



ROXIE'S PROTECTORS

LEIF'S SURRENDER

MARISA CHENERY

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Blurb

Jaden notices the sexy hunk in her cashier's line. But she knows, with her plain looks and glasses, he'd never notice her. So when he returns to the grocery store the next day and kisses her senseless in front of everyone, she can only hope she'll see him again.

Leif swears he will never be permanently mated, but when he feels his mate at a grocery store while buying pregnant Roxie ice cream, his world turns upside down. Drawn to his would-be mate, he finds fighting his mating urge is harder than he expects. If he can only hold out long enough to let nature run its course, he can get on with his life. But resisting her is impossible, and he needs to claim her as his.

Chapter One

“You want me to do what?” Leif asked Roxie with a scowl.

“You heard me. I want you to run to the store and get me some ice cream.”

“Why?”

Roxie rolled her eyes. “Well, I’d go get it myself, but since you guys won’t let me go anywhere by myself now that I’m showing, you’re going to have to get it for me. I ate the last of what I had last night and now I’m craving ice cream, bad.”

“Can’t you get Jager or Daylen to get it instead?”

Leif hated going to the grocery store. He avoided it like the plague. The few times he had gone grocery shopping, he’d had the back of his heels run over by unobservant mortals with their carts, which was beyond annoying. Even worse were those who came to a sudden stop in the middle of an aisle, oblivious to those behind them.

“No, they can’t,” Roxie said. “They’ve gone a few times for me already. It’s time you took your turn.”

Leif made one last attempt to get out of it. “What about Beowulf? He’s your mate. He should be the one getting it for you.”

“He’s not here, as you well know. It could be hours before he gets back from Wade and Taryn’s.”

Wade was Beowulf’s younger brother. He and his mate, Taryn, owned a winery in Napa Valley. Taryn had inherited it from her uncle, so once Wade and she became mates, Wade had moved in with her.

Damn. It looked as if he wasn’t going to be able to escape making the dreaded trip to the grocery store. Knowing Jager, he’d probably put Roxie up to it. As one of Roxie’s Protectors, they had lived together for centuries. Jager had to have known Leif would balk at the idea. The big idiot was probably having a good chuckle over it too, knowing full well Roxie wouldn’t back down. Jager may now be mated to Daylen, who used to be a police officer—before Roxie turned her into a werewolf, which made her now one of the Protectors—but that didn’t mean Jager still didn’t do or say whatever the hell he wanted.

Leif breathed a heavy sigh. “All right. I’ll get you your ice cream this time, but don’t expect me to do this too often.”

Roxie smiled and put her hand on her distended belly. “Just think, in three more months, the baby will be here, and I won’t have any more cravings. Then you won’t have to worry about it.”

Turning on his heel, Leif left Roxie’s mansion and headed for his black Cadillac CTS. He got into the drivers’ side and headed down the winding drive to the street. He was a warrior, having trained for centuries with the rest of the Protectors for the day when the foretold one would come. Roxie was the foretold one. It was his duty to protect her against other werewolves abducting her to use as a figurehead to rule the packs. Running to the grocery store to buy ice cream wasn’t part of the job description.

Pulling into the parking lot of the store closest to Roxie’s place, Leif found an empty space and parked. He got out, slammed the car door a little harder than necessary and headed inside. Forgoing a shopping cart, he walked through the large store, searching for

the freezer aisle. When he finally found it, he stood in front of the glass freezer doors staring at all the different types of ice cream. *Well, hell.* He'd forgotten to ask Roxie what kind she wanted.

He reached inside the front pocket of his jeans for his cell phone, then remembered he'd left it at home. He'd forgotten to charge it during the night, and it now sat on his dresser in his room doing just that. Wasn't this just his day? Making an executive decision, he opened the freezer and grabbed cartons of vanilla, chocolate and butterscotch ripple. Roxie should at least like one of them. He juggled the ice cold containers in his arms and made his way to the checkout.

Moving to stand at the end of the express line, Leif looked up to the front of it and groaned. An older lady was paying for her purchase, counting out change one coin at a time. Hopefully, the other customers in front of him wouldn't take so long. The ice cream was damn cold. Already his fingers were starting to feel numb. He was rethinking his decision to not take a cart, but he wasn't going to leave the lineup just to get one now.

The line inched forward until he reached the conveyor belt. More than happy to put the ice cream down—which was more than likely already starting to melt—Leif shook out his frozen hands.

He bit back a curse when the cart behind him pushed into the back of his thighs. Leif turned to find a woman who looked to be in her forties staring at him. She quickly apologized. He smiled and had the satisfaction of watching her jaw drop. After telling her it was okay, he turned back around and smiled even more. He was used to the effect he had over mortal women. Standing at six-foot-five, with his body well padded with muscle and his werewolf good looks, Leif drew a lot of feminine stares. Not that he complained about it. He loved women, all women. Young, old, he flirted with them all. Most male werewolves longed to find their mates, the one woman their soul would join with, but not Leif. He never wanted to be that tied down.

Finally, at long last, it was his turn. Muttering to himself about pregnant women and their cravings, he took a deep breath when he moved to stand across from the cashier. As if he'd been sucker punched in the gut, Leif froze in place and struggled to draw another big breath of air into his lungs. His cock went instantly rock hard, and the unthinkable happened—his mating urge kicked into high gear.

Settling his gaze on the cashier, the woman who was to be his mate, Leif took in her mousy brown hair that she wore pulled back in a high ponytail. He couldn't see what color her eyes were behind her stylish glasses, because she was busy looking down as she rang in his purchases. Her face, he found cute in a plain sort of way. She wasn't ugly, but she was by no means a raving beauty. And she was not at all what he expected his mate to look like.

She might not be heart-stopping beautiful, but she appealed to all of Leif's senses, in a big way. Her scent stirred his body like no other. He wanted to jump across the counter, rip the glasses off her face, pull her hair loose and devour her lips with his. He wanted to hear her make little moaning noises as he ground his aching cock against her pussy. And his wolf wanted to claim her as his.

The sound of her voice brought him out of the haze of lust that had descended over him. He looked at her and asked, sounding like a complete idiot, "Wha...what?"

She lifted her gaze to his. Her eyes were brown. "I asked if you wanted paper or plastic," she said in a quiet voice that seemed to take hold of his cock and make it throb

even more.

“Plastic is fine,” he said.

His voice sounded gruff with need, even to his own ears. A spark of interest flashed in her eyes before she bagged the ice cream. Their fingers brushed when he handed her the money to pay. That simple touch caused his cock to jerk hard inside his jeans. Leif had to bite back a growl of need. If he wasn't careful, he'd be howling like the wolf he was, and his eyes would be glowing mutedly for all the mortals to see.

When she handed him back his change, he made sure their fingers didn't come in contact, and he found his gaze settling back on her face. The mating urge had well and truly dug its claws into him. Leif started to panic. Grabbing the bag of ice cream, he did the one thing his mating urge was *not* screaming at him to do—he hightailed it out of there.

* * * *

Jaden turned her head to watch the guy she'd just run through beat a hasty retreat to the store's exit. She let out a breathy sigh and turned back to ring through the next customer in her cash register's line. She went through the motions of scanning each item, but her mind wasn't totally there. It was still focused on the exceptionally good-looking guy who'd bought the three containers of ice cream.

She'd noticed him as soon as he'd gotten in her line. She would have had to be blind not to. He stood about a foot taller than she, had a body that made her want to drool, and a face that reminded her of a male model's. His not-too-short auburn hair had just brushed the collar of his black, form-fitting t-shirt. The blue jeans he wore were faded and snug in all the right places. She'd had to fight not to let her gaze zero in on the front of them to check him out.

As he moved up in line, Jaden couldn't stop herself from stealing glances, knowing that looking at him was about all she'd be able to do. Men as good-looking as him rarely acknowledged that she existed. With her plain looks and glasses, she was pretty much overlooked half the time. She was used to it, therefore, she never had any high expectations when it came to good-looking men.

But when she'd asked him if he wanted paper or plastic and his gaze had latched onto hers, she'd had to blink a few times to make sure her eyes weren't playing tricks on her. He had stared at her as if he was ready to jump over to her side and devour her in one bite. Jaden shivered just thinking about it. Having his blue-eyed gaze greedily lock with hers had her wishing for things that she knew would never happen. Her body, though, thought otherwise. Her nipples had hardened beneath her shirt, and her pussy had clenched with the need to be filled.

Of course nothing went beyond that. Once he'd paid, even making sure she didn't touch him inadvertently when she handed him back his change, he'd practically run out of the store. He may have looked at her as if he wanted to devour her, but obviously that really hadn't meant anything. *C'est la vie*. That was the story of *her* life.

After she rang through the last customer in line, she put a sign up on the end of the conveyor belt directing customers to the next cash register. It was her break time, and she was ready for it. Working as a cashier for a large grocery store chain wasn't exactly her dream job, but it was better than not working at all. Her life was in a bit of a funk, and no matter what she tried, she couldn't change things around. One day seemed to bleed into

another.

As she headed for the small coffee shop inside the store, Jaden had to admit that getting stared at by an exceptionally hot guy was a step away from the same old, same old. Who knew, if she was lucky, he'd come to the store again. It was kind of pathetic to think catching a glimpse of a good-looking guy, who she didn't have a chance in hell of ever really knowing, was the highlight of her day.

* * * *

By the time Leif arrived back at Roxie's place, he still hadn't gotten himself totally under control. And the shock of actually finding his mate hadn't worn off yet. It was like a bad dream come true. He was also fighting a battle within himself. His wolf side, and the mating urge that rode him, had him yearning to go back to the store and claim his mate. But the part of him that liked being unmated and wanted to stay that way fought it tooth and nail.

Leif turned off the car and grasped the steering wheel with both hands as he smacked his forehead on it a few times. He had to get it together. He could resist. All he had to do was stop thinking about her and how much he wanted to strip her naked and taste every inch of her body before he sank his aching cock inside her pussy. He'd be so deep inside her she'd never want to let him go. Leif could almost feel her inner walls clutching at his shaft as he rode her.

He groaned and smacked his forehead on the steering wheel again. Grrr, he had to stop thinking that way. There was no way in hell he was going to sleep with her. If he did, their souls would join and he'd be tied to her forever. Once werewolves became mated, they couldn't stand to be away from their mates for long periods of time. In the beginning, a few hours apart felt like days. Their minds would play tricks on them, making them think something had happened to the other. Leif didn't want that kind of commitment with a woman. Just thinking he was close to that very thing scared the bejesus out of him.

Giving himself a good shake, Leif grabbed the bag of ice cream off the passenger seat and got out of the car. Before he went inside, he had to make sure he didn't show any outward sign of what had happened in the grocery store. If he did, Roxie would pick up on it and make his life a living hell. Like a dog, or a wolf, with a bone, she'd ride his ass until he eventually caved and went after his mate. He didn't need that kind of interference in his life, thank you very much.

He walked through the door and headed to the kitchen to put the ice cream in the freezer. Leif had just put the grocery bag on the counter next to the fridge when Roxie came into the room.

Leif kept his back to her and opened the freezer door. "You didn't tell me what flavor to get so I picked what I thought you'd like."

When Roxie moved to stand beside him and her shoulder brushed his arm, he couldn't stop himself from jerking away from the contact. He was still wound up as tight as a top.

"What's the matter with you?" Roxie asked. She ran her gaze over him. "You look a bit...tense. Did something happen while you were out?"

"No. Having to go to a grocery store tends to do that to me. So are the flavors I picked all right?"

Roxie gave him another onceover, then looked at the ice cream containers he was putting into the freezer. “They’re good. Chocolate, I’m kind of meh on, but I like the other two. And if shopping gets you this strung out, I won’t send you again.”

“I’ll take my turn just so long as you don’t expect me to pick up more than a couple of items.”

He slammed the freezer door hard enough to shake the fridge. Why had he said that? Did he now have run-away-mouth syndrome? He couldn’t go back to that grocery store. Ever. If he did, he’d be only setting himself up for his own doom. *Remember, dummy, you don’t want a mate.*

Turning to face Roxie, he found her staring at him with a strange look on her face. “What did my fridge ever do to you?” she asked.

“It slipped. All right?”

“Whatever you say.”

Before Roxie could say anything more, he said, “I’m going to look for Jager.”

“Why don’t you do that? He’s out in the backyard with Daylen giving her another sword fighting lesson. She may not be able to disarm him with a sword yet, but she used her karate skills and knocked him on his butt. I never get sick of seeing that.”

“Neither do I,” he said as he left the kitchen.

Leif made a short detour to his car to get his sword out of the trunk before he headed to the backyard. When he arrived, instead of sword practice, Jager and Daylen were locked in a passionate embrace, kissing like there was no tomorrow. Usually the sight of them—or one of the other two mated couples that lived in the Protectors’ mansion—putting on such a display would leave Leif shaking his head. Now it just made him feel downright uncomfortable. It made him wish for things he didn’t want *or* need.

Walking closer to the couple, he said what he normally said in such a situation. “Would the two of you go get a room? Is it really necessary for me to see you sucking each other’s lips off? You do anything more, and I’m liable to go blind.”

Jager broke the kiss and moved to stand at Daylen’s side with her tucked under his arm. “What’s the matter, Leif? Jealous?”

“Hardly,” he scoffed. He then lifted his sword. “I came out here to see if you wanted some real competition.”

“Hey,” Daylen said. “I could take offense at that. I may not be as quick with a sword, but I can still kick both of your butts.”

Jager kissed her temple. “Leif and I both know that, love. I, in particular, have learned that from firsthand experience, more than once.”

When Jager and Daylen first met, she’d caught Jager sword fighting with another werewolf in an alley while she was on patrol. She’d even managed to get the drop on Jager, using a karate move her mate hadn’t expected, and had almost ended up arresting him.

Daylen kissed Jager’s cheek. “And don’t you forget it. I guess I’ll go inside and keep Roxie company while you two whack at each other.” She then headed off across the lawn to the mansion.

Leif had just enough time to lift his sword to block Jager’s when he swung it in his direction. Leif then pulled his sword back to make a strike of his own. Jager’s next blow had Leif spinning away. He used the momentum, taking a slashing cut that would have sliced across Jager’s ribs if he hadn’t blocked it.

Letting the familiar rhythm of thrust and parry take over, Leif gave as good as he got. The stretch of his muscles and the need to concentrate on Jager's next move helped relieve some of the agitation the mating urge had caused. Leif had deliberately challenged Jager for that very reason. Jager was one of the best swordsmen of the Protectors. The man didn't go anywhere without his sword, and until recently, even slept with it in his bed. The only one of the Protectors who could get the better of him was Saskia, their leader.

After fifteen minutes of intense sword play, Jager backed up and lowered his sword. Leif lowered his so the tip rested on the grass as he bent over trying to catch his breath. "Give me a couple of minutes," he panted. "Then we can go again."

Jager was breathing just as hard. He used his hand to wipe sweat from his brow. "Is there something you want to tell me?"

"No. Why?"

"Well, for starters, you don't usually practice this hard. And for another, you're pounding on me as if you're trying to distract yourself from something."

Leif straightened. "You're the last person I thought would complain about a tough sword workout."

"Hey, I'm not complaining. The way you're acting just reminds me of how I was before Daylen and I become mates and I had to convince Daylen not to arrest my ass every time she saw me." Jager gave Leif a hard stare, then scratched his chin. "If I didn't know better, I would say your mating urge has you in its claws and you're trying to ignore it. You weren't like this when we first arrived here, so I'm guessing it happened when you went to the store for Roxie."

Hearing Jager accurately guess what was bothering him, Leif dropped his sword and jumped on the other warrior. Having caught Jager off guard, Leif knocked the larger man flat on his back and straddled his chest.

"What the fuck?" Jager snarled.

Leif kept him pinned and lowered his head until he was in Jager's face. "Not a word. Do you understand me? Don't tell anyone, especially Roxie."

The scowl on Jager's face disappeared as he started to roar with laughter. "You found your mate," he said through peals of laughter. "You should see your face. You look as if the hounds of hell are after you."

Putting his hand over Jager's mouth, he quietly snapped back, "Would you keep it down?"

With a hard shove, Jager pushed Leif off him and stood. His laughter had settled down to a chuckle. "So it's true?"

"Yes," Leif said with disgust.

"You're a stupid fuck if you think you can run away from the mating urge. Accept it. Being mated is not as bad as you think it is. It's actually the best thing that ever happened to me. I never knew what I had been missing in my life until I found Daylen."

Leif shook his head. "I will not accept it."

"So what do you plan to do? Just ignore it and hope it goes away?"

"That's exactly what I'm going to do."

Jager picked up his dropped sword and shook his head. "You're delusional if you think that. There is no *ignoring* the mating urge. What's the problem with her, besides you not wanting a mate? Is she a mortal?"

“Yes. There’s *nothing* really wrong with her. She’s just not what I expected.”

“She’s ugly? If that is the case, you could always put a bag over her head while you screw her.”

Leif let out a wolfish growl and launched himself at Jager, not liking the insult to his mate. Jager easily sidestepped him then slowly started to back away toward the mansion. “See, you’ve got it bad, Leif. You say you don’t want her, but you’re quick to defend her. You’re buggered, man.”

After watching Jager go inside, Leif picked up his sword. Shit, Jager was right. Of course the asshole had had to prove it to him in the most direct of ways. Jager may have been right, but that didn’t mean Leif was going to meekly accept his fate. He was going to stay strong. He wasn’t going to let the mating urge get the best of him.

Chapter Two

Leif was in a foul mood. It was the next day, and he was once again at Roxie's place. This time he was with Kye and Dirk. He'd also volunteered to take another shift of protecting her. He figured being here would give him a good enough excuse not to talk himself into going to the grocery store to see if his mate was working today.

He went into the kitchen, wondering if there was any coffee. Sleep had not come easily last night. And what he did get was filled with erotic dreams of claiming his mate. He'd woken up with an aching hard-on. All he could think about was getting his mate under him and taking her in every position imaginable. He'd taken a cold shower this morning, which hadn't cooled his libido any. Jerking off hadn't done much to take the edge off, either. Even now, his cock was semi-hard.

Spotting the full pot of coffee, Leif crossed over to it and took a clean mug out of the cupboard. It was almost noon, but it already felt as if he'd been up for days. He needed caffeine, and lots of it.

Kye came into the kitchen and helped himself to a cup of coffee as well. He glanced over at Leif, went over to the fridge and took out the milk and dumped some into his mug. "You look like you didn't get any sleep."

Leif shrugged. "It was just one of those nights when I couldn't shut my brain off."

Kye put the milk back and moved to stand in front of him. "I guess we'll be making another pot of coffee soon then. Dirk and Roxie are upstairs again doing whatever they do on her computer. Listening to them talk about it puts me to sleep."

Roxie was a web designer and had been teaching HTML to Dirk for months now. He'd even coded a few web pages of his own. Not that Leif understood their technical speak anymore than Kye did.

"That should keep the two of them busy for hours," he said.

"Yeah, the two computer geeks are happily in their element."

"I wouldn't let Roxie hear you call her a computer geek," Beowulf said as he walked into the kitchen. He smiled at Kye. "I wish she'd stick to the computers, though lately, she's been experimenting with her magic to see what other neat tricks she has that the rest of us don't. And you know nothing good can come out of that."

Every werewolf had a spark of magic inside them. It was how he and the rest of his kind were able to shift into their wolf forms. Roxie had a little bit more magic than the average werewolf. She not only could shift into a wolf, she could also shift into a half human/half werewolf form. No other werewolf could do that. She also could keep a werewolf in wolf form for twenty-four hours and freeze a person in place for as long as she wanted. Her great-great-great, etc. grandmother had been a mortal with magic of her own, or so Leif had been told. This magic had finally been passed down to Roxie, who supposedly was very similar in looks to her grandmother. Her grandfather, Royce, was still around to attest to that. Werewolves weren't immortal, but they were very long-lived, living up to three thousand years old. Royce was well over a thousand and had found another mate who at one time had been a mortal like his first mate.

Kye cringed. "I definitely don't want Roxie practicing anything new on me. She'd probably turn me into a toad or something just as awful."

Beowulf chuckled. "I don't think you have to worry about that. Do you think one of you could give me a hand? The new crib and change table need to be brought up to the baby's room and assembled."

Before Leif could say anything, Kye said, "I can help."

"Great," Beowulf said. "Since Roxie is busy with Dirk, I thought we could get it set up for her."

Leif watched Beowulf and Kye walk out of the kitchen. So much for the added distraction he was looking for. He was now left alone with his thoughts, which seemed to center around sex with a certain cashier at a certain grocery store. He took a sip of his hot coffee. This had to get better, but if he was going to be truthful with himself, he knew the longer he held off claiming his mate the worse the mating urge would get. And it wasn't as if he could search out another woman for some relief. Until the mating urge let him go, his cock wouldn't get hard for anyone else. God, he hated this.

Finishing his coffee, he put down the mug on the counter and went over to the fridge. He was in the mood for something to eat. He opened the fridge door, but didn't see anything that appealed to him. Opening the freezer, he spotted the ice cream he'd bought the day before. He reached in and took out the carton of vanilla.

He took it over to the kitchen table and opened it. Roxie had already been into it since a quarter of it was gone. Having a hankering for some, Leif grabbed a big spoon out of the drawer. Usually not much of an ice cream eater, this one went down pretty good, creamy vanilla with just enough sweetness. Before he knew it, he'd eaten well over half the container of ice cream. There was nothing left but a few scrapings on the sides and the bottom.

"Oh, shit," he said in a murmur.

Roxie was going to kill him. Wanting to hide what he'd done, Leif dropped the spoon inside the carton, closed it and hurriedly put it back in the freezer. What to do, what to do. He knew. He'd have to go to the grocery store and buy another one before Roxie found out. Yeah, that's what he'd do.

Leif left the kitchen and planned to go upstairs and tell Kye where he was going when he saw Roxie coming down the stairs. She of course headed straight for the kitchen. He closed his eyes and waited.

Sure enough, he heard Roxie yell, "Hey! Who the hell ate all the vanilla ice cream? And who leaves a spoon in it?"

Deciding it was better to make a getaway now, Leif ran out of the mansion without telling Kye anything before Roxie came out of the kitchen. He was in his car and on the road to the store in less than a minute.

Arriving at the grocery store, all his senses started to come alive. Like a piece of metal drawn to a magnet, he headed inside. He sniffed the air, trying to single out one particular scent mixed in with the many. His mate's scent was there, but weak. Realizing what he was doing, Leif gritted his teeth and forced himself to walk to the freezer section. He was not here to search out his would-be mate. He would not try to find her. He would make his purchase and get the hell out of there without seeing her.

But in thinking that, he ended up doing the opposite. After he grabbed a carton of vanilla ice cream, he went unerringly to the end of the line where his mate's scent was the strongest. She was once again working the cash register for the express checkout.

The closer he moved toward her the more her scent washed over him. His cock

throbbed painfully, straining against the zipper of his jeans. The need to touch and taste every inch of the woman who had no idea what she meant to him just about overpowered Leif. The wolf inside him threw back its head with a howl of longing.

His body shook when it was finally his turn to pay. He tried to not look at her, but after he handed her his money, his gaze lifted to her face. She gave him a tentative smile, as if unsure of herself or what his reaction might be.

That small, sweet smile was just too much. With a groan, Leif leaned over the counter that separated them, wrapped his hand around the back of her neck and pulled her lips to his. He hungrily kissed her, pushing his tongue inside her mouth to get his first taste of her. At first, her lips remained stiff and unyielding, but after he stroked her tongue, twining it with his, she started to kiss him back.

At the sound of loud whistles and cat calls, Leif jerked back to reality and to what he was doing. He abruptly released her and jumped back. His chest heaving as if he'd run a great distance, he looked at her. She stood there staring at him, her glasses slightly askew, looking dazed. The scent of her arousal filled his nose. He had to fight the growl that threatened to push past his lips.

Snatching up the ice cream, he dropped his gaze to her chest to look at the name tag pinned to her shirt. He only took the time to read it before he hurriedly walked away. With the taste of Jaden still on his tongue, Leif forced himself not to turn back and drag his mate away with him. He had one taste of her. It had to be enough.

* * * *

Jaden's brain had seemed to stop functioning. It took her more than a few seconds to gather her wits about her and remember where she was. She straightened her glasses as she tried to get her rapidly beating heart to slow. The left lens was smudged where his nose had brushed up against it while he'd kissed her stupid.

Holy crap. The gorgeous guy had come back and kissed her like there was no tomorrow. Kissed *her*, Jaden Pryce, the plain Jane who normally only attracted men who wouldn't know a dumbbell from a barbell. And what a kiss it had been. The feel of his tongue stroking hers had set her body on fire. Wetness had pooled in her pussy while her nipples had tightened beneath her shirt, begging for some attention.

Ignoring the large smudge hindering her line of sight, Jaden rang through the remaining customers in her line before she closed down her cash register for a quick washroom break. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw her friend Vicky, shut down her register and follow.

Once inside the employee washroom, Vicky said, "You have to tell who that hot hunk was who laid that kiss on you."

Jaden took off her glasses and ran them under the water in the sink before she grabbed some toilet paper from one of the stalls to dry them. "I have no idea."

"What do you mean you have no idea? From that kiss, I'd say you know each other pretty well."

Putting her glasses back on, Jaden shook her head. "It's true. I don't even know his name. I saw him here yesterday for the first time."

"Well, you must have made one hell of an impression if he came back today and kissed you as if he couldn't get enough of you. Why can't something like that happen to me?"

Shaking her head, Jaden smiled. "If I did, I have no idea how I did it. I doubt it will happen again, and I doubt I'll see him again."

Vicky rolled her eyes. "If you believe that, you need your head seriously examined. A guy does not kiss a woman like that and walk away forever. He'll be back. And I bet he'll hang around longer as well."

Jaden wanted to hope that would be the case, but she didn't have much confidence when it came to men. Yes, Mr. Gorgeous had kissed her senseless today, but he hadn't exactly stuck around afterwards. At the end there, it almost seemed as if he realized he'd been doing something he shouldn't have. And he couldn't have been all that affected if he could just walk away without a word. Jaden had been lucky she'd even remained upright, let alone regained all her brain power. For a split second, when he'd stared at her after the kiss, her muddled brain had thought his eyes had glowed mutedly.

"Come on, Vic. Do you really think a guy like that would have any real interest in a woman that looks like me?"

"Stop selling yourself short. You're not that bad."

"But I'm not that good, either. Compared to you, I look like chopped liver."

Vicky was in her mid-twenties, blonde and blue-eyed with a face that had turned more than one male head when she walked by. She had no trouble getting boyfriends and seemed to go through them faster than Jaden could keep track of.

"I've offered to give you a makeover, and you always refuse. If you'd stop wearing your hair up in that tight pony tail and wore contacts, you'd get your fair share of guys."

"I told you I can't wear contacts. I tried them once, and I couldn't tolerate them. And I doubt changing my hair style would help that much."

"Fine, have it your way. But I still think you'll be seeing your hunk again soon."

Vicky headed for the washroom door. "I'm going to go back to my register before both of us are missed. Don't take too long."

After Vicky left, Jaden stared at her reflection in the large mirror over the sink. Her lips were still a little puffy from being kissed. She touched them with her fingertips, remembering how it felt to have his lips moving over hers. It hadn't been the longest kiss in the world, but it was one she'd probably always remember. With a sigh, she tugged her pony tail tighter and left the washroom. She still had another four hours of her shift to get through. At least she had something to daydream about to help make the time pass more quickly.

* * * *

Leif managed to return to the mansion and sneak the new container of ice cream into the freezer with Roxie being none the wiser. He then spent the remainder of the time there thinking about Jaden. The taste of her mouth, the feel of her lips against his, the soft skin at the back of her neck all seemed to have burned into his brain. Her scent was already permanently etched there. He would be able to latch onto it anytime, anywhere.

Standing at the living room window, he watched Skylar's black Kawasaki Ninja ZX-14 motorcycle drive up to the front of the mansion. Skylar was attached to that bike as much as his true brother, Jager, was attached to his sword. Personally, Leif didn't know how Skylar could ride the thing, considering how low the handlebars were. Being a Supersport motorcycle, more suited for racing, the rider had to practically lean over the gas tank to reach them. Leif's back just ached thinking about how uncomfortable that

position had to be for any length of time.

He watched Skylar sit up, shut off the bike and put the kickstand down. Skylar was to replace him and Kye. Dirk was going to stay overnight. Ever since they'd found out Roxie was pregnant, the Protectors had stepped up their protection duties. At least one of them now spent the night at Beowulf and Roxie's place. With Miles, Saskia's true brother—and at one time a Protector himself until he'd decided he'd rather switch sides—on the loose they couldn't be too careful. If Miles got his hands on Roxie, especially in her condition, he'd use her to rule all the werewolf packs in her stead. So far, as far as they knew, Miles didn't know what Roxie looked like. They wanted to keep it that way so they kept Roxie well under wraps. And it wasn't as if the packs had a society paper that told everybody who was who. The leaders of every pack had come and sworn their allegiance to Roxie, but the general population didn't know too much about her yet.

Leif met Skylar at the door when he walked into the mansion. "You can tell Kye I already left. He's upstairs with Beowulf. They've been working in the baby's room most of the day. Of course Roxie and Dirk are in her office doing their computer stuff."

Skylar nodded. "All right. Off on a hot date, are you?" he asked with a smile.

Leif stiffened. "No. Why would you say that?"

"You seem to be in an awful hurry to get out of here. I thought maybe you were going to go to Wulf's Den tonight to look for your next conquest."

Wulf's Den was the nightclub Beowulf owned. Both werewolves and mortals went to the club. None of the mortals realized they were rubbing elbows with werewolves, either. Leif had picked up his fair share of women there.

"No," he said. "I'm not going to Wulf's Den tonight. Maybe I'm just in a hurry to get home, sit in front of the TV, and call it an early night."

Skylar burst out laughing. "Sure you are. What's the matter? Are you in a slump when it comes to finding women to sleep with? I haven't heard you bragging about taking a hot woman to bed for the last couple of days."

Clenching his jaw, Leif took a few deep breaths to stop himself from snapping his teeth at Skylar. As if he would go and sleep around on Jaden now that he'd found her. She was the only one that he wanted naked and moaning with pleasure in his bed. He wanted only her to stroke his cock, making him hard before she took him in her mouth. *Fuck*. There he went again, thinking about Jaden as a mate he was going to claim. It wasn't going to happen. He wasn't about to give up his freedom. He liked it too much.

Not bothering to explain himself to Skylar, Leif brushed past the other warrior and headed outside. Before heading to Marin County, where the Protectors' mansion was, he'd go for a drive. He needed to get himself back under control before he went home. So far Jager had kept his mouth shut about Leif finding his mate. He didn't need the others to figure it out as well.

Getting into his car, he drove out onto the street and decided to drive to wherever the mood struck.

Chapter Three

What a long day. Jaden walked out of the grocery store ready to go home, put her feet up and relax in front of the TV. Her shift had ended up being longer than what she'd been scheduled for. When one of the other girls had called in sick, the manager had asked her to stay for a few extra hours to help cover her shift. Not one to turn down the extra money, she'd said she would do it. Now her feet and lower back ached from standing at her cash register for so long.

Feeling tired, it was times like this that she wished she still had a car. When her old late-model Tempo had finally given up the ghost, she hadn't been able to afford another car to replace it. Not even another clunker. Jaden was now relegated to riding the bus to and from work, along with anywhere else she couldn't walk to.

Crossing the parking lot, heading for the bus stop not too far from the grocery store, she noticed the sporty black Cadillac parked close to the lot's entrance. If she were rich, that was the type of car she would buy for herself—one that cost an arm and a leg and had enough power under the hood to make an adrenaline junky envious.

Wanting to get a closer look, Jaden altered her course a little so she would have to walk right by it. She'd just take a peek inside to see if it was an automatic or a manual drive. She always thought it was a shame that people who could afford sporty cars like this one ended up with an automatic transmission. Sports cars were meant to be manuals.

At the driver's side, she stopped and looked inside. What she saw had her breath catching. The hot guy who had kissed her earlier that day sat behind the steering wheel smacking his forehead against it. Before she could think about what she was doing, she knocked on the closed window.

His straightened in his seat and turned his head to look through the window. When his gaze latched onto her, he jumped. Jaden took a step back when he opened the car door and got out. His gaze never left her, staring at her intently.

Jaden swallowed. He really was a big guy. Next to all those muscles and his much greater height, she felt really small. She had to crane her neck to look him in the face. "Ah, sorry. I didn't mean to disturb you. I was just admiring your car, and then when I saw you smacking your forehead on the steering wheel I..."

She let her words fall away. He didn't say anything, but continued to stare at her as he had both times she'd seen him in the store—with hunger blazing in his blue eyes. Her body of course reacted as it had before. An ache started to beat inside her pussy and wetness pooled. Every time she saw him, her libido kicked into high gear. She had to stop it or she'd end up not only being horny, but frustrated as well. He may have kissed her, but that didn't mean he would do anything beyond that.

He still had yet to say anything, Jaden really started to feel uncomfortable. She cleared her throat and shifted her gaze to her feet. "Like I said, I'm sorry. I'll leave you alone now." She'd begun to turn to continue on her way when his hand shot out and his fingers wrapped around her wrist.

"Wait," he said. The husky tone of his voice sent a thrill through Jaden's body straight to her pussy. "Don't go. Are you just getting off work?"

She turned back around to face him. "Yes." A shiver of awareness zipped through

her when his thumb stroked the inside of her wrist.

“I guess you wouldn’t have eaten dinner yet. Would you like to go somewhere with me to eat?”

She blinked. “You want to take me out for a meal?” Jaden had to ask just to make sure she’d heard him right. He couldn’t possibly want to take her out on a date. Could he?

“Yes. We could go back to your place first so you can change.” He then stiffened and said “Shit. What the fuck am I doing?” so quietly under his breath she almost missed it.

Jaden yanked free of his grasp and slowly backed away. “Look, it’s okay. I’ll just be on my way. I don’t want to miss my bus.” She’d only taken a few steps when he captured her wrist again.

“Jaden, don’t go. I..I’m having a hard time...just forget what I said.”

“How do you know my name?” He glanced down at her chest, and Jaden followed his gaze to her name tag pinned there. “Oh,” she said with a blush. “Right.”

She looked up when he caressed a finger across her cheek. “Your cheeks turn a nice shade of pink when you blush,” he said with a smile.

Of course that made her blush even more. “Ah, thanks.”

“Since I don’t have a tag, I’ll tell you my name. I’m Leif.”

Even his name was sexy. Jaden didn’t think there wasn’t anything about Leif that didn’t scream sex. She pulled on her wrist, but he kept his fingers wrapped around it. “I really should go before I miss my bus. The next one won’t come for another half hour.”

“Forget the bus,” he said as he started to pull her toward the passenger side of his car. “I’ll drive you, then we can go out for dinner.”

Jaden yanked a few more times on her wrist, but it didn’t do any good. She found herself standing near the passenger door while Leif opened it. “It’s really not necessary. I’m sure you’d rather be doing something else besides driving me home.” *Like going out on a date with a gorgeous model who matches you in looks.*

Leif’s answer was to pull her up against his wide chest and lower his mouth to hers. He kissed her hungrily, his tongue spearing into her mouth, before he lifted his head. His voice even huskier than it had been, he said, “It really is necessary, and there is nothing I’d rather do than be with you right here, right now.”

Jaden forgot to breathe. By the time she remembered to, Leif had gotten her into the passenger seat. He put the seat belt around her and the back of his hand brushed one of her breasts as he moved to click it into place. She sucked in a breath at the contact. Her nipples tightened even more, the taut peaks brushing against her shirt.

Unable to find her voice, she silently watched Leif shut her door and walk around the front of the car. He folded his large frame into the driver’s side, and he started the car. She closed her eyes. This had to be a dream. This couldn’t really be happening. She wasn’t sitting in a fancy sports car owned by a guy who was hotter than sin and about to let him drive her home. She counted to five and opened her eyes again. She found Leif watching her with a bemused look on his face. Oh, my god. It *really* was happening.

He gave her a lopsided grin. “So where to?”

*

He watched Jaden squirm in her seat. Watching her reactions to him seemed to attract him all the more. She was a mixture of uncertainty and shyness. So unlike the usual women he dated, she was like a breath of fresh air.

When his aimless drive had ended with him parked in the grocery store parking lot, Leif had sat there in disbelief for a few minutes. No matter how hard he tried to stay away from Jaden, he subconsciously always ended up doing the opposite. She drew him like a lode stone, and he couldn't fight the pull.

Frustrated, he thought to knock some sense into himself by bashing his forehead on the steering wheel. At the rate he was going, he'd end up cracking the damn thing. But when someone knocked on his window and he saw it was Jaden, everything he told himself about staying away from her flew out the window. He was out of the car in no time at all and staring at her with all the pent-up longing he was trying so hard to bury.

Asking her out for dinner had slipped off his tongue before his brain could catch up with it. Knowing he wasn't going to be able to just walk away without spending some time with Jaden, Leif had decided to roll with it. Maybe if he got to know her better, he'd be able to appease his mating urge enough to let him leave her unclaimed after the meal.

Leif smiled and heard Jaden's breath catch. "We can sit here all night if you want, but I'd much rather take you some place nicer than the inside of my car."

Jaden blushed again. "Oh. Sorry." She then rattled off an address.

He started the car and pulled out of the parking lot. "Do you like Italian? I know of a place that has the best Italian food."

"Anything is fine. I'm easy."

"You're easy, huh?" he said with a grin. "I'll have to remember that." He was then rewarded with the pinkening of Jaden's cheeks once more when he glanced in her direction.

"I...I didn't mean I'm easy, easy," she stammered. "I meant when it comes to food I'm easy. I'm not picky."

He chuckled. "Relax, Jaden. I'm just having a bit of fun with you. I knew what you meant."

"Oh."

When the silence grew between them, Leif asked, "Have you been working at the grocery store for long?"

"For about a year now."

"Do you like it?" Out of the corner of his eye, he saw her shrug.

"It's a job."

"So in other words, not really."

"It's better than some jobs I've had. That's about all I can say about it." She then pointed toward the windshield. "There's my place. The second driveway on the left."

Leif pulled into the drive of small bungalow. It wasn't much to look at, and the neighborhood was an older one. To be polite, he said, "Nice house."

"It's all right, I guess. It isn't mine. I rent the basement from the older couple who own it and live upstairs."

Jaden got out of the car before Leif could get to her side. She led him to a side door, unlocked it and stepped inside. He followed her in and down a flight of stairs and through another door to a small basement that had been converted into a bachelor-type apartment. The tiny kitchen, living room and bedroom were all visible with no walls separating them. Being in a below ground basement, the apartment was gloomy. Leif had a feeling even if it had been the middle of the afternoon, instead of the evening, there wouldn't have been much light streaming in from the small windows set high in the walls.

Personally, if he had to live here, he would have been claustrophobic within a week. The drop ceiling was low enough that Leif had to almost hunch his shoulders so the top of his head wouldn't brush it.

Moving to the area that was her bedroom, Jaden pulled some clothes out of her dresser, then said, "Take a seat. I'll just be a few minutes." She walked over to what had to be the bathroom and shut the door behind her.

Leif went and sat down on the couch that had seen better days. A small nineteen-inch TV sat across from it on an equally small stand. The place was no prize, but Jaden kept it neat as a pin. There was no clutter, and there didn't seem to be a speck of dust on any of the furniture. She obviously didn't have enough money to live better than this, but Jaden appeared to be making the most of what she could afford. Seeing how his mate lived, Leif had to fight the instinct to take her away from all this and give her something better. But since he wasn't going to claim her as his, he couldn't do that.

Jaden came out of the bathroom wearing a pair of black jeans and a pink long sleeved t-shirt. She carried her store uniform over to her bedroom and put it on the bed before she moved over to where he sat.

"Is what I'm wearing going to be okay?" She gestured to his jeans and shirt. "Going by what you have on, I figured we wouldn't be going anywhere fancy."

"No, it's casual."

"Good. I guess we should head out then."

Jaden headed for the door when Leif stood. Following behind her as she walked up the stairs, his gaze fell to her ass. The jeans she wore hugged her hips and backside, showing off her curved-in waist a lot better than the dress pants she'd worn for work. Even the long sleeved t-shirt she had on molded her upper body in a flattering fit. Before she'd turned away, Leif had seen she had generous breasts, something the grocery store's uniform did not reveal. Looking his fill of the back of her, his cock hardened painfully. He quickly adjusted his erection before Jaden could see it.

Back in his car, he drove them to the Italian restaurant he'd told her about. The interior had dark wood paneling on the walls, red thick carpet under foot and red and white checked tablecloths. Not owned by a large restaurant chain, it was family run and only had limited seating. Luckily for them, there was a table free, and they were quickly seated.

Once they were settled with menus open in front of them, Leif said, "So, what do you do for fun when you're not working?"

Jaden lifted her gaze from her menu and looked at him. "Not much. I mostly sit at home and watch TV or read."

"You don't go out with your friends?"

Her gaze fell to the menu again. "No. I don't have what you would call close friends. I don't mind really. I've always been a bit of a loner anyway."

When the waitress came to take their orders, Jaden ordered the manicotti and Leif asked for the spaghetti and meatballs. After she left them alone again, he said, "Nothing wrong with that, I guess."

Jaden snorted. "As if you would know anything about being a loner."

"Why would you say that?"

"Have you looked in the mirror lately? A guy like you is never alone. I'm sure you just have to snap your fingers and a woman falls into your arms. Which leads me to ask,

why me?”

Leif latched onto the last part of what she'd said. There was no way he was going to tell Jaden she wasn't too far off the mark with her statement about women throwing themselves at him. And if he survived this evening, there would more than likely be many more years of it.

“What do you mean by why you?” he asked.

“I'll say it again, have you looked in a mirror lately? Why would a guy as good-looking as you—who could get any woman he wanted—want anything to do with someone as plain as me?”

The wolf inside him didn't like how Jaden talked down about herself. Nor did the man. She may not have spectacular looks, but she wasn't ugly. If she only knew how she affected him, she wouldn't have asked that particular question. He still had a hard-on, and he ached to bury it deep inside her. He also wanted nothing more than to pull her to him and show her how wrong the perception she had of herself was. Someone had to have put that notion in her head. Whoever it was should count themselves lucky he didn't know them or Leif would have gladly made them pay.

Reaching across the table, he took hold of Jaden's hand and laced their fingers together. Touching her made the mating urge dig its claws deeper, but Leif wanted, needed, to have some tactile contact with her.

When she lifted her gaze to his, he said, “When I kissed you, did it feel as if I didn't want you? Even now, I want to come around to your side of the table, take you in my arms and kiss you until neither one of us knows our name.”

Jaden swallowed. “No, it didn't feel as if you didn't want me. I just don't understand why.”

He lowered his voice so only she heard. “If we were alone right now, I'd show you how badly I want you. Let's just say the front of my jeans is about two sizes too small.”

With his acute werewolf hearing, Leif heard her heart beat faster. The scent of her arousal perfumed the air around her. The smell of it made his cock jerk. Jaden may have a hard time understanding his interest in her, but that didn't mean she didn't want him.

As the air became charged with longing, the waitress appeared with their food. Leif reluctantly let go of Jaden's hand. She quickly put it on her lap under the table as her food was placed in front of her. Alone once again, she focused her gaze on her meal. Leif decided to let her have that space. He needed it to get himself back under control. Eating some of his spaghetti, he forced his body to cool. He couldn't let things blaze out of control between them. They would have their meal, he'd drop her back home, and then he would leave. He could do it. *No*, he had to do it. He didn't want the alternative if he couldn't walk away.

Chapter Four

Jaden stole a quick glance over at Leif as he drove them back to her place. She still felt a bit nervous around him, even though their meal had gone well. She hadn't choked on her food or dumped it on herself, which was a good thing. Most of her nervousness came from how good looking Leif was. During the meal, she'd pinched herself under the table a few times just to make sure she wasn't dreaming. And hearing Leif say he wanted her left her shaking. Stuff like this didn't normally happen to her.

Once Leif pulled his car into the driveway of her place and shut off the engine, Jaden took off her seat belt before she turned to face him. She really didn't want this evening to end. She thought of asking him if he wanted to come inside and watch some TV with her, but she didn't want to appear too pushy, or desperate.

Deciding to wait and see how Leif wanted to end the night, she said, "Thanks for dinner. The food was really good."

He took off his belt and turned slightly in his seat. "I told you they had the best Italian food."

"I'll have to remember it the next time I get a craving for Italian cuisine." When Leif didn't say anything more, but seemed to stare at her in that hungry way of his, she stammered, "Well...ah...I guess—"

Leif cut her off by cupping the back of her neck and leaning across his seat to kiss her. His lips moved sensuously over hers, angling for a better fit before he ran his tongue along the seam of her mouth. Once she opened for him, he deepened the kiss, stroking and sucking on her tongue.

At her moan, he pulled back. The heat she saw in his eyes had her whispering, "Do you want to come inside?"

In answer, Leif got out of the car, walked around to her side and opened her door. He held his hand out for her to take. Holding hands with their fingers laced together, Jaden let them into the house. He let go as they walked down the stairs, but as soon as they were inside her apartment, he pushed the door shut, then took her in his arms. His lips hungrily claimed hers once again.

Jaden wrapped her arms around Leif's neck as he backed her into the middle of the living room. His hands skimmed down her back to her bottom. Shifting her closer, she felt the hard length of his cock against her belly. Her pussy clenched, liking how good he felt. She rocked into him, which elicited what sounded like a soft growl out of Leif. The ache of arousal between her legs increased, causing her juices to leak into her panties.

Backing her toward her bed, he said against her mouth, "I promised myself I wouldn't do this, but the scent of your arousal is driving me crazy. I need to taste more of you."

Having slept with only two other men, she'd hadn't gone to bed with them until they'd been dating for a while, but Jaden felt no such reservations with Leif. His kisses were making her desperate for him. Right now, her body didn't care that they hardly knew each other. All it cared about was getting naked with the man in her arms.

When they reached the foot of her bed, Leif pulled off her glasses and put them on the corner of the mattress. He then took hold of the bottom of her shirt and pulled it over

her head. He let it fall to the floor. Staring down at her chest, he thumbed her taut nipples through her bra.

“So beautiful,” he said in a husky whisper. “They’re just begging for me to suck on them.”

He bent his head and kissed a path across her upper chest as he undid her bra at her back. Jaden lowered her arms to her sides so the straps slid down them, and her bra landed at their feet. She kicked it aside when Leif’s hand came up to cover one of her breasts. He rolled her nipple between his thumb and index finger while his lips made a lazy path across her skin toward it.

By the time he reached her nipple, she was practically panting. The feel of his tongue circling the taut peak made her moan. Leif put his other arm around her waist and bent her slightly over it as he opened his mouth and sucked her nipple between his lips. His suckling caused more wetness to leak out of her pussy. With each pull of his mouth, she felt it deep inside her core.

Leif moved to her other breast, lavishing the same attention on it as he’d done to the first. Jaden dug her nails into the tops of his shoulders, her arousal building by steady degrees. She rubbed against him, the feel of his hard cock making her ache to have it buried deep inside her.

Lifting his head, he ground his erection into her. His blue eyes seemed to glow mutedly for a split second before the faint glimmer was gone, making Jaden question if she’d actually seen it or not.

“I want to see more of you. Will you let me?” he asked.

“God, yes,” she said going up on tiptoe and taking possession of his lips.

Leif’s hands dropped to the waist of her jeans. He made short work of undoing the button and zipper. Jaden sucked his tongue into her mouth when he pushed his hand down inside the front of her panties. A finger brushed against her clit before delving inside her pussy.

“So wet,” Leif said as he brushed his lips along the side of her jaw. “I need to taste you there.”

He pushed her jeans down past her hips so they pooled at her feet. With a gentle push, he got her to sit on the bed. Nuzzling the side of her neck, he then leaned into her until she fell back onto the mattress. Leif shifted so he stood with his legs on either side of hers. He rested his weight on his hands on the bed above her head. He trailed kisses from the side of her neck to the top of her shoulder. Moving down her body, he licked and kissed across both collarbones and down to her breasts. He sucked each one into his mouth, swirling his tongue around her taut nipples until she panted, arching her back to push herself closer.

Leif continued his downward journey. By the time he’d kissed down her stomach, pausing to swirl the tip of his tongue inside her bellybutton, he was on his knees. He ran his hands down her sides and hooked the top of her panties with his fingers and pulled them down to join her jeans at her ankles. Picking up one foot, he took off her shoe and sock before he removed the other pair.

With a sweep of his hands, he pushed her jeans and panties all the way off. He then moved to kneel between her legs. Using his upper body to spread her thighs farther apart, he lifted her legs and placed each of her feet on his hard-muscled thighs. Leif dragged his lips up the inside of her leg. As he inched closer to her pussy, Jaden lifted her head to

watch. The sight of his dark auburn head between her thighs had her gripping the quilt under her in anticipation. Then his tongue came out and licked her wet core. She let out a keening moan, and her head dropped back down onto the mattress.

Leif lapped at her pussy. "You taste as good as you smell," he said.

His warm breath fanned over her clit when he spoke. Jaden lifted her hips, wanting more. With another strange growl, Leif licked her slick opening before stiffening his tongue to spear it inside her. Pushing down on his thighs with her feet, she rocked her pussy against his mouth. Her core coiled tighter, her climax not too far off.

Oral sex had never been this good. From past experience, Jaden had thought something was wrong with her since the other men she'd slept with hadn't ever been able to make her come this way. Obviously, it had been their lack of skill and not something physically wrong with her.

When Leif sucked on her clit and pushed a finger inside her, she panted, "Yes. Don't stop."

Leif pushed a second finger into her pussy to join the first. "Come for me, baby."

He continued to take her with his fingers as he alternated between licking and sucking on her clit. Jaden tightened her inner walls around the digits that moved in and out of her. She was so close. Clutching the quilt in tight fists, she called out Leif's name and fell over the edge into ecstasy. Her pussy rhythmically clutched his fingers while she came and as wave after wave of pleasure washed through her. He kept pumping his fingers in and out until the last crest hit her. When it was over, she relaxed on the bed, unable to move.

Once she regained her breath and realized Leif hadn't moved from his kneeling position on the floor, she weakly lifted her head. He had his head down with his forehead on the mattress between her legs. His hands were curled into tight fists on the bed next to her hips. He clenched them so tightly the veins and muscles popped out along his arms. His thighs shook under her feet.

"Leif? Are you all right?"

At the sound of her voice, he stiffened even more. "I can't. I won't." His voice sounded muffled from being pressed into the mattress.

"What do you mean?" After that orgasm, her brain wasn't exactly firing on all pistons at the moment. "You won't what?"

With one fluid move, Leif pushed to his feet. He stared down at her as she ran her gaze over him. His large erection strained against the front of his jeans. She sat up and reached out to stroke his cock, but he blocked her with a sweep of his hand.

"Don't," he said through clenched teeth. "Don't touch me or I'm lost."

"Lost? You're not making any sense."

Leif didn't answer. Instead, he spun away from her, walked out her apartment door and shut it behind him. The sound of his heavy footfalls going up the stairs, and then a few seconds later the sound of his car starting, left Jaden wondering what the hell had happened. He had given her the best orgasm of her life then up and ran off. With the hard to miss hard-on he'd sported, she'd have thought for sure Leif would have wanted to go all the way. It wasn't as if he hadn't wanted her. The way he had kissed and touched her weren't the actions of a man who hadn't been as turned on as she.

Sitting on the bed as her apartment grew darker, Jaden couldn't figure Leif out. And right now, she had no clue if she would ever see him again. He'd left in one hell of a

hurry. That didn't exactly make a girl think he wanted to be around her.

Picking up her discarded clothes, she threw them in the hamper and then walked to the bathroom naked. She needed to have a good long drenching in a hot shower. Wrapping the long strands of her pony tail around the scrunchie she wore to pull it back, Jaden formed it into a bun, twisting it tight enough so it would stay in place.

She turned on the water in the shower stall and waited until steam started to fill the room. Leif was an enigma. He ran hot one moment and cold the next. She'd just have to wait and see if he would drop back into her life again or stay away for good this time.

* * * *

Leif sped toward Marin County and home as if the hounds of hell chased him. That had been too fucking close. He should never have gone back inside her apartment after they'd finished their meal. He should have dropped her off and left just as he'd planned. But he'd been too weak to resist the pull Jaden had over him. Then she'd stammered at him, unsure of herself, and he hadn't been able to stop himself from kissing her. And then his determination not to touch her shattered.

He smacked the steering wheel with the flat of his palm. Once he'd started to kiss Jaden, he hadn't been able to stop. Her complete acceptance of him had been his downfall. One kiss had led to another, which led to him stripping her naked and feasting on her pussy until he'd made her climax.

The sound of her cries of pleasure still rang in his ears. Leif gritted his teeth as his cock jerked. He was still painfully aroused and would probably stay that way until he washed Jaden's scent from his body. It was like his own personal aphrodisiac, keeping his cock fully engorged.

And of course doing what he'd done with Jaden had not done him any favors. Oral sex with a would-be mate only increased the mating urge. He now had to look forward to a night of sex-filled dreams. The only way to stop them was to sleep with Jaden, and he didn't want to do that. He'd really bugged himself.

Arriving at the Protectors' mansion, Leif parked his car in the large garage and went inside. He headed for the kitchen to grab a cold beer out of the fridge. Just as he reached the doorway that led down to the basement, Jager walked through it. He must have been working out down there, because he was bare-chested and had a small towel hung around his neck. There was a sheen of perspiration on his face as well. Just the person Leif didn't need to run into right now.

Jager stepped in front of Leif and looked him up and down. "You aren't looking so great." He then sniffed the air. A large smile appeared on his face. "Well, well. Let me guess. Since you have the scent of a mortal female on you, obviously your mate, along with the scent of her passion on you, I'd say you got your taste of her but didn't fuck her."

Having an acute sense of smell as every werewolf had, it was no surprise to Leif that Jager had been able to pick up on all that with one sniff. It also meant Leif would have to get into a shower pretty darn quick before he ran into any of the others.

"Piss off, Jager," he said as he brushed past him and continued on into the kitchen. Jager followed right behind him.

"You won't be able to fight it forever, Leif."

He pulled out a beer, twisted off the cap and took a big swallow before he answered.

“I was able to this time.”

“Yeah, but for how long? Why torture yourself? She’s your mate. You have to be at least halfway in love with her now or she wouldn’t be yours.”

Leif scowled. Well, shit. Jager was right, but he wasn’t going to tell the other warrior that. Just spending some quality time with Jaden had him wanting her more than he had before. He wanted to know everything about her. And getting her glasses off, along with her clothes, he found she was even more attractive. If he wanted to be truthful with himself, a tiny, miniscule part of him wanted to wrap her in his arms and never let her go. The thought of spending the rest of his years waking up with her in his bed didn’t seem as repugnant as it first had.

But how long would that last? He honestly didn’t know if he could stay true to one woman for that long of a period of time. He was only a couple of years over a thousand. Could he spend the remaining two thousand years of his life with the same woman even if she was his destined mate? Given his past history of becoming quickly bored with his latest flame, the chances weren’t very good. He didn’t want to join his soul with a mate, and find out years later, it wasn’t something he wanted. It wouldn’t be fair to him or to his mate.

He shook his head. “I can’t, Jager. It’s not in me to be a mate.”

“If you think that way, then you’re an idiot. You’re wired just like any other male werewolf. We all long to find our mates, to love and protect them.”

“Well, I’m a living, breathing example of that not being true.”

“Leif, you’re fucked in the head. You’re going to fall just like the rest of us who have become mated. In a way, I pity you, though. Your mating urge is going to have you so strung out you won’t know whether you’re coming or going. And when you break, and I can guarantee you will, your choice will be taken from you.” With that cryptic remark, Jager turned on his heel and walked out of the kitchen.

Leif finished his beer in two large swallows and thumped the empty bottle onto the counter. He got himself a second beer before he headed upstairs to his room. Much to his dismay, he found Saskia leaning against his door as if she had been waiting for him. This night just seemed to get better and better.

She crossed her arms over her chest and gave him a knowing stare when he came even with her. “Claim your mate and be done with it, Leif.”

He scrubbed his face with his hand. “You heard what Jager and I were talking about in the kitchen.”

“Yes, but I already knew about you finding your mate before that. I saw it yesterday when you met her. I’ve just been keeping quiet about it to see what you would do.”

Leif knew exactly what Saskia meant by saying she “saw” it. She had the sight. Just like her grandmother, she saw snatches of the future. It had been Saskia’s grandmother who had the vision about the foretold one.

“Well, if you saw it, then you already know I’m fighting it.”

The corner of Saskia’s mouth lifted in a half smile. “I didn’t need to see it to know that.”

“I’m not going to claim Jaden,” he said.

“Yes, you will. Your will is weakening already. As Jager said, you smell like you were doing some fooling around with your soon-to-be mate. And if you wanted to keep yourself distanced from her, you wouldn’t be referring to her by name.”

Was everyone in his family not listening to what he wanted? He sighed. "It doesn't matter. I won't do it."

Saskia pushed away from his door. Her face took on a serious mien. "If I could, I would order you to take her as your mate. But this has to be your choice. That doesn't mean I can't pull you off protection duties until you decide to do what your mating urge must be screaming at you to do." When he opened his mouth to protest, she held up her hand. "Not a word. You have no say in the matter. I'm the leader of The Protectors, and I have to do what is best for the rest of us and Roxie. If you're going to continue on with this stupidity, then I have no choice but to pull you. Soon you'll be no good to anyone. So, as of now, you're off rotation."

Leif watched Saskia walk away while he resisted the urge to beat his head against the wall. Now a member of his own family was conspiring against him. *Shit, shit, shit.* Could his life get any worse? He didn't want to be pulled off protection duty. He *needed* to be in the rotation. Without it, he would do nothing but think about Jaden with all the free time he'd have on his hands. He was so screwed.

Chapter Five

The next day at work, Jaden caught herself looking down the length of the line of customers for her cash register again. She'd done it at least a million times already, hoping to catch a glimpse of Leif. As in all the other times, she didn't see him.

He had been all she'd been able to think about until she'd gone to bed, and she'd started thinking about him again as soon as she'd woken up. She'd even been awakened a couple times during the night to the most erotic dreams she'd ever had—both of them featuring Leif. Maybe because of the great orgasm he'd given her, she now found herself obsessing about him. And she never obsessed over men.

Even though she'd told herself that what they had done hadn't really meant anything to Leif, she couldn't stop thinking about him, wanting to be held in his arms again. It was stupid, really. After his departure last night, the chances weren't high that he would want to see her again. Hadn't he said so himself that he couldn't and wouldn't. Jaden took that to mean he couldn't be with her. Not that she understood why. From her perspective, things had been going pretty damn good.

After she finished ringing through the last customer in line, for now, Jaden lifted her head to find Vicky staring at her from the cash register across from hers. "There's something different about you today," Vicky said as she studied Jaden closely. "I can't put my finger on it."

Jaden pushed her glasses higher up on her nose. "No, there isn't. Maybe it's just tiredness. I did work a longer shift yesterday."

Vicky shook her head. "No, that's not it. It's hard to explain, but there is *something* different. If I didn't know any better, I would say you got laid last night."

Jaden blushed. "Don't talk that way. If Grant hears you, he'll give you hell for it."

Grant was their manager and believed all his employees should be above reproach. He'd actually laid off another girl just because she'd tried to stand up to a customer who was basically verbally abusing her. Grant had told everyone that he'd laid her off because she hadn't been working out as well as he'd thought she would. They all knew that wasn't true.

Vicky huffed. "Forget about Grant. Knowing him, he's probably in his office right now seeing how far he can shove a stick up his butt just to keep himself all stiff and snooty. The pretentious ass."

Jaden covered her mouth with her hand, hoping to smother her laugh, but it bubbled out of her anyway. She could just picture Grant doing it too. "You're bad," she said with another laugh.

Vicky waved her comment away with a flick of her hand. "So, are you going to tell me what you did last night that brought this change to your appearance?"

Jaden instantly sobered and another blush colored her cheeks. What could she say to Vicky? That the hottest guy she'd ever seen gave her an intense orgasm and then bailed on her right afterward?

When she didn't say anything, Vicky then said, "Ah ha. I think I know what did it. It was that kiss that hot guy gave you yesterday."

She rolled her eyes. "It was only one kiss. I doubt it was enough to change me that

much. Remember, I don't even know his name." That little white lie wasn't going to hurt anyone.

"Maybe it's the prospect of seeing him again. I've been watching you. I've seen you trying to be oh-so-casual as you look at each customer that comes to your cash register. You're looking for him, aren't you?"

Jaden adjusted her glasses again. "So what if I am?"

Vicky smiled. "There is nothing wrong with it. It just goes to show you have needs just like every other woman. And a man like that, I'd be watching for him at every turn as well."

"Well, I doubt I'll see him today."

"You never know."

Just then a customer walked up to Jaden's cash register. Looking away from Vicky, and essentially ending their conversation, she rang through each item. As for Vicky's last remark, Jaden did know. It was just wishful thinking on her part to assume Leif would just saunter into the grocery store, walk to her cash register, and say he wanted to continue where they'd left off last night. She had to be realistic and face facts. For a girl like her to end up with a man like Leif, Earth would have to tilt off its axis and spin in the opposite direction.

* * * *

It had been three god-awful, painful days since Leif had last seen Jaden. Tenaciously, he hung onto his resolve not to see her again, but he was losing the battle. His mating urge had not only sunk its claws into him, it was ripping and pulling with its sharp teeth as well. No longer able to watch over Roxie, he thought of nothing but Jaden almost the entire twenty-fours in a day. It was unending, and it was driving him insane with need. And nothing he did seemed to stop it. He'd even driven out to Muir Woods, hoping shifting to his wolf form and going for a long run in the forest would help, but that was one mistake he wouldn't make again anytime soon. In wolf form, his mating urge went off the charts, the wolf inside him more than willing to search Jaden out and force him to claim her.

And to make matters even worse, he basically walked around all day with a hard-on. He'd tried to find some relief by knocking off in the shower, but at this stage, it no longer worked. He could stroke his cock until his hand hurt, but he never reached climax. He had a feeling only sleeping with Jaden would end that particular pain. Leif had no idea if that was normal for a male in the throes of the mating urge, mostly because he'd never heard of another male werewolf ever refusing to claim his mate.

Now in the third day of unending torture, Leif paced the length of his room like the wild wolf he was. He'd been at it for hours. Every time he passed the mirror attached to his dresser he caught a glimpse of his mutedly glowing eyes. Along with his dick staying perpetually hard, his eyes glowed with the state of arousal he was in constantly.

By now, everyone in the mansion knew he'd found his mate, and that he wasn't thrilled about it. It was kind of hard to miss when he walked around with a huge bulge in the front of his pants and his glowing eyes. He'd had every member of his family cajole, then yell at him, trying to persuade him to just go to Jaden. He refused all of them. Today, if they tried it again, he didn't know if he could still do it.

Leif suddenly stopped pacing when his bedroom door slammed open and three of his

brothers-in-arms barged in. He growled and snapped his teeth at Roan, Jager and Skylar. Since they were the only three true brothers, they were all similar in looks as well as in size. When they advanced on him, Leif realized he was sunk. There was no way he could get away from the three of them working together.

Roan rushed in to take hold of one of his arms while Skylar grabbed the other. Jager picked up his legs, holding on tight to his ankles. Leif arched his back, pulling on his arms and legs to get free, but he couldn't shake them off.

"Get the fuck off me," he growled.

Jager shook his head. "Not going to happen. Enough is enough."

"Yeah," said Roan. "We've heard you pacing up here all day. Everyone has. This torturing yourself is going to stop, today."

They started carrying him out his bedroom door. "Where are you taking me," he snapped.

"Out to your car so you can go to your mate," Roan stated.

Leif really started to fight them then. "No. I can't leave the mansion, let alone get in my car. I'll just head straight for Jaden."

"That's what we're counting on," Skylar said with a chuckle. "And just so you know, Saskia knows exactly what we're doing. She's also not here, so don't even think about calling out for help. No one is going to save you."

Even though he struggled, muscles straining, trying to throw them off balance with his weight, the brothers managed to get him out to his car. One of them must have moved it out of the garage to the front of the mansion. They wrestled him into the driver's side and strapped him in. Leif then noticed the engine was running.

Jager bent into the car and slapped a pair of dark sunglasses over Leif's eyes. "We can't have mortals, including your mate, seeing those glowing peepers of yours. At least not yet. Explanations of what you are can wait until after you've claimed her." Jager then slammed the car door shut.

Free of the confines of his room, Leif couldn't ignore his mating urge anymore. He put the car into gear and peeled away down the large drive. It vaguely registered on him that the sky was just starting to darken. He drove straight to Jaden's basement apartment, unable to stop what was about to happen. The only thing that would save them both would be if she wasn't home.

Leif pulled over to the curb in front of the house and parked. He got out of the car and crossed the distance between it and the side door of the house in a few long strides, using his ability to move faster than any mortal could. If anyone saw him, he pretty much didn't care. All of him was focused on getting to his mate, of making her his.

He banged on the door, praying Jaden wouldn't be home and then just as quickly praying she was. When he heard movement on the other side of the door, he groaned to himself. His senses went on high alert in anticipation of Jaden opening it.

When she swung it open, she asked, "Leif?" The tone of her voice said she was surprised to find him standing on her doorstep.

With her scent filling his head, he was beyond being able to form words. Longing and desire pounded through him, leaving no room for anything else. Only left with the need to act, he pulled her to his chest and took Jaden's mouth in a searing kiss, unleashing all his pent-up arousal.

Circling his arms around her waist, he picked her up off her feet so he could kiss her

without having to bend his head. He carried her over the threshold and kicked the door shut before he walked down the stairs, all the while hungrily moving his mouth over hers. She put her legs around his waist, her pussy coming to rest against his cock, where he ached the most.

As he stepped into her apartment and shut that door as well, Jaden buried her fingers in his hair at the back of his head and kissed him just as greedily. Her responsiveness caused a loud growl of need to rumble out of his chest. He carried her to the bed and put her down on the center of it, following her down. With her legs still around his waist, his cock remained against her pussy. He rocked his hips, groaning into her mouth with the pleasure of it.

Leif lifted his head. While he covered one of Jaden's breasts, tugging on her taut nipple that he badly wanted to suck, he said, "Tell me you want this."

Jaden arched her back into his touch. "Yes. God, how I want this. I've done nothing but dream and think about you touching me again."

A shudder racked his body. She may not be a female werewolf, but Jaden was obviously feeling the effects of the mating urge as well. His bringing her to orgasm that night must have started the process that would make her his.

He took off her glasses, reached over the side of the bed and put them on the small nightstand next to it. Leif then took her hand and led it to the front of his jeans. "Touch me. I ache for you."

Jaden cupped him through the material of his pants before trailing her fingers upward over his full length. When she reached his button and fly, she undid them both. He sucked in a breath when his cock sprang free and she took him in her hand. As she stroked it up and down, he couldn't hold back the growls of pleasure that rumbled out of him.

When she circled the head of his dick, rubbing the bead of pre-cum that she found there into his skin, Leif had to fight not to come then and there. Even though all male werewolves could keep an erection for hours at a time, even after coming several times, he wanted his first time to last a little bit longer.

In one pull, he yanked Jaden's t-shirt off and over her head. He removed her bra just as quickly. Once he had her bared breasts in front of him, he bent his head and sucked a nipple into his mouth. Rocking his hips, pushing his erection tighter into her hand as she stroked his shaft, Leif sucked until Jaden was panting.

He groaned at the loss when she let go of his cock and yanked at the bottom of his shirt, lifting it up to his chest. To help, he grabbed the back of it and dragged it over his head, taking the sunglasses he wore with it. Not caring if Jaden saw his mutedly glowing eyes, he bent his head and sucked on her other nipple.

Jaden tugged at the top of his jeans, trying to push them over his hips. "Take these off."

He quickly obliged. Jaden's hand once again wrapped around his cock, squeezing him tight as she stroked it. He felt about ready to explode. The scent of her arousal beat at him, making his cock harden even more.

With no finesse at all, Leif tore off the sweatpants she wore, taking her panties with them. Feeling more animal than man, having pushed the mating urge to its limits, he used a thigh to spread her legs wider before he settled his hips between them. He tested her readiness to take him by stroking a finger against her pussy. It came away soaked.

With an animalistic growl, he positioned his cock at her entrance and seated himself to the hilt with one stroke. The feel of her wet inner walls closing around his shaft had Leif's eyes almost rolling back inside his head. Pleasure built in his gut and spread throughout his body. It increased a thousandfold when he started to move inside her.

Resting his weight on his bent arms, he worked his cock in and out of her pussy. "So tight," he groaned. "Feel so good."

Jaden's inner walls squeezed his shaft, making it an even tighter fit. She whimpered beneath him as she lifted her hips to match his strokes. He'd been with a lot of women over his long life, but none had given him this much pleasure. Leif usually liked to take his time when he had sex. Not this time. This joining, he wanted Jaden hard and fast, wanted to hear her desperate cries of passion ringing in his ears as she strived for her orgasm.

He pounded into her faster. Just before his climax hit the point of no return, he felt it—the mating bond beginning to form. Looking down into Jaden's face, he watched her eyes snap open, as she obviously felt it too. A part of his soul reached out for hers at the same time hers reached for his. They both sucked in a breath when they joined and became one. Staring up at him in wonder, she then cried out as she started to come. With her pussy milking his shaft in a tight fist, Leif drove into her one final time, threw back his head, and howled as his cock pulsed deep inside her, filling her with all he had to give. When the last tremor shook him, he collapsed on top of Jaden and buried his face in the crook of her neck.

*

Jaden wrapped her arms around Leif's back as his much heavier body pushed her deeper into the mattress. He was a solid weight atop her, making it hard to take a breath, but she liked him there. Little aftershocks rocked her, twitching around his cock that was still deep inside her, and still very hard. She had no idea how Leif had managed to keep his erection. She'd felt it when he'd come. She'd also felt something else pass between them just before they'd found their release. To describe what it felt like, she'd have to say it was as if they had joined not only their bodies but another part of them as well.

She shivered when Leif nuzzled her neck and gently scraped his teeth along her skin. He nipped her gently, then licked over the same spot. He also pulled back his hips until his cock was almost free of her body, only to push back inside.

With a gasp, she asked, "Again?"

"Again," he growled in her ear.

In a show of strength, Leif wrapped his arms around her, and holding her close, he sat up, taking her with him. He settled her bent legs on either side of his hips and then urged her to ride him. Being on top had his cock sinking even deeper inside her pussy while she impaled herself on him over and over again.

While she rode him, Leif cupped the back of her head and pushed her mouth to the side of his neck where it met his shoulder. She licked his skin and felt him shiver beneath her.

"Bite me, Jaden. Mark me," he said in a voice husky with arousal.

"No." She shook her head. "I can't bite you."

"I want you to. Mark me as yours."

Leif pushed up into her hard enough to lift her knees off the mattress when she grazed her teeth along the spot he wanted her to bite him. She was never one for the

kinky stuff in bed, but something seemed to take her over. Somehow knowing this would tease Leif, she dragged her teeth over his skin a few more times before she gently bit down.

He stiffened, his hands on her hips urging her to ride him faster. “Harder. Bite me harder.”

His cock seemed to harden even more, hitting a spot inside her pussy that had another climax building. Gripping Leif’s shoulders tight, Jaden bit him as hard as he demanded. He surged up into her harder and made one of those strange animalistic growls he’d made before. And just like that, she fell over the edge, whimpering against his skin as she climaxed. Leif came at the same time, holding her hips to his as his cock emptied into her pussy.

Tasting blood on her tongue, Jaden pulled her mouth away from Leif’s neck to see she’d broken the skin when she’d bitten him. Horrified at what she’d done, she quickly said, “I hurt you. I didn’t mean to.”

Leif put a hand under her chin and forced her to look at him. “You didn’t hurt me. I asked you to mark me, and you did.”

Now just embarrassed that she’d let herself get carried away with the moment, she relaxed against his chest and rested her head on his shoulder. Adjusting her legs, incredibly she found Leif’s cock still thick and hard inside her. She squeezed her inner walls around him, and he moaned. He’d come twice. It shouldn’t be possible.

“Don’t get too comfortable there,” he said. “I’m not finished yet.”

She sat back up. “I don’t know if I can a third time.”

“Yes, you can.”

Bending his head to one of her breasts, he circled her nipple with his tongue before taking it inside his mouth. He sucked on it while he held onto her hips and slowly raised and lowered her on his shaft. He continued to do it until she moaned.

Releasing her nipple with a pop, Leif lifted her off him, turned her so she was on the bed on all fours, and moved to kneel behind her. “I’m going to take you this way to truly make you mine.”

He bent over her and nipped the back of her neck as the head of his cock nudged at her pussy. Straightening, he pushed forward, sinking his shaft inside her. Jaden gasped. He was in so deep she swore she felt him at the back of her throat. Then he started to move. Holding onto her hips, keeping her right where he wanted her, he surged into her with powerful strokes. Leif seemed to growl with each exhale he made. Jaden’s pussy coiled tighter as the desire she felt grew stronger.

She fisted the sheets under her hands, pushing backwards to meet him. The orgasm she thought she wouldn’t be able to have tore through her when Leif reached around her and stroked her clit with his finger. Whimpering his name, Jaden vaguely heard him howl like a wolf when he came.

Satiated and worn out from the intense sex she’d just had, Jaden let Leif lower her to her side so her back was pressed to his chest. Her last thought before sleep claimed her was that Leif’s cock was still hard, keeping their bodies joined.

Chapter Six

Leif awoke to the sensation of a warm female body wrapped around him. The feel of Jaden's breasts plastered to his side and her leg thrown over his thigh had his cock starting to harden. He ignored it as memories of the night rose to the surface of his mind.

Lying perfectly still, he shifted his gaze, only to look at Jaden. She appeared to be in a deep sleep. Each breath she took was deep and even. He silently cursed himself with every swear word he knew. He'd taken her in every position imaginable, more than once, during the night, making them well and truly mated. And judging by the throbbing in his now fully erect cock, he was ready to go again.

He really had mixed emotions about being mated to Jaden. On one hand, the old part of him wanted to run away in horror. And on the other, the new part found what had passed between him and Jaden to be something he never wanted to give up. Making love to her had been mind-blowing. Just one night of passion and he was addicted to her touch. And after the closeness they'd shared, he wanted to know everything there was to know about her, too know her better than anyone else ever had.

And it was probably a good thing he felt that way, because now that he'd claimed her as his mate, they wouldn't be able to stand being apart for any real length of time. Now he had the excruciating task of trying to figure out how the hell to explain that to Jaden as well as the fact that he was a werewolf.

Jaden stretched against him, her knee nudging his erection. She pressed her lips to his chest and kissed him. "Hmm, I see someone is awake before me, and raring to go."

She trailed her fingers down his body to his cock and took him in her hand. She pumped his shaft. Leif knew what would happen if he let this go much further, but with Jaden stroking him, he had a hard time getting his brain to function. With all the blood in his body rushing to his cock, that was no surprise. "Ah...god, you're making me horny. Ah, Jaden, we should have a talk."

Letting go, she rolled on top of him, straddling his thighs. Jaden shook her head playfully. "Somehow, I really don't think you're in the mood for talking right now. I know I would much rather be doing something else."

Leif sucked in a breath when she bent to his chest and flicked one of his flat nipples with the tip of her tongue. His erection jerked against her stomach when she did it to the other as well. "We really need to talk, Jaden."

"It can wait. I have more important things to do."

Obviously, sometime during the night, Jaden had lost her shyness around him. She shifted down lower on his legs as she licked, kissed and nipped a trail down to his abs, moving ever closer to his cock.

His breath punched out of his chest when her lips settled on his lower belly. "Jaden, seriously, we have...oh Christ."

She'd taken a firm grip on the base of his shaft and circled the tip with her tongue. She then proceeded to lick him like an ice cream cone. He lifted his head to watch her. The sight of her laving the length of his cock while she used her other hand to fondle his balls had him lifting his hips off the bed. Leif then just about lost it when she gave the head one last lick before opening her mouth and sucking him deep.

The suction of her mouth had his balls drawing up close to his body. Her head bobbed up and down as she worked him in and out. Having his mate suck him off was the most erotic thing he'd ever seen. He also knew if he let Jaden keep this up he wasn't going to be able to stop himself from blowing his load.

"Jaden," he panted with a groan. "Even though this feels so damn good, you have to stop or I'll come."

Keeping a tight grip on him, she released his cock and shifted her gaze to his face. "I want you to. I know you'll still be hard even after you do." She then sucked him back inside the moist confines of her mouth.

She sucked on him hard, her cheeks hollowing as she worked her hand up and down the part of his shaft she couldn't take. His cock hardened to bursting point. The pleasure she gave him had him growling, thrusting his hips, pushing more of his length into her mouth. Then, for one suspended moment, he hung on the edge of coming before he crossed over it with a loud moan. Jet after jet of cum pumped out of his cock. Jaden didn't stop sucking until she'd wrung every last drop out of him.

With a satisfied smile on her face, she climbed up his body and positioned her wet pussy over his still hard cock. "My turn," she said.

Reaching between them, she took hold of his shaft and slowly lowered herself down on it. They both moaned in pleasure. Jaden put her hands on his chest before she began to ride him. Leif reached up to cover her breasts, squeezing and tugging on her nipples. He looked down at where their bodies were joined, watching her pussy taking his cock over and over again.

She sat up and rocked against him faster. Jaden angled her hips so her clit rubbed against his pubic bone, wringing a breathy moan out of her. Leif felt another climax build. Just when he thought he wouldn't be able to hold back long enough until Jaden had found her release, she let her head fall back and released a keening moan. Her pussy gripped his cock rhythmically, sending him into an intense orgasm.

When it was over, he put his arms around Jaden and pulled her down to his chest. His still hard cock kept them joined. He kissed her sweaty forehead, realizing that he was well and truly lost.

* * * *

Jaden was just getting nice and comfortable sprawled out on top of Leif when he lightly slapped her butt and said, "No more sleeping. We aren't staying in bed all day."

She pillowed her chin on top her hands on his chest and met Leif's gaze. His eyes seemed to be normal again, not that she really believed they had been glowing in the first place. Considering she'd thought she noticed the change only while they were having sex, Jaden had to chalk it up to her mind being fried with pleasure, distorting her sight. Being nearsighted, her eyesight wasn't exactly great to begin with. It was plausible that she was only seeing things. And as for the animalistic growls and wolfish sounding howls, her ears must not have been working properly, either.

Cocking her hips so his still hard cock moved deeper inside her, she said, "Are you sure about that?"

Leif slapped her butt again and gave her a grin. "I'm positive, greedy woman. At this rate, you'll make me weak and feeble."

She raised a brow. "Yeah, right. I'm sorry, but I can't see you ever getting in that

condition.” Jaden nipped his chin, then sucked on the stubble-roughened skin.

Leif’s body shivered. Instead of going for round two, he rolled her to her back, pulled out of her and pinned her to the mattress. “I can see you aren’t going to take pity on me. To make you behave, I’m going to get up and use your shower.”

She sighed dramatically. “Oh, very well. Since my shower is nothing more than a small corner unit with no tub, we won’t be able to share. You can shower first then I’ll take one.”

“Do you have to work today?”

“No, not until tomorrow. Why?”

He kissed the tip of her nose. “Because once you’re showered and dressed, we’re getting out of here.”

“And where exactly are we going?”

“My place so you can meet my family,” Leif said as he got up and stood beside the bed. “Where is the shower?”

Jaden gave his naked body an appreciative glance as she slipped out of bed to stand next to him. She’d explored every inch of him during the night. Leif’s body was a work of art. She could probably spend an eternity running her hands and lips over all his muscles. And then there was his cock, which was long and thick and still hard, jutting out from his body.

Leif snapped his fingers in front of her face. “Jaden? The shower?”

Meeting his gaze, she could tell from the look in his eyes that she’d been caught staring. Not embarrassed in the least—how could she be with all the things they’d done to each other during the long hours of the night—she said, “I’ll show you.”

Walking past him, Jaden led Leif to her almost closet-sized bathroom. She pushed open the door and went to pull out a clean towel from under the sink. After she put it on top the counter, she turned to find him stepping into the shower stall. He took up all the space inside. There was no way the two of them could fit in there at the same time.

“I’ll leave you to it,” she said as he shut the shower door and turned on the water. “Just don’t use all the hot water on me. The hot water heater isn’t the best here.”

“Gottcha,” he said as he tipped his head back under the spray, having to bend his knees to do it.

Jaden went back to the bed and stretched out on it. A goofy smile spread across her face. Never in a million years would she have thought she’d spend the night getting screwed silly by a man like Leif. The other guys she’d slept with hadn’t had near Leif’s stamina in bed. It had taken hours, and numerous orgasms, before he’d lost his erection. And boy did he know how to use his cock. He’d made her come over and over again. If things didn’t work out between her and Leif, she didn’t know if she could go back to a regular guy.

That thought gave Jaden pause. Before Leif had shown up at her door yesterday evening, she’d thought for sure she would never see him again. She’d been shocked to see him standing there. But when he’d pulled her into her arms and started to devour her mouth, she hadn’t wanted to question what had caused him to change his mind.

She listened to the sound of the shower running and shook her head. She wasn’t going to exactly question him now, either. Whatever had caused it, she was quite happy with the way things had turned out. Having Leif say he wanted to take her to meet his family had to mean he wasn’t going to skip out on her again. Didn’t it? She shook her

head. She had to stop second guessing everything, something she notoriously did more often than not. It was kind of a byproduct of her not being exactly confident about herself. If she really wanted to have things work out with Leif, it didn't take much thinking on her part to realize she couldn't let herself get that way around him. As good-looking as he was, she doubted Leif had self-confidence issues like she did.

Five minutes later, the shower shut off. Jaden lifted her head from the pillow when Leif stepped out of the bathroom with a towel around his hips. He ran a hand through his damp auburn hair and walked to the bed.

"The shower is all yours," he said. Before she could get up, he added, "How about I take us out for breakfast? I'm starved."

Jaden scooted off the end of the bed. "I'm hungry too." She smiled. "I guess we both worked up an appetite."

Leif grabbed her arm and pulled her to him. He kissed her slowly and thoroughly until she started to breathe quicker. After he released her, he said, "Hurry up in the shower."

She didn't waste any time getting into the bathroom or starting the water in the shower. No way was she going to delay Leif's plans any longer than she had to. For the first time in a very long time, Jaden actually looked forward to what the day would bring.

* * * *

During breakfast at a diner-type restaurant not too far from Jaden's place, Leif started to become a little anxious. Having decided not to claim her as his mortal mate, he hadn't prepared himself for what he would do if he did. He had to tell her the truth about him. There really was no choice in the matter. If he didn't, Jaden would think it awfully strange that he wanted her with him all the time. Mortals who first entered into relationships didn't do that. They eased into making that kind of commitment. The mating bond he'd forged with Jaden last night negated that.

He wasn't exactly scared to tell her he was a werewolf. It was just the thought of Jaden becoming afraid of *him* didn't sit well in his gut. He sure as shit didn't want to scare her away. Leif may not have wanted a mate, but he had one now, and he planned to do right by her. Letting her leave him so she would go through the separation anxiety that would ultimately come was not something he wanted her to experience this early when it really wasn't necessary. She was his to protect and care for. And the first thing he would do to in regards to that last thing would be to get her out of the tiny basement apartment. Christ, his room at the Protectors' mansion was the same size if not bigger than her whole apartment.

"What has you all silent and brooding?" Jaden asked as she put her fork down on her empty plate.

Leif watched her tuck her hair behind her ear. It had been a bit of a battle, but he'd managed to get Jaden to keep it down after her shower. He liked it better that way then pulled back in a ponytail. "I'm not brooding. I just got lost in my thoughts."

"Well, they must have been pretty intense since you were scowling while you stared off into space."

"Maybe it was thoughts of you that had me so distracted."

"Gee, thanks. Am I supposed to be flattered to know thinking about me makes you scowl like that?"

“Actually, yes,” he said with a chuckle. “I was just thinking about how you’ll react when you meet my family. We aren’t exactly like your normal, run-of-the-mill family.”

Jaden waved his concern away. “At least you have a family to introduce me to. I wish I could say I had one to bring you to meet.”

“You have no family at all?”

“No. It has only been me for a while now. I pretty much grew up with just my Mom. I haven’t a clue who my father is. She never talked about him, and I never really got a chance to push the issue with her, either. When I was sixteen, a car jumped the sidewalk when she was walking home from work and hit her. She was killed instantly. The driver was a twenty-year-old guy who’d had one too many drinks to have any business getting behind the wheel of a car.”

Leif reached across the table and took Jaden’s hand in his. “So what happened to you? Did you have grandparents to stay with?”

“Nope. My mom’s parents had been up there in age when they had her, so by the time of her death, they had already passed away. I was put into foster care for a couple of years. Once I was eighteen, I moved out of my foster parents’ place. I found a job, a place of my own, and I never looked back.”

“Do you still have some contact with them?”

“Not really. In the beginning, they called on my birthday and Christmas, but we’ve basically lost touch. I’ve moved to so many different places over the years it got a little tedious to let them know every time I changed my address and phone number. Enough about me. What’s your family like?”

Leif smiled and shook his head. “I’m not going to say too much, or you’ll back out of meeting them, especially if I tell you about Jager.”

“He’s your brother?”

“Yeah. You may find he’ll take some getting used to. He likes to say whatever he’s thinking. Let’s put it to you this way, subtle Jager is not.”

Jaden laughed. “Is he really that bad?”

“At one time, yes, but now that he’s ma...married, Daylen tries to keep him reined in as much as she can. She used to be a cop, so she knows how to handle Jager.”

“I can’t wait to meet them. Do you have any other siblings?”

“In total, I have five brothers and one sister. Besides Jager, one of my brothers and my sister are married.”

“Wow, you have a large family. What about your parents?”

“No parents, just us.”

“Well, at least you guys have each other.”

Leif let the conversation end there as their waitress came to gather their empty plates and give them their bill. He put enough money on the table to cover it and then waited for Jaden to stand before he took her hand.

Once he had them back in his Cadillac and on the road to Marin County, they talked about trivial things. Much to Leif’s surprise, he found it nice. Now with the mating urge no longer riding him, he actually found he could relax around Jaden and be himself. He would be the first to admit that sometimes his sense of humor could be a little out there, but she seemed to get it. Even though they were mated—and even for that to be possible his feelings for Jaden had to be running along the lines of love—he wasn’t ready to admit that he loved her. He liked her, a lot, but he still had doubts as to whether he was capable

of that kind of strong emotion. Yes, he loved his brothers-and sister-in-arms. Those feelings weren't exactly the same as giving his heart away to a woman, forever.

And it would be pretty darn close to that. He had to somehow convince Jaden to allow Roxie to perform the spell that would turn her into a werewolf. Allowing Jaden to have a regular mortal lifespan was out of the question. They were mated, and there was no going back, so he wanted them to be true mates in every sense of the word.

When they crossed the Golden Gate Bridge, heading toward Marin County, Leif decided he'd have to take his time and slowly ease Jaden into his life without dropping it on her all at once. The first step would be to introduce her to his family and take it from there.

Chapter Seven

When Leif pulled his car onto a long drive that led to a large mansion, Jaden wasn't particularly surprised to find he lived in one. Considering the car he drove, there was no question in her mind that Leif wasn't hurting when it came to money. It only made sense.

Jaden stared out the window at the manicured lawns and perfectly landscaped flowerbeds. The mansion loomed in front of them. There were a lot of windows lining both stories of it, which meant there were a lot of rooms to be found inside. She could only ever dream of living in a place as rich as this.

As Leif parked his car at the front of a large detached garage, she said, "Your house is huge. You can't tell me you live here all by yourself. It looks as if you could house a small army inside it."

Leif chuckled. "You could say that. And no, I don't live alone. I share it with my family."

She blinked. "You all live together?" Growing up, she'd wished for a bigger family, but now as an adult who had spent most of that time living alone, she didn't think she could handle living with a family as large as Leif's. How did they get any alone time or privacy?

Once they were out of the car and walking toward the mansion, Leif said, "It's not that bad, living with them. We've lived under the same roof for years. I'm not saying we don't get on each other's nerves from time to time, but for the most part, we get along. Mostly because we work together as well."

"You do? And what exactly is it that you do? You haven't told me."

"We're in the protection business."

Jaden believed that. Leif was muscular enough to kick ass as a hired bodyguard for somebody rich or famous. "You and your family must be doing well at it to live in a place like this."

"Well enough."

Leif pushed open the front door and moved aside for her to step into the large foyer that had a black and white checked marble floor. A large crystal chandelier hung from the middle of the cathedral ceiling. She'd never been inside a house this ritzy. A blond oak railing ran up the outside of the curving staircase that led to the second floor. It was definitely the kind of place she only dreamed of owning if she ever won the lotto.

With a small tug on the hand he was holding, Leif pulled her to a stop and took a deep breath. "Damn. Roxie is here," he said quietly, almost to himself.

"Who?" she asked cautiously.

"Roxie. She's the woman my family and I protect. I was going to introduce her to you at some point, but I wasn't planning on doing it today. Maybe we can slip back outside before we're noticed, and we'll come back after she's gone."

Before they could move, a woman's voice called from somewhere at the back of the mansion. "Leif! Don't you dare go anywhere. I can smell the two of you."

Smell the two of you? What did she mean by that? It wasn't as if both she and Leif hadn't showered before they came here. And how in the heck could anybody *smell* them from that great a distance away.

Leif groaned. “Too late. That was Roxie. We might as well brave the lion’s den.”

He led her in the direction Roxie’s voice had come from. It turned out to be the kitchen. Two women were there. One, who could have passed for a super model with long almost white-blond hair, stood near one of the counters with another woman who looked to be about six months pregnant. She was eating a big bowl of ice cream. Her looks weren’t nearly as spectacular as the other woman’s, but she was better looking than what Jaden considered herself to be. She also had long golden-brown hair that she flipped over one shoulder as she watched Jaden and Leif come closer.

Leif let go of her hand and put his on the small of her back. “Jaden, this is my sister, Saskia.” The woman with the white-blond hair smiled. “And the one stuffing her face with ice cream is Roxie.”

“Hi,” Jaden said.

“It’s nice to meet you, Jaden,” Saskia said in return.

“Yes, it is,” Roxie added. “I never thought I’d see the day Leif would actually find his mat—”

Leif jumped closer to Roxie and put his hand over her mouth before she finished speaking. “I don’t think Jaden is ready to hear that, if you catch my meaning.”

Roxie glared over his hand at him. She then yanked it away, narrowing her eyes. “Not another one. What is wrong with you guys?”

“Take some pity on Leif,” Saskia said before Leif could reply. “He wasn’t exactly capable of following your list of rules because of you-know-what. He fought you-know-what until we were left with no alternative but to send him out to do what had to be done.”

Now completely lost, Jaden had no idea what the “you-know-what” Saskia kept referring to was. It was obvious both Roxie and Leif did from the expressions on their faces.

Roxie shook her head and gave Leif an exasperated look. “Stupid man. Why did you even bother? You know there is no beating the you-know-what. I told you one day this would happen.”

Saskia chuckled. “We all did, Rox. I guess I’ll go let the others know Jaden is here.” She then left Jaden and Leif alone with Roxie.

“So why are you here, Rox? I thought you would be at your place stuffing your face with your own ice cream and not ours. Did you run out and none of the others would go to the grocery store to get you any?”

Jaden bit back a smile. That explained why Leif had come to the store and bought nothing but ice cream. Knowing where he lived, she now knew the grocery store where she worked wasn’t really all that close by.

“Har, har,” Roxie said. “Aren’t you a funny one? Not. Skylar was telling Beowulf about the new motorcycle he bought. Since he hadn’t ridden it to our place, he was boring the crap out of me with describing every minute detail about it to Beowulf. So I suggested we come here so Skylar could show it to him. Kye decided we’d all go in the SUV, because God forbid, something might actually happen to me while on his watch. He’s going to drive us back this evening and then stay overnight.”

“Kye is just being cautious.”

“Whatever,” Roxie said as she put her now empty bowl on the counter. “I’m going to go see where my husband is. You can introduce Jaden to the rest of your family

whenever you're ready."

After she left, Leif blew out a breath. "That went better than expected."

"She seems nice enough," Jaden said.

"She is, but I can tell she's getting fed up with us watching her closer than we used to. But because of her pregnancy, that's the way it has to be for now. Roxie is special and tends to forget sometimes just how special she is. That's why we are here to protect her. Shall we go see where the others are?"

"Sure."

With his arm around her waist, Leif guided her out of the kitchen. He seemed to always want to touch her in some way. Jaden didn't mind, though. It made her feel wanted. It also made her want him again. Just one little touch and he stirred her body to life. It was almost as if her body was trying to make up for the years of celibacy that had been forced on it.

As if Leif had picked up on her thoughts, his nostrils flared as he stopped her and crowded her until her back hit the wall. Jaden put her arms around his neck when he settled his hands on her hips and lowered his lips to hers. She moaned into his mouth, sucking on his tongue once it pushed past her parted lips. He pulled her closer. She felt the hard ridge of his erection against her stomach.

A loud cough had Leif pulling away from her mouth, but he kept her pressed against the wall with his body. He turned his head to look at the large man who stood a short distance away. Jaden quickly adjusted her glasses that had been knocked askew while Leif had kissed her.

"Can I do something for you, Jager?" Leif asked.

"What is it you always tell Daylen and me when you catch us making out? Oh, yes, I remember now. Why don't you go get a room?"

So this was the brother Leif had warned her about. Jager was just as tall and muscular. He wore his long hair pulled back in a ponytail. And just like Leif and Saskia, he had model good looks. It made Jaden wonder if the rest of the family had been so lucky in the looks department.

Leif stepped away and pulled her against his side so they stood facing Jager. "I can see you're going to use this as an excuse to get back at me."

Jager chuckled. "I wouldn't pass this up for the world. Payback is a bitch, or so they say." He then focused his attention on her. "You must be Jaden. I have to tell you I'm happy to see you didn't hoof Leif's ass out your door. We'll now be able to live with him once again."

"You're welcome, I guess," she said softly.

"Come on, then," Jager said as he nodded toward another part of the house.

"Everyone is waiting to meet her."

Leif and she fell into step behind Jager as he walked away. Stepping into a large living room that had a big widescreen television against one wall, Jaden found the room full of people. All conversation stopped when they entered.

She had to do a double-take a few times as Leif introduced her. The rest of his brothers turned out to be super good-looking and large. Roan, Jager and Skylar looked so similar there was no mistaking them as siblings. And Roxie's husband, Beowulf, fit right in with the rest of the hot-looking men. The only people in the room who didn't have the supermodel attractiveness going on were Roxie, Ansley who was Roan's wife, Daylen,

Eli who was Saskia's husband, and, of course, herself.

Jaden still found it mind-boggling that Leif lived with all these people—minus Beowulf and Roxie—and didn't find it overcrowded. Yes, the mansion was huge compared to her standards, but with this many people in the house at any given time, you'd be running into someone at almost every turn.

Leif and she went and sat down on one of the couches, which were the only seats not taken. Once they were settled, Roxie asked, "So where did you two meet?"

When Leif didn't offer up anything right away, Jaden answered. "At the grocery store where I work. I believe he was buying ice cream for you."

Roxie shot Leif a knowing smile. "Ah ha. I knew something was up after you came back from shopping that time I sent you."

"Well, I wasn't going to be telling you, now was I?" Leif said. "If I had told you I'd met Jaden there, you would have just used it to ride the hell out of me. I really didn't need that in addition to the urge driving me crazy."

Jaden looked at Leif. "The urge?" When he stiffened beside her, she quickly added with a small laugh, "What's that? I hope it isn't something contagious."

"Yes, Leif," Roxie said. "Why don't you explain to Jaden what the urge is?"

Leif stood, yanking her up with him. "I'll show Jaden the rest of the house now." He then practically dragged her out of the room by her hand.

She was almost running to keep up with his longer stride. He didn't seem to notice that her much shorter legs couldn't cover as much space as his long ones. He led her back to the kitchen and out the door to the back of the mansion. Leif didn't stop until they stood on the grass in the center of a large backyard. It had been as beautifully landscaped as the front.

Panting from her run out of the house, Jaden said, "Can you at least give me some warning before you start dragging me around like a dog on a leash? Not everyone is a giant like you."

He gave her a sheepish look. "Sorry. I wanted to finish the tour."

She raised a brow. "Sure you did. I think it's more along the lines of you wanting to get me away from Roxie."

Leif captured her in his arms and kissed her forehead. "Okay, you found me out. It's just..."

"It's just what?"

"There are some things I have to tell you about me, and I'm not ready to do that yet."

Jaden went very still. "I have to say that doesn't exactly make me think it's anything good. Please don't tell me you're married."

"No, I am not."

"Or that you're really gay."

"No! No, I'm not gay or bisexual. Believe me, I've never swung that way." He nibbled at the corner of her mouth. "I would think after last night my sexual orientation would be quite clear."

She shivered when Leif moved to her ear and swirled his tongue inside it. "Those were the only things I could think of that you might be reluctant to tell me about."

"Since the thought even crossed your mind, I guess that means I should show you my room and remind you why thoughts of me being gay are completely unfounded."

"Hmm, I could go for seeing your bedroom."

Jaden lifted her face to Leif as he shifted his lips back to her mouth. He took it in a heated kiss. When he ground his hips into her, she felt just how hard he'd gotten. Her pussy grew wet knowing how good it was to have his thick cock inside her, stroking in and out. Even though she hadn't ever had this much sex in her life, Jaden desperately wanted Leif again. If he pulled her down to the grass and stripped her naked to have his way with her right out here, she probably wouldn't stop him. He touched her, and she lost all her common sense.

"Arg, I'm going blind," Jager yelled out one of the open windows. "Would you two get a room already?"

Leif lifted his head, looked toward the mansion, and flipped his brother off. "I'm going to kill him."

"I guess we asked for it, standing out here in the open for anyone to see."

"Then it's time for us to go some place where we won't be disturbed."

Instead of heading back to the mansion as Jaden thought he would, Leif took her hand and took her to what looked to be a storage shed at the back of the property. He opened the door and urged her to step inside. Once he moved in behind her, he shut the door again.

Since there weren't any windows in the shed, Jaden couldn't see anything. "I'm blind here."

"It's okay. I got you," Leif said as he pressed his body against the back of her.

"I thought you were going to show me your room." She then sucked in a breath when his large hands covered her breasts and kneaded them through her shirt.

"I will, but I don't think I can wait long enough to have you. We'd have to get you back inside and all the way up the stairs."

Jaden relaxed into him. Her pussy throbbed as Leif bent his knees slightly and rocked his erection against her bottom. She felt wetness leak into her panties. "I don't think I can wait, either."

"Good, because I'm going to have my cock inside you very soon."

That just made her even more breathless. She let her head fall to his chest and rubbed her bum against him. "And I want you there."

He brushed her hair aside and kissed the side of her neck. "Hold onto the shelf."

"What shelf? I can't see anything."

"It's right in front of you."

She reached out blindly until her fingers brushed against wood that was about waist height. Jaden figured Leif couldn't see any better than she could and was about to tell him she'd found the shelf when he dropped his hands to her waist. He tugged her sweats down her legs to her ankles. Cupping her pussy through her panties, his fingers stroked her. Not able to see, Jaden had to rely on her other senses. The feel of Leif touching her in complete darkness only enhanced the pleasure she felt.

Leif hooked the top of her panties with his fingers and stripped them down her legs to lay puddled on top her pants. He skimmed his hands back up to her hips and pulled her farther away from the shelf. She ended up slightly bent over. Then, with a knee between her legs, he pushed her to open them as far as she could with her pants around her ankles.

"Perfect," he said, running his hands under her shirt and pushing her bra up and over her breasts. "Stay just like that."

After giving each nipple a tweak, Leif kissed a path down her back to her bare waist,

lowering behind her as he went. His hands skimmed the back of her calves and thighs. His mouth followed the same trail, one leg at a time. When he reached the curve of her backside, he gently nipped the flesh there. Jaden gripped the shelf in front of her tighter. A pounding ache throbbed deep inside her pussy.

“Leif,” she whimpered. “Now.”

“I will. I just need a quick taste first.”

Jaden practically went up on her toes when his tongue swiped her pussy from behind. She moaned as a wave of pleasure swept through her. As he continued to lick, delving his tongue into her wet opening, she rocked against his mouth. God, did Leif know how to use his tongue. If he kept it up, she would come before he even entered her.

He gave her one last lick and then Jaden heard the sound of the zipper on his jeans being tugged down along with the rustle of material. When Leif rose behind her, his cock brushed against her entrance with nothing between them. He rocked into her, stroking his shaft along her pussy, the blunt head gliding against her clit.

Wanting him inside her now, she shifted her hips when he pushed in from behind her. The head of his cock slipped inside her pussy. With a strangled moan, Leif grasped her hips and sank the rest of his length inside her. Using her hips for leverage, he pumped in and out. Jaden gripped the shelf so hard the wood creaked beneath her fingers. Lost in the sensation of his cock impaling her over and over again, she rocked back to meet his strokes.

Their harsh breathing filled the small shed. As her orgasm built, Jaden couldn't have cared less that they were in a garden shed with no lock on the door, where anyone who walked past could hear what she and Leif were doing. All that mattered was having his thick shaft pumping inside her.

Just as her pussy started to clutch Leif's cock when her climax took her over, he half growled/half groaned. He surged into her one final time and stiffened while he too started to come.

Once she slowly came down from the sexual high, Jaden found her legs and arms were shaking. If not for Leif holding her around the waist, she wouldn't have been able to hold herself up. Each time she made love to him, it just seemed to get more intense. If not for remembering where they were exactly, she would have gone for a second round since Leif's cock was still thick and hard inside her.

He pulled out and straightened her against him. Cupping the side of her face, he turned her head toward him and gave her a tender kiss. “I think we're going to have use the shed like this more often.”

She chuckled. “If we do, I think we should figure a way to lock it from the inside. I don't know about you, but I wouldn't want one of your family walking in on us.”

“You have a point there. I doubt they would, but with Jager, you never know. We'll figure something out for next time.”

Jaden blindly fumbled to pull her panties and sweats back up while she heard Leif doing up his jeans. “This was nice, but I was really looking forward to seeing your room,” she said.

Leif opened the shed door and guided her outside. Jaden had to shade her eyes with her hand until they adjusted to the bright sunshine. “I was thinking my bedroom would be the logical place for my tour to end. I can also show you my shower, which I can say has enough room for two adults. Maybe you would like a tour of it as well?”

“I’d love to see it, along with a few other things,” she said in a husky voice.

She ran her gaze suggestively over Leif’s body and landed on the still prominent bulge in the front of his pants. Before she could protest, he scooped her up in his arms and ran with her toward the mansion.

Chapter Eight

Using the tips of his fingers, Leif traced circles against Jaden's shoulder as she lay snuggled into his side. They had made love in the shower and then in his bed, twice. They'd also fallen asleep for a few hours, which was not surprising since they were expending a lot of energy making love. Soon he would have to get up and find them some food. They had probably burned a ton of calories.

But he wasn't ready to leave the bed yet. Leif was quite content to just quietly hold Jaden in his arms—something else that was entirely new for him. He wasn't what you would call a cuddler. Usually after he slept with a woman, he made sure he satiated her to the point where she would fall asleep. That way, he could easily slip out of her bed without any fuss or muss.

With Jaden, he'd satiated her enough that she fell asleep, but he wanted to keep her close. This feeling had to be part of the reason why she had been destined to be his mate. After only a few short days of knowing her, he felt strongly for her. His hunger for her seemed to be unending. It was still in the early days, but he had a feeling he would not get bored with Jaden. The more he made love to her the more he craved her touch.

Jaden stirred beside him and lifted her head so she could look at his clock on the bedside table. Her eyes squinted. "What time is it? Without my glasses on I can't see it that well."

He turned his head and took a quick look. "It's a little after six."

She dropped her head back down onto his chest. "You do realize we've spent almost the entire day in bed."

"There's nothing wrong with that."

"Won't your family say anything? They have to know what we're doing up here."

"They do. That's why no one has come pounding on the door. With three other couples in the house, everyone knows when a bedroom door is shut not to disturb the people inside."

Jaden stretched. "I think I could lay here with you for the rest of the night, but I should get up. For one thing I'm hungry, and for another, I should be heading home soon."

Leif clutched her tighter. "Why? I can feed you, and you can even stay here in bed. I'll make us something and bring it up. Plus, I want you to stay the night."

She propped herself up on her bent arm and stared down at him with an expression on her face that said she was surprised by his offer. "Really? You want me to stay the night?"

"Yes, really. Why do you find it surprising?"

"Well, you spent the night with me last night, and we've been together ever since. I thought men liked to have their space."

He smiled. "At one time, that may have been true for me, but not anymore."

Jaden seemed to mull it over for a few seconds. "I don't know, Leif. It's very tempting, but I have to go to work tomorrow morning." She leaned down and kissed his lips. "If I stayed here tonight, I'd end up not getting much sleep and I wouldn't be able to wake up to go into work."

“I promise I won’t keep you awake all night. We’ll get up early enough for me to drive you back to your place so you can change into your uniform, then I’ll take you to work.”

She took her bottom lip between her teeth. It made Leif want to suck on it. “I’m really not sure. It would be an awful lot to ask of you.”

“I don’t mind. Soon you’ll be living here anyway.”

“What did you just say?”

Leif gave himself a mental kick. He hadn’t exactly expected to broach the subject of Jaden moving in with him in quite this way. Since he had it out in the open, he decided to run with it anyway.

“I want you to move in with me, Jaden.”

“You mean move into the mansion and share your bedroom with you?” At his nod, she sat up. “Don’t you think you’re rushing things a tiny bit? I didn’t want to bring this up, but now I have to. The first time you came to my place you ended up running out of there saying you couldn’t do it. Now you want me to move in with you. I may not have that much experience when it comes to relationships, but I know just great sex won’t make it last. And if we jump into it too quickly it may not work out.” When he opened his mouth to interrupt, she said, “Wait, let me finish. If we did break up, you’d be okay. I, on the other hand, would have to go in search of another place to live. On my wages, I’m pretty limited as to where I can go.”

He sat up and took Jaden’s face in his hands. “It will work out.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“I just know,” he reassured her.

This would have been a great time for him to tell her what he was and about her being his mate, but his tongue seemed to become stuck to the roof of his mouth, refusing to form the words. They were getting along so well right now, and he didn’t want anything to mar it.

“Can I at least think about it?”

“Yes, and while you’re doing that, I want you to think about quitting your job.”

Jaden’s eyes widened. “My job? You want me to quit my job?”

“Once you move in with me, you won’t need to work. I have enough money to look after us both financially.”

“Then what will I do? I’m used to taking care of myself.”

He cupped the back of her head and brushed his lips across hers before he put their foreheads together. “It’s time you let someone else take care of you. I want to be that person. Say you’ll stay with me tonight.” Leif then kissed the side of her neck, nibbling his way down to the top of her shoulder. “Just say yes.”

Jaden put her arms around his waist and leaned into him. “All right, I’ll stay. But I’m going to work tomorrow. I’ll use that time to think about everything else.” She shivered. “With you kissing me like this, I don’t think I can tell you no anyway.”

He covered her breast with his hand and squeezed. “I do have my ways.”

“Yes, you do, but if you don’t feed me soon, you won’t be getting much further than this.”

Leif let her go, jumped out of bed, and quickly reached for his discarded jeans. “Then I’d better do something about that right now.”

He gave her one more quick kiss then left to go find some food his mate would like.

* * * *

As promised, Leif did nothing but sleep next to Jaden during the night. Falling asleep at night with her in his arms, and waking up with her still there, was more than nice. He looked forward to many more of those.

He'd set his alarm so he could get Jaden back to her place in time to change before she had to start work. Leif now sat on her bed, watching her pull on the slacks and blouse that were the grocery store's employee uniform. They really did nothing for her. The uniform did a great job of hiding the curves he knew were just under her clothes. And when Jaden pulled back her hair into a tight ponytail, he easily saw how other men could overlook her. But as far as he was concerned, it was their loss and his gain.

Jaden put her glasses back on once she finished with her hair. "I'm ready."

He stood. "What time do you get off work?"

"At four."

"All right. I'll be outside in the parking lot waiting for you then."

She chuckled and shook her head. "And let me guess, you're going to take me back to your place afterwards."

"Of course." He gave her bed a quick glance. "No offense, but I don't really fit all that well in your double bed. My feet hang *way* over the edge."

"Yeah, I guess my bed wasn't made for a man of your size. I'll take pity on you and won't force you to endure that again."

"Which I'm grateful for. Let's go."

Once they arrived at the grocery store, Leif pulled into an empty spot close to the front entrance. Before Jaden could get out, he leaned across his seat and gave her a kiss goodbye. "I'll be right around here waiting for you when you get off."

"And I'll look for you." She gave him another quick kiss, then said, "I'm going to miss you."

"I'll miss you too."

Jaden opened the car door and got out. Leif watched her walk inside the store. Once she was out of sight, he started the car and drove around to the side of the building. He parked it before he headed for the side entrance. Since he wasn't ready to tell Jaden what being mated to him entailed, and he didn't want either of them to have to go through the anxiety of being separated, there wasn't much else he could do but hang out at the store. As long as he was inside, they would be fine. He just had to make sure Jaden didn't see him, which meant he'd be playing hide-and-seek with her for her entire shift.

Catching sight of Jaden heading toward her cash register, he ducked down an aisle. This wouldn't be much fun, but it was better than the alternative. It was going to be a long damn day.

* * * *

Jaden spent the hours until her break dealing with customers and thinking about Leif. She also couldn't stop thinking about his offer for her to quit her job and move in with him. It wasn't as if she loved her job, but to accept what he was offering would be a huge leap of faith. As she told Leif the day before, if things didn't work out between them, she'd stand to lose a lot more than he would. She just had to decide whether she was willing to make that leap or not.

She also had to decide whether she'd be able to handle everything that did come with Leif. She wouldn't be just moving in with Leif, she would be moving in with his entire family as well. Her feelings about it all were torn. Living alone, she liked her privacy, but on the other hand, being part of a big family was something she'd always wanted. There were times when being alone was overrated. Not having anyone around to help celebrate her birthday, Christmas or the other holidays really sucked. If she moved in with Leif, she wouldn't have to face another one by herself.

And there was the fact that she was falling for Leif in a big way. She could easily see it not taking much for her to fall completely in love with him. He must obviously feel something for her or he wouldn't have asked her to move into the mansion with him. When he touched her, he made her feel as if she was precious to him, and that he never wanted to let her go.

Jaden could easily see this driving her crazy. What she needed was some advice from someone neutral. Knowing exactly who she could talk to about all this, she caught Vicky's eye and pointed to her wrist to indicate it was time for their break. There weren't too many customers around, and luckily none of the other girls had called in sick so they didn't have to cut their break short.

Vicky met up with her as Jaden made her way toward the staff break room. "How did your weekend off go?"

"Good." Jaden pushed open the break room's door. They had it to themselves for now. She turned to face her friend. "I really need some advice."

"Okay. Lay it on me."

"I need some man advice."

Vicky grabbed her hand and led her over to one of the chairs. "Sit. I'm all ears."

"All right. I'll get straight to the point. I met a man, and we ended up spending over twenty-four hours together this weekend. He slept over at my place the first night and I stayed over at his last night. Now here is where I need your advice. He wants me to move in with him."

"First of all, do I know this man?"

Jaden figured she might as well tell Vicky who Leif was. Her friend would eventually see them together anyway. "It's the guy who kissed me at my cash register the other day. His name is Leif."

"I told you. Didn't I tell you? I knew you would see him again."

She rolled her eyes. "Yes, you told me."

"As for you moving in with him, how do you really feel about him?"

Jaden blew out a breath. "I like him, a lot. He makes me feel comfortable, and I enjoy being with him. There aren't any of those awkward silences. We just seemed to click from the very start."

"Since you've spent so much time together, you have to have slept with him. How is he in the sack?"

A blush spread over her face. "Let's just say I would never have any complaints in that department."

"So the man is a god in bed as well as looks like one. I'd say go for it."

"Well, there is one other thing I haven't told you about. He also wants me to quit my job. Leif is what you would call pretty well-to-do. He says he has more than enough money to look after the both of us."

“The guy is rich too? Man, do you know how many times I’ve wished for a rich guy to come into the store, sweep me off my feet, and carry me away from all this? You’d be an idiot to tell him no.”

“I wouldn’t just be moving in with him. He lives in a mansion in Marin County with his big family. He has five brothers and a sister. The spouses of his sister and two of his brothers also live there.”

“If it was me, he could live with fifty people and I’d still move in with him. If you like Leif that much, don’t let him slip through your fingers. You’ll find a way to make things work.”

“I don’t want to lose him, but don’t you think this is all a bit rushed?”

“Look, if you feel that way, why don’t you give it a trial run? Tell Leif you want to try it for a week before you give up your place and quit here. If it doesn’t work out, you won’t be left in the lurch. And if it does work, what’s a week?”

She nodded. “I think you just gave me the answer to my problem. A trial run is a perfect idea.”

Vicky patted her hand. “See, I’m good for something sometimes.”

Jaden laughed. “It would seem so. I guess we should head back.” When they stood, she said, “Thanks, Vicky. I really needed someone to talk to about this.”

“I’m always here for you.”

Now Jaden couldn’t wait until the end of her shift so she could tell Leif about her decision. It wasn’t exactly what he wanted, but she didn’t think he would object to a trial run.

Stepping back out into the store, Jaden thought she caught a glimpse of Leif just out of the corner of her eye. When she turned to look at that spot, no one was there. Obviously, she was thinking about him so much she was now seeing him when he really wasn’t there.

Chapter Nine

That had been a close one. Leif had watched Jaden go to the break room with another cashier and had decided to hang close by it until she left. He'd already walked around the store so much that he now knew where to find everything in it. So far, he'd been able to keep under the other employees' radars. He didn't need one of them noticing he'd been here for hours and have him kicked out for loitering.

To be honest, he didn't know how many more times he could do this. If he had to do this all week, he could see himself losing his mind from boredom. You could only look at food for so long before your eyes started to cross. Plus, it was making him hungry. At least the store had a coffee shop. He'd managed to grab a cup of coffee and a muffin close to lunch time, before Jaden had gone there to buy her lunch.

It wasn't all completely bad, though. Spying on Jaden all day allowed him to see what she was like when not around him. Able to see for greater distances than a mortal, he hadn't had to get very close to watch her. There were times when he swore she turned to look his way, but he wasn't worried that she would catch him. Her glasses only improved her eyesight so much.

Her nearsightedness was something Leif hoped would go away once Jaden was turned into a werewolf. Not that he minded that she wore glasses. She looked cute when he accidentally knocked them askew while kissing her. He just wanted her to have all the abilities a normal werewolf would have. Since neither Roxie nor the other morals she'd turned into werewolves had worn glasses before the spell had been used, he wasn't sure what would happen to Jaden's eyesight.

But he was getting ahead of himself. Jaden first had to accept him for what he was, along with their being mates, before he made any mention of the spell. He hoped she would allow Roxie to turn her, but there was always that chance that she would refuse. It might be selfish of him, but he didn't want to settle for one human lifetime with her. He wanted to live out the rest of *his* days with Jaden at his side.

Leif walked down the aisle and headed for the opposite end of the store from where Jaden worked. He ignored the mortals around him, feeling as if he'd just been pole-axed. He loved Jaden. For a man who had never thought he was capable of having that kind of emotion for a woman, it was a huge revelation. But it was true. His feelings for her had solidified into love.

A smile spread across his face. Now he understood what his mated siblings had meant about him not being able to escape it when it became his turn to find his mate. He'd been a fool to try. Even now, he couldn't picture his life without Jaden in it. Christ, he was even having a hard time remembering what it had been like before her. She completed him. He'd thought he was good the way he'd been, but now that he could admit his true feelings for her, he knew how wrong that had been.

He'd have to tell Jaden tonight what he was. And then he'd convince her to move in with him and quit her job. There was no point in putting it off. He'd also bare his soul to her. Chuckling to himself, he shook his head. For a man that once thought doing that would doom him to hell, he couldn't wait for the opportunity to do it.

* * * *

At five minutes after four, Jaden walked out to the parking lot. She gave it a quick scan and found Leif's Cadillac parked almost in the same spot he'd used when he had dropped her off. Smiling, she made her way over to it and got inside.

"You're right on time," she said.

"Of course I am. I wouldn't leave you hanging like that."

Leif gave her a thorough kiss that made her wish they weren't in such a public place, then he drove out of the parking lot. When she noticed he was taking the route to her apartment, she said, "I thought we were going to your place."

"We are. I thought you would like to change and pack some clothes for tomorrow."

"How about I pack enough clothes for a week?" Jaden turned her head to look at Leif, to see his reaction to her words.

He gave her a quick glance before he turned his attention back on the road. "Does that mean you'll move in with me?"

"Well, not exactly. What it does mean is that I'm willing to give you a week as a trial run."

"A trial run?"

"Yes. If after a week we haven't started to hate each other, I'll quit my job and move in with you permanently."

"How about instead the trial run only lasts three days?"

"A week."

"Four days."

"Are you trying to bargain me down?" she asked with a laugh.

He gave her a sexy grin. "Is it working? If not, I think I can come up with some ideas that will help sway you."

She laughed again, but inside, Jaden started to melt. She had a pretty good idea what Leif would do to win her over to his way of thinking. He'd use his body to persuade her, and it would work too. One good bout of lovemaking and she'd be putty in his hands.

"All right, you win. Four days, but I'm standing firm on that. Not a day less."

Leif reached over and ran his hand up and down the top of her thigh. "You drive a hard bargain, but I'll still use my powers of persuasion to see if I can wheedle you down some more."

When they arrived at her apartment, Jaden didn't take very long to change out of her uniform and pack it along with enough clothes for four days. She also taped a note to her landlords' door to let them know she would be staying over at a friend's for a few days, just in case something came up.

In no time at all, she and Leif were back on the road heading for Marin County. She watched the landscape go by, still finding it hard to believe that there was a chance she would be living in such a rich neighborhood.

At the mansion, Leif took the small suitcase she'd packed and carried it inside while he held her hand. Instead of taking her upstairs to his bedroom, he put her suitcase down near the stairs and then headed them in the direction of the kitchen.

"I don't know about you," he said, "but I'm starved. I bet you are too, having to look at food all day."

"You build up a tolerance after a while."

"I doubt I ever would. I'd want to come home and eat everything in the house."

“I’m not saying there aren’t some things I see and decide I should pick up after my shift is done. It’s kind of the downside of the job. I’ve spent more money at the store than I should at times.”

“I’ll have to take you shopping sometime and let you fill the cart up with whatever you want. My treat.”

They found only Dirk inside the kitchen. He stood at the stove plating a steak he’d fried. He also had a large mound of mashed potatoes smothered in gravy on his plate.

“You’re finally back,” Dirk said as he turned and went to sit at the table.

“Where is everyone else?” Leif asked.

“Saskia, Eli, Roan, Ansley, Jager and Daylen went out for dinner, separately. Kye and Skylar are with Roxie. I’ll be heading back over there as soon as I’m done eating.”

Leif pulled out a chair for Jaden to sit. “Oh yeah, it’s date night. And isn’t this your day off?”

Dirk nodded and swallowed his mouthful of food. “Yes, but Roxie is helping with a project of mine. Before I forget, Saskia left a couple of thawed steaks in the fridge for you and Jaden.”

Moving toward the fridge, Leif said, “I don’t know, Dirk. Since you practically live over at Roxie’s, you might as well move in with her and Beowulf.”

“I don’t think so.”

Leif turned to Jaden with two packages of steak in his hands. “I think I’ll throw these on the barbeque. How would you like yours done, Jaden?”

She looked at the t-bone steaks he held. “I like mine medium, but not too pink.”

“Then yours will have to go on before mine.” Leif turned back to the stove and lifted the lids off the two pots that sat on it. “And it looks as if there are enough potatoes and gravy for us so I don’t have to make anything else. I’ll just run out and get the barbeque fired up.”

Jaden watched Leif walk out the back door to the patio. Now alone with Dirk, she turned to him and smiled. After meeting all of Leif’s siblings, she’d noticed that Dirk was the quietest of the bunch. He even used quiet even tones when he spoke. With his friendly dark green eyes and dark brown hair with blond highlights that just fell past his shoulders, she was sure he drew a lot of female attention, but Dirk didn’t come across as a man that would take much notice of it.

He smiled back. “While Leif is busy, I just want to tell you that I’m happy you’re with him. He’s a better man for it.”

Jaden blushed. “Thanks, but I’m sure I haven’t had that much of an effect on him. We haven’t even known each other for a week.”

“Yes, you’ve definitely had an impact. Before meeting you, he had a bit of a roving eye when it came to women. But he’s settled right down with you. We all told him one day he’d find the woman meant for him. He never wanted to believe us. And now here you are.”

“Thanks, I guess,” she said, not sure what to say in response.

“Anyway, I’m happy to see you with Leif.”

Dirk then turned his attention to his food, leaving Jaden to think over what he’d said. She’d assumed Leif wouldn’t have had any problem picking up women before meeting her, but she hadn’t thought he was one of those guys who went from one woman to the next. It didn’t seem like the Leif she knew. Whenever he was with her, he seemed only to

have eyes for her. Not once had she caught him staring at another woman. Assuming what Dirk said was true, Leif's asking her to move in with him would have been a monumental step for him to take. Maybe his feelings for her were a lot stronger than she thought.

Leif returned to the kitchen and washed his hands in the sink. "I have your steak on, Jaden. I figured we can just heat the potatoes in the microwave."

When he turned to face her, she stood and walked over to him. "How about I do that since you're looking after the steaks?"

He wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her close. "All right. That would be a big help."

Dirk pushed back from the table. "I'm done so I'll leave you two alone to enjoy your meal." He put his plate in the sink and then walked out of the kitchen.

"I hope Dirk doesn't feel as if he had to leave because of us," she said.

"He knows he doesn't. Knowing him, he's probably in a hurry to get to Roxie's to play on the computer. They're both internet junkies."

"Oh."

Leif brought his mouth down to hers. He swept the seam of her lips with his tongue before it slipped inside. Their tongues brushed against each other, tasting. Jaden leaned into him, feeling herself getting swept away on the tide of passion Leif stirred inside her. At her moan, his kiss deepened. Angling his lips over hers for a tighter fit, he ground his erection against her.

Before she completely lost the ability to think, Jaden said against his mouth, "Leif, the steaks."

He quickly let her go. "Crap, I almost forgot about them. We'll have to continue this later."

After he went back outside, Jaden looked inside the cupboards until she found the plates. There was no question of what she and Leif would be doing after they ate. It looked as if she would be getting dessert once she finished her meal after all.

* * * *

The sound of his cell phone ringing had Leif reluctantly leaving the warmth of Jaden's arms. They'd eaten and then hurried up to his room to make love. It had been pretty close as to whether or not they'd make it to his room. While they had eaten, he'd used every opportunity to heat things up between them. He would never be able to look at another steak or mashed potatoes without getting aroused.

Grabbing his cell phone off his nightstand, he flipped it open. "Hello?"

"If you want that information you were looking for, you need to meet with me in an hour. Alone."

Leif recognized the gruff male voice as a lone wolf he had been working on to get information about what Miles was up to. "I'm not in the city right now. How about we set up another meeting?"

"No, it has to be tonight or the deal is off. I found out what you wanted. Meet me in the parking lot behind the bar. You know which one. You have less than an hour now."

When the other end disconnected, Leif swore under his breath. He had no choice but to meet up with the lone wolf. The information he had might be the lead they needed to flush Miles out of hiding again. The bastard had a knack for pulling a disappearing act.

Putting his cell phone back, Leif turned to look at Jaden. The lone wolf had just complicated things between them. He couldn't bring her with him. It was too dangerous. She was a mortal and could easily get hurt or worse. Leif didn't exactly trust this lone wolf. Leaving Jaden behind was going to cause them to go through the separation anxiety. And it would be really bad since they were newly mated. Once they had been mated for a while, like Roxie and Beowulf, they could stand to be away from each other for a few hours. Shit, he was going to have to quickly explain everything to her before he left, and he wouldn't have any time to reassure her or answer the inevitable questions she would have.

"Is everything okay, Leif?"

He sighed. "No. I have to go out, and I can't take you with me. Get dressed."

Jaden frowned, but she did as he asked. Leif quickly dressed, then headed for his walk-in closet. He came back out with his sword and a leather jacket in his hands. When he looked over at Jaden, she was dressed and her gaze was locked on his sword.

She swallowed. "Is that a sword you're holding?"

"Yes. Come downstairs with me. I don't have much time, but I have to tell you something."

Once they reached the foyer, he belted his sword on his back and pulled his jacket over top of it. Turning to Jaden, he took her by the arms. She gazed at him curiously. He also saw the confusion in her eyes. There was nothing for it but to tell her everything at once. He hoped he didn't scare the hell out of her.

"I have to go meet someone, a lone wolf. He says he has some information we need to help keep Roxie safe. There's a man named Miles, and if he ever got his hands on Roxie, he would use her so he could rule over all the werewolf packs in her stead. As her Protectors, we can't allow that to happen."

"Wait a second. Werewolf packs?"

"I'm a werewolf, Jaden. So are Roxie and the rest of my family."

"How can you be a werewolf? It's not possible."

"Yes, it is."

Hating that he could no longer ease Jaden into this, Leif let go of her and took a step back. Reaching inside himself for the spark of magic that would allow him to make the change, he shifted into his wolf form. Jaden let out a small shriek and took a step back as she stared back at him. He knew what she saw. Even in his wolf form, he was big. His fur was the same auburn color as his hair. Leif gave her a chance to take him all in then he shifted back to human form.

Before she could take another step away, he took Jaden by the arms again. "I know you're probably having a hard time accepting what I am, but you have to listen to me. It's important. I've claimed you as my mate. The first time we made love our souls joined. Being mated to a werewolf is very different from taking a mortal as a husband. With our souls joined, we won't be able to stand to be apart from each other for very long, which means after I leave, you're going to feel as if you haven't seen me in months even though it has only been an hour. It could get so bad you'll feel like climbing the walls. You'll also think something bad has happened to me. Just try to remember I'm going to come back. I'll feel it as well, but I don't have much choice. Until Roxie turns you into a werewolf, you're too vulnerable as a mortal. I won't take the risk that something will happen to you."

Jaden's eyes had gone round behind her glasses. "Claimed me as your mate...turn me into a werewolf...Leif, I can't—"

He cut her off with a kiss. "The others will be home soon. Tell them I went to meet the lone wolf about Miles. They'll understand." Leif dropped his hands and started to walk backwards toward the front door. "And tell them I didn't get to explain much about us. Saskia and the others will help you understand. I promise I won't be away any longer than I have to."

Knowing he was about to put them both through hell, Leif turned and walked out the door without a backward glance.

Chapter Ten

She was going crazy. Jaden had never experienced anything like this before, and quite frankly, she never wanted to again. Her nerves were stretched thin. All she could do was pace back and forth across the large foyer. Leif had been gone for an hour, and it felt as if she hadn't seen him in almost a year. Every fiber in her being wanted, no, needed to be with him.

Along with feeling as if she was slowly losing her mind, what he'd told her about his being a werewolf and being her mate kept swirling around inside her head. After watching him shift into a wolf, there was no doubt that what he said was true. At first, she had been scared, but as the minutes ticked by after he'd left, she hadn't been able to hold onto her fear. Her anxiousness to be with him again kind of overrode any other emotion she felt. God, she missed him. She didn't care what he was. She just needed to have him hold her again.

Finally, some of the other couples of the house started to return. Saskia, Eli, Roan and Ansley arrived back at the mansion at the same time. Saskia took one look at Jaden and rushed over to her, worry clearly showing on her face.

"Jaden? Where's Leif?"

She stopped pacing, but she couldn't seem to stop wringing her hands. "He got a call on his cell. A lone wolf called that supposedly had information about Miles. He went to see him. Leif said you would know what that meant."

Saskia's look of worry increased. "I do. Did he get a chance to explain—?"

"About you all being werewolves and that I'm his mate? Yes, but I don't think as well as he wanted to. He was in a bit of a rush. But he did take the time to shift into his wolf form to make me believe what he'd told me."

"How long has he been gone?"

"About an hour. He told me it would get bad, but I wasn't expecting this. I don't know if I can take much more of this." Jaden crossed her arms over her stomach and rubbed her arms.

"We'll help you get through it," Saskia reassured her as she rubbed her back. "We've all experienced this since we became mated. Once Leif comes home, it'll end."

A cell phone ringing had Saskia reaching into her jeans' pocket. She pulled it out and looked at who was calling. She smiled at Jaden. "It's Leif. I'll put it on hands-free. Hearing his voice should help a little."

Saskia flipped the phone open. "Leif, you'd better be on your way back."

A male voice, that wasn't Leif's, said, "I'm sorry, sister dear, but Leif is a little... indisposed at the moment."

"Miles, what have you done to Leif?" Saskia asked with a snarl.

"The nosy bastard got what he deserved."

"You better not have harmed him. Or I'll—"

"You'll do nothing. I didn't harm your precious brother-in-arms. He's taking a forced nap right now. No harm will come to him so long as you agree to a trade."

"A trade?"

"Yes, sister dear, a trade. The foretold one for Leif."

“We are her Protectors. We aren’t going to just hand her over to you.”

“You will or Leif won’t live to see another thousand years. I’ll give you until dawn to think about it, then I’ll call you again to tell you where to make the trade. For Leif’s sake, you’d better make the right decision, because if you don’t bring me the foretold one, I’ll take my disappointment out on him before I put him out of his misery.”

Miles disconnected, and silence reigned for a few seconds before the others started to argue about what to do.

“We can’t hand Roxie over to Miles,” Saskia said.

“No,” Roan agreed, “but we can’t leave Leif with Miles, either.”

“What if we made the trade with a decoy?” Eli asked. “You know, find another female that Miles wouldn’t know, one who would be able to hold her own against him and be able to get away.”

“Hmm, that could be an idea,” Saskia said, but then she shook her head. “The only female I know who would be strong enough to take Miles down, besides myself, is Billie and she and Royce are away on holiday.”

Eli chuckled. “My sister will be upset that she missed the opportunity to kick some butt.”

“We’ll just have to come up with something else,” Roan said.

Feeling even more desperate than she had before, Jaden said not very loudly, “What about me?” When she got no response, she said louder, “Use me instead of Roxie. I’ll go.”

The others stopped talking. Saskia then gave her a sad look. “Jaden, you can’t. For one thing, you smell like a mortal. Miles would get one whiff of you from a distance, and he’d know. And being that you are mortal, it would be twice as risky as sending in an untrained female werewolf. At least she would have the ability to shift.”

“Then do it,” Jaden blurted.

“Do what?”

“Leif said something about Roxie being able to turn me into a werewolf. Then get her to turn me. That way I won’t smell like a mortal.”

“I don’t know, Jaden. Once you’re turned, it can’t be undone. You have to know that we live a very long time. You would be living as a werewolf for at least a couple of thousand years.”

“But I would be living those years with Leif as my mate, right? And I would be a lot stronger than I am now.”

“Yes.”

“Then I want it. Call Roxie and do whatever you have to do to get her to turn me.”

When Saskia hesitated, Roan said, “I think we should let her. She and Leif are mated. If he sees his mate put in danger, he’ll be that more protective of her. He’ll claw through Miles and whatever men he has to get to her. Nothing will hold him back, especially after being separated from Jaden for so long.”

Saskia sighed. “All right, you have a point there. But what if there is a slim chance that Miles has seen Roxie from a distance? Jaden and Roxie have similar builds even though they aren’t the same height, but Jaden’s hair isn’t the same. She wouldn’t be able to fool him even from a distance.”

Ansley cleared her throat. “That’s where I come in. Remember, I’m Roxie’s hair stylist. I can color Jaden’s hair to match hers and cut it the same way. It may be a tad

shorter, but it won't make that much of a difference. As for the glasses, Jaden just won't wear them."

"I really can't see all that well without them," Jaden said.

"After you're turned you'll have perfect vision, I'm sure," Roan assured her. "Since she was turned, Ansley's eyesight and hearing are now as acute as any born werewolf. The same will happen with you." He looked at Saskia. "Well, sis, what do you say?"

Jaden looked at Saskia expectantly as did Ansley. Finally, Saskia nodded. "All right, we'll do it. Let's just hope Leif doesn't kill me afterwards for putting his mate in danger."

* * * *

After one quick phone call, Roxie was on her way to the mansion with the Protectors who had been with her. Roan had taken Ansley out to an open late drug store to buy the hair coloring kit needed to dye Jaden's brown hair to Roxie's golden brown. They arrived back a short time after Jager and Daylen had returned home.

While waiting for Ansley to get back, Saskia had done her best to answer any questions Jaden had. She now had a better understanding of werewolves, as well as what being mated to one entailed. She still couldn't get over the fact that Leif had known she was his mate from her scent right on that first day she'd seen him. After what Dirk had said about Leif being a lady's man, it also didn't surprise her to learn he'd fought the mating urge to claim her as his. It also explained why he had been so desperate to have her that night he'd come to her place.

Jaden wasn't bothered that she hadn't been given any choice when it came to their mating. Leif was the man for her. Her feelings for him had grown deeper faster than she'd ever experienced before. And now that she was separated from him, she realized she never wanted to live without him.

Ansley had died her hair, and Jaden had just come down from showering out the color when Roxie, Beowulf, Dirk, Skylar and Kye arrived. Everyone had congregated in the kitchen while Ansley set to work cutting Jaden's hair. The men and Saskia had moved to one part of the kitchen while the other women had moved to where Ansley worked.

Roxie pulled a chair up across from Jaden and met her gaze. "Are you still sure you want to go through with this, Jaden?"

"Yes, I'm sure." To distract herself from the rollercoaster of emotions she was almost constantly feeling because of not being with Leif, she asked, "How is the spell done?"

"It's pretty simple. I inject you with some of my blood, say the words of the spell and then you'll turn. That's why I brought these with me." Opening a paper bag, Roxie pulled out two small packages holding rubbing alcohol wipes and a new syringe, one that looked like the kind diabetics used.

"I can handle that."

"Now I'm not going to lie to you, Jaden. Once I've said the words, it's going to hurt like a bugger. But it doesn't last for very long. Right, Ansley?"

"Roxie's right," Ansley said in return. "It only lasts a matter of seconds."

"Just remember what the outcome will be," Daylen said. "Once the pain is over, you'll be Leif's mate in every way."

"I should be able to handle it then." Jaden listened to the sound of Ansley's scissors clipping away for a few seconds before she said, "While on the phone with Saskia, Miles

called her sister but called Leif her brother-in-arms. Wouldn't Leif be his brother too?"

Roxie shook her head. "The Protectors may call themselves brothers and sister, but they all aren't natural siblings. Roan, Jager and Skylar are the only true siblings. They have been living together for centuries, so they've come to think of themselves as one big family. Saskia's grandmother was the one who brought them all together, basically forming their own small pack with Saskia as pack leader. Miles is Saskia's real brother and, at one time, was one of them until he went bad."

"I get it now. And Miles needs you so he can rule the packs?"

"Basically. I rule them now since I'm the foretold one. Saskia's grandmother had the sight and was the one who saw my coming, hence the title of the foretold one. Saskia also has the sight, and recently, we unfortunately learned Miles has a bit of it as well. That's why he's been able to keep one step ahead of the Protectors."

"If he has the sight, why hasn't he been able to see you in one of his visions?"

Saskia, who had come to join them, said, "That's a good question. I haven't been able to figure that one out. I had the vision that led me to Wulf's Den where I knew the foretold would be found, but Miles obviously hasn't been able to pick up on you."

"Well," Roxie said, "I may have an explanation for that. You know I've been playing around with my magic to see exactly what I can and can't do. One of the things I've been doing ever since that night at the club, when you said how you found me, is to use my magic to shield myself. When you told me about Miles, I've been kind of specifically directing it to deflect him."

"You've been doing it all this time and you never told me," Saskia said.

"I didn't know if it was actually working or not, but I have a feeling it must be."

"All right. Let's do a test. I know I can pick up your location if I concentrate hard enough, and a vision will come to me. Include me in this direct shielding you're doing for Miles."

Roxie closed her eyes for a few seconds, then opened them. "Okay, done."

Saskia got a faraway look on her face. A full minute passed before she shook her head and smiled. "Well, I'll be damned. I'm getting nothing but a blank."

"Then I guess it's working," Roxie said with a large smile.

"At least we don't have to worry about Miles learning your identity through a vision."

Ansley put down her scissors and picked up the hairdryer. "I'm all done. Once I style it, it should look exactly like Roxie's."

Jaden closed her eyes as Ansley dried her hair. She'd let the others' conversations wash over her. It was taking almost everything she had not to go out and look for Leif, even though doing so would be a complete waste of time. Miles had him hidden somewhere in the city. It would take an army and more hours than they had to be able to find him.

Shutting off the hairdryer, Ansley put it on the table and took off the cape she'd put around Jaden. "What do you think?" she asked the women.

"Perfect, as always," Roxie said. "From a distance, Jaden will pass for me."

Jaden opened her eyes. "I guess it's spell time."

Roxie met her gaze. "Are you ready for this?"

The men joined them as Jaden nodded and put her glasses on. She wanted to be able to see everything Roxie did. "Let's do it."

After opening one of the wipes, Roxie rubbed the inside of her elbow with it before she took off the top of the syringe and stuck the needle into her skin. She pulled out the plunger and filled it with some of her blood. Guessing at what was to come next, Jaden held out her right arm with it turned so the inside of her elbow was facing up. Roxie used the other wipe, then jabbed the needle into Jaden's arm.

Once she pushed the plunger to inject the blood, Roxie said the words of the spell. "The magic of the wolf's blood is now in thee. A wolf you become to run wild and free. Where once there were two, now only one we see."

Jaden gasped while Roxie said them. They seemed to resonate inside her. The place where Roxie had injected her started to burn. Then, moving like quicksilver, it swept through her whole body. It felt as if Jaden was burning from the inside out. She bit her bottom lip until she tasted blood to keep herself from yelling out in pain.

When she thought she wouldn't be able to take anymore, the burning sensation slowly started to ease until it disappeared completely. Shaking with the aftereffects, Jaden took a few deep breaths. Looking at everyone crowded around her, she found her sight was blurry. Jaden pulled off the glasses she no longer needed.

She gave everyone a shaky smile. "It worked. I can't see through these anymore." She put her glasses on the table.

Saskia came and hugged her. "Welcome to the family, Jaden." She then pulled away from Jaden sharply and gasped.

"What?" Jaden asked, scared that something had gone wrong with the spell after all.

"Your scent is different, and not just because you're now a werewolf. It's subtle, but it's enough for me to smell it." Saskia's gaze ran over her face with shock. "You're scent is similar to Miles'."

"Are you sure?" Jager asked. At Saskia's nod, he leaned in to Jaden and took a deep breath. "Holy crap. You're right."

Starting to feel uncomfortable, Jaden said, "How can I smell like Miles? I don't know him, and I've never been near him."

"Jaden, who is your father?" Saskia asked softly.

"I have no idea. My mother never told me. She never spoke of him. After she died, I never found anything in her belongings about him, either."

"I know who he is. Miles is your father, which makes you my niece."

Shocked, Jaden asked, "How can you tell just by my scent?"

"Werewolf offspring carry the scent of both their mother and father. It's something that doesn't go away, even after they reach adulthood. Because of that, we always know the paternity of our children. I guess being born as a mortal has somehow masked Miles' scent, but you are most definitely his daughter."

Learning her father was the man who had taken her mate and threatened to kill him was just not something Jaden needed. She'd always wondered what he was like, but right now, she wished he'd have remained a mystery.

Chapter Eleven

They had all moved out into the living room waiting for Miles to call. No one had been able to sleep. Jaden hadn't been able to even sit down for any length of time. She'd sit for a few minutes, then have to get up and pace once again. No one said anything about it. There was nothing they could really do to help her. Only being with Leif would end her torment.

Precisely at dawn, Saskia's cell phone rang.

Jaden crossed back over to stand in front of Saskia, where she sat on one of the couches next to Eli. Saskia flipped open her cell and put it on hands-free. "Hello, Miles."

"My, aren't we polite?" he said back. "Have you thought over my offer?"

Jaden listened to the sound of her father's voice, wishing like hell she could reach through the phone and strangle him. He sounded too smug for her liking.

"Yes," Saskia replied. "We'll make the trade. Tell us where and when."

"Really? You're willing to hand over the foretold one just like that?"

"It's the way she wants to do it. She rules the packs so I really don't have any say in the matter, now do I?"

Roxie silently gave Saskia the thumbs up. They had known full well that Miles wouldn't believe they were that willing to hand her over. There had to be a pretty good reason behind their decision.

Obviously, Miles bought it, because he then said, "And of course you wouldn't be able to ignore a direct order from her. Doesn't that just work out to my advantage?"

"Would you stop crowing about it and tell me where you want to make the trade?" Saskia snapped.

"Watch how you speak to me, sister dear. I said I would give you Leif if you gave me the foretold one, but I never said in what condition he'd be in when we make the trade."

Jaden bit the inside of her mouth to stop herself from whimpering. Her mind formed one image after another of Leif bloodied and badly beaten.

"Where, Miles?" Saskia asked impatiently.

"The warehouse that you forced me to destroy. In one hour." He then ended the call.

Saskia stood. "Roxie and Beowulf, I suggest you go home. And don't fight me on this, Rox. You're pregnant and need your sleep. I'll send Dirk with you two. Even though Miles will be a little busy dealing with us, I still don't want you unprotected. The rest of us will take Jaden to make the trade."

Roxie grumbled under her breath, but did as Saskia said. Before she left, she made them promise to call her once they had Leif back. Dirk followed the couple out. Saskia then motioned for everyone else to follow her.

Jaden told herself to take deep, even breaths as she followed the Protectors outside to the detached garage. Once Skylar backed the SUV out, she climbed inside it with Kye, Saskia, Eli, Roan and Ansley. Jager and Daylen were going to ride in Jager's car. After they had all piled in, they were speeding toward the Golden Gate Bridge.

Sitting by one of the windows, Jaden pressed her forehead to the glass and concentrated on watching the scenery go by. Her hands were tightly fisted on her lap. The

closer they got to the city the worse her anxiety became. At the feel of a large male hand closing over her fist, she turned her head to look at Kye.

“It’ll be all right, Jaden,” he said kindly. “You’ll get through this.”

She gave him a wavering smile. Right now, she didn’t feel as if it would ever end. It seemed as if she’d been suffering forever.

When they reached the warehouse district of the city, Skylar drove to a burned out site where an older warehouse had once stood. Jager followed behind them. Once he parked in front of the ruin, everyone got out of the SUV, except for Ansley. Roan gave his mate a quick kiss and told her to stay put.

Walking toward what was left of the warehouse with the Protectors surrounding her, Jaden told herself over and over again that she could do this. It was the only way to get Leif back. She couldn’t let herself think that she would be coming face-to-face with her father for the first time, or how much of a bastard he really was.

Once they had come to what would have been the back of the building, their group stopped a distance away from a smaller one. It consisted of one man standing out in front with two men behind him and off to the side, holding Leif hanging limply between them. With her much improved vision, she could see he had been beaten. She then forced her gaze to the man who stood in front—her father.

The sun glinted off the same white blond hair he shared with his sister. His looks were similar to Saskia’s as well. The only difference was his violet eyes had a hard, cruel edge that his sister’s didn’t have. Like the rest of his kind, he had a werewolf’s super good looks.

Miles took a step away from his men and held up his hand. “That’ll be far enough. Send over the foretold one.”

Even though the distance separating them would have had a mortal shouting to be heard, Jaden had no problems hearing what Miles said.

“Give us Leif first,” Saskia said back.

Miles motioned back toward his men and Leif. “I’m afraid Leif isn’t in any condition to be walking at the moment.”

“What did you do to him?”

“Nothing that will cause permanent damage. I just gave him something to keep him asleep. No more stalling. Send her over. Now.”

Before Saskia could say anything more, Jaden moved up behind her and tapped her shoulder. “I’ll go.”

Saskia turned back to Miles, blocking his view of Jaden. “I don’t like the idea of sending you out there alone. There’s no telling what Miles will do.”

“You said that you recognized me as his daughter from his scent on me. He’ll be able to tell as well. Let’s hope his meeting a daughter he never knew he had distracts him enough for you to get Leif free.”

Saskia silently searched her face. “It may work. Miles definitely won’t be expecting that. Leif may be drugged, but I don’t think he’ll stay under when he scents you. You being Leif’s mate will be another surprise for Miles when he finds himself confronted by an enraged mated male. His two men won’t be able to hold Leif back.”

With a nod, counting on everything Saskia said to be true, Jaden straightened her back, and with her head held high, she slowly made her way toward her father. Just before she reached him, the wind shifted direction so it was no longer blowing in her

face, but at her back.

She knew the instant Miles smelled her scent. His brows drew together in confusion, then his gaze locked on her. He seemed frozen in place as she closed the distance between them and stopped to stand in front of him.

“Hello, father,” she said, meeting his gaze.

“Sarah,” Miles whispered.

Hearing him say her mother’s name so reverently, Jaden resisted the urge to slap him. He had no right to say it like that. He obviously had abandoned her mother when she had needed him the most.

Reining back her temper, Jaden shifted her gaze to Leif then back to Miles. “I’ve come for my mate.”

“Your mate?” her father asked dumbly and reached out a shaky hand toward her. “You’re my daughter.”

Jaden slapped his hand away before he made contact with her cheek. “Don’t touch me,” she said harshly.

A loud growl ripped through the air, then everything exploded in utter chaos.

Leif threw off the men holding him and launched himself at Miles. Jaden jumped out of the way just as he landed on Miles’ back. Leif’s eyes glowed and his upper lip curved in a snarl as he started to pummel her father with his fists. Both men shifted to their wolf forms, using sharp claws and teeth to fight.

Before Miles’ men could join in the fray, the Protectors surrounded them. Soon, the only one who hadn’t shifted into a wolf was Jaden. She listened with only half an ear to the second fight that had broken out. She kept her gaze locked on Leif and Miles as they tore into each other. Neither one of them seemed to be gaining the upper hand. Each of them bore bloody claw marks on their sides that glistened through their fur. She could easily tell which wolf was which since her father was a white wolf.

Then her worst fears were realized. Miles somehow managed to get Leif onto his back and took his throat in his jaws. Knowing what would come next, Jaden ran to them and pulled on the fur on Miles’ neck.

“Stop it!” she screamed. “If you had any feelings for my mother at all, you will not take my mate away from me.” Miles’ wolf eyes shifted toward her. “Please,” she pleaded as tears dripped down her face. “Please don’t do this to me.”

Miles seemed to hesitate. It was enough for Leif to break out of his hold. He would have attacked her father again, but Jaden moved to stand between the two wolves. “No, Leif. Enough. I need you.”

Once Leif shifted back to his human form, Jaden just about went down on her knees as a wave of longing and arousal washed over, a wave so intense it left her gasping for breath. The separation anxiety she’d felt became replaced with the need to join her body with Leif’s, to reaffirm the mating bond between them.

Leif stood panting, and his gaze ran up and down her body. “Jaden?”

When Miles whispered her name behind her, Leif snarled and whirled to go after her father once again. Jaden blocked him and grabbed his arms. “No. He’s my father.”

“But, Jaden, we—”

“You’ll do as I say, Leif,” she said in her best authoritative voice. “As the foretold one, I’m telling you to let him go.”

Leif’s gaze shot to her face. “What?”

“You heard her, Leif,” Saskia said. “The foretold one has given you an order.”

Meeting his gaze, Jaden stared at him, her eyes pleading for Leif to follow along. “Let him go.”

Leif shuddered once, then dragged her into his arms. Jaden clung to him, needing to be closer. Now that they touched, she found what little control she had over herself was slipping away.

“We have to get out of here, now,” Leif said against her hair as he plastered himself to her.

The feel of his erection pressing against her had Jaden unable to hold back the moan that pushed out of her. She started to ache, her pussy throbbing in time with her rapidly beating heart.

Jager jangled his car keys. “Here, take my car.”

Leif snatched them out of Jager’s hand and scooped her up into his arms before he took off at a run. Jaden looked over his shoulder one last time at her father. He silently watched them leave.

Once Leif got them both into the car, he peeled away with the tires squealing. Jaden couldn’t control her panting. Her body was on fire. “Leif? I need—”

“I know, baby. Just hold on. I feel it too. It’s because of the separation. It won’t take long to get to your place.”

True to his word, they arrived at her basement apartment in record time. Jaden shot out of the car and went to the entrance. When she turned the knob and found it locked, she remembered her keys were back at the mansion. Leif pushed her hand away, gave the knob a hard turn, breaking the tumblers, and pushed it open. He did the same to the door at the bottom of the stairs.

Inside, he kicked the door shut and had her back in his arms. Aroused to the point of pain, Jaden tugged at Leif’s t-shirt. Not used to her new strength, she ripped it down the middle and tore it off him.

Leif didn’t seem to mind. His lips slammed down on hers, kissing her with desperate hunger. The sound of her shirt and bra being ripped from her body filled the room. While he continued to nip and suck on her lips, they both rid themselves of their pants. Completely naked, Leif took her down on the bed. His hips landed between her thighs. Jaden made an animal-like growl as the tip of his cock brushed against her wet pussy. Digging her fingers into the top of his shoulders, she pushed down just as Leif surged inside her. He took her hard and fast. His hips thrust against her as he pumped his cock between her legs. With three strokes, Jaden felt her climax barreling up to meet her.

Just before it hit, she panted, “God, I love you, Leif.”

He groaned. “I love you too. Come for me, Jaden. I can’t hold back. I needed you too much.”

She wrapped her legs around his waist. “Just a little bit more.” Then she let out a keening moan, her orgasm tearing through her like a freight train.

Leif quickly followed, throwing back his head and howling as his cock filled her with his cum. Out of breath, he collapsed on top her, his still hard shaft keeping them joined.

When they both could breathe evenly again, Leif lifted himself on his bent arms and stared down at her. “Roxie turned you.”

“It was the only way I could stand-in for Roxie when we made the trade.”

He fingered her hair. "I guess that also explains why your hair is cut and colored to match hers."

"We didn't know if my father had seen Roxie from a distance."

Leif searched her face. "How do you feel about all this? Being my mate, you being turned into a werewolf and Miles as your father?"

She reached up and cupped his cheek. "I want to be your mate, and I wasn't going to give up the two thousand years we can have together. How do you feel about having Miles' daughter as your mate?"

He gently brushed her lips with his. "I'll love you no matter who your father is. You're mine."

"Yes, I'm yours, and you're mine." She shifted her hips and grinned. "How about you show me how much you love me? Or, as the stand-in foretold one, do I have to order you to take me again?"

Leif smiled and slowly moved in and out of her. "That will be one thing you'll never have to order me to do."

He showed her over and over again what she had to look forward to for the next couple thousand years.

Epilogue

Alone in his highrise apartment, Miles went to his bedroom closet and took out a box he hadn't looked in for a very long time. With shaking hands, he carried it over to his bed and sat down.

The box wasn't very big, but it held some items that he held dear. He'd tried to throw them away once, but he hadn't been able to do it. They were mementos from a time in his life when he thought he could be a better man. That was before it had all fallen apart.

Taking off the lid, he reached inside and took out a photograph that had been taken twenty-eight years before. The last time he'd looked at it had been eleven years ago. Looking at the woman with long brown hair that smiled back at him from the picture, he gently brushed her cheek with the tip of his finger. It was a picture of Sarah, the mother of his daughter. She hadn't been his mate, but he'd loved her just the same. And she had loved him until he'd let his greed and need to find the foretold one come between them.

For years, he'd tried to push her out of his mind, and for a while, he had succeeded. Then in a moment of weakness eleven years before, he'd taken out her picture only to have a vision showing him her death. He'd had no idea that she'd left a daughter behind. His daughter.

Jaden looked more like her mother than she looked like him. It had been a shock to smell his scent mixed in with hers. He'd never thought of himself as a parent, but knowing a part of Sarah lived on in Jaden, he longed to get to know her better. But the chances of that were slim. She was the mate of one of the Protectors, as well as the foretold one.

Learning his daughter was the one he'd sought to use and control for so long left him not knowing what to do. He may have taken the dark road of life, but the part of him that Sarah had made feel human had never really died. When it came to his daughter, he had a conscience after all. Ripping her away from her mate to bend her to his will, making her suffer, was something he couldn't bring himself to do.

Stuck between what he knew was right and the ambitions he'd lived with for centuries, Miles stared at the one woman who had expected him to be more than what he was. With the knowledge of what his daughter truly was, his life would no longer be what it once was. What was he supposed to do now?

The End

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.

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