach his eyes. They were cold and flat.

Pasting a smile on her lips, she asked, "What can I get you?"

"A pint of your best ale." He looked her up and down. "You're an American?"

"Yes, but I call Norwich my home now."

Nika moved down the bar to pour him his drink. When she returned, she put it in front of him and told him how much it cost. Giving her another of his cold smiles, he fished some pound notes out of his pocket and put them on top of the bar.

As she went to pick them up, he stroked his hand down the length of her arm, caught her by the wrist, and said, "Keep the change. From the number of empty tables here, I can see you need it."

She pulled her arm away. "It's a slow night."

"Do you run the pub by yourself?"

"I'm the owner, but I do have an employee who is the cook." Nika felt the need to let him know she didn't work here totally alone.

"I guess I'll have to come back sometime and try the food."

"Lee is a great cook."

Not liking the way he continued to look at her – as if he was the hunter and she the prey – Nika left him to drink his beer. Keeping herself busy by wiping down the bar top, she felt his gaze following her every move. Unlike when Garrick did the same thing, this guy's stare made her edgy. Even though she welcomed the sight of new customers, she wished he'd hurry up and drink his beer so he could leave.

Luckily, he did just that. Once he walked through the pub's front entrance, Nika retrieved his dirty glass and found a large tip sitting next to it. She picked up both and pocketed the money. At least the man had tipped well.

Chapter Ten

Garrick sat in his car in the pub's parking lot as he practiced inside his head what he was going to say to Nika. He'd spent most of the time perfecting his speech while he'd been hunting, except for when he'd taken down a couple of his prey.

As prepared as he ever would be, he got out of his car and crossed the mostly empty lot to the pub's front entrance. There was only one car parked there, other than his. When he reached the door, he drew up short. His nostrils flared. A faint, acidic scent wafted around him. Breathing deeply, Garrick opened the door and walked into The Old Sow. The scent grew much stronger.

A low growl pushed out of his throat. Even though the scent wasn't that of a werewolf, Garrick recognized it. He had to fight to stop himself from going wolf with anger. Somehow, Nathan had found a way to mask his true scent. Whatever he did, it left an acidic smell behind wherever he went.

Needing to see how far into the pub the scent went, he followed the faint trail. He'd just about reached the bar when Nika came out of the kitchen with Lee on her heels. Garrick barely kept it under control while he watched her walk the other man to the entrance and say goodbye.

Once the door shut behind Lee, Nika walked over to join him. "You came," she said as she drew nearer.

"I told you I would."

She stood in front of him, and the smell of Nathan's acidic scent masker grew even stronger. His eyes went wolf and his claws pushed through the tips of his fingers, despite his best efforts to remain calm. With a low, wolf-sounding growl, he tried to zero in on where, exactly, Nathan had placed the scent, but Nika quickly jumped away.

"Garrick, y-your eyes. They look like an animal's. And are those . . . claws?"

Her face had gone white, and he heard her heart racing, but he ignored the signs of her fear. "He was here. He put his hands on you," he said through a growl.

"He who?" Nika asked. She kept backing toward the pub's entrance. "I don't know who you're talking about. What the hell are you, Garrick?"

The door flew open behind Nika and slammed against the wall. Nathan, along with three other werewolves, walked in.

"Yes, Garrick, why don't you tell your mate what you are? Better yet, why don't you just show her instead," he said.

Nathan nodded to his men, who shifted into their werewolf forms. Nathan grabbed Nika from behind. Garrick had no choice but to shift as well. The three large werewolves attacked him at the same time. He only had enough time to see Nika's look of horror at the sight of him before they were on him. The sound of her screams filled his head as he tried to fight them off.

Garrick used his teeth and claws to defend himself, but he couldn't get in a blow that would buy him enough time to will his sword into his hand to take out the werewolves permanently. The one behind him jumped onto his back, sinking his teeth into his shoulder, while the other two attacked him from his sides. He howled in pain. He was strong, but the three beasts were the size of Brand when in werewolf form.

Bleeding from numerous bite and claw marks, Garrick soon lost his footing, and the three overpowered him and took him to his knees. He couldn't shift without sustaining even greater injury from his attackers, so he stayed in his werewolf form and glared at Nathan. "Let her go," he said in a voice that was gruffer than his usual one. "It's me you want. Take me, but leave my mate alone."

"Oh, I intend to take you with me," Nathan said, wrapping his arm around Nika's head and yanking it to the side at an awkward angle. "But I wouldn't dream of separating you from your mate. She comes with us. Let's see how you'll like being mated to one of your prey."

Nathan shifted into his werewolf form and sank his teeth into the left side of Nika's neck where it met her shoulder. Garrick howled. Nika screamed again, then passed out, slumping against Nathan's furred body. Enraged, Garrick fought to free himself, to get Nika away from the pack leader, but the other werewolves were too strong.

Nathan shifted back to his human form and lifted Nika into his arms. "This is when you take a rest, warrior."

The three pounded on Garrick with their large fists until he lay battered and bloody on the floor. The last thing he saw before he lost consciousness was Nathan carrying Nika out of the pub, then darkness closed over him.

* * * * *

Unceremoniously dumped into the back of a cargo van, Nika came to. She quickly regained her senses, but before she could even try to make an escape, the man

who had been at the pub earlier – now her captor – climbed inside and grabbed her by her wrists. He pulled out a length of rope from his jacket pocket and bound her hands as the three other men – who were no longer furry – shoved what Garrick had become into the van next to her. She flinched when his wolf-like head brushed up against her.

Her captor laughed. "What's the matter? Don't you like your mate now that you know what he truly is?"

"And what would that be?" she asked in a shaky voice.

"A werewolf."

"Like you?"

"He's nothing like me," her captor spat. "I'm what a true werewolf should be. I'm not like your mate over there, who was given immortality and the ability to shift by his Anglo-Saxon god, but denied the bloodlust a true werewolf should have." He pulled out what looked to be a small, black sack. "Enough talking."

Easily controlling her with one hand, her captor yanked the sack over her head. He then secured her bound wrists to something inside the van. Nika tried not to panic as the van bounced. She heard a bit of scuffling, the doors slammed shut, and then . . . silence. Sensing her captor had left, she pulled on her wrists. The sound of the van's engine turning over roared through the tiny compartment, and they started to move. Nika struggled to free herself, but whatever they'd tied her to didn't budge. The van hit a bump, sending a shooting pain to where her captor had bitten her.

Sitting, unable to see anything, Nika forced back the tears that threatened to spill over. Tears weren't going to help her situation one bit. She couldn't fall apart. She had to forget that her world had suddenly become the stuff of horror movies. And that there were people who shifted into creatures that would give her nightmares probably for the rest of her life. She would not let herself freak out. Not even with the realization she'd been sleeping with one of those creatures.

Nika didn't want to believe Garrick was a werewolf, but seeing him turn into something that looked half human and half wolf, how could she not? The sight of him in that form had scared the crap out of her. And hearing her captor and Garrick calling

her Garrick's mate had done nothing to keep her fears at bay. She didn't understand how any of what she'd seen could be possible. Werewolves weren't supposed to be real. Her mind still had a hard time processing what her eyes and ears told her.

The van stopped, and she braced herself for what her captor had in store for her next. The engine cut out. Nika's heart tried to thump out of her chest as minutes passed. The back doors finally opened, and the sound of chains rattling reached her ears. She heard grunts, and the van bounced as if something heavy had been taken out of it. Nika cowered back away from the sound. They had to have taken Garrick.

Next, someone unhooked her bound wrists and dragged her outside. With her head still covered, Nika had no idea where they were. The strong hand that held her upper arm pulled her into motion. It wasn't her original captor who held her this time, because the body that brushed up against her every time she stumbled was much larger. It had to be one of the larger werewolves who had attacked Garrick.

She was taken inside a building and then forced to sit on a cold cement floor. Her bound hands were once again secured to something in front of her. The sack was yanked from her head, and it took a few seconds for Nika's eyes to adjust to the lights. Blinking, she glanced around. The building looked like an empty barn, one that would have been used on a dairy farm. There were plenty of farms in the Norwich area, and this could be one of many.

Looking to her right, Nika found Garrick, still in werewolf form, beside her. They were chained to the same raised metal bar that had been cemented into the floor. He was still unconscious. Her captor moved to stand over him, then bent down. She noticed the syringe in his hand just as he pushed the needle into Garrick's furred arm and pushed the plunger down.

"What did you give him?" she asked shakily.

Her captor stood, wearing a satisfied smile. "Nothing you would know. It's a concoction of mine that I have been working on and finally perfected. It'll stop Garrick from shifting back to his human form."

Not thinking clearly enough to realize it would be better to keep her mouth shut, she asked, "Why? Wouldn't he be weaker in his human form?"

Luckily, her captor didn't seem annoyed with her questions. "Normally, yes he would be, but not now. With his wounds, he's at his weakest if he stays like he is. If he were able to, the shift would instantly heal them. What I gave him will buy me some time to decide what I want to do to your mate before I end his existence."

With a sinister laugh, her captor motioned for the other three men to follow him as he walked away. A few seconds later, the building's door slammed shut.

Nika was at least thankful they left the lights on so she wouldn't have to sit in the dark. She turned to look at Garrick. In his werewolf form, he was even larger – height and muscle mass – than when he was in his human one. Light brown fur that matched the color of his normal, human hair completely covered his body. He even had a tail. Sharp claws tipped his fingers. Seeing them shoot out the ends of them while he was still human had been disconcerting, but actually watching him shift – his body blurring as it took on another form – had been even worse.

She shifted her gaze to Garrick's lupine head. Gone were the lips she loved to kiss so much, that had given her so much pleasure. In their place was a wolf's muzzle. Even his ears had changed. They were pointed like a wolf's and on top his head. She looked down the rest of him again. His hands and feet, though furred and tipped with sharp-looking claws, were still human in shape. His body showed where the other werewolves had clawed and bitten him. There was a particularly nasty bite in his throat, as if one of them had tried to rip it out. Blood glistened in his fur.

Garrick made a low, rumbling groan and blinked open his eyes. Even they had changed. The brown of his eyes had almost taken up the white. They were a true wolf's eyes. He slowly pushed himself into a sitting position, and Nika skittered away from him as far as her secured and bound wrists would allow.

Her breath sawed in and out of her lungs, her fear increasing now that Garrick was awake. "Don't come any closer," she said.

"Relax, Nika. It's still me."

His voice sounded different, deeper, and more gravelly. "You sure as hell don't look the same."

He gave her a sad look. "I'll shift and see about getting us out of here."

She shook her head. "He said he injected you with something that is supposed to stop you from being able to shift."

"Who?"

"The one who bit me."

"That's not possible. There isn't anything I know of that is capable of doing that."

Garrick's body blurred slightly, but he remained in his werewolf form. Nika watched him try twice more before he gave up.

"I told you," she said. "He said it was something he had been working on, and that he'd finally gotten it right."

"Mother fucker," Garrick said with a loud growl. He yanked on his hands that were bound and shackled in chains to the metal bar. "I guess Nathan thought of everything. These chains are too strong for me to break, and my wounds will keep me from regaining my strength."

"So we're stuck here until they come back and do who knows what to us," Nika said with a shiver. She didn't want to think about what horrors the other werewolves would inflict on her. Being bitten was bad enough. At that thought, she stiffened. "He—Nathan—bit me. Does that mean I'm going to turn into a werewolf too?"

"I need to look at your back, Nika," Garrick said.

She shook her head. "No."

"Nika," he said in a calm tone. "I'm not going to hurt you. I may look different on the outside, but I'm the same on the inside. I'm not some kind of beast that will try to rip out your throat the moment you come near. That would be Nathan and his kind of werewolves. They are more beast than man. In their werewolf forms, they don't have the ability of speech as I do."

She still wasn't ready to put her fears aside and snuggle up to Garrick when he looked like he did. "I take it this is your big secret. Were you going to tell me tonight?"

"Yes, and yes again. I had wanted to wait until you got to know me a bit better, but you forced my hand. I don't want to lose you, Nika. You mean a great deal to me."

"As in, I'm your mate. I didn't miss you and Nathan both referring to me in that way."

Garrick's wolf-eyed gaze met hers. "You *are* my mate."

"How can you know that? We hardly know each other. Or is it some kind of animal thing only you can sense?" Her last question came out tinged with the revulsion she felt.

"Even though it won't do anything to make you think of me as less than an animal, I'll tell you the truth. You stirred my wolf the first time I met you. With women I've been attracted to in the past, my wolf half never came into play. I've never touched a woman and had my eyes go wolf and my claws come out. And what happens when we make love . . . that is only supposed to happen with my mate, only with you."

Nika closed her eyes and took a deep, steadying breath before she looked at him again. "So you going more animal than man told you I'm your mate?"

"Yes, it does, but I'm more man than animal. I was born mortal, the same as you. I had a human mother and a father."

"So it's true? You're immortal?"

"I see Nathan told you lots of things about me when I wasn't awake. I would have never guessed him to be such a gossip." At her frown, he said, "Fine, I can see you aren't any closer to loosening up around me. Yes, I'm immortal. I was born in the late 500s A.D. here in the area of Norwich. I was a warrior in my king's court, King Raedwald of East Anglia. He, along with me and four other of his warriors, were chosen by the Anglo-Saxon god, Tiw, to protect mortals from those werewolves sired by Fenris the wolf, the son of Loki, another god. In return, we were gifted with immortality and the ability to shift into what we hunt each night to give us better odds. Tiw also placed his mark on us, what you think is my tattoo."

Nika felt all the blood drain out of her face. Garrick was over a thousand years old. An ancient warrior from old. No wonder he'd taken offense when she'd berated him for acting as if he was from the Dark Ages. He'd lived through them.

"So Nathan and his werewolves are those sired by Fenris the wolf? And it's your job to help – along with your warrior buddies – to protect mortals from them. Just how many of those types of werewolves are around?"

"More than you can imagine," Garrick said, voice grim. "All it takes to turn a mortal is a single bite from one of Fenris' get. And there isn't any cure."

She felt suddenly light-headed. "Nathan bit me," she said weakly. "I'm going to be one of those monsters."

"No, no you won't. That's why I asked to see your back. As my mate, you will be marked by Tiw as well. It should have already started to appear."

"What does the mark look like?"

"It will be exactly the same as what I have on the cap of my left shoulder. Yours will be high up on your back on the right side. In the beginning, when it starts to appear, it will look like a hand-sized, blackish bruise."

"And if I have that kind of mark?" Nika kept very still while she waited for Garrick's answer.

"Besides being marked as my mate, you'd be immune to a bite from one of Fenris' werewolves."

Nika sagged with relief. "I'm safe. I have the beginnings of the mark you described on my back."

"You do?"

"Yes, I found it today. I thought it was exactly what it looks like – a bruise."

Garrick's wolf's eyes grew serious. "I need to see it, Nika. Please."

She pulled at her bound hands. "How? Neither one of us has the use of our hands."

"Slide your hands down the bar until they're next to mine. If you sit with your back toward me, I should be able to use my teeth to pull back the collar of your T-shirt."

Nika's gaze fell to Garrick's sharp teeth. They were capable of ripping her to pieces, but now that she'd been talking to him, she felt less fearful of him. She recognized the man inside the body of the werewolf.

Garrick didn't say anything while he let her sit and make the decision as to whether or not she'd move to be next to him. In the end, remembering how strongly she had felt for him before finding out what he was, and not being able to deny those feelings now that she knew the truth, Nika slowly shifted her hands down the bar toward him.

When she reached Garrick's side, he turned his body, twisting his arms over his head. The chains attached to the bar and his wrists rattled. "It's okay, babe. I would never hurt you."

Not a hundred percent comfortable with Garrick in this form, Nika slowly turned her back toward him. He shifted closer and made a sound that was between a groan and a growl. "Garrick?" she asked nervously.

"It's just my wounds. It hurts to move around like this. Some of them have started to bleed again."

"Maybe we shouldn't do this."

"I'm all right. I can handle the pain, and it isn't as if my wounds will kill me. Being immortal, I'd have to lose my head to have that happen."

A picture of Nathan using an axe to chop off Garrick's head flashed through her head. "Please, no more talk about death, especially when that could be something looming in our near future."

Garrick moved even closer, so she sat between his furred legs with his chest pressed to her back. He then rested his lupine head on the top of her shoulder. Nika turned her head to look at him.

"We're going to get free, Nika," he said. "I'm going to try a couple of things once I've seen the mark on your back."

She nodded to keep herself from saying anything negative. She had no idea what Garrick planned. Tied the way they were, they had nothing with them that would get

the chains off him. Her bonds were only thick rope. Obviously, Nathan figured chains weren't necessary in her case.

Garrick lifted his head from her shoulder and gently took the back of her shirt in his jaws, and Nika held still. He pulled back the material and held it there for a few seconds before he released it. Silence stretched between them.

"What?" she asked. "It's still there, right?"

"Yes, it is," Garrick replied, his gravelly voice even huskier. "I can see the faint outline of the wolves and Tiw." He rubbed his furred cheek against hers. "If I could shift, I would be kissing you right now. You have no idea what seeing that mark makes me feel. I've been alone for so long. I honestly didn't think I'd care one way or the other about finding my mate. Now that I've found you, I realize how lonely my life has been. You complete me, Nika. I'll do everything in my power to protect you, and to keep you happy."

She swallowed the sudden lump that formed in her throat. Hearing Garrick say how he felt about her choked her up, but she wasn't in any state to reciprocate. "I don't mean to take away from anything you just said, but I'd really like to get out of here before Nathan and his werewolf thugs come back."

Chapter Eleven

Garrick rubbed his cheek against Nika's again. "It's all right. I know this isn't the time or place to be professing my feelings for you." He painfully inched back from her. "Turn and face me, but not so close that I don't have room to work. I'm going to try to bite through the ropes on your wrists."

"If it works, watch the skin. All right?" She did as he said.

"I'll be careful. The only skin nibbling I want to do is when I'm in human form and we're both naked."

"Garrick," Nika said with a stern look on her face.

"Fine. I'll get to work on these ropes and won't say anything more about what I'll do to you the next time I get you into bed."

Feeling the pain of each of his wounds, Garrick went up on his knees to reach Nika's wrists. He bent his head, sank his sharp teeth into the thick rope, and pulled to snap the fibers. Over and over he repeated the process, and little by little, the rope frayed. The time-consuming work took its toll on his weakened body, but he refused to stop until Nika was free.

Once the rope was frayed enough, Nika yanked on her wrists until what remained intact snapped. She quickly untangled her hands from the rope as Garrick sat back on the floor, panting a little.

"What about your chains?" Nika asked once she'd moved to his side. "You can't bite through those."

"Not unless I want to break my teeth," he said, trying for some humor. He dragged himself up straighter. "I don't know if I'll be able to do it since my shifting ability has been affected, but I'm going to try to will my sword into my hands. Then I want you to take it and use it to break the chain."

Nika swallowed. "Your sword? You have some kind of magical sword that you can make appear and disappear?"

"Something like that. We'll just have to see if I can do it, since I draw on the same power inside me to shift as I do to will my sword to my hand."

Concentrating, Garrick drew on his power. Same as when he'd first tried to shift, he didn't meet with success. He only managed to will a ghost of his sword into his bound hands. One after another attempts failed until he felt even weaker, but he wasn't ready to call it quits. Gathering his powers, he focused them harder than he'd ever had to, willing the sword to take on solid form. A split second before he was about to lose the hold on his ability, his sword appeared, and he closed his hands around the pommel.

Panting heavily, his head hanging to his chest, Garrick tightly clutched his prize. Once he'd caught most of his breath, he lifted his head and looked at Nika. "Take the sword, and use it to chop through the length of chain between my wrists and the bar."

Nika took her bottom lip between her teeth while she wrapped her hands around the pommel just above where he held onto it. He let go, and she pulled away. The point of his sword slammed down onto the cement, causing a spark to fly.

"I can't do this, Garrick," she wailed. "It's too heavy, and there isn't much space between your wrists and the bar. I'm liable to chop your hands off rather than hit the chain."

"At least I'd be free," he said with deadpan humor.

"I'm serious, Garrick."

He met her worried gaze. "You can do this, Nika. I'm putting my trust in you. Lift the sword over your head, and then bring it down on the chain. It's sharp and tough enough so it should cut through the links, which luckily aren't that thick. It should only take a couple of hits."

Garrick pulled on the chain, stretching it tight. He gave Nika a nod. She bettered her grip on the sword and took a deep breath as she struggled to lift it over her head. She then brought the edge of the blade down on the chain, right in the middle of it. The sound of it hitting rang through the empty building.

Sparks flew when Nika struck at the chain again and again. After the third time, she lowered the point of the sword to the floor while she puffed for air. "I don't know if I can do this too many more times."

He gave the chain a hard tug and felt it start to give. "One more time should do it, Nika." At a sound from outside, Garrick cocked his head toward the front of the building. "Hurry, they're coming back."

"I don't hear anything."

"Werewolf hearing, babe, is a lot more sensitive than a mortal's. Get me free before they come in."

Nika lifted the sword again. It shook in her hands as she strained to keep it held above her head, and then quickly let it fall. This time, the blade grazed the knuckles on his clenched hands, but it hit true, and one of the links broke. With a mighty tug, he pulled the chain free of the bar. He pushed the weakness he felt aside and surged to his feet to protect his mate just as Nathan and his three thugs returned.

All four of them rushed him and Nika. The three he'd fought earlier shifted to their werewolf forms while Nathan tried to reach Nika. Garrick fought back the werewolves, swinging the short length of chain that hung from his wrists. He tried to keep Nika at his back, but the three werewolves worked to draw him away, giving Nathan a chance to get around him.

With a howl of fury, and drawing on some reserved strength he hadn't known he was still capable of, Garrick beat back his attackers. He used his teeth, claws, and the chain until he had them subdued enough for him to focus on Nathan.

Spinning around, he saw Nika holding his sword out in front of her to hold Nathan back. Her arms shook, and the blade wavered. Just as he launched himself at the pack leader, Nathan moved to bat the sword out of Nika's hands. To avoid Nathan, she pulled it away, then thrust it forward at the same time Garrick rammed into the pack leader's back. His momentum was enough to push Nathan onto the sword, the blade piercing his chest.

Everyone froze and stared at the sword. It couldn't have hit Nathan's heart, because he was still breathing, but it must have come close. A gush of blood welled out of the pack leader's sizzling chest when Nika pulled the sword free.

Nathan staggered back, clutching his wound. His face turned a sickly grey. Being one of Fenris' get, he'd suffer from the silver in the sword just as any other of his kind. He looked at his werewolf thugs and pointed at two of them. "Kill them," he said in a pained voice.

Garrick grabbed his sword out of Nika's hands and shoved behind him. The two werewolves moved to attack. The third werewolf – now in human form – helped Nathan toward the entrance of the building.

With the need to protect his mate at all costs beating at him, Garrick viciously swung his sword two handed, necessary because of the chains still binding his wrists. The weapon gave him the needed advantage he hadn't had earlier. Neither of the two werewolves could get close enough to sink their claws and teeth into him without feeling the bite of his blade.

One of his opponents suddenly changed tactics and reached for Nika. She whimpered, and Garrick turned his back on the second werewolf and moved to intercept the other. He lunged between the beast and Nika, jabbing his sword into the werewolf's stomach. The beast howled in pain, but Garrick quickly put it out of its misery by stabbing it through the heart. The werewolf dropped to the floor dead.

Nika shrilly screaming his name was all the warning he had before the second werewolf was on him. The beast dug its claws into his sides and tried to take the back of his neck in its jaws. Garrick howled, unable to jab his elbows into the stomach of the creature because of his bound hands. He threw back his head and slammed it into the werewolf's forehead. The move gave Garrick enough time to break free of the beast's grasp and to bring up his sword. He rammed the blade into the werewolf's chest.

Letting the beast drop to the floor, Garrick sank to his knees, unable to hold himself up on his feet any longer. Blood dripped down his sides and into his fur, adding to what was already there from his previous wounds. He tried to shift to his human form to heal himself, but he was still unable to.

"Garrick!" Nika shouted as she came to kneel in front of him.

He lifted his head to meet her concerned gaze. "I still can't shift."

"There's too much blood. We have to get you some help."

"We need to get in contact with my brothers-in-arms, but first I have to take care of the bodies. I need you to help me drag them outside."

"Why?"

"I need to call Tiw's fire to get rid of them so no mortal will come across them. Tiw is the sky father, so his powers are much stronger outside."

Garrick painfully pushed himself to his feet. Nika quickly moved to his side and put an arm around his waist to help steady him. Knowing Nathan would be long gone, Garrick managed to will his sword away after the second try. Calling on what little strength he had left, he hooked the first dead werewolf under the arms and dragged him toward the building's door. Nika grasped an arm and pulled along with him. Between the two of them, they managed to get both of the dead beasts out into the night.

Looking up at the night sky, Garrick called, "Tiw, I have need of your fire."

Blue god-fire engulfed the bodies of the werewolves, and Nika jumped. As it burned hotter and brighter, he pushed her farther back. Once the fire had turned the bodies to ash, an unnatural wind blew it away, leaving no evidence behind.

"We have to call your friends, Garrick," Nika said softly as she once again put her arm around his waist to help him stay upright.

Garrick looked down at her. His blood had stained her T-shirt. She looked shaken, but he was pleased she didn't seem to mind touching him now, even though he remained in his werewolf form. It wasn't as if there was anything he could do about it anyway. He lifted his gaze and did a quick scan of the property. The building they had been in was a barn. The farmhouse sat a short distance away.

"Let's try the house and see if there is a working phone inside," he said.

"The barn looked as if it hadn't been used for a while. Don't you think the house would be abandoned as well?"

"Maybe, but I have a feeling the werewolves might have just killed the owners."

As he hobbled along with Nika under his arm, Garrick kept his senses open for any sign of Nathan and the other werewolf. He sniffed the air, scanning from side to side, but he didn't see or smell anything out of the ordinary.

At the house, they walked up onto the porch. He noticed the door had been boarded up, along with the window next to it. The house was abandoned, after all.

"Now what?" Nika asked.

"You leave me here and see if you can flag down a car on the road. Get the driver to take you to the closest phone. I'll give you the number to reach the others."

Nika shook her head. "No. I'm not leaving you here alone. Nathan could come back and bring more werewolves."

"I doubt that. He's in no condition to try to finish me off. There's silver mixed into the steel of my sword. Silver is deadly to his kind. Even though his wound wasn't to the heart, which would have killed him instantly, the silver is poisoning him. Nathan won't be in any shape to do anything but hide to lick his wounds."

"I'm still not going to leave you," Nika said adamantly.

"It's the only way," he said. "I can't let any mortals see me like this."

I've told Raed and the others what has happened and where to find you. Tiw's voice filled Garrick's head.

"Did a voice just speak in your head?" Nika squeaked.

Garrick let out a raspy chuckle. "Yes. That was Tiw."

"So I'm not all of a sudden becoming schizophrenic?"

No, you are not, Nika, Tiw said with a laugh. *Three of the other warriors are on their way.*

"Then we'll stay put," Garrick said. "I can't shift, Tiw. Nathan injected me with something to prevent it."

It's only temporary. Come morning, your body will have burned the drug away without leaving any permanent damage.

"Good to know."

You and your mate are safe now. The others will arrive shortly. I'll talk to you both tomorrow.

Garrick felt Tiw's presence fade away. He looked at Nika. "So help is on its way. And I guess you'll have to put up with my arse being furry for a while longer." Much to his surprise, Nika dropped her hand from his waist to his tail and gave it a yank.

"I have to admit I like your tail," she said lightheartedly.

He turned them away from the door of the house and walked down the porch stairs. "For someone who was terrified of me not too long ago, you seem to have adjusted quite well and quickly."

"It's either that or scream my head off. Tonight, I've had more shocks than I think I can handle. It'll probably really hit me later. All I'm worried about is staying out of Nathan's clutches. He and his werewolves are scarier than you are."

Garrick turned to face her and put his other arm around Nika, holding her tight against his chest. "Tomorrow will be soon enough for you to face everything else."

He just hoped Nika would still be as accepting once the strain of the night wore off. After seeing the faint outline of Tiw's mark on her back, he wouldn't be able to let her go.

* * * * *

Nathan felt the acidic silver slowly poison his organs as it pumped through his bloodstream. The wound to his chest continued to bleed profusely. He couldn't shift to his werewolf form, mostly because it wouldn't remove the silver from his system. The shift would heal him, but he was better off bleeding some of the silver out of his veins. He needed to get back to the den where he had the antidote for silver poisoning, something else he'd perfected over the years.

Lost in agony, he at first didn't realize Stephen – the werewolf who now supported him – wasn't taking him across the large field that separated this farm from the one where their den was located. They were headed into the woods that ran parallel to both properties.

"You're going the wrong way," Nathan snapped. "I have to get to the den before the silver has a chance to spread any farther than it already has."

With a growl, Stephen grabbed Nathan's head and slammed it into the nearest tree. Lying stunned on the ground with blood dripping into his eyes, he snapped his teeth at Stephen.

"Remember who I am," he said angrily. "I'm your pack leader. I turned you."

"Well, mate," Stephen said, "that's about to change." He dragged Nathan to his feet by his throat. "I've never much liked being ordered around. I prefer to be the big man on top."

"You dare to challenge me for pack leader?"

"I more than dare. I intend to take it away from you."

"To get the others to follow you, you'll have to challenge me at the den while I'm in fit condition."

"That's another thing about me – I don't follow anybody else's rules but my own. As for getting the rest of the pack to accept me as their leader, I think when I bring them your severed head they'll be more than ready to declare me leader."

The last thing Nathan saw was Stephen shifting to his werewolf form and his jaws clamping around his throat to rip it out.

Chapter Twelve

Nika sat on the window seat in Garrick's bedroom inside the mansion he called home and watched him sleep. He lay stretched out on the bed still in his werewolf form. It was just past dawn, and she could no longer to sleep. Not that she'd slept much before she'd gotten out of bed. Thoughts of what had happened during the night wouldn't let her rest.

About twenty minutes after Garrick's and her conversation with his Anglo-Saxon god, Tiw, – she still found it amazing that she'd heard an actual *god's* voice inside her head – a black Land Rover Range Rover pulled into the yard of the abandoned farmhouse. Three large men had gotten out of it and approached them. They had turned out to be Wolfric, Dolf and Brand – three of Garrick's brothers-in-arms.

At the sight of Garrick, they'd taken over the charge of supporting him and getting him into the Range Rover. Once they'd all piled in, Wolfric had made the introductions while Brand drove. Dolf sat in the back with her and Garrick. Dolf had

been the one to tell her all of Tiw's warriors, along with the two women who had become mates, lived together in their mansion like an extended family.

When they arrived at their home, Nika had been knocked speechless by the size and beauty of the mansion. It was a showplace home. She'd soon found out the inside was just as spectacular as the outside after she'd been ushered through the front door. The large, open-concept foyer with its check marble floor, curving oak staircase, and crystal chandelier hanging from the ceiling, had her looking around gawking.

Nika hadn't had long to do much admiring before Wolfric and Brand had helped Garrick up the stairs and into his bedroom. She'd followed behind and stayed out of the way when the men put Garrick in his bed. She had cringed a bit when they pulled back the sheets and blood from his wounds soaked into them. But she'd kept her mouth shut when the men didn't seem to care.

Shortly after that, Raed and Algar had arrived and introduced themselves. Their mates had been sleeping, and they had reassured her Lexi and Kamryn were anxious to meet her. Obviously, they already knew about her.

Raed did a quick check of Garrick's wounds and declared they were slowly healing and would be gone once Garrick could shift. He'd then bandaged Nika's wound, before the men left her alone with the werewolf who was her mate. Too tired and not wanting to sort through how her life had changed, she'd climbed into bed beside Garrick and tried to sleep.

Now she could no longer keep those thoughts away. Nika ran her gaze over Garrick again. With him being stuck in his werewolf form for hours, and used to seeing him like that, she wasn't afraid of him. Actually, she liked snuggling against his warm fur as she'd done during what had been left of the night. That form was just a part of what Garrick was. As he'd told her, he was still the same man inside the werewolf.

With the threat of death at the hands of the bad werewolves no longer hanging over her head, Nika thought of how close she'd come to losing Garrick. If he'd been mortal, a few of his wounds would have killed him. Thinking about that had her admitting how she would have felt if she had lost him. It would have devastated her.

She loved Garrick, and she didn't want them ever to be separated. He'd pushed his way into her life and stolen her heart. She was more than happy he hadn't listened to her when she'd told him she wasn't ready to start a new relationship.

Garrick stirred on the bed and opened his eyes. He reached across to the side of the bed where she'd slept. Only encountering empty space, he gazed around the room until he saw her at the window seat.

Nika got to her feet and moved to sit on the bed beside him. "How are you feeling?"

"Sore," he said in his gruff werewolf voice. "What time is it?"

"Very early in the morning. I couldn't sleep anymore."

His gaze searched her face. "I'm sorry you had to find out about me like this, Nika. If it had been left up to me I would have done it much gentler."

She smiled. "It's okay, Garrick." She ran her hand along his furred chest, careful not to brush one of his wounds. "I can handle you being a werewolf. I was actually thinking with you in this form, it would be kind of nice to snuggle on a cold winter's night."

Garrick gave her a wolfish grin. "I can do that, but right now, I need to be back in my human body."

Garrick flung back the sheets, and Nika eased back a bit. He slowly sat up. She held her breath, hoping it would work, as his body began to blur. This time the shift worked, and soon, a naked Garrick in human form took the place of his werewolf one. All his wounds had disappeared with no dried blood to show where they had been.

Seeing the relieved look on Garrick's face, Nika threw herself into his arms. "I might have gotten used to you in your werewolf form, but I much prefer you like this. Then I can do this." She captured his lips with hers and kissed him deeply.

Garrick kissed her back, twining his tongue with hers, until he had her moaning. He then pulled back. "I want you, Nika, my mate. Let me show you how much I love you."

Her breath caught. "I need you to. I can't stop thinking about how close I came to losing the man I've fallen in love with."

"It takes more than a few werewolves to take down your mate," Garrick said with a smile. "Come." He slipped off the bed and pulled her to her feet to stand in front of him. He pulled her bloodstained shirt up and over her head. "I want to be inside you, but we both need to wash the stink of prey off us first. How does a shower sound to you?"

"Heavenly," she said.

Nika quickly reached for the button of her jeans and undid it. While she stripped out of the rest of her clothes, Garrick watched her every move. By the time she was as naked as he was, his cock had become fully erect, jutting out from his body. At the sight of his erection, she grew wet.

Garrick took a deep breath. "The smell of your arousal makes me ache to sink my cock inside your sweet pussy."

"I want you there, now," she replied huskily.

He took her hand and led her to the en suite bathroom. Garrick started the shower and lifted her into the tub before he joined her and closed the sliding glass door. He moved her under the warm spray until her hair was wet. He grabbed the bar of soap from the soap dish and lathered it up in his hands, then began to wash her body. His large palms glided over her skin, taking particular care when he reached her breasts and pussy. His touch turned her on even more.

Her front done, he turned her into the spray of water to rinse as he brushed aside her long hair. Nika felt his lips reverently kiss the place high up on her right shoulder where Tiw's mark was.

"What does it look like?" she asked.

He kissed the spot again. "I can see Tiw's mark clearly now. It looks exactly the same as mine."

"I guess that means we're really mated now?"

"Almost. Once Tiw gifts you immortality, then we'll be truly mated."

Nika turned to face Garrick. "So we'll have forever together?"

"Yes."

"Good, because I want that."

"We'll have our chat with Tiw about it, but not until after our shower."

She smiled. "I have to agree with that. We're far from done in here."

She took the soap from Garrick and lathered up her hands, then put the bar back in the soap dish. She pressed a kiss to his chest as she ran her palms down his sides to his hips. Nika skimmed her fingers across his lower abs until she reached his cock. She wrapped her soapy hands around the shaft and gave it a thorough wash. It jerked in her grasp, and Garrick moaned.

When she was done, Nika allowed the water to wash the soap away. She then went down on her knees and took Garrick's cock in her mouth. She sucked and stroked him until he moaned as he rocked hips.

Nika stood and looked at him. His eyes had changed, going wolf. Garrick held up his hands, letting her see his claw-tipped fingers. "See what you do to me? You make me lose control."

The thought that only she did that to him excited her. "Take me, Garrick. I want to feel you deep inside me."

With a growl, he captured her mouth, sucking on her tongue until she whimpered. Lifting her off her feet, he urged her to put her legs around his waist. "Lock your legs behind me, Nika. I'm going to give you exactly what you want."

Once she had done as he'd told her, he positioned his cock at the entrance to her body and surged inside to the hilt. Holding onto her bottom, he moved her up and down his shaft. Nika strained against him, tightening her pussy around him. Bracing his feet on the bottom of the tub, Garrick pistoned into her. His cock grew even harder.

With each of his hard thrusts, Nika felt her climax build. She clutched his shoulders, loving the feel of her mate taking her, filling her with his thick cock. She moaned. "I'm almost there. Don't stop."

"I won't," he growled. "You feel so good, Nika. I'm about ready to explode."

Just as Garrick's cock swelled to lock them together, her orgasm overtook her. She released a keening moan, and her inner walls clutched around his shaft, holding him in a tight fist. His howls of pleasure filled her ears while his cock pulsed deep inside her, filling her with his cum.

Dropping her head to Garrick's shoulder, she held onto him tight when he turned and put her back to the tiled shower wall. She felt another splash of cum. "I think Tiw is going to have to wait a little longer to make me immortal," she said once she could speak without panting.

"Why is that?"

She lifted her head to look at him. "Because once isn't going to be enough. I want to see how many times I can make my werewolf mate howl."

Garrick gave her a sexy grin. "And your werewolf mate likes the sound of that. And I don't think Tiw will mind waiting."

Keeping her in his arms, Garrick turned off the shower and carried her to the bed. He then allowed her to have her way with him over and over again.

Epilogue

"How long has it been?" Wolfric asked for the thousandth time.

"Only a couple of hours," Dolf replied.

Everyone sat in the living room trying to watch television. The only two members of the household who were missing were Raed and Lexi. They were upstairs in the bedroom with the midwife. Lexi had gone into labor a few hours before.

Nika thought the strain of waiting for it to be over was harder on the warriors than herself and Kamryn. Wolfric had begun pacing the floor shortly after the midwife had arrived. Dolf kept flipping through the TV channels, never settling on one station for very long. Brand, being his usual quiet self, seemed to be taking it in stride, but Nika had caught him gazing up at the ceiling from time to time. Algar appeared to be less anxious than the others. Nika had to think having Kamryn with him helped.

Nika turned her head to look at Garrick, who sat next to her on one of the leather couches. "How are you holding up?"

He smiled. "Fine. I'm just glad it isn't you up there. I don't know if I'm ready to watch you go through labor."

Nika had been waiting to tell her mate until later that night, but since he'd brought the subject up, she said, "Do you think you'll be able to handle it in eight months?" The room went completely silent. Nika looked around to find all eyes on her.

Garrick swallowed audibly. "Are you telling me you're pregnant?"

"Surprise," she said just before her mate gathered her in a crushing embrace. Nika smacked his back. "I may be immortal now, but I still need to breathe."

He loosened his hold, but didn't let her go. "I'm going to be a father."

"I don't know if I can handle going through another birth so soon," Wolfric said from his side of the room.

Just then, the sound of a newborn baby's cries sounded from upstairs. Everyone in the room rushed out of the living room to stand at the bottom of the stairs that led to the upper level. A few minutes later, Raed appeared at the top carrying a well-wrapped bundle. He came down the steps wearing the biggest grin Nika had ever seen.

"Lexi knew you would all be impatiently waiting, so she told me to bring the baby down." He pulled back the blanket from the child's face. "It's a girl."

They all looked at Lexi and Raed's daughter and congratulated him. At the sight of the newborn's precious face, Nika couldn't wait to hold her own baby in her arms. Garrick pulled her close and moved her a little away from the others. She looked at him. "Will you be ready to have one of those?"

He kissed her forehead. "I think so." Garrick then put his hand on her still-flat stomach. "I'm looking forward to seeing your belly grow big with my child."

"And I'm looking forward to sending you out into the night to pick up whatever food I start craving."

"Whatever my woman wants, my woman gets."

Nika sighed contentedly and leaned back into Garrick's embrace. She'd definitely gotten one of the things she wanted – a werewolf for a mate who would do everything in his power to keep her happy.

~The End~

About the Author

Marisa Chenery was always a lover of books, but after reading her first historical romance novel she found herself hooked. Having inherited a love for the written word, she soon started writing her own novels. After trying her hand at writing historicals, she now also writes paranormals. Marisa lives in Ontario, Canada with her husband and four children. Check out Marisa's website at www.marisachenery.com. She would love to hear from you, so drop her an email while you're there.

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If you enjoyed *Wolves of East Anglia*, *Reluctantly His*, you might also like the following books from Marisa Chenery and Noble Romance Publishing:

[Wolves of East Anglia: Mate for a King](#)
[Wolves of East Anglia: Forever Claimed](#)