

AGE GAP WOLF SHIFTER ROMANCE



BOSS'S MATE

SILVERDALE WOLVES

MIA WOLF

Boss's Mate

Age Gap Wolf Shifter Romance

Silverdale Wolves Book 11

Mia Wolf



Copyright © 2024 by [The Wolf Sisters Books](#).

All rights reserved. This copy is intended for the original purchaser of the book only. No part of this book may be reproduced, scanned, or distributed in any printed or electronic form, including recording, without prior written permission from the publisher, except for brief quotations in a book review.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Contents

[Chapter 1 - Kayla](#)

[Chapter 2 - Lance](#)

[Chapter 3 - Kayla](#)

[Chapter 4 - Lance](#)

[Chapter 5 - Kayla](#)

[Chapter 6 - Lance](#)

[Chapter 7 - Kayla](#)

[Chapter 8 - Lance](#)

[Chapter 9 - Kayla](#)

[Chapter 10 - Lance](#)

[Chapter 11 - Kayla](#)

[Chapter 12 - Lance](#)

[Chapter 13 - Kayla](#)

[Chapter 14 - Lance](#)

[Chapter 15 - Kayla](#)

[Chapter 16 - Lance](#)

[Chapter 17 - Kayla](#)

[Chapter 18 - Lance](#)

[Chapter 19 - Kayla](#)

[Chapter 20 - Lance](#)

[Epilogue - Kayla](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Books by The Wolf Sisters](#)

Chapter 1 - Kayla

“Jeez, could you look anymore glum?”

The question caused Kayla’s head to whip up from her desk, hands balled into fists and fingers itching to elongate into claws. “Damn it, Sarah!”

She bared her teeth at her best friend, who leaned over her desk with a half-curious expression.

“You’re a werewolf, Kayla, act like it,” Sarah chuckled, rolling her eyes. “You should have heard me coming down the street, let alone down the hall.”

Kayla blushed. She knew that, but she was so intent upon her work, so focused on doing a good job, that sometimes it did get her into trouble where her ears were concerned. Luckily, she was only a secretary at the security firm and not one of the security agents, or she was certain that there would be a few complaints by now.

“What are you doing here?” Kayla grumbled back at her friend, watching as Sarah picked up the little bronze wolf ornament she kept at pride of place upon her desk—the only thing she had left of her mother. “Please, put that down.”

“Sorry,” Sarah said and did as she asked. “I was just in the neighborhood and thought I’d swing by and see how that dating app is treating you.”

Kayla scowled. “You’re always in the neighborhood, Sarah. Silverdale is a small place.”

“Fine,” Sarah said, mirroring Kayla’s expression. “I just came to see how the app was going.”

“I never wanted to be on the stupid thing in the first place,” Kayla pointed out, making a point of adjusting the pile of papers in front of her. She had work to do. She didn’t have time for this. “So it isn’t going anywhere.”

Swift as, well, a werewolf, Sarah shot around the desk and yanked open the top drawer.

“What are you—” Kayla exclaimed, but before she could finish, Sarah had grabbed her cell phone and unlocked it. “Sarah, don’t you dare!”

“Oh, look, you matched with someone,” Sarah said, her smirk widening as she held Kayla back with one arm, stopping her from grabbing the phone. “WolfMan78. Forty-five years old. Athletic. Likes nature, hiking and history. Looks like he ticks all the boxes—you love old things and history.”

Sarah laughed and typed on the phone.

“What are you doing?” Kayla demanded.

“There aren’t any pictures, but hey-ho. Beggars can’t be choosers. Looks like you didn’t put any pictures up, either.”

“Because I didn’t want to be on the stupid app in the first place!” Kayla pointed out, growing more and more frustrated as she tried to wrestle her phone away from Sarah.

Finally, as if she had wreaked all the havoc she had intended, Sarah gave up the phone. Kayla grabbed it and spun it until the screen was the right way up.

“What did you do?!” Kayla exclaimed, looking at the message that Sarah had sent to one of her matches.

Hey WolfMan78, I love your profile. If you’re up for meeting, I’ll be at the Silver Moon bar tonight @ 7 wearing a black dress and red boots. Don’t be late.

“Why, Sarah? Why would you do that?”

“Because you need to get laid and I want my friend back!” Sarah sighed, rolling her eyes. “You’ve been like a wolf with a sore head ever since you-know-who.”

Kayla cringed at the mere mention of her ex. She didn’t need to be reminded of him. It was hard to forget him as it was.

“Maybe I’m just not ready yet,” Kayla shrugged and looked down at the phone in her trembling hands.

“It’s been three years, Kayla. It’s time to live a little. Besides, what harm could going on one date do? You might even have fun!” Sarah said, opening her mouth in a mocking gape before she added, “Imagine that! Fun, Kayla, just a little fun!”

She gripped Kayla’s shoulders and shook her a little. Bile rose in the

back of Kayla's throat. Just the thought of going out on a date made her feel physically sick. She had never really been one for dating. Though she was a hopeless romantic at heart, she much preferred to live vicariously through characters in books and television shows, especially since her last relationship hadn't gone down too well. And she had never really been any good at socializing.

In fact, she made a pretty shitty werewolf all round. Maybe that was why she had always chosen to date outside of the pack. And look where that had gotten her.

"I have had fun!" Kayla protested. "There was...."

She trailed off, trying to think of a single time that she'd done anything remotely close to romance in the last three years.

"Watching romcoms and sobbing into popcorn is not fun," Sarah sighed. She grabbed hold of Kayla's shoulders, looked her in the eye and added, "Please, just do this one thing for me and I promise I will always love you."

"You will always love me anyway," Kayla pointed out, sticking her tongue out at her friend. They had been best friends ever since they were tiny pups, their own mothers having been close before them. But their mothers were both gone now, and they only had each other. And their pack, of course, but they had always been the closest.

Otherwise, Kayla liked to keep herself to herself. It was easier that way. Sarah was the only one who had never let her down, never disappeared or died on her, and had always been there for her whenever she needed her.

"Are you really going to make me do this?" Kayla sighed.

Sarah nodded strongly. "Yes."

"Why did you have to choose the red boots?" Kayla growled. She hated those damned things. She had never been able to walk properly in them. In fact, save for half an hour before she had decided to go barefoot on a night out instead, she had never worn them.

"Because they look killer on you and nobody would be able to mistake you for anyone else in them," Sarah shrugged, smirking. "They are perfect for a blind date."

Kayla cringed. Blind dates were mortifying. She had only ever been

on one, and it hadn't ended well. In fact, it had barely even begun at all before the realization that there was absolutely no chemistry there at all.

What if he's ugly? Kayla thought grimly, though she immediately felt guilty.

As if she had read her mind, Sarah scowled and pointed out, "If his account name is anything to go by, he's a werewolf, and when have you ever met an unattractive werewolf?"

Kayla had to admit that she did have a point there. Sighing with only slight relief, Kayla said begrudgingly, "Fine, I'll go, but only for you!"

Playfully, she reached up and tugged on Sarah's golden blonde hair. Sarah growled back at her and pinched her arm before she yanked her into a tight embrace and said, "I knew I'd get to you in the end."

Chapter 2 - Lance

The buzzing of Lance's phone on his desk caused him to jump. He had been so busy going through contract details on his computer screen that he had entirely forgotten he'd placed it there.

"Who is that?"

"None of your business," Lance grumbled back at his son, who sat in the armchair opposite his desk going through the contract pages Lance had printed not two minutes earlier.

He ignored the way his son eyed him and only glanced at his phone. Seeing that it was a notification from the Supernatural Lovers dating app, he rolled his eyes and decided to ignore it. It was probably from yet another fae, desperate for a man with stamina to satisfy her needs in the bedroom. Those damned fairies were ruthless when it came to sex. But that wasn't what he had been looking for when he downloaded the app. In fact, he wasn't even sure what he had been looking for.

Whatever it was, he hadn't found it, and he was done with the app. He had been for weeks. He just hadn't gotten around to deleting it yet.

"Go ahead and take it if it's important," Lewis insisted, glancing up from the paperwork in his hands with a raised brow.

"It's nothing," Lance assured him, reaching out to press the lock button to darken his cellphone screen before he turned his attention back to his computer.

He could still feel his son watching him, but he tried his hardest to concentrate upon his work.

"Would you quit worrying about my phone and get back to work?" Lance snarled at his son. "We have to get those reports ready for Jake."

"Isn't that what your hot secretary is for?" Lewis chuckled, glancing over his shoulder. Lance cringed. He was just glad that his office door was closed, though he was almost certain she would be able to hear his son through the door. Lewis had never really been any good at whispering.

"Watch your mouth, boy," Lance warned him with a low growl in his chest. "You're at work, not the bar, and even if you were—"

“Yeah, yeah, I get it. Respect.” Lewis growled in his own throat and turned his gaze back down to the papers in hand.

Silence reigned for several minutes while Lewis checked over the paperwork and Lance checked the computer, flicking through e-mails and making sure there were no new alerts.

But several times, Lance found himself glancing at his phone, his fingers itching to pick it up. He didn't quite know why. It wasn't the first time he had received a notification from the app. In fact, in the first few weeks of being on it, he had received no end of notifications from women wanting to chat or meet up. All of them had turned out to be a terrible waste of time.

It had been about two weeks since he had last received anything of any interest at all. And yet, somehow, he couldn't resist the urge to check whatever had just popped up on his screen.

“If it isn't important then why do you keep glancing at your phone?” Lewis insisted, and before Lance knew it, his son had hopped up from his chair. He zoomed around the desk and grabbed Lance's phone.

“Don't you dare, Lewis!” Lance snarled, using his most angry dad voice. But his son wasn't a child anymore and had long ago outgrown being scared of his father. *I think I need to teach him another lesson in respect*, Lance thought grimly as he watched his son unlock his phone.

“I should have always known my darling sister was always your favorite,” Lewis grumbled, having just put her birth date in for the passcode.

“Ever thought that it's because she's less irritating?” Lance snarled at his son, holding out his hand to add, “Give. Me. The. Phone. Now.”

The death glare he gave his son might have worked when he was younger, but now, at twenty-seven, Lewis appeared utterly unphased. In fact, he swept his blonde hair back with a mischievous smirk on his face and proceeded to look at the phone.

“Hmm...I wonder who LunaLover01 might be,” Lewis said, his tone mocking as he darted out of the way of Lance's grasping hands. “She doesn't have any pictures, but she's twenty-two. This says she has blonde hair, blue eyes, is curvy but athletic, and loves taking moonlit walks on the beach. She sounds absolutely perfect for you!”

Lewis turned his back on Lance and busily tapped at the screen.

“Lewis fucking Leafson, what the fuck are you doing?” Lance boomed at his son. He grabbed him by the shoulders and yanked him around to face him, grabbing his phone from his hands.

But it appeared that the damage was already done. On the screen was a message from LunaLover01 asking him to meet her at a bar. And beneath it was a message from *him*, which he most definitely hadn't just written, saying he would be happy to.

“You know, if you were still a pup, I'd take you outside and give you a good beating!” Lance snarled at his son.

“Come on, old man,” Lewis snapped back at him. He sucker punched Lance's arm and cocked his head to the side. “You aren't dead yet. You're only forty-five. Mom would understand.”

At the mention of his late mate, Lance froze. His teeth gritted and he could feel his fangs threatening to protrude.

“You clearly didn't know your mother very well,” he growled through his teeth. “She would have clawed my eyes out for even looking in the direction of another she-wolf.”

Lewis cocked his head further and crossed his arms over his chest. “It's been ten years, old man. Give it up and admit you're lonely.”

Lance gulped. The words hit too close to home.

“It is what I deserve,” he pointed out, guilt clawing at his insides. *Why did I even download this stupid app in the first place?* He slammed his phone down on the desk, leaning on its edge to hold himself up. The shame and anger that threatened to overwhelm him was almost too much to bear.

He growled low in his throat when he felt Lewis's hand grip his shoulder, though he did not shrug away. It felt odd to have his son comfort him. He was the parent, not Lewis. Yet sometimes it truly felt as though they were closer to being brothers. He was, after all, only forty-five, and Lewis was twenty-seven. For werewolves, they were both still exceptionally young, sometimes even maybe immature when their wolves took over. But still, Lance would never ordinarily let his grief or his shame show.

Maybe he had been holding it all in for too long.

“Mom would want you to be happy,” Lewis said softly, his tone making Lance cringe even harder.

“She would want me to protect you and your sister,” Lance countered. “That was all she ever asked of me.” *And I couldn't protect her.*

“We're grown now, dad,” Lewis pointed out, clapping Lance hard on the back. “You've raised this business from the ground up and cared for us like no other daddy wolf ever has. It's time to think of yourself for once.”

Tears pricked at the corners of Lance's eyes. He closed them tightly until the emotion eased and finally took a deep breath, opening his eyes to finally look at his son.

“Why don't you go on my behalf?” he suggested, forcing a chuckle. “You're all about sowing your wild oats.”

Lewis raised his brow at that and sneered, “And here I was thinking you disapproved.”

“I never said I didn't,” Lance scoffed. “How do you think your mother and I ended up with you?”

Lewis looked a little hurt at that but he said nothing. Instead, he returned to his chair and picked up the papers he had dropped on the seat.

“If I didn't know any better,” he said once he had reorganized them, “I would say you were frightened.”

“Frightened?” Lance repeated. “What could I possibly have to be frightened of?”

His hackles rose at his son's words, and he tightened his hands into fists in order to fight the sensation. His wolf stirred, awakened by his son's teasing. *I'll show you something to be frightened of, you little shit.*

Ordinarily, he might have cuffed his son over the head and entered into a sparring match just for the sake of showing him who was still boss, no matter how old he got. But somehow, this felt more serious than that.

“Dad, we both know the immense guilt you've felt since Mom died,” Lewis said, and Lance's heart skipped a beat. “You built this place on it. And we both know you're scared that if you actually allow yourself the chance, you might find someone worth trying to protect again. You're scared you'll fail again.”

Bile rose in the back of Lance's throat. He hated just how easily his son could read him. It made his stomach hurt.

He remained silent, fearful that if he tried to speak, his son would hear the truth in his voice.

Lewis crossed the room and only stopped at the door to look back over his shoulder. "Just give it a chance, would you? What is the worst that could happen from having a drink with a pretty woman?"

Lance's insides twisted. Deep down, he knew his son was right. Under the surface, he was still fearful, though he would never admit it aloud.

"I will think about it."

Lewis looked a little pleased with that and winked. "Don't do anything I wouldn't do."

Lance grumbled. There wasn't much his son wouldn't do. In fact, he reminded him all too much of himself in his younger days. He only hoped Lewis wouldn't go and get himself in a sticky situation as he had done all those years ago, mating well before he had been prepared to do so. Worse yet, choosing a mate who had already belonged to another.

He shook himself mentally. He couldn't think of her now. Lewis was probably right. Daisy would have wished for him to be happy. It had been ten years, after all.

"Hey, Kayla, do you think you could file these for me, sweetheart?" he heard his son say in a most seductive and entirely inappropriate tone to his secretary.

Whipping around his desk, he made it to the door in only a few steps and popped his head around the corner.

"Lewis, file your own damn paperwork," he growled at his son. "I am giving Kayla the rest of the day off."

Kayla looked up from her desk, her blue eyes sparking with surprise.

"Mr. Leafson?" she said, sounding quite unsure of herself. "I still have e-mails to look at."

"They can wait until tomorrow," Lance assured her with a smile. "You've been working too hard lately. Take the rest of the day off. Hell, go and socialize a little. I'm sure a young girl like you has plenty of friends."

And guys running at your heels, Lance thought. Though he always prided himself on being professional, keeping work for work and home for, well, everything else, he was not blind. Kayla was an exceptionally attractive young woman, just as many werewolves were. With her pale blonde hair, blue eyes and ample figure, she was most werewolves' wet dream.

Control yourself, he snarled at himself, digging his nails into his palms to ease off his over-horny wolf. *Lewis is right. I do need this.*

“I'm not sure about that,” Kayla responded, and the way she blushed made her all the more attractive.

“I am sure my sister would love to hear you saying so,” Lewis chuckled, but he fell silent the moment Lance gave him the eye. His son knew better than to tease and flirt with the staff. And yet, he still pushed his luck from time to time. Lance couldn't exactly blame him. He knew what it was like to have a young wolf's hormones, after all.

“If not socializing, then go home and relax,” Lance insisted. “I'm leaving the office early, anyway.”

Kayla looked surprised, glancing at the open diary on her desk. “You don't have anything booked in the diary, sir.”

Lance shook his head, smiling gratefully at the young woman. “I know. Don't worry, you didn't miss anything. I've just made plans, is all.”

A look of relief washed over her face, and she hesitantly reached for her mouse to turn the machine off. It stopped whirring after several moments and Lance thought for a second he could hear Kayla's heart beating abnormally fast. She glanced at Lewis, and Lance guessed his son had gone and done it again. He had an odd way of making women fall for him. It was oddly infuriating, and yet it still filled him with pride.

“I'll be in early to make up for it tomorrow,” Kayla promised, grabbing her handbag from beneath her desk and her cell phone from where she always kept it in her top drawer.

She is the best secretary I have ever had, Lance thought, remembering the day his daughter came to him and insisted she had the perfect recruit. When he found out it was one of her friends, he had been more than a little hesitant. She wasn't exactly well-known for choosing good company. But Kayla was the exception.

“Don't be silly,” Lance scolded her. “Just come in at the usual time. You deserve the break.”

Again, Kayla blushed, and she dipped her head before skirting around the desk toward the hall. “Thanks, sir.”

“You're welcome,” Lance called after her. “And how many times do I have to tell you to call me Lance before you will finally listen?”

“Sorry, sir,” she called back. “I mean, Lance.”

Lance chuckled to himself at the innocence in her tone. His face quickly fell when he realized that Lewis was looking at him as if he had grown a second head.

“What are you staring at?” Lance demanded. Lewis quickly cleared his throat, shook his head and raised one hand as if in surrender.

“Nothing,” Lewis said, stepping back. “Absolutely nothing at all.”

Chapter 3 - Kayla

Sitting at the bar several hours later, Kayla still didn't feel ready for her date. It felt as though it had taken an age to prepare; waxing, hair, makeup, those damned red boots with about a mile of laces to hitch up. And yet, she still didn't feel ready.

Hell, she didn't even know why she had gone to so much effort when she hadn't even wanted to go on the date in the first place. *Sarah!* she thought begrudgingly, wishing her friend would just ease off the pressure on demanding it was time for her to get back out there. She would have done so on her own eventually, maybe.

Glancing at the clock above the bar, she saw that she had only five more minutes left to wait. That was, if he turned up at all. What if he didn't? Whether she had wanted to come or not, the rejection might well eat her alive. She cringed at the thought.

"You waiting for someone?" Eddie, the bartender asked, appearing before her with a bottle of wine in hand.

"I guess I am," Kayla said, shrugging. She forced a smile, though she was sure that it looked as fake as it felt.

"On the house," Eddie told her as he refilled her glass.

Do I really look that pathetic? she wondered, but all she said was, "Thanks."

She grabbed the glass, drained half of the contents and reached for her phone. Maybe she still had time to cancel. It was better than sitting here all night looking like an idiot when he didn't show.

Her phone buzzed then. Maybe it was him. Glancing at the screen, she saw the notification that popped up. Bile rose in her throat. There was no name, only a number. And the message read, *Kayla, it's me. I know you don't want to hear from me but...*

The message cut off, but there was no way she was unlocking her phone to read the rest. It didn't take much to piece it together. She'd had messages like that every few months for the last three years. Never from the same number, because she always blocked them. But it didn't take much to guess who it was.

“LunaLover01?”

Kayla tensed, her heart skipping a beat when she heard her account name being muttered. A shiver ran through her at the realization she did not only recognize her username, but the voice whispering it.

How? she wondered. The only people who knew it were her, Sarah and her supposed date. The voice that sounded behind her most definitely didn't belong to her best friend. The alternative was too horrendous to comprehend, and so, slowly, she turned on her stool and prayed that she had imagined it.

“Mr. Leafson!” she exclaimed, all of the heat in her body rushing to her cheeks.

Salt and pepper-haired, mature and handsome, well-groomed and just plain dreamy, Mr. Leafson was practically Kayla's perfect mate. There were just two problems. The first: he was Sarah's father. The second: he was also her boss!

She watched the blood drain from Lance Leafson's face and tried not to think about how he was even more good-looking in the dim light of the bar, considering he had clearly made the effort to groom his close-cropped beard and had his hair trimmed.

He did that for me? she thought, before quickly reminding herself, *no, he did it for his date, who just so happened to be me.*

“Kayla? There must be some mistake,” he said, shaking his head. Kayla didn't miss the way he glanced down at her red boots.

There was certainly no mistake, she was sure of that.

“WolfMan78?”

She gulped, seeing what remained of the color in his face draining away.

This was such a bad idea!

“Kayla, I had no idea that you were LunaLover01!”

Kayla glanced around quickly, relieved the bar was fairly quiet save for a couple of regulars stooped in the far corner. Though Eddie was within earshot, she thankfully knew him well enough to think he would mind his own business. At least until she mentioned it to him. Which she most

definitely wouldn't, because this was simply too mortifying to voice.

“I...I should go,” Kayla said, stammering hard on her words as her entire body started to tremble with humiliation. She slipped off her stool and prepared to leave, brushing her blonde hair back behind one red, hot ear. Why did she have to go all out? She'd even put in her most prized pearl earrings, the ones passed down to her from her grandmother and her mother before her. All to meet...her boss. Somehow, mortified didn't cut it.

“I'm sorry,” she apologized, turning away. “This is just too—”

Her breath caught in her throat when a warm hand encircled her wrist, urging her back around.

“At least stay for a drink,” Mr. Leafson suggested. How could she possibly even begin to call him Lance now? “I did tell you to go out and socialize, after all. The least I can do is help you with it.”

Help me. Kayla blushed fiercely. As if she was some charity case who needed help to socialize. Well, it wasn't exactly untrue. Save for Sarah, she liked to keep herself to herself.

She was about to decline when her phone buzzed in her hand again. One glance told her a second anonymous text had come through.

Fuck! Maybe having a date with her best friend's father was the lesser of two evils. At least she wouldn't go home, drink herself silly, have a cry and finally give in to her ex's pleading messages. She had done that once or twice and always ended up regretting it.

At least this way she might have a little less regret in the morning.

“Just one,” she announced, and was surprised when Mr. Leafson pulled out the stool for her to return. As she took it, she smiled and said, “Thank you.”

“You're welcome,” Mr. Leafson responded, taking the stool beside her. “Nice boots, by the way. I wouldn't have expected they'd be your style.”

Kayla's heart skipped a beat. “They...they aren't. They were brought for me by...a friend.”

She most definitely didn't feel right mentioning his daughter right now. She grabbed her wine glass and drained the rest of its contents, feeling even more self-conscious. Was she at risk of losing her job if she made

herself look like a total alcoholic tonight?

“Eddie, I'll have a whisky and whatever the lady would like,” Mr. Leafson announced to the bartender, and Kayla's heart fluttered. She had never been described as a lady before.

“Just another glass, please, Eddie,” Kayla said and swiftly added, “Just a small one this time.”

Mr. Leafson looked at her with a half-smile and she couldn't help but blurt, “What?”

“Kayla, there's no need to be so uncomfortable. You see me every day at work.”

A lump formed in Kayla's throat. She glanced down at her hand where she had absentmindedly been playing with the hem of her little black dress.

“That's work. This is...is a...” Kayla stuttered, feeling like a total idiot.

“You can say it,” Mr. Leafson smirked back at her. It was a devastatingly charming smile that made Kayla's heart skip several beats. She had to clench her teeth and tighten her thighs to stop from swooning. “A date. Mr. Leafson, this isn't appropriate.” She glanced down again.

He leaned in a little closer and whispered, “I'm your boss. I know. But who says coworkers can't have a quiet drink together?”

And you're my best friend's father! She wanted to scream the words at him, but she already felt foolish enough, so she kept her mouth closed.

“Kayla, you don't need to look so terrified. I am not going to take you home and ravish you,” Mr. Leafson scowled at her, and the words caused a whole heap of images to rush into Kayla's mind, all of which she most definitely shouldn't be thinking about.

She wasn't sure how it was even possible, but her face grew even hotter.

“And for wolf god's sake, call me Lance, please!”

Kayla's only relief was her wine glass being filled again. Suddenly, she didn't care how she looked. She grabbed the glass and swigged again. She was a werewolf, after all, and so was he. They could both handle their liquor.

“Lance, if I had realized you were WolfMan78, I never would have

suggested we meet,” Kayla said, horrified at the thought it had actually been his own daughter who had set up the meeting. There was no way she could have known, either. Surely? It didn't bear thinking about.

“Kayla, would you just relax?” Lance suggested. He laid a hand on her shoulder, and it took everything in her not to flinch away—not because it felt wrong, but because it was quite the opposite. The warmth of his touch sent a tingle down her spine. It had been so long since...

No! Stop it!

“Kayla? Are you alright?” Lance asked, and she realized he was looking at her with concern.

Her chest tightened. She had wandered off in her mind, thinking on how desperately she needed to feel something physical. Sarah was right. It had been too long. But there was no way in hell she was going *there* with her boss!

“I'm sorry. I think I should go.” Kayla bounced off her stool so fast she almost slipped in those stupid red boots that were far too high. How the hell was she supposed to walk out of there without looking like a total moron? She was going to throttle Sarah in the morning.

“Are you walking home?” Lance asked, but before she could answer, he added, “Let me walk you.”

Silverdale was a small place. Most people walked everywhere even though most people had vehicles of some sort. Kayla wasn't one of those people. She walked everywhere, even in stupid six-inch heels.

“I'm a werewolf. I can take care of myself. Thank you for the drink.”

Before he could protest, Kayla turned and hurried remarkably well out of the bar, even more glad that the only people in there save for Eddie were all too drunk to notice her wobbling. All save for Lance, who she felt watching her all the way out of the door.

Knowing his keen wolf ears would hear her, she muttered at the door, “Let's pretend this never happened.”

Chapter 4 - Lance

Though he agreed with Kayla on pretending that their 'date' had never happened, he couldn't squash the urge to be sure she got home safely. He had always been a gentleman, always concerned for the safety of the fairer sex, even more so since the death of his last mate.

Besides that, she was his secretary, and he had a responsibility to her. Even if she was too humiliated to see that, he wasn't about to live with it on his conscience if he got to work the next morning to find something had happened.

Draining his whisky, he paid Eddie with a smile and a thanks and headed out of the bar.

The dark chill of the evening made Lance even more determined to be sure she got home safely. Raising his head, he sniffed the air for her scent and started to follow.

This isn't creepy, he told himself. She didn't even need to know he was there so long as he saw her safely to her door. If she wanted to be independent, he wasn't going to try and intervene, but he had to be certain she was safe. He was the reason she was out in the first place.

He had just turned a corner in the road when he heard something that made his blood run cold.

"Get away from me!"

He was just in time to see Kayla get dragged sideways into an alley halfway down the street.

Though he didn't see her attacker, the scent of cat shifter filled his nostrils. *Damn lion shifters*, he thought angrily. He could never understand why Dash let other shifters into Silverdale. They'd always been trouble.

But there was no time to debate that now. He charged down the street without so much as a blink, ready to tear off his clothes and shift if the need arose.

The sound of scuffling turned to fighting and Lance entered the alleyway to find that Kayla was giving as good as she got. Barefoot, her bag and shoes discarded on the cobblestones, she slashed at her attacker with

elongated claws. Her teeth were bared in a ferocious growl, and Lance hesitated to intervene, wondering whether she truly had the situation under control.

But then his wolf won out. There was no way in hell he was going to stand by and let her handle this on her own.

Stepping swiftly forward, he grabbed the golden-haired lion shifter by the back of his neck and yanked him backwards just as he attempted to shove Kayla away.

“Ahh!” the she-wolf cried out as Lance slipped between her and her attacker, growling menacingly.

“You lions never could take no for an answer,” he snarled, shoving the man back again. Blazing amber eyes met his, and there was a madness he saw there that frightened him. He had seen that look before in the eyes of the man who had taken his Daisy.

Not this time! He splayed his hands at his sides, claws extended, prepared to lash at the lion shifter. “Think carefully before you take me on, boy.”

For a lion, the man was small—muscular, perhaps, but small nonetheless. And he was most definitely half Lance's age, nowhere near as strong or experienced. If he had any wits about him, he'd leave without even attempting anything further.

Lance allowed his wolf to graze the surface, knowing his eyes would spark a warning. His fangs protruded and he saw the fear in the other man's eyes as they went from amber to a dull brown.

“Good choice,” Lance half-growled, half-laughed. “Now leave.”

The lion shifter scurried away, though not before Lance lashed at his back, giving him a few claw marks to remember him by.

It wasn't until he was certain that he was gone that Lance turned to find Kayla on the ground, leaning against the wall of the building with her head in her hand.

“Kayla?” he exclaimed, dropping down in front of her. “Are you hurt?”

She turned two astonishing blue eyes upon him and said, “I bumped

my head, but I think I'm okay.”

“Let me check,” Lance insisted, and before she could protest, he adjusted her head to get a good view of the back. He didn't see anything and so he sniffed deeply. There was no scent of blood.

“I told you, I'm fine,” Kayla reiterated, attempting to get up. All she managed to do was awkwardly bump her head on his shoulder and lean back against the wall again. There was no way she could get up with his great hulking form hanging over her.

“Here, let me help you,” Lance said, offering her his hand. When she took it, he braced himself, rising to his feet and bringing her with him.

It was only once they had straightened up that he realized his mistake. She was much too close, much too small and innocent standing before him, trapped between his body and the wall of the alley.

She may have been a werewolf, strong and agile and athletic, but still, she was petite with just the right amount of curves. And so, so beautiful.

Instinct took over and Lance leaned in a little, his hands pressed against the wall on either side of her to stop her from falling if she became dizzy, but also to stop himself from touching her again.

It was just as big a mistake as helping her up had been, only drawing her closer. Their noses almost touched as she turned her head up to meet his gaze.

“Thank you,” she whispered, and the way her breath tickled his lips made his entire body quiver. She smelled so good. Her breath smelled even better. The way her gaze locked with his was intoxicating and he found he couldn't look away.

The urge to kiss her was so strong, so deep, that even his wolf was rearing inside him. He pursed his lips tightly to stop himself and finally shoved off the wall.

It took all he had in him to break his gaze away from hers.

Control yourself! he yelled inwardly, his hands tightened into fists. *She is your secretary, your daughter's best friend, half your age and much too beautiful. She is way out of your league.*

He had to remind himself of all that and more just to stop himself

from doing what his entire body, mind and soul wanted him so desperately to do.

The way his wolf clawed at his insides was so painful that he almost howled aloud.

“Mr. Leafson? Lance? Are you alright?” Kayla asked as he turned away, closing his eyes tightly and pursing his lips even harder.

When he felt her hand upon his back, he almost whipped around and dominated her right then and there. It was perhaps only the reminder of what had just happened, her being attacked, that stopped him from doing so. He wouldn't traumatize her any further tonight.

But what about tomorrow?

He forced the thought away. How were they supposed to pretend like nothing had happened now? He was almost certain she must have felt something, just as he had. Maybe revulsion at the thought of being kissed by someone old enough to be her father.

“Please, don't touch me,” he hissed under his breath, but it was clear she had heard him when she removed her hand slowly, as if she thought too swift a movement might awaken the animal in him.

“Are...are you hurt?” she asked hesitantly.

Lance shook his head, teeth gritted. Taking a mental inventory just to be certain, he realized he didn't have even a scratch on him. The lion shifter hadn't had the opportunity to get a good lash in before he scared him away. He might have laughed at that if he wasn't so tense.

“Lance, are you sure you're okay?” she asked again. Lance cringed. Why did he have to tell her to call him that? His name suddenly sounded far too good on her lips. Those lips that were plump and pink as rosebuds.

Eyes still closed and teeth still gritted, he growled, “Grab your things. I am walking you home.”

Chapter 5 - Kayla

The walk home was just as awkward as the bar had been, if not more so. Kayla's only relief was that Lance didn't ask who had been attacking her. For all he knew, the guy had been a total stranger. He didn't need to know that she had been stupid enough to actually date that guy back in the day.

Though she was shocked by Stan appearing out of the woodwork, what stunned her more was how she felt at Lance's rescue. He had been so strong, so dominant, so frightening. She had seen how every muscle in his body rippled beneath his shirt as he shoved Stan away from her.

Even though she had stumbled and hit her head, ending up on the floor, she hadn't missed their exchange or the fact that Lance was twice the size of her ex, domineering and sexy and quite simply her type in every single way.

The fact that his rescue was like something out of one of the romance movies she so loved to watch most definitely didn't help the situation. If it hadn't been for who he was, Kayla would have rung Sarah gushing about the encounter.

The way she had felt when their eyes locked as he helped her to her feet was something she would remember for a lifetime. The exhilaration she had felt was almost, if not as, powerful as what she felt the day she had embraced her wolf side for the first time.

And that was quite simply frightening as hell when it came to thinking of who had been standing opposite her.

She couldn't feel that way for her best friend's father, let alone her boss.

Though the walk from the bar to her home was fairly short, it felt like a lifetime as they walked in sheer silence, a good distance between them. Yet the air between them seemed filled with electricity, the tension there so heavy it weighed on Kayla's shoulders like a cinder block.

And yet, when they came to stand before her front door, the time suddenly seemed to have gone all too quickly. Before she knew it, she was blurting, "Will you come in for a drink? A-as a thank you for rescuing me."

She blushed uncontrollably then. She hadn't really needed rescuing.

At least, she didn't think she did. She was a werewolf, after all, and she knew how to take care of herself. But when it came to Stan, she always found herself lacking. Even a she-wolf couldn't exactly match the power of a lion shifter. Yet, Lance seemed to have had no trouble.

“I should probably head home,” Lance responded, and Kayla felt disappointment claw her insides.

It was probably for the best. All hell might break loose if he came inside.

“Thank you, Lance.”

Lance shrugged his shoulders and shook his head. “It's my job to protect.”

That caused the disappointment to grow. How could she have believed she was special when he was right? He was a security subcontractor, after all. *And I'm just his secretary!*

“Good night,” he told her, dipping his head in a most gentlemanly fashion.

Why can't I find someone like you who isn't forbidden? Kayla thought, her entire body tensing up as he turned to leave.

She had just grabbed her keys from her bag and shoved one in the front door when Lance took a deep breath that made Kayla turn back.

He had also turned, meeting her gaze with an odd spark in his eye. “Maybe one drink wouldn't hurt? It is still early.”

The way her heart skipped a beat told her she should encourage him to leave, but instead she unlocked her door and shoved it open. “After you?”

“Ladies first.”

There it was again, his calling her a lady. Why did he have to be such a gentleman? He had always been that way, ever since the first day she started working for him after high school, but somehow it felt different tonight, more personal.

Kayla entered her house, sure she could feel his eyes on her rear. And the sensation made her spine tingle.

“What can I get you?” she asked as she dropped her bag and keys on the table in the hall, taking her phone with her out of habit, even though

Sarah and Lance were the only ones who ever called and he wasn't exactly going to need to call his secretary when he was already with her. "I'm afraid I don't have whisky but I do have wine and beer."

"Wine is fine," Lance said, closing the front door and following her through to the kitchen.

Kayla poured two glasses of wine and set them down on the breakfast bar, deciding that the couch in the den was much too intimate.

For a few minutes they sat in silence and Lance sipped at his wine. Kayla wondered whether it might be out of distaste or a desire to stay just a little longer. Though she told herself she didn't hope it was the latter, she didn't want it to be the former, either.

"You've got a nice place here," Lance said, finally breaking the silence. It eased Kayla's tension only a little to think of something a bit less awkward.

"It's small, but it's good for little old me," Kayla said, shrugging. "There are still a few repairs to be done here and there, but I'll get around to it eventually."

"Don't you have any male friends who could give you a hand? A father or brother?"

Kayla cringed. "I have no siblings, my father passed years ago, and well, if I had any male *friends* I wouldn't have been on a dating app, now, would I?"

Lance's cheeks grew red at that. "Good point. And I'm sorry for your loss."

Kayla glanced at her glass. "Don't be. He was a waste of space anyway."

"I hope my kids never say that about me."

"Oh no! Sarah loves you to bits!" Kayla exclaimed, reaching for his forearm. Lance glanced down at her hand and she snatched it away again. She had to keep her distance.

But when their gazes met again, she felt the urge to lean in. It was only her phone buzzing on the surface in front of her that stopped her.

She clenched her jaw when she glanced down to see yet another text

from Stan. Why today of all days did he have to choose to show up?

She placed her arm over her screen and reached for her wine glass.

“If there's something you need help with around here, I know my way around a toolbox,” Lance offered, and Kayla couldn't help but smile.

“After tonight, do you really think that would be a good idea?” she asked. He looked at her with a raised brow and his expression melted her insides.

That's when her phone started to ring.

“Is there something important you need to take care of?”

Bile threatened to choke her. Kayla would be happy if she never had anything to do with Stan again.

“It's nothing.”

She swiftly pressed the lock button, silencing her phone. No sooner had she done so than another text came through.

“Are you sure?” Lance asked, looking concerned.

Kayla cringed. She was an idiot. Her boss was a security guy. He probably saw this kind of thing all the time.

“It's my ex,” she said, cringing again as she felt Lance tense up. “I keep blocking his number, but every time I do, he gets another.”

When she saw the anger that blazed in Lance's eyes, she felt an odd sense of terror churn her gut. Quickly, she decided it best not to mention that he had just met him in the alleyway.

Unable to bear the look in his eyes a moment longer, she reached for the wine bottle and said, “I think another drink is in order.”

After drinking almost an entire bottle between them, Kayla found it much less awkward. And after several more interruptions from Stan, she found herself spilling everything.

“He was lovely at first, sweet even, but over the year we were together he got possessive, then aggressive, and then violent. I tried to leave a few times before it finally stuck,” she admitted, drinking the small remnants from the bottom of her glass.

“You should have come to me,” Lance snarled, and Kayla saw how

tightly he was holding onto his own glass. “No woman should go through that.”

It was then that realization dawned on Kayla. The alcohol seemed to have cleared her mind, and somehow she remembered what Sarah had once told her of her mother.

“I'm sorry. This must bring up terrible memories for you.”

The way his shoulders tensed told her it did. And Kayla knew her suspicions had been right. She remembered every word of her friend's story on how her mother had been set to marry another werewolf back in the days when the alpha chose the matches within his pack. She'd fallen for Lance instead, and her intended hadn't liked that. Even after she'd rebelled, married Lance in secret and had two children with him, her ex-mate hadn't given up.

“I have seen too much of what men like that can do,” Lance admitted. “I didn't do enough the last time. And it took someone I loved from me.”

Bile rose in her throat as she remembered how Sarah had described her mother's death at the hands of her jealous, psycho ex-mate and how her father had never quite gotten over the guilt of it all.

She could see that all written on him now plain as day.

Instinctively, she laid a hand on his shoulder and said, “What happened to Daisy wasn't your fault.”

“Then whose was it?” Lance snarled, and he whipped around to face her, so close their noses almost touched just as they had in the alleyway. Only the blazing anger in his gaze stopped her from kissing him this time.

“Things were different back then,” Kayla pointed out. “There were different rules surrounding mates.”

“And I broke every one of them,” Lance countered, the guilt and regret thickening in his voice. “And here I am, doing it all over again.”

Kayla was stunned when the anger turned to lust in his eyes. He grabbed hold of her face, and in the next instant his lips were upon hers.

A rush of electricity so great it took her breath away surged throughout her body and instinct took over.

Her arms wrapped around Lance's neck and she slipped off her stool, embraced in his arms in a way that made her feel more secure than ever

before.

The she-wolf inside her howled furiously. The response she heard from Lance's was so intoxicating that nothing else mattered. She ignored the alarm bells ringing in the back of her mind, her entire body vibrating excitedly when Lance gripped her rear and pulled her up onto the breakfast bar.

He pinned her there with his hips between her thighs, his hands on her face once more. He only stopped kissing her long enough to whisper against her lips, "You are so beautiful, so strong, so...so..."

The desire in his words sent a warm tingling sensation shooting down Kayla's spine. She tightened her arms around his neck, wrapped her legs around his waist, held him to her.

What if he suddenly pulled away? What if she blinked only to realize she had imagined it all?

And so, she kept her eyes firmly clamped shut, enjoying the caress of his hands upon her cheeks before they trailed down over her body.

His fingertips grazed her breasts, lingering a second on her nipples before traveling lower still.

This isn't happening, a small voice in the back of her head screamed at her, *this cannot be happening!*

But it most definitely was. With every moment that passed she became more and more certain of that. She didn't even need to pinch herself to be sure.

What she was feeling, what her body was screaming at her, was all too real to have been imagined. Maybe it would have been better if she was imagining it. At least then she wouldn't one day have to admit to her best friend that she had had her hottest-ever make out session with her father.

But she shoved all thoughts of Sarah away quickly. She couldn't think of her right now. It was just too weird.

All she could think about was how good Lance's hands felt gripping her body and how his kiss warmed her through from head to toe.

Nothing could ever compare to that sensation, and she embraced it like a thirsty woman who had been stuck out in the desert for a week.

It was Lance who finally ended the kiss just as Kayla gripped hold of his belt buckle. Embarrassment clawed at her insides, yet she could not release the metal clasp.

Her gaze met his defiantly, and her wolf growled low in her throat, just daring him to try and deny her what she wanted.

She was a she-wolf, and when she wanted something, it was next to impossible to keep her from it. Was Lance dominant enough to stop her?

From the look that beamed in his chocolate brown gaze, she suspected that he most definitely was. And a part of her wanted to challenge him to try. But instead she remained utterly silent.

Still cupping her face in one hand, Lance used his other to stroke her hair back from her face. His fingertips brushed her ear, forcing her hair back behind it.

And the longing look he gave to her made Kayla's shiver. Though the sensation wasn't entirely unpleasant, it was enough to warn her not to try to kiss him again.

But when Lance spoke, it was not to tell her that what they had just done was wrong. Instead, he said, "You are too good, too innocent, too perfect. You are a she-wolf, a goddess, otherworldly. You should not have been subjected to violence from the likes of *him*."

Kayla knew that what he meant was the fact that no other creature, supernatural or otherwise, save for a werewolf should ever have the opportunity to go up against her; whether in a fight or in romance, it did not matter. It was the way many werewolves thought, wishing to keep their bloodlines and their lives pure and free of outside influence.

Kayla had never understood that. Not until now. With Lance gazing at her the way he was, she truly felt as though she was all of the things he had said. She felt strong, powerful, goddess-like. And yet, she still felt innocent, small and weak in his arms. All just the right mix to make her feel utterly perfect, a sensation that maddened and intoxicated in equal measure.

Gripping hold of his face in her hands, she looked him in the eye, and without the slightest hesitation she growled dominantly, "Worship me."

The words ought to have felt awkward, humiliating even, but they made her feel even more powerful. And the spark of obedience in Lance's

eyes only made it even more so.

He lunged at her, his face nestling into her neck, and he kissed her throat and scraped his fangs along her collarbone.

A shiver of pure lust and desire rushed down her spine and she grabbed for his belt buckle again. She wanted him more than she had ever wanted anyone before. In fact, never in her life had she ever been the dominant one. She had always been the mild, meek-mannered she-wolf who preferred to stay out of the limelight and at the back of the pack.

But here in her kitchen, with Lance wantonly devouring her flesh in the most sensual manner, Kayla was utterly changed.

Still, she was obedient when Lance whispered against her neck, "Show me to the bedroom."

When he stepped back just enough to allow her off the breakfast bar, she slipped onto the floor. He towered over her just as he always had, but somehow tonight it felt different.

She sidestepped to do just as he had told her, but before she could, he grabbed her hips and pulled her back to him, his lips on hers all over again.

The taste of wine on his tongue was fading fast, revealing the true taste of him. He was sweet and yet spicy as cinnamon, lingering on her tongue even when she pulled back and closed her eyes at the sound of her phone ringing for about the hundredth time that night.

"I really should have put that on silent," she growled, and just like that the spell that had come over them was broken.

Both stood panting, their foreheads pressed together, still wrapped in each other's arms.

The longer they stood there, the more tension filled the air between them, and the more Kayla wished she had put her phone on silent. Maybe if she had she would already be well on her way upstairs by now.

"Maybe it is a good thing you didn't," Lance whispered, and the tone of his voice suggested he really hadn't wanted to say the words. "We shouldn't be doing this."

"We shouldn't," Kayla agreed. Though her head told her so, her soul was screaming at her almost as much as her beast was. She gripped hold of

Lance's forearms, frightened to let him go.

The bubble of heady desire that had been created around them wasn't quite popped yet, even if Kayla did feel like she was already coming down from a seriously intense high.

“Sarah would flay me alive if she saw me now,” she said through gritted teeth, imagining just how she would look to her friend, likely with her lipstick smeared and her cheeks and chest flushed with desire.

When she finally pulled her face back from his, she looked up to see that she had left her mark upon him. Her peach lipstick, though quite pale, was smeared across his face. And for a few moments, all she could feel was satisfaction.

Then the guilt threatened to overwhelm her.

“This is my fault,” Lance said, stepping away so quickly that Kayla almost stumbled right along with him. She had to grip hold of the edge of the breakfast bar in order to stop herself from falling.

Her knees were so weak that her entire legs felt like jelly.

“I never should have come in for that drink,” Lance continued, and Kayla's throat constricted.

“Do you regret it?” she whispered the words so quietly that if he hadn't been a wolf, he might not have heard her.

Yet, his eyes whipped up to meet hers, and the anger he saw blazing there told Kayla all she needed to know.

“Never,” he declared, and a rush of heat spiked through Kayla's body all over again.

“You should go,” she said, still through gritted teeth, forcing herself to continue to meet his gaze, “before we both do something we will regret.”

They stared at each other for several long, agonizing moments, and Kayla had to fight desperately not to grab hold of him and kiss him again.

“What about that?” Lance asked, inclining his head to Kayla's phone that had dinged with the arrival of yet another message.

Kayla shrugged her shoulders and sighed. “I'll do what I always do and block the number again.”

Lance didn't look entirely convinced that that was going to do much of anything, but he didn't protest.

Instead, he increased the distance between them a little more, raised his head high and said, "Thank you for the drink."

"You're welcome," Kayla said, and silently she added to herself, *thanks for reminding me of what it feels like to be truly desired.*

She feared that if she said the words aloud they might just end up picking up where they had left off. And now that her wits were returning to her, she knew just how bad an idea that would be.

"If the trouble continues," Lance insisted, crossing his arms over his chest, "you know where I am."

Kayla knew that well. Having spent six out of seven days a week in his company, she knew exactly where he was and how to get ahold of him. What she had never anticipated was that she would get ahold of him in the manner she had tonight.

He is Sarah's father! she reminded herself over-firmly. *Worse, he's your boss!*

It was as he turned and started toward the hall that Kayla called after him, "We really should forget this ever happened."

Lance stopped at the archway leading to the hall and looked back over his shoulder. "I will if you will."

Chapter 6 - Lance

The next morning Lance entered the office half expecting that Kayla wouldn't be there. How could he blame her if she had called in sick or even quit altogether? The truth was, he couldn't. And if she did, he would kick himself. She was quite simply the best secretary he had ever had, and he had been through five or six in the past three years alone.

He was greeted as he always was by the other subcontractors working within the building, a smile and a wave here and there, a few words in passing. But all the while he was anxious to get to his part of the building, which just so happened to be the furthest from the main doors, down the hall and to the right.

And as he approached, he sniffed the air questioningly. Was that her patchouli and orange blossom perfume he could smell? No, he was sure he was just imagining it.

He was almost entirely certain she wouldn't be there waiting at her desk for him as she was every other morning.

And yet, when he pushed through the door at the end of the hall that led to the space in which he, Lewis and Jake had their offices, there she was.

“Good morning, Lance,” she said, smiling as she rose from her chair to bring him his coffee and the morning reports. “I hope you had a pleasant evening.”

Lance searched her gaze, but he saw only her smile. In fact, there seemed nothing different about her at all.

Clearing his throat, he said, “I did, thank you, Kayla.”

He moved to take the coffee and reports from her, his fingers brushing hers. The shockwave of heat and electricity that shot up his fingers, into his arms and through his chest was enough to make him gasp. And he thought he heard Kayla do the same.

Yet, when he looked down at her, her smile was still plastered on her face. “You have meetings at ten and two, sir.”

“Thank you, Kayla. Anything on the Webber contract?” he asked, trying desperately to follow her lead.

Kayla shook her head. “Nothing yet, but I will let you know as soon as I hear anything.”

“Good. Thank you, Kayla,” he said, heading for his open office door. It was only when he reached the threshold that he paused and looked back over his shoulder. “I hope you had a pleasant evening last night, too.”

The words felt thick and stupid on his tongue. He should have said them sooner. But Kayla just smiled and thanked him before returning to her desk.

Maybe this was for the best? If they just played along awkwardly for a few days, they might finally fall back into their old ways. Maybe then he could forget about all that had happened.

He placed his stuff on his desk and dropped down into his chair. Absentmindedly, his gaze traveled to the open door, and just beyond it, Kayla.

Sitting with her back to him, she appeared utterly oblivious to his gaze. And he thought that a good thing, considering if she saw his face now, she would most certainly know what he was thinking about.

Every time he closed his eyes, he could still picture her in that little black dress and those hot red lace-up boots. It was a far less conservative outfit than the usual pencil skirts and blouses with three-inch heels that she usually wore for work.

In fact, now he thought about it, he was sure she had closed an extra button or two on her blouse this morning. Maybe he was just imagining it.

He most definitely was imagining the way her lips had felt against his, how her curves had felt beneath his hands, the warmth of her body pressed against his own. More than that, he felt the anger he had experienced when she told him about her past and the protectiveness he felt when he imagined anyone trying to harm her.

He was just beginning to see red when Lewis swept into the room with his usual arrogant smile.

“So?” his son demanded as he came to lean against Lance's desk.

“So what?” Lance said, flicking through the reports Kayla had handed him even though he could barely focus on the words in front of him. He suspected he already knew what his son was going to ask.

“Well, how did your date go last night?”

“Lewis, I am your father, not your friend,” Lance growled through gritted teeth, all too aware of how close Kayla was; with the door wide open he was almost certain she would hear them. “My private life is my own.”

Lewis scowled at him and rolled his eyes. “You're a werewolf. You live in a pack. Not to mention, this is Silverdale. I'm sure it'd only take me ten minutes of asking around to find out for myself.”

Lance gulped at that. Though he wanted to believe that nobody would have enough interest in him or Kayla for that, he knew Lewis was right. Silverdale was full of busybodies.

He had to force the thought away quickly. All anyone would have seen was him having a drink with a coworker. He didn't need to worry about what might get back to his daughter on the matter. Unless someone had been peeping through Kayla's windows last night, nobody would have seen anything.

“So, how did it go?” Lewis asked before Lance could respond. Gritting his teeth, Lance growled low in his throat.

“You won't give up until I answer, will you?” he asked, cocking his head. Lewis shook his own. “Fine, then, it turned out to be nothing.”

Out of the corner of his eye, he could have sworn he saw Kayla flinch. Guilt bit at Lance's insides. Who was he to say that their date had been nothing?

It felt wrong to say so, even to him, but what else could he tell his son when they were both determined to act as if nothing had happened?

“So, what happened?” Lewis asked. He perched on the edge of the desk looking all too interested, and Lance thought that for once his son must have had a quiet night. Usually by now, he was already raving about his latest conquest. “Did you get any?”

Lewis winked in a way that made Lance cringe. “

Don't be so vulgar!” Lance snarled at his son. If he had been closer, he might have smacked him.

Kayla was right out *there*, and she could hear everything. Whether he had gotten any or not, he wouldn't ever have told his son the intimate details

of their date, even if she hadn't been utterly forbidden.

“Oh, come on, you're forty-five, not 450. Don't be such a prude!” Lewis snapped back at him. He placed his hand on the desk and leaned over to whisper, “Was she good?”

Lance glowered at his son and snapped, “No, she wasn't, because nothing happened!”

Again, he thought he saw Kayla flinch. Glancing out of the door, he was at least certain she was solid with tension. He could see it in the way she hunched her shoulders as she leaned over her desk.

“Nothing at all?” Lewis gaped at him in astonishment. “Dad, I think you're losing your touch.”

Lance gritted his teeth further. He most definitely wasn't losing his touch. If he had wanted to, he would have taken Kayla right there on her breakfast bar. He would have made love to her all night long if he could, but all the while that little voice had been screaming in the back of his mind, and it had been the only thing stopping him.

From the way Kayla had gazed up at him after their mind-blowing kiss, he suspected she had been having similar mixed feelings on the matter.

“No, nothing at all,” Lance assured his son, though even as he said the words, he knew they weren't true. Something had most definitely happened, but how was he to admit it to Lewis when he couldn't even admit it to himself?

Chapter 7 - Kayla

Work that day was perhaps the hardest thing Kayla had ever had to do. Not only was it awkward and uncomfortable trying to pretend nothing had happened between her and her boss, it was also infuriating because a part of her wanted to charge into his office where the door was now closed and ask if he had meant what he said to his son that morning.

Had their date really meant nothing to him? She knew it was stupid and irrational and they had promised to forget anything had happened, but Lewis didn't know any of that. For all he knew, his father had been on a date with some drop-dead gorgeous supermodel and he'd had wickedly hot sex all night long after a wonderful meal.

No, he'd had her. One drink in a bar followed by a fight and finally an amazing kiss that had clearly left them both wanting more, even though they both felt horrendous shame and guilt for those whose backs they were going behind.

Lewis was bad enough for flirting and teasing, but she couldn't even begin to imagine how he might react if he knew the truth. Maybe it was best Lance had suggested the date didn't go anywhere. She didn't want to have to sit there listening to him talking about her as if there was ever any hope for a second date. They both knew that wasn't possible.

Kayla might have been stuck on that train of thought all day, automatically going through the motions of work, if it wasn't for the man who stepped into the office just after lunchtime.

Hearing the footsteps before they approached the doors of the waiting area, Kayla cringed. It couldn't be.

A glance at the clock told Kayla it couldn't possibly be Lance's two o'clock appointment, so who else could it be? The answer didn't bear thinking about, yet she most definitely recognized those stealthy bootfalls coming from the hall.

Her entire body tense, she glared at the door opposite her desk, waiting with a clenched jaw.

And almost the instant that Stan barged through the door she was on her feet, glaring at him. "Stan, what are you doing here?"

Tall and slender yet muscular, Stan was swift and agile, and in an instant he reached the desk. It was the only thing that stood between them as he leaned over and said, "I needed to see you. I need to talk to you."

Kayla cringed, because she had heard those words from his lips a million times before.

"I have nothing to say to you, and you have nothing I wish to hear," Kayla said firmly. "You should go. This is not appropriate, Stan. I work here!"

"Please, Kayla, I miss you. I just want to talk."

Kayla's body quivered. Those were the last words she wanted to hear. She had heard them too many times to count. The first few times she had believed them. She had believed everything Stan said to her at some point or other. But after three years of constant letdowns and her only gifts being bruises, Kayla had finally wised up.

"You should leave before I call security," Kayla asserted, her hand moving for the panic button on the underside of her desk. She had worked for Lance for years, but never had she been forced to use it before. In fact, she couldn't remember ever coming close.

Yet, here she was.

"I'll go on one condition," Stan told her in typical Stan blackmail fashion. "Promise me you'll meet me later? I need to talk to you, please, Kayla. I've changed. I swear."

She had heard that a million times before, too, and believed it all too many.

"I don't have time for this, Stan," Kayla said desperately, hoping he would get the hint and go. "I'm working."

"Then just say you will meet me and I will wait for you," Stan insisted. He leaned over the desk and reached up with one hand to cup her face. Kayla jerked away from him, desperate not to ever feel his hands upon her again. It was quite the opposite of how she had felt with Lance the night before, and it frightened her immensely.

"I...I'll meet you if you go now!" she pleaded with him. "If my boss —"

She cut herself off, terrified of what Lance might do if he heard her. She remembered all too well the anger in his gaze as she had told him her past the night before. To him, Stan was just another scumbag like the one who had taken his late mate from him.

And Kayla couldn't say she blamed him, but the last thing she wanted was for him to get into trouble for her, especially if their date really had been nothing.

“Meet me in the park?” Stan suggested, and Kayla cringed. They had met in the park a hundred times before, finding a quiet spot to sit on the good days and arguing like, well, cats and dogs on their bad.

“Fine,” Kayla ground the words out through gritted teeth. “I’ll—”

She never got the chance to finish her words because the office door behind her suddenly burst open.

“You!” Lance roared, his eyes locking onto Stan immediately. Kayla felt small and insignificant as Lance charged across the room.

“Lance, please! Don't!” Kayla cried out as he grabbed hold of Stan by the throat.

The lion shifter's eyes looked like they were going to pop right out of his head as Lance dragged him toward the hall.

Even as they disappeared through the doors, Kayla could hear her boss. “You are leaving now, and Kayla will *not* be meeting you, now or ever. You will stay away from her or you will have *me* to deal with. Am I understood?”

The only response Kayla heard from Stan was a half-choked, half-grumbled sound that was completely indecipherable.

Footsteps continued to march through the building, the sound of dragging feet overlapping it.

Then, finally, a door was shoved open and slammed shut before Lance came marching right back.

It was only when he loomed over her that Kayla realized she had slumped back down into her chair. “You will not be meeting him, Kayla, now or ever,” he repeated.

He glowered down at Kayla, a hard yet protective look in his eye.

All she could do was softly nod her head. The hard lump in her throat left her speechless. And before she could come up with anything to say, Lance added, “And I will be escorting you home this evening.”

His tone left little room for argument, and before Kayla could even open her mouth to try, Lance turned and stormed back into his office. He slammed the door behind him with such force that it sent a shiver down Kayla's spine.

Chapter 8 - Lance

Never in his life had Lance felt such an urge to punch someone's lights out. It had taken everything in him not to snap Stan's scrawny little neck. For a shifter, the man was pretty weak and repulsive. Lance had met his fair share of shifters—lions, bears, tigers, even a dragon or two over the years, but Stan was by far the most pathetic.

And somehow, that only made Lance angrier. Why should he waste his time on someone so insignificant?

For Kayla. That was all the encouragement he needed. And so, the moment the end of the day came, he grabbed his jacket and headed for Kayla's desk.

“Come on, let's get you home,” he said. He hadn't meant for his words to sound cold, but he was certain that they did, especially when he saw the discomfort in Kayla's gaze. A little more softly, he added, “Let me take that for you.”

Before she could protest, he took her laptop bag from her and slung it over his shoulder, gesturing for her to lead the way out.

“Everything alright?” Lewis asked from the doorway of his own office. Having been out on a house call during the Stan incident, he had missed the whole thing.

“Fine,” Lance grunted and continued on. He was in no mood for his son's questions.

Holding the door open for Kayla, he slipped out after her and said, “We'll be taking my truck.”

“There really is no need for this,” Kayla protested as they made their way for the side door of the building that led to the parking lot. “I am perfectly capable of walking myself home.”

“I might have agreed with you until I learned that fuckwit in the alleyway last night was your damn ex!” Lance snapped back at her, his fury growing threefold. “Why didn't you tell me?”

Kayla blushed, averting her gaze. She adjusted her handbag on her shoulder and Lance saw the way she gulped. “I was worried you might

overreact, what with—”

She didn't get the chance to finish. She didn't need to. Lance knew all too well what she was going to say.

“How could I possibly overreact? That guy attacked you last night. He wouldn't leave you alone afterward, and then he has the balls to show up at your work inside a damn security firm run by werewolves? He's insane, Kayla. You need to stay away from him.”

“I intend to.”

There was very little Lance could say to that and so he simply held open the door again.

Leading her to his truck, he unlocked it and yanked the passenger side door open. “Get in.”

Kayla's eyes flashed as if she were about to argue, but instead she pursed her lips and slipped into the truck.

Slamming the door shut, Lance rounded the vehicle and climbed into the driver's seat. Placing her laptop bag in the back, he slammed his own door shut and shoved the key in the ignition.

Neither of them spoke as he pulled the truck out of the parking lot and headed for her house.

Gritting his teeth against the silence, he turned up the radio, hoping it would remove some of the tension. Somehow, it only made it worse.

Though the drive was short, less than ten minutes, it was perhaps the most painful drive he had ever taken.

It was only when he pulled onto her driveway and killed the engine that he finally dared to speak. “You know, if you were to have need of anything, I'm only a call away.”

Kayla looked at him with an expression of sadness that made his heart ache. “It isn't your job to protect me.”

Lance laughed a little at that. Cocking his head to one side, he pointed out, “Actually, it is. Security is what I do, remember?”

Kayla blushed brighter than ever before, and Lance's insides melted. She was so radiant in the dying light of the day that it took his breath away.

Through gritted teeth, he said, “You should get out of the car before I do something I’ll regret.”

A mixture of hurt and confusion darkened Kayla's face, but she didn't question him. Instead, she shoved open the door and slipped out, leaving only her patchouli and orange blossom scent behind.

For just a second, Lance watched her perfect swaying ass as she walked up the driveway.

She wasn't even at her door before he turned the key in the ignition and kicked the truck into reverse. He had to get out of there before he did something stupid.

He had done all he meant to do. She was home safe. Now all he had to do was save her from himself before he climbed out of his truck, grabbed her and ravished her right there on her driveway.

The scent of her lay thick in the air mocking him as he sped away, fighting the urge to look back. The only thing that stopped him was the small voice in the back of his mind that said, *Sarah would never forgive you.*

Chapter 9 - Kayla

The screeching of Lance's truck as he sped out of the driveway made Kayla almost jump right out of her skin. Stopping halfway up the walkway, she closed her eyes and tightened her hands into fists, gritting her teeth against the noise.

Desperately, she wanted to look back over her shoulder at him, but she feared if she did her heart would hurt twice as badly as it already did. She might even have called him back if it wasn't for the coldness in his tone as he urged her out of the truck.

There was nothing left of the warmth she had felt in his touch the night before or the affection she had witnessed in his gaze. Whatever had happened, it appeared Lance had forgotten it. And that hurt like hell.

She didn't dare move until she could no longer hear his truck in the distance, wondering whether maybe he might come back. He didn't.

However, her phone did start to ring as she rummaged in her handbag for her keys.

Grabbing it, she saw Sarah's name flash on the screen. She wanted to ignore it, but she almost never did that to her best friend, and the last thing she wanted to do was worry her. So, reluctantly, she answered, "Hey, Sarah."

"Hey yourself!" Sarah snapped over the phone, but her tone wasn't entirely unfriendly.

I see where she gets that from now, Kayla thought, imagining Lance only a few minutes earlier.

"I've been waiting for you to call me all day!"

"Did I say I would?" Kayla asked. She thought back but couldn't remember having done so.

"Well, no, but you always call me after a date!" Sarah hissed. Kayla gulped. "How did it go?"

"It...it didn't, really."

What else was she supposed to say? *It turned out to be your dad. We had a drink and then I left. Stan showed up and attacked me and your wonderful dad came to the rescue. Oh, then he walked me home and we*

almost fucked the night away...

She could have gone on and on, ending with what had just happened in the truck, but she couldn't even get the first sentence out. How could she ever tell Sarah any of it?

“You're kidding. He seemed like the perfect guy for you on the app!”

Kayla's cheeks grew red hot and she was glad her friend couldn't see her face. “Yeah. He was, on paper.”

She placed her key in her door.

“What happened?”

Kayla cringed. Her friend's question brought forth far too many vivid memories.

“Nothing. He was just too old.”

Kayla flinched all over again. It was a dumb excuse.

Sarah laughed haughtily. “You love older men! You love everything old.”

Kayla's jaw tightened. Her friend was right. And Lance was most definitely not too old. At least, not in her book. He might have been twenty-two years older than she was, but they were werewolves. They could live for hundreds of years. They might have 150 years left on the earth together.

Kayla's insides fluttered at the thought. Lance was gorgeous. He was a gentleman. He clearly cared for her. *But he's Sarah's dad!*

Turning the key in the lock, she released it to press her thumb and forefinger to the bridge of her nose. She was beginning to get a terrible stress headache.

“Sarah, can I call you back later? I've just finished work and I'm super tired after last night,” she said, hoping that would be enough to put her friend off for a while.

“You better!” Sarah insisted. “I need to know everything!”

I'm not even sure I know, Kayla thought, but through gritted teeth she promised, “I will.”

With that, she ended the call and pushed open the door.

The scent that hit her the second she walked in made her skin crawl.

That's impossible.

Yet there Stan was. He leaned against the kitchen archway with his arms crossed over his chest, a cocky expression on his face as he said, "I've been waiting all afternoon for you."

Bile threatened to choke Kayla, but she forced her back to straighten and her hands into fists. "What the hell are you doing in here, Stan?"

"I told you earlier, Kay, I miss you. I want you back. I want you to see I've changed."

Kayla scoffed at that. It was perhaps the worst thing she could possibly have done. Stan always hated it when anyone laughed at him.

He stalked down the hallway to meet her, his gaze darkening. "Let me show you."

He placed his hands on her cheeks as he had done a thousand times before, pressing her back against the wall beside the door.

Kayla's entire body turned to ice. It was entirely the opposite of how she had felt when Lance manhandled her the night before. And against Stan's lips, she screamed.

Shoving at his chest, she fought hard, harder than she ever had in her life. Fear threatened to make her freeze but she fought through it, shoving him sideways, out the door.

"Get away from me! Leave me alone!" she screamed loudly, hoping some neighbor might hear and come to help.

In case they didn't, she grabbed her keys from the door, slammed it shut and locked it quickly before he could try to force his way back in.

The second it was locked, Stan started to hammer on it.

How did he get in here? Kayla thought, panicking. What if he could get back in?

She dashed about the house, looking for any way in. A broken window, an unlocked door, anything.

It was then she saw the open kitchen window. Thinking back, she remembered how she had opened it the night before when she had made herself a late-night snack. What an idiot she had been to leave it open all this time.

It was then the hammering on the front door stopped. Straining her ears, she realized she could hear rushing footsteps. They stopped for a second and she heard the rattling of the back gate as Stan volleyed over it.

Shit! She hurried to reach up for the window handle. Just as she grabbed it Stan appeared in the garden, running right at her.

Just in time, she slammed the window shut, locking it firmly. Trembling hard, she unlocked her phone and searched for the one number she could think to ring.

“Kayla! Put the phone down. I only want to talk!” Stan yelled through the window. He hammered on the glass, and Kayla feared it might break.

Nausea bubbled up her throat and she struggled to hold back tears as she pressed call.

The second she heard the call connect, she screamed down the phone, “Lance, he's here. Stan is here!”

Chapter 10 - Lance

The phone started to ring when Lance wasn't even halfway home. Still riled by how things had gone down, he debated ignoring it. It was likely Lewis just calling to let him know he had closed up the office, or maybe even Sarah checking on how his day had gone. But he was truly in no mood to talk to anybody.

Yet, something deep in his gut made him press the answer call button on the steering wheel.

"What is it? I'm driving," he said into the microphone above his head, really in no mood for chitchat.

"Lance, he's here! Stan is here!"

The words were filled with such terror that Lance immediately slammed his brakes on.

"I know I shouldn't have called you, but he's here! He was in my house. I got him out but now he's trying to get back in and—"

"Whoa, Kayla! You did the right thing. Calm down and do exactly as I say," Lance instructed. "Grab something, anything you can use as a weapon. Go to the nearest bathroom or closet and lock yourself in. I'm on my way."

He heard the sound of hammering footsteps and knew that Kayla was obeying his instruction.

"What do I do if he gets in?" Kayla asked, her voice still terrified but calmer than before.

"You do whatever you can to stay out of reach until I get there," Lance told her. His stomach twisted painfully at the thought of what might happen if he didn't get there in time. Deja vu made every muscle in his body tense up, and he turned the truck around so fast that he almost crashed it before he was even headed in the right direction. "And, Kayla, if there's no other way, kill him."

"But I..." Kayla trailed off, as if she wasn't sure how to respond to such a thing.

"You're a good girl, Kayla. I know you think you don't have it in you,

but if it comes down to it, don't choose him. He'd never choose you."

Pain lanced through him as he thought on how many times he had seen it, how many times he had witnessed women giving everything for the man they loved and the one they thought loved them back only to lose everything, to be so bruised and beaten that they couldn't see what was right in front of them.

"If it is between you and him, Kayla, choose you!" he emphasized. "I'm almost there."

Speeding faster and faster, Lance screeched into Kayla's driveway.

"Is...is that you?" Kayla asked as if she had heard him. "I...I think he's heard you."

"Where is he? Can you see him?" Lance demanded, killing the engine.

"Yes. I can see him out the bathroom window. He's running down the garden, over the fence."

"Stay right where you are. I'll call you back."

With that Lance ended the call, checked that his phone was in his jeans pocket, and rushed from the truck. He vaulted over the garden gate and around the back of the house. The scent of lion shifter hit him like a slap in the face and he wrinkled his nose.

One glance at the upstairs windows told him Kayla had listened to him. He could see her peering out from behind the net curtain in the bathroom.

Lance stood, straining his ears, trying to pinpoint exactly which way Stan had gone, but when he picked up the pounding of feet, he realized the lion had already put a great deal of distance between them.

I have to check if she's alright, Lance decided, and so he gestured up to the bathroom window and mouthed, "Come down. Unlock the back door."

When he was certain she had understood him, Lance slipped under the carport on the back of the house and waited impatiently, his foot tapping on the concrete floor.

The moment that Kayla unlocked the door she practically flew into Lance's arms. The way she trembled made him wrap them around her,

holding her tight even as she wept, “I’m sorry. I didn’t know who else to call.”

For several moments, Lance said nothing. He simply held her close, nuzzling his face into her hair and trying not to think too hard about just how good she smelled.

“Shh,” he whispered gently, stroking the back of her head, “Shh, I’ve got you. You’re safe now. I told you, you did the right thing calling me.”

“I...I thought...” Kayla stammered, her lips quivering as much as she was, and Lance could clearly see how much shock she was in.

“Come on, let’s get you inside,” Lance said gently, urging her back into the house. “You’re in shock and freezing.”

It wasn’t often that werewolves got cold, but shock would do it to them, and just feeling the way she shivered made Lance’s jaw clench.

“Are you sure he is gone?” Kayla asked, glancing over her shoulder.

Lance shook his head. “I’m not, but as soon as you’ve calmed down, I’ll go and scout about a bit.”

“Don’t leave me!” Kayla whipped around and gripped hold of Lance’s forearms so tightly that he could feel her fingernails as if they were claws. He had to glance down to be sure that they weren’t.

When he saw that she wasn’t at risk of shifting, he reached up and brushed her blonde hair back from her face. Cupping her cheek, he looked her deep in the eye and promised, “I am not going anywhere.”

He kicked the back door closed behind him to prove it.

“I’ll have a quick look around close by, and if there’s no sign of him, I’ll give Lewis a call to get a patrol together,” Lance told her gently, caressing her cheek with the ball of his thumb. *Damn, why does her skin have to be so soft?* It took all he had in him to keep his wits about him. “I’ll stay with you for as long as it takes for him to be found and arrested.”

“No, no! You can’t arrest him,” Kayla protested. She snatched her face away from his hand, shaking her head. Somehow, she trembled even harder than before. “That’ll just make him worse.”

Lance cringed at that. He had heard those words before. Kayla wasn’t the first beaten partner he had dealt with in his line of work. And they always

said the same thing, too scared to get help for fear that it could go wrong, and then they would find themselves in even worse trouble.

“I will never let him hurt you again,” Lance promised her. Never had he spoken truer words. He had seen what could happen when he didn’t keep such a promise. He wasn’t going to make that mistake again.

“How...how can you be so sure?” Kayla asked, her gaze darkened, brow raised.

Lance sucked in a breath and pulled her close in order to comfort her as he said, “Because I won’t leave your side until he is caught and banished from Silverdale.” *Or dead.* Though he knew the latter was the only unchangeable option, and he would have very much liked to be one hundred percent sure that Kayla never laid eyes on her ex again, he had always followed the law. It was perhaps the only thing he had to keep his anger in check, especially these days.

The way she looked up at him, eyes so filled with gratitude and affection, caused Lance to lean forward. His arms wrapped just a little tighter around her.

It was only when he realized what he had been about to do that he started to pull back again. Only it was already too late. At the very same instant, Kayla pushed herself up onto her tiptoes. Just like that, her lips were on his, and all bets were off.

Chapter 11 - Kayla

All sense of reason was gone from Kayla. The shock of what had just happened had washed everything else clean, and all she could think about was not feeling frightened anymore.

In Lance's arms it was impossible to feel any fear. His mere touch wiped it away as if it had never been. And when she reached up to kiss him, she felt her entire world beginning to spin in an entirely different direction.

The smallest of voices whispered in the back of her mind, *you shouldn't be doing this. He should be calling Lewis!*

But with every second longer that the kiss lasted, the voice became quieter and quieter until Kayla couldn't pick up any more than a niggling mutter.

Finally, as Lance's tongue grazed her lips asking for entry into her mouth, the voice was totally silenced.

The rush of lust was so great that it overwhelmed everything else, and all Kayla could think about was how good it felt to have his hands on her body, to feel him gripping her hips with such pressure that she knew he needed her as much as she did him.

Instinctively, she gripped hold of the first button on his shirt. It was half-popped when Lance gripped hold of her wrist and held her hand close to his chest. Against her lips, he whispered, "Not here."

Disappointment clawed at Kayla's insides, and for a second the voice returned, warning her again that this was wrong.

Then, just as she was about to suggest that maybe he should go and call Lewis after all, he pulled her up into his arms, cradling her buttocks. She wrapped her arms and legs around him just as she had the night before when he had placed her on the breakfast bar. And that was exactly where she anticipated him carrying her.

It was only when he carried her right past it that she knew he had other ideas. And her stomach fluttered with delight when he reached the bottom of the stairs.

How he climbed them without looking, Kayla would never know, but

she made no protests as he kissed her over and over, his scent enveloping her just as much as his arms were.

She wondered whether she ought to tell him which way her bedroom was, but fear of ruining the moment kept her silent. She was amazed when he made it to the master bedroom without too much trouble, only catching his boot on the doorframe as he pushed open the door and wandered in.

The next thing she knew, Kayla was on her back on the bed with her pencil skirt hitched up around her waist, her stockings and garter belt fully exposed. For the first time in her life she was exceptionally pleased that she had never gotten on with pantyhose and the restrictive material. They would have been far less sexy, and she was certain she never would have gotten to see the hungry look in Lance's eyes as he drank in the sight of her.

She bit the inside of her lip as he stood over her at the end of the bed and gently pulled off her kitten heels. His hands gripped her ankles then, and he rubbed gently just beneath the bone before sliding his palms up.

They traveled further and further, stopping only at the knees to massage there before traveling further still. The sensation of his warm hands through the silky material of her stockings was intoxicating, all the while his massaging hands easing her anxieties and she lay back, closing her eyes to enjoy every second.

“You are so damn beautiful,” Lance whispered gently, even as he hooked his thumb in her panties and eased them sideways. “I can't help but wonder if you taste as good as you look.”

Kayla's breath caught in her throat. Her eyes flashed open just in time to find Lance crouched between her spread thighs, a devilish smile upon his face.

And before she could even attempt to tell him no—not that she ever could have found the words—his mouth slipped between her legs. Hand still holding back her panties, he lapped at the sweet-smelling nectar between her thighs, his tongue moving languidly over her lust-swollen sex.

Propped on her elbows, cheeks burning with both lust and a little embarrassment, Kayla watched him at his work. And somehow, he was even more gorgeous whilst on his knees between her legs.

Her hand moved of its own accord, her fingertips snaking into his salt

and pepper hair, gripping at the roots as she was overwhelmed by the sheer pleasure of his tongue upon her.

Her insides tightened, her entire body quivered, and suddenly she was so hot she felt as though she might burst into flames.

“St...sto...stop!” she screamed aloud, but Lance seemed not to hear her. Even as she tried to wriggle away, Lance gripped hold of her thighs and pulled her back down the bed, his mouth latching onto her only intensifying the twisted knot of pleasure in her stomach.

And then, suddenly, it exploded within her like a dizzying, mind-blowing firework that spread from her stomach to her chest and out into her limbs in one fluid rush.

The sensations ebbed away just as quickly as they had come, but Lance did not relent. He continued to lap at her, adding a single finger, teasing her with just the tip at first. Then he slipped in just to the second knuckle, thrusting in and out, in and out. Finally, he added a second finger and gently eased them all the way, stroking and stroking, thrusting and thrusting, licking and licking until Kayla came over and over again.

By the time he eased up Kayla felt as though she was one step away from passing out. And yet, it was all worth it as she lay there, spent.

And just as she thought she might not be able to take anymore, she heard the sound of his belt buckle popping open, and like a kid at Christmas, the excitement within gave her a fresh wave of energy.

Lance came down on top of her, and when she felt his fingertips upon her chin, she realized she had turned her head to the side in her last screaming, writhing orgasm.

His fingers urged her face back to his gently, and when he kissed her, she tasted the sweet nectar of her climax upon his lips.

It was then they started to tear at what remained of each other's clothes, writhing together until there was nothing but flesh between them.

“I was right,” he whispered gently against her mouth even as he reached down between their bodies and used his hand to graze the tip of his rock-hard cock against her sex. “You do taste as good as you look.”

As he said those words, he slipped his cock deep inside her, the words and the action mixing as one to tighten her insides all over again.

The excitement and pleasure were a heady mixture that left Kayla entirely unable to think. All she could do was react, her head tilted back to open up her throat as she moaned and screamed with every deep, orgasmic thrust of his manhood inside her.

Eyes closed, she reveled in the sensations. The throbbing, thrusting cock. His hand upon her breast, squeezing gently whilst his thumb rubbed at her hard nipple. His muscular torso against hers, warm and slick with sweat. Whether it was his or her own, she couldn't be sure, but it no longer mattered, for she could no longer tell where she ended and he began.

Their bodies melted into one and his groans mirrored her moaning. Her hands tightened into fists at her sides, buried in the bed sheets. They were the only thing she had to hold onto, the only solid anchor she had in the real world. And she feared that if she let them go, she might float off into this dream forever.

Lance brought with him a whole new meaning to rocking her world, and as she came all over again she prayed that it never reverted back.

Her insides clenched so tightly around his cock then that even as she came down from her climax, she feared she might have hurt him. Yet Lance's response was most definitely not one of pain.

His body started to tremble, and when Kayla looked up at him, she saw his jaw was now clenched. Through gritted teeth, he growled, "Fuck!"

And the sheer pleasure in his tone told Kayla exactly what was coming. Welcoming it with a climax of her own, Kayla leaned up to kiss him with her hands upon his face, angling her pelvis up to take every last inch of him.

"Fuck, Kayla, I'm going to—" Before he could finish what he was going to say, he growled out a groan so powerful that it made the bed tremble beneath them. Kayla felt the warm, wet sensation of his seed spilling deep inside her and she moaned right along with him.

Just when Kayla thought it was all over, imagining that he would simply climb off, get up and see himself out, Lance dropped down onto the bed beside her. A giddy sensation fluttered in her stomach as he slipped his arm under her neck and urged her up to lay upon his chest.

Both still panting for breath, they lay there in silence, both staring up

at the ceiling for quite some time. Still reeling from the pleasure, Kayla realized she had never felt so good in all of her life. Every single inch of her was relaxed, fizzing with orgasmic energy, her limbs heavy with exhaustion.

The sound of Lance's heart beating beneath her chest was enough to make her own heart swell and she listened closely as his heartbeat slowed and his breathing eased.

It was only as the pleasure started to wear off that the guilt started to creep in. The mist of pleasure was blown away by the realization of what had just occurred.

Not only had she just had the best sex of her life, she had just had sex with her boss and the father of her lifelong best friend.

Her bottom lip quivered as she attempted to find the words to say. Yet she realized there was nothing she could say or do to change the fact. Nor could she bring herself to move away from Lance's warm, muscular chest. And so, she closed her eyes tightly, trying to hold onto the sensations for as long as possible.

If this was to be the only time this happened, which she was most certain it would be, then she wished for it to last. *This can't happen again*, she thought even as she slipped her hand onto Lance's chest to play with the smattering of hair she found there. *It never should have happened in the first place.*

When Lance's hand resting upon the back of her head, stroking her hair, she closed her eyes and tilted her head back into his hand. Those magical hands were far too good to give up just yet, and she reveled in the memory of all he had done to her.

"I may have gotten a little carried away there," he whispered, finally breaking the silence. "I hope I didn't hurt you."

Kayla raised her head so quickly that if she hadn't been so relaxed before she might have hurt her neck. "Are you kidding me? You could never hurt me."

She knew the truth of her words right deep down in her soul as she reached up and cupped his face in her hand. He smiled back at her sadly, and she was about to ask him what was wrong when he kissed her on the tip of her nose and slipped out from beneath her.

“I should go and give Lewis that call,” he said, reaching for his pants that he had left on the floor at the bottom of the bed. “Stan might still be out there.”

Kayla groaned. The very last thing she wanted to think about right now was Stan. “Is that the only reason you are getting out of bed right now?” she asked, because she was too afraid to ask anything more serious like, ‘do you regret what just happened?’

Though she hated the feeling of guilt in her gut, she most definitely knew she did not regret it one bit. She was, however, fearful that he might.

Yanking his pants back on, Lance perched on the edge of the bed and leaned over to kiss her forehead. “Believe me, if I could stay in this bed forever with you, I would.”

Kayla’s heart hammered so hard in her chest that it made her throat swell up. She had absolutely no idea what to say to that. In fact, she feared that if she tried to speak she might make herself look like a complete fool, and so she kept her silence, watching as Lance slipped from the bedroom with his cell phone in hand.

Chapter 12 - Lance

“Hey, what's up?” Lewis answered the phone on the second ring, clearly knowing something wasn't quite right. It wasn't often Lance called his son. After all, they saw each other five or six days a week at work.

Lance cleared his throat, still reeling from what had just occurred in the bedroom. Standing on the landing, he glanced over his shoulder at the bedroom door. Though it was closed, he could sense Kayla just beyond, moving about.

“I need you to round up a team,” Lance said, struggling to keep his attention on the conversation at hand and not his thoughts of the naked woman just beyond the door.

“For?” Lewis ground out the word as if he was irritated that he hadn't already given an explanation.

“I need someone hunted down and brought in,” Lance explained. “A lion shifter named Stan.”

Lance heard his son scribbling on a piece of paper. “Any last name?”

Shit! Lance growled through gritted teeth. Maybe if he hadn't been so busy with his dick inside Kayla he might have gained a little more information. “No, but he may be hanging around close to the Silver Moon. I've seen him there previously.”

Anger surged through Lance's veins at the mere thought of that night. It was only when Lewis spoke that he realized it must have been in his voice too. “What did this guy do to piss you off?”

“He's an ex of Kayla's,” Lance explained, jaw clenched.

“Huh...” Lewis said, his tone over-curious, and Lance sensed what was coming. “Got the hots for your secretary, pops? That why you got so protective with me?”

Bile rose in Lance's throat as he remembered how he had warned his son off Kayla.

“My personal life is none of your business,” Lance growled down the phone at his son. “The bastard came into the office today whilst you were out on your errands. He was trespassing in her house this evening when she got

home.”

“Is she alright?” Lewis asked, and Lance was almost shocked. He wasn't sure he had ever heard such genuine concern from his son before, not when it came to a young, hot woman he barely knew save for being his father's secretary.

“She's fine,” Lance assured him. *More than fine.* He trembled a little as he thought on what they had just done. She had certainly felt more than fine on the end of his cock. *Stop it!* he snapped at himself for thinking of her like that. He wasn't his son. But hell, he had felt every inch of his body bursting with pleasure and happiness to be inside of her. “But I want him found and arrested and taken before Dash. He's a danger to the peace of Silverdale.”

Lewis scoffed at that. “One lion shifter? Don't they usually run in prides or something?”

“Usually,” Lance admitted, “but our records show no sign of any within Silverdale.”

He didn't even need to look to know that. He was well aware of the comings and goings of everyone in and out of the gates of Silverdale. It was his job to keep a record of such things.

“So either he lost his pride, or he was so wrong they chose to lose him?” Lewis suggested, sounding thoughtful. A shiver ran down Lance's spine.

“Exactly. I want him found, arrested and assessed.”

“And while I'm doing, that you will be doing...” Lewis trailed off again, but Lance had heard the cheeky amusement in his tone.

I will not be doing Kayla again! Lance told himself firmly even before he said to his son, “I will be staying at Kayla's to be certain he doesn't come back.”

“Sure thing, boss,” Lewis said, though he didn't sound entirely convinced. “Do you have a description? I might be able to track him the database with his first name, shifter status and appearance.”

Lance scraped his palms with his fingernails, angry at himself. Why hadn't he thought of that? Maybe it was because he couldn't think straight when Kayla was in close proximity.

“Blonde hair, brown eyes, tall but not as tall as me. Muscular but nowhere near werewolf muscular. In fact, he was quite wiry for a shifter.”

Lance mused over that for a moment, feeling oddly egotistical. He shoved it away quickly. He wasn't that kind of man. Yet, when it came to Kayla, he seemed to be pushed past his usual limits.

“Sounds like he doesn't stand a chance against you,” Lewis said, almost as if he were reading Lance's thoughts.

“Or the rest of the pack, if he continues causing trouble,” Lance said, and before his son could say anything else stupid, he added, “Just find him and call me back.”

He was just putting the phone down when Kayla pulled open the bedroom door. Her expression was a little sheepish as she slipped from the room wearing nothing but an oversized t-shirt.

Lance's jaw clenched even harder at the sight of her. The scent of their lovemaking still clung to her, intoxicating him all over again, and it took everything he had in him not to go straight to her.

“I'm starving,” she announced, slipping past him to bounce onto the first step. “I could make something. Are you hungry?”

“Famished,” Lance admitted. He had certainly worked up an appetite, though in truth it wasn't food that he was really craving. Having had just one taste of her, he wanted more. His wolf clawed at his insides with the same need.

“I'm sure I have something,” Kayla said, hopping down the stairs. Her curvaceous, muscular legs teased Lance all the way down, and though he could not see it, he sensed her bare ass just beneath the hem of her t-shirt.

“Mind if I use your bathroom?” Lance called down the stairs.

“Go for it. First door on the right of the bedroom.”

Lance slipped into the bathroom and closed the door behind him. Using taking a leak as an excuse, he took several moments to collect himself, wishing his cock didn't smell like Kayla and their lovemaking for the simple fact it started to make him hard all over again.

Washing his hands, he splashed his face and chest with freezing cold water in an attempt to cool himself of the lust that was already building

within.

Having her the once simply wasn't enough.

He grabbed his clothes from the bedroom and shoved them on, leaving only his boots off and his shirt unbuttoned in an attempt to keep himself cool.

The second he entered the kitchen, he realized his mistake. He ought to have declined food. He should have told her he would sit out in his truck all night and keep an eye on the place.

Instead, he walked in to find her reaching for the topmost cupboard to grab some plates. The hem of her t-shirt was hoisted up by her reaching arm, and Lance got a devilishly good view of her perky, round ass.

“You know,” he growled through gritted teeth as he moved to help her grab two plates. “You should really put some more clothes on, or I might not be held responsible for my actions.”

It was only once he had placed the plates on the counter that he realized just how close Kayla was standing. She dropped down onto flat feet before him, her nipples just barely grazing his bare chest through her t-shirt as she went.

“I thought it best not to put anything clean on, so I put my night things on,” Kayla said, shrugging. “My clothes from earlier aren't exactly in any fit state to wear again.”

Lance raised a brow. Kayla chuckled and reached for his shirt, turning the open hem so that Lance could see where the buttons were supposed to be. They were gone, several loose threads all that remained.

“They look pretty similar to this,” Kayla explained. “Though my skirt is practically shredded.”

“Sorry,” Lance said, feeling heat build in his cheeks. “I guess I got a little carried away.”

Kayla inched closer and her fingertips grazed the hair on his chest. She watched herself do so before she looked into his eyes and said, “I think we both did.”

And then she bit her lip, entirely undoing Lance all over again.

He couldn't help himself. He grabbed hold of her by the buttocks and

pulled her close, kissing her with as much passion as he had the first time. For a fleeting moment he feared she might try to pull away. Maybe she had some post-lovemaking clarity as he had before she came out of the bedroom looking like *that*.

But she didn't, and so Lance pulled her into his arms, growling against her lips when she hopped up, wrapping her legs around his waist once more.

Instinctively, he carried her to the breakfast bar. He had wanted to do things right the first time, but this time he simply needed to be inside her. And the breakfast bar was as good a place as any for that.

Besides, he simply couldn't wait to get up those stairs again before he had her.

"We shouldn't be doing this," Kayla whispered against his lips, but even as she said the words, she grabbed his head and kissed him hard, tilting her pelvis toward him.

"I know..." Lance ground out, reaching for his belt buckle.

"We are in huge trouble," Kayla continued, but each time they spoke, their kisses became more heated, their hands gripping each other more tightly as he prepared to take her all over again.

"We'll fig—" Lance never got the chance to finish what he had about to say, as there was a sudden hammering upon the front door down the hall.

Kayla's back went rigid beneath Lance's hands. His own body tensed and he gritted his teeth. He listened, raising his nose to sniff the air. Yet all he could smell was the scent of Kayla's wonderful perfume and the fragrance of their last lovemaking.

"I...I should get that," Kayla said, slipping off the breakfast bar. Her cheeks were bright red.

"Not a chance," Lance said, whipping her back behind the bar. To take the sting out of his tone, he kissed her forehead before he said, "It could be anyone. I'll go."

By anyone, he meant Stan, though he couldn't bring himself to say the name. The way Kayla's gaze flashed suggested she knew what he had meant.

Silently, Lance headed down the hall, leaving Kayla where she stood. She was clearly frozen with concern over who might be pounding on her door

in such a manner. Even Lance's heart was hammering at the sound as it grew more insistent.

His fingernails elongated to claws, prepared to take on whoever was on the other side of the door. He imagined slashing right through Stan's jugular for all the trouble he had caused.

Though Lance was a werewolf, and a protector, he had never allowed himself to use violence as the first option. Maybe if he had, his Daisy might still be alive.

And so, he prepared himself to do the worst.

He turned the lock in the door and yanked it open only to almost be barreled over by a little blonde firecracker.

“Where is she?”

Lance barely had time to get out of the way as Sarah stormed past him.

Fuck! Lance wasn't sure what was more infuriating, the fact that his daughter had just interrupted what could have been the second-best sex of his life—the first being what he and Kayla had just experienced upstairs—or the fact that her arrival caused his stomach to clench up with guilt.

Still, she seemed far too concerned for her friend to even notice the state of him. “Lewis called me. He told me what happened. Where is she?”

But even as she said the words, Sarah was already well on her way down the hall in the direction of the kitchen.

Chapter 13 - Kayla

Shit! Kayla's insides turned to mush the second she heard Sarah's voice. Luckily, she'd left some laundry in the basket just inside the laundry room that linked to the kitchen, and she quickly grabbed a fresh pair of underwear to yank on in the seconds before her friend arrived at the kitchen door. It was all she had time for, and it would have to do.

Within seconds, Kayla was wrapped in Sarah's arms. Her friend hugged her so tightly she felt like her eyes might pop out of her head.

“Why didn't you call me, Kay?” her friend asked, concern dripping from her voice.

Kayla looked over her friend's shoulder with a questioning expression. Lance, standing beneath the kitchen archway, leaning against the frame with his arms crossed, simply shrugged.

Kayla gritted her teeth. She should have known better than to imagine he would get involved. After all, the more he said, the more likely they were to be caught. Sarah was here for her, not him, and the last thing she wanted was to draw too much attention to his being there.

“I called Mr. Leafson, umm...your dad, because well...he is a security guy, and Stan did break in here.”

The words felt clumsy on her thick tongue and she could only hope her friend didn't see how embarrassed she was as she finally released her.

Sarah looked around at her father then, eyeing him closely for the first time. Kayla held her breath, wondering what the next words out of her friend's mouth might be.

“I hope your wolf taught that bastard a lesson,” Sarah said finally, and Kayla had to catch her sigh of relief. Clearly, Sarah had assumed her father's state of undress was down to a shift. And how could Kayla blame her? If she were to have walked in on Sarah and her own father, if he were still alive, she would likely have thought the same thing in this kind of situation.

Sarah would never dream of sleeping with my dad, Kayla thought, her insides turning to liquid rather than mush. She felt sick to her stomach, and she trembled so violently that she was sure they would be able to hear her knees knocking together soon.

Lance merely huffed and shook his head. “I chased him off before I could get my hands on him.”

Sarah crossed her arms over her chest and scowled deeply. “Well, I'm here now. You can head off and go lead your team.”

“I'm not leaving Kayla here alone,” Lance blurted, and his cheeks looked almost as red as Kayla's felt.

If Sarah noticed, she didn't mention it. Instead, she countered, “I'm here now, and Stan may be a creep, but he's not a total madman. He wouldn't dream of taking on two she-wolves.”

Kayla's heart swelled at the loyal protectiveness of her friend, but it almost made her feel twice as guilty. *I don't deserve you.*

Lance didn't speak. Instead, he looked to Kayla. Though the words caught in her throat, Kayla said, “I think we'll be okay.”

Lance looked reluctant, though he didn't argue. His expression was tinged with discomfort and it didn't take much to guess why. The scent of sex still clotted in Kayla's own nostrils and her body still tingled where he had touched her.

“You have my number if you need me,” Lance pointed out. “I'll find him.”

And with that, Lance was gone. All Kayla heard was his picking up his boots as he left.

Almost the second the front door was closed, Sarah demanded, “What the hell happened?”

Kayla opened her mouth only to realize she had no clue where to begin.

Sarah sniffed deeply and Kayla's throat constricted. She could see the next question before it hit, though it wasn't quite as she expected. She braced herself with her hands tightened to fists.

“Did you sleep with Stan? Did he fuck you and then you came to your senses and told him to leave but he wouldn't go? What. The. Hell. Happened?”

Sarah grabbed Kayla's shoulders and shook her while she questioned her, making her feel quite dizzy.

“I most definitely did not sleep with Stan!” Kayla blurted as soon as Sarah stopped shaking her. Immediately afterward she realized her error. Maybe her friend thinking she had been weak again and let Stan back into her life was preferable to the truth.

But it was too late to go with that now, and so she quickly said, “I...I used the dating app again. I had a date over and he'd just left when I found Stan in the house. I...I didn't tell your dad that because well... I didn't want my boss thinking I sleep around.”

Silence filled the air between them. Kayla looked at Sarah. Sarah looked at Kayla. Bile rose in Kayla's throat. Sarah appeared unconvinced.

She sniffed again as if trying to decipher another scent, something to back up Kayla's story.

Shit! Kayla cursed again. She should have known better than to try and lie to a werewolf. Especially one who knew the scents of everyone who had been in that house.

“Did you finally find yourself a werewolf?” Sarah asked, her tone cold.

Kayla bit the inside of her lip and said, “Yes.”

It wasn't entirely a lie. She had certainly found herself a werewolf. She just wasn't sure her friend would approach if she knew *which* werewolf.

“Silverdale, I assume?” Sarah questioned, and the hair on the back of Kayla's neck stood on end.

Does she really believe me?

“Of course,” Kayla ground through her teeth, her whole body aching with how tense she was.

She watched Sarah's own body relax a little but still didn't dare to breathe.

“That's why I can't quite pick out a scent, then,” Sarah said, laughing a little. She shrugged as if it were no big deal. “I thought I might be able to guess who. So, you gonna tell me or what?”

Sarah nudged her playfully and Kayla blanched.

“It's too early to kiss and tell.”

She pursed her lips, praying silently to the wolf gods for her friend to go easy on her.

Sarah looked disappointed, but she shook her head and said, "Fair enough. Well, I'll stay with you until Dad calls to tell us they've found him if you like?"

Kayla couldn't think of anything worse than spending time with her best friend knowing all she had just done.

"Actually, I'm pretty tired. I think I might just head to bed if you don't mind?"

Sarah smirked at that. "Jeez girl, did he rock your world that good?"

Kayla's heart fluttered at the reminder. "I guess he did."

It felt so wrong talking about such things knowing the truth, but what else could she do?

"I can stay while you sleep? Keep an eye on the place."

"No!" Kayla protested. There was no way in hell she'd sleep with Sarah here. Not with how guilty she was feeling. She would be surprised if she could sleep at all. Embarrassed, she added, "I'm not a child. I know how to lock my doors and defend myself if Stan comes back. Besides, your dad probably has half of Silverdale looking for him by now. He wouldn't be stupid enough to come back here."

Kayla could only hope she was right. If Stan smelled another man on her, she was done for. His jealousy had always been his worst quality.

"Are you sure?" Sarah asked, crossing her arms. "I'm really not opposed to sleeping on the spare bed."

In an attempt to act as normal as possible, Kayla chuckled and said, "We both know you prefer that mattress to your own, but really, I'll be fine. You should head home. You've got better things to be doing than babysitting me."

"Okay, fine," Sarah sighed and grabbed hold of Kayla again, hugging her tight. "Just make sure you call me the minute anything happens."

"I promise I'll sleep with my phone right next to me." That wasn't a lie. She most definitely would. She'd sleep with both it and a knife under her pillow if that was what it took to feel safe enough to sleep.

Chapter 14 - Lance

Having anticipated having to work without a secretary for the next few days (at least), Lance was surprised when he walked into the office the next morning to find Kayla awaiting him with his usual coffee and morning reports.

“Good morning, Lance,” she said, smiling as she handed him both. Though she acted normal, there was a hint of worry in her gaze that he might have missed had he not known what had happened the night before.

“Good morning, Kayla,” he responded, taking the coffee and reports. “How are you this morning?”

He watched her expression closely.

“I am well, thank you for asking. And you?”

There was too much politeness in her voice. Her smile was too wide. It unnerved Lance more than he would ever care to admit.

The way she glanced sideways made Lance follow her gaze. When he noticed Lewis at his desk just inside the door of his own office, Lance knew why she was trying her hardest to act normal. Yes, his son knew about her ex, but what he didn't know was that last night he and Kayla had crossed a line. In fact, they had crossed more than one.

“Can I see you in my office for a moment?” Lance asked, knowing that the second he closed the door behind them the soundproofing he'd installed would minimize any werewolves listening in. So long as they kept their voices down, anything they said was between them.

Kayla didn't look entirely convinced and she glanced at Lewis again as if she thought he might begin to show an interest.

“There's no need to look so scared,” Lance said, forcing laughter in an attempt to act as he ordinarily would. “I just want to go over a couple of e-mails I need you to handle for me.”

The plausible excuse appeared to ease the tension in Kayla's shoulders. “Of course, sir. Lead the way.”

“After you,” Lance insisted, gesturing for her to go ahead.

As soon as she turned and stalked into his office, Lance wished he

hadn't encouraged her ahead of him. The way she walked, how her hips swayed from side to side, was maddening. He had to bite his lip to stop from grabbing her buttocks right there and then.

Blinking his eyes shut, he remembered being inside her the night before, and his groin heated almost painfully.

“What e-mails do you need a hand with?” Kayla asked, skirting around his desk to power up his computer. Lance watched her, his eyes never leaving her as he kicked the door shut with his heel.

The clicking sound as it shut caused Kayla to straighten up where she had been leaning over his desk.

“Lance?” she looked at him questioningly, eyebrow raised.

“You and I both know I do not want to talk about e-mails,” Lance said, voice low. He narrowed his eyes at her and stalked across the room. “How are you really?”

He slipped around the desk and gripped hold of her upper arms, rubbing them gently when he felt just how cold she was.

Kayla gulped, and when she spoke there was a clear lump in her throat. “I've been better.”

“Stan hasn't been caught yet, but I promise you, he will be,” Lance said, looking her dead in the eye with the hopes it would make her believe him.

“I believe you,” Kayla said as if she had read his mind. “It's not really him I'm worried about.”

She blushed then and averted her gaze. Lance's insides twisted.

“Then what is the matter? I can tell something has you worried.”

Kayla's eyes met his again, a perplexed and perhaps slightly angry look in her eye. “You're kidding me, right?”

This time it was Lance's turn to gulp. He opened his mouth to speak, but before he could do so, Kayla snapped, “It's last night that has me worried. What...what happened between us...”

“Was totally natural,” Lance pointed out. “We're werewolves. Our sex drives are ten times stronger than a human's.”

Kayla pulled away from him then and turned herself away from him completely. “That doesn't make it any better, Lance.”

Bile bit the back of his throat. The thought that she regretted their lovemaking made him feel sick.

“Do you regret it?” Lance asked, biting the inside of his lip to stop from saying any more.

Kayla turned on him then, her eyes ablaze. “Of course I don't!”

A mixture of anger and embarrassment plastered her face and Lance had to bite back laughter.

“And that is exactly the problem!” she continued. Her words hit Lance in the gut and made him instinctively close the distance between them.

Reaching out, he laid his palms upon her cheeks and pulled her close until their noses were almost brushing.

“If you do not regret it, then what is the problem?”

Deep down he knew what she was saying, and he had to agree, but all he could think about was how good she smelled, how sexy she looked, how even the sound of her voice enticed him and awakened his cock.

Everything about her was driving him insane, and he feared that if he did not take her right then and there, he might never find his sanity again.

“Lance, please...” she pleaded weakly, and although he knew she was begging him to stop, the tone of her voice suggested that secretly she wanted this just as badly as he did.

In all his years he had never done anything as wildly unethical as he was thinking of doing now. His arm itched to sweep everything, including his brand new and very expensive computer, right off the desk so he could take her right there on its surface.

He could already imagine the soft moans and gentle grunts she would make after they had been imprinted upon his memory the night before.

And so he kissed her. Not doing so wasn't an option. His mind was not his own. It belonged to her, just as his body and soul did, too.

He wanted to wrap her in his arms and pull her so close that their bodies melted together and their wolves howled in harmony.

And for a while, she kissed him as if she felt the same way. It was a balm for his sore heart. The way she slipped her hands around the back of his neck and pushed herself onto her tiptoes just to deepen the kiss made his insides flutter with desire for her.

His cock became so hard against the zipper of his pants that it was almost painful. The urge to release it, to bury it deep inside of her, was so intoxicating that he could think of nothing else.

Then, just as he was about to clear his desk with one swipe of his arm, Kayla pulled away.

She gasped for breath as she freed herself from his arms. Holding onto his forearms as if she thought it might stop him from reaching for her again, she said, "We can't do this, Lance. It is wrong on so many levels."

"Why?" he breathed, inching his face close to hers again. He could smell the sweetness of her breath and he longed to taste it again. "It doesn't have to be."

"I'm your secretary, Lance, not to mention your daughter's closest friend," Kayla pointed out. She released his arms and stepped away before wrapping her own around her chest. She rubbed them as if she really were freezing. "This is wrong on so many levels," she repeated.

Lance gritted his teeth. Though she spoke sense, it did nothing to dissuade his cock or his wolf. Both were screaming for Kayla. They wanted her so badly it was as if he were just barely able to control himself. If she so much as moved a muscle, he would pounce on her like a hunter catching his prey and she would be done for.

It took all he had in him not to force himself on her. He would never do that, no matter what his wolf was begging of him.

As if she saw the danger in his darkening gaze, she added, "It's forbidden, Lance. Sarah would never forgive us."

At the mention of his daughter, his stomach started to ache.

"You're right," he growled out through gritted teeth. Silently, he added to himself, *but how can this be wrong when it feels so damn right?*

In fact, he wasn't sure he had ever felt such a pull before. His every waking moment was a torment whenever he wasn't around her, and when he was, all he could think about was having her in his arms and being inside her.

How was he supposed to work with her if he couldn't concentrate with her around?

He had managed it for years now, so what the hell had changed? Maybe it was the realization that he was not as old as he felt, nor as alone. Maybe it was just that she had given him something he hadn't had in such a long time.

He tried his hardest to tell himself that she was nothing special. But just staring into her crystalline blue eyes reminded him that wasn't true.

He growled low in his throat, and as if she heard the warning, Kayla took a large step back.

"I...I should get back to work," she said, indicating to the door with her thumb. "There's a lot of paperwork to go through and Lewis asked me to give him a hand with some filing."

"You're my secretary, not his!" Lance snarled, and the protective streak he felt was even more infuriating than his desire for her.

He was not a possessive man; he never had been. Nor had he ever been the kind of man who would mix work and pleasure, yet here they were, doing just that.

"I...I should get back to work," Kayla suggested, glancing down at his hands. It was only then that he realized they were tightened into fists at his sides.

"Kayla, wait!" he said, encouraging his hands to unclench. It was almost painful to do, his joints so tight that he had to have been squeezing hard enough to break something if he were human.

But at that moment his phone began to ring. Seeing that it was the Silverdale manor, he groaned inwardly. He couldn't ignore a call from the alpha, not even for Kayla.

Pained beyond imagining, he watched Kayla slip from the room, leaning against his desk with whitened knuckles to stop from chasing after her. Neither of them could ever live down the scene that would cause.

With gritted teeth, he grabbed his phone and answered. "What is it?"

Chapter 15 - Kayla

Returning to her desk, Kayla found she was shaking too badly to even consider trying to use her laptop. The cursor would be all over the damn place. Besides, how could she even contemplate working right now when all she could think about was what had just happened?

She closed her eyes, still reeling from the fact she had almost given herself to her boss right there in his office. If someone had asked her only last week if she would ever consider an in-office romance, she would have snapped their head off just for suggesting such a thing. And yet, here she was, having had sex with her boss the night before and just coming out of his office shaking with the thought of doing it all over again.

Her lips felt bruised with the lingering touch of his kiss, and with eyes still closed, she reached up to press her fingertips delicately against them. Were they swollen? She thought so.

And that felt so damn good. She clenched her thighs tightly together. Why was she feeling all of these things when everything about this situation was so fucking wrong?

She had already risked her oldest and closest friendship the night before when Sarah had shown up out of the blue. She could only imagine what kind of hell would break loose if Lewis were to have overheard them in Lance's office. He and Sarah were always at each other's throats in a sibling rivalry kind of way, but Kayla wouldn't put it past him to use this kind of thing against his sister.

Get a grip, Kayla! she snapped at herself. Under the desk, she discreetly pinched her own leg through her stockings. She did so over and over again until she was certain she had bruised herself, praying it would be painful enough to take her mind off the desire she was feeling everywhere else.

She was so intent on trying to stop herself from thinking that Lance whipping open the office door behind her made her almost fall right out of her chair.

He stormed right past her, barking over his shoulder, “Kayla, come with me. Now!”

His tone left no room for argument, and in an instant Kayla was on her feet, following him out of the building. He moved so fast that even for a werewolf he was difficult to keep up with without breaking into a run.

The hard set of his shoulders and the quick march left Kayla feeling exceptionally uneasy. Though they had almost been about to have sex right on his desk, she didn't think he had gotten himself so wound up that he was ordering her back to his place to fuck her over and over until they were both finally sated and could finally say they had gotten everything out of their systems.

No, something about his body language told Kayla whatever had happened, it was bad.

“Who was on the phone?” Kayla asked as they dashed out into the parking lot.

Her cheeks blushed red and she fought the urge to snap at him when he didn't answer. Instead, he yanked open the passenger door of his truck and growled, “Get in.”

Kayla's stomach twisted. Had she done something wrong? She had only been sitting in her desk chair for a few minutes. How could she possibly have done anything to make him this angry when she hadn't even done anything save for sit down?

Still, she didn't argue or demand to know what was going on. She slipped into the passenger seat and flinched when he slammed the door shut behind her.

It wasn't until the vehicle was moving, racing through the town, that Kayla dared to ask, “Lance, what the hell is going on?”

His response made Kayla's blood run cold. “Sarah has been attacked.”

Heart pounding, Kayla leaned forward in her seat. How could she sit still after that?

“What do you mean attacked? Is she alright? What happened?”

Her throat constricted. The speed with which he was driving, how he held the steering wheel with white knuckles, the way he glowered out of the windshield as if he was prepared to mow right through anyone who got in the way, suggested that she most definitely wasn't alright.

He shook his head. "I don't know. All I know is she was found unconscious by one of my patrols. They've taken her to Silverdale manor to be treated at the infirmary."

Kayla gulped. If she had been taken to the infirmary, then it had to be serious.

The second Kayla saw Sarah sitting up in one of the infirmary beds, she barely dared to breathe a sigh of relief.

"What the hell happened?" Lance demanded, storming into the room. He practically barged right past the healer at the end of the bed in order to get to his daughter's bedside.

"Hello Dad, nice to see you too," Sarah said, scowling at him.

Kayla might have laughed at Sarah's response had she not looked quite so dreadful. Her head was bandaged and what little of her hair Kayla could see was matted with blood. There was a graze down one side of her face as if she had been dragged over rough ground.

Just the sight of her made Kayla's throat constrict again.

"Sarah, are you alright? What happened?" Kayla asked, hurrying to the opposite side of the bed. She had to focus on her friend right now and being too close to Lance wasn't going to enable her to do that. She needed to stay away from him.

Dropping down onto the bed, she gripped Sarah's hand and found it cold to the touch. "You're freezing!" she gasped, and before Sarah could respond, Kayla turned to the healer and said, "She's freezing. What the hell is wrong with her?"

"It's just the shock," the woman assured her with a gentle smile. "She will be fine once the pain meds kick in."

"I told her I don't need any pain meds," Sarah grumbled, scowling at the healer. "I'm a werewolf. I'll be right as rain in a few hours."

"That smells like a nasty head wound," Kayla pointed out. One sniff told her that beneath the bandages the wound had bled profusely. "What happened?"

Sarah shook her head momentarily before stiffening her neck. She ground out a gasp through clenched teeth as if it hurt to move her head. Then,

finally, she explained, “I went back to your place to scout it out. I didn't want you coming home from work again to find Stan waiting for you.”

Kayla's insides tightened into knots. She should have known this had something to do with Stan.

“Like an idiot, I let him see me before I saw him,” Sarah shrugged, though the movement looked painful. “I had my hood up and he must have thought I was you, because he called your name right before he hit me over the back of the head.”

“I'll kill him with my bare hands!” Lance snarled in a way that made the healer look at him with fear and disapproval in her eyes.

“I am quite certain our alpha might have something to say about that,” Serena, the healer, stated, but Lance clearly did not hear her; he had already broken into action, and what he did made Kayla's mouth drop open in horrified shock.

Chapter 16 - Lance

The fury he felt was like nothing he had ever felt before. This man hadn't just frightened one of his employees or broken into the house of one of his romantic interests. Now, he had attacked his daughter and put her in the infirmary.

He was so angry that he couldn't even think straight. On instinct, he reached over the bed, gripped hold of Kayla's face and looked her dead in the eye. "I swear to you I am going to find this bastard and make him regret the day he was born."

With that, he planted a hard, almost bruising kiss upon her forehead, hoping that even in his anger he might be able to offer her some comfort.

It was only when he pulled back and saw his daughter's horrified expression that he realized exactly what he had done.

Fuck! His gut churned and he bit the inside of his lip, wondering what to say.

Instead, he turned on his heel and stormed from the room. Whatever consequence was coming his way, it could wait. First, Stan had to be dealt with. Sarah could kick his ass later when she was feeling better.

It was only at the door of the infirmary room he dared to stop and look back. He had never been a coward before. He wasn't about to become one now.

Both Sarah and Kayla were staring at him open-mouthed; even Serena looked mightily uncomfortable, though it was clear from the confusion on her face she truly had no idea what was going on.

He was about to growl something about how they would talk about all of this later when his phone buzzing in his pants pocket saved him.

The three she-wolves continued to stare at him, though Sarah's expression had become somewhat more of a glower.

"It's Lewis," he said, hoping that was enough to silence them all. Before any of them could say a word, he slipped from the room and answered the call. "Lewis, what is it?"

"I've had all reports back, and though his scent is all over the place,

nobody seems able to pin him down,” Lewis explained, and though he sounded frustrated, he wasn't nearly as angry as Lance.

“That's not good enough!” he snarled down the phone, his hand tightening on the handset until he nearly crushed it. “I want this guy found now before he hurts anyone else.”

“What's happened?” Lewis demanded. “Is Kayla okay? He didn't break in again, did he? I'll have a patrol sent straight over to her house now.”

Lance barely stopped himself from scolding his son for not having already done more. This was his fault as much as it was Lewis's. They had both failed the she-wolves in their lives enough.

“He attacked Sarah,” Lance snapped instead, and before his son could question him, he added, “She is okay, but she's pretty banged up in the infirmary. Kayla is with her. They'll be safe at the manor until we catch this guy.”

Lewis's tone turned deadly. “What do you want me to do?”

“I want every guy we have out there looking for him,” Lance said. “I don't care who has excuses for being off today. I want them all in and brought up to speed. Nobody is to rest until this guy is caught. He's a danger to Silverdale.”

“You got it, boss,” Lewis responded, “Shall I call Dash for extra manpower?”

Lance, already on the march down the hall toward Dash's office, shook his head. “I've got the alpha covered.”

With that, he ended the call and slammed his fist against Dash's office door.

He was just about to do so again when someone behind him said, “If you're looking for Dash, he's out.”

Lance turned on Max, Dash's second, and hissed, “Where?”

The big, burly werewolf scowled and crossed his arms over his chest. “How should I know? He's the alpha. I'm just the guy who cleans up his messes.”

Lance growled and turned his attention back to his phone. Max might have had some power where Silverdale was concerned, but right now Lance

needed the head honcho.

Searching Dash's number, he connected the call and put the phone to his ear so hard it made his eardrum hurt.

“Hello?”

“Dash, I need every man and woman you've got searching Silverdale for a lion shifter.”

Lance knew it was dangerous to make demands of the alpha, even if he was twice the Silverdale leader's age, but in that moment all he could think about was getting his hands on the man who had scared Kayla and hurt his daughter.

He gave a quick and brief rundown of what had happened and the danger that faced the community before he finished, “He's a danger to us all.”

“Why didn't you tell me any of this before?” Dash seethed. “When Lewis called me yesterday and said someone had broken into Kayla's house I thought he was exaggerating.”

Lance scoffed angrily at that. He couldn't exactly blame the alpha. There weren't many in Silverdale brave or stupid enough to commit a crime against a werewolf, or a crime in general for that matter.

“He wasn't exaggerating, and he is more dangerous than even we imagined,” Lance continued. “We need him found before anyone else gets hurt.”

“All my resources are at your disposal,” Dash assured him. “I'm out of town, but find Max and tell him you have my complete permission for anything you need. I'll be back as soon as I can.”

“I'm here with him now!” Max called from where he was listening. Lance gritted his teeth. He didn't really need anything from either of them. All he needed was to get his bare hands on that damn lion shifter. The minute he did, he would feel better.

“I'll bring him in as soon as I get my hands on him,” he vowed to the alpha. Silently, he added to himself, *if I don't kill him first.*

Chapter 17 - Kayla

The look on Sarah's face set Kayla's teeth on edge. Her heart pounded so hard she was certain her best friend could hear it. The tingling on her forehead told her she hadn't imagined what had just occurred no matter how much she wished that was all it was.

Lance had just kissed her, on the forehead, right in front of his daughter! More than that, the father of her oldest and best friend had just basically outed them in a millisecond to the very last person who should have found out about whatever it was that was going on between them.

What the hell was he thinking? Kayla thought, her insides twisting into painful knots.

Sarah's face wrinkled into an expression that was a mixture of anger and confusion as she asked, "What the hell was that?"

Kayla's insides threatened to bottom out. Nausea clawed at her throat. She was barely able to find her voice. "Maybe you should rest and we will talk about this when you are feeling better." *Whatever this is*, she added silently to herself, biting the inside of her lip.

The flash in her friend's eye told her it wasn't going to be anywhere near that easy.

For the first time in her life, she actually wished her friend was injured enough not to ask questions. And that made her feel guiltier than anything else. Sarah was her everything, practically her sister, and yet the way Sarah was looking at her right now, anyone could be forgiven for imagining that they might actually be enemies.

"Explain," Sarah barked through a clenched jaw. "Now!"

The room suddenly felt too small. Kayla's throat constricted and she struggled to breathe.

"I...I shall leave the two of you to talk," Serena said, dipping her head as if she couldn't meet either of their gazes after what had just happened. Being one of the members of the pack, she was no stranger to Sarah and Lance's relationship, nor Sarah and Kayla's, for that matter. It didn't take much for the healer to put two and two together. And though werewolves had a very nasty habit of jumping in head first and coming to the wrong

conclusions thanks to their emotional and aggressive natures, this time Serena's conclusions were likely right.

Kayla and Lance had fucked up. They had jeopardized all that they both loved and for what? Sure, the sex had been absolutely mind-blowing, and just being in Lance's arms had made Kayla feel as if nothing—not even Stan—could hurt her, but was that enough to risk losing the truest friend she had ever had?

“Sarah, look, I didn't mean for any of this to happen,” Kayla said. She blushed and turned her gaze to a loose thread on her t-shirt, her fingers twiddling it in an attempt to distract herself from her friend's expression.

“I don't even know what *any of this* is!” Sarah pointed out. Her harsh tone made Kayla cringe.

With a gulp, Kayla ran her fingers through her hair and debated whether or not to occupy her hands with plaiting it. Yes, it would look stupid, but surely her best friend would know why she was doing it. It wouldn't be the first time that Sarah had seen her looking uncomfortable, though ordinarily, outside influences were the cause.

“Kayla, I need the truth,” Sarah insisted, and the way she looked at Kayla made everything so much harder. She could practically see her friend hoping that she had the wrong idea. Kayla wished so desperately that she could tell her she had, but if she were to do that, she would only be lying.

She looked down at her hands and saw how badly they trembled, then pursed her lips.

Holding in a sharp inhale, Kayla finally dared to look her friend, but she didn't speak until Serena had beat a hasty retreat from the room.

The lump in Kayla's throat threatened to choke her, and Sarah's glowering at her certainly didn't help matters, though she was well aware of the fact that she deserved it.

“You...you remember WolfMan78?” she stammered, unsure of what else to say. “And h...how you practically set me up on a blind date with him?”

Sarah raised a brow. Her expression became confused. Then realization dawned on her. “The dating app? What does that have to do with the fact my *father* just fucking kissed you as if you were...were...”

Sarah visibly shivered and started to shake her head. It was abundantly clear that she didn't want to think about where her mind was going.

“Because Lance Leafson, your father, is WolfMan78,” Kayla admitted, her heart hammering hard in her chest.

Sarah threw back her head then and laughed such a haughty laugh that Kayla might have joined her if not for the fact she knew her friend so well. The sound was filled with denial and it only made Kayla more uncomfortable.

When Sarah leveled her head again, she looked Kayla dead in the eye and said, “You're kidding me, right? My father doesn't date. He hasn't so much as sniffed at another woman since my mother's death.”

Kayla gulped. A week ago, she would have agreed with her. She had seen how Lance treated every woman who came into his office, with dignity and respect, looking at them admiringly if they showed the slightest hint of flirtation, but it was abundantly clear that he did it for the sake and confidence of those women. Not once had she seen him show a single ounce of genuine attraction toward a woman. In fact, there had been a point where she thought he might bat for his own team. After all, he was far too handsome, well-groomed and just plain dreamy to be so unlucky in the dating world.

Having had the pleasure of him inside her, Kayla could say without a shadow of a doubt that she had been entirely wrong.

“Your father loved your mother very much,” Kayla insisted. She blushed hard, so hard that it actually hurt her cheeks. Even to her own ears, her words sounded stupid, but she couldn't stop herself. “He talked about her often at work.”

It was then that she realized she had spoken in past tense. Kayla couldn't really remember the last time Lance had spoken of his late wife, save for when he had explained how she had died that night in her kitchen.

There had been a time when Lance had been quite reminiscent, where he would make small comments about how Kayla had done something that reminded him of Daisy. He'd smile and thank her for keeping her memory alive for him, and Kayla would feel slightly awkward but continue to do those things anyway just to put a smile on her boss's face. It wasn't anything

save for wishing to see a little less loneliness in the man's eyes, something entirely innocent.

Yet, Kayla couldn't remember the last time he had made such a comment. It certainly hadn't been for weeks, since well before any of this happened.

“Everyone has to move on eventually,” Kayla pointed out, realizing that was what had to have happened for Lance to have been on the app in the first place. “And I may have been too young to remember your mother too well, but I did know her well enough to know that she wouldn't have wanted your father to be alone for the rest of his life.”

“He isn't alone!” Sarah snapped. “He has me and Lewis and the rest of the pack.”

And me, Kayla thought silently with an odd sensation in her stomach. Ordinarily, she would have allowed herself to be lumped in with *the rest of the pack*, but something about the way Sarah said it sounded totally off to her.

She was far more than that to Lance, and he was far more than that to her. What they were to each other, Kayla didn't rightly know, but it was definitely more than simply being cogs in the same machine.

“Sarah, you know what I meant,” Kayla said through gritted teeth. She forced herself to meet her friend's eye.

“I guess I did,” Sarah said, shrugging. She didn't even blink as she met Kayla's eye and said, “What I don't understand is, how does this story go from your learning that *my* dad is WolfMan78 to him kissing *you* on the forehead?”

The lump in Kayla's throat hardened. *Here goes nothing.*

“Before I explain, just remember it was you who encouraged me back into the dating world and you who planned for me to meet him in the first place, so if you had just kept your nose out none of this would have—”

“Kay, just get on with it already!” Sarah snapped. Normally, the two of them might have paused there a moment to laugh about how this always seemed to happen. Kayla would babble on and Sarah would order her to get to the point, they'd laugh, finally get to the point and go on discussing whatever it was they were talking about.

But today there was no laughter, only a stone-cold glare in Sarah's eye as she waited, her arms crossed over her chest. Even the sight of her with a thick wad of bandages wrapped tightly around her head wasn't enough to give the situation even a hint of comical relief. Even that was Kayla's fault. She wouldn't have even been there if it weren't for her.

“I waited at the bar for my date and almost chickened out,” Kayla began, struggling to get every word out past the lump in her throat and the dryness of her tongue. It felt too thick, too large in her mouth, as if she were having some kind of allergic reaction.

She wasn't. Kayla wasn't allergic to anything save for the usual werewolf crap like silver and wolfsbane. But there wasn't likely to be either of those lying around in an infirmary run by werewolves. The dungeons below them, maybe, but not the infirmary.

And yet, how she wished for just a reaction right now, something to stop her from having to break the only true friendship she had ever had in her life.

After this, she decided, she was going to start walking around with a silver coin in her purse for just such occasions. Not that she thought she would ever be stupid enough to land herself here again. But she had thought a week ago that she wasn't even capable of something like this. If future her had come back to the past and told her she would sleep with her best friend's father, she would have laughed in her own face, or maybe even attacked herself for suggesting such a thing.

And yet, here she sat on the edge of her friend's hospital bed, potentially about to blow up her entire life in less time than it had taken her to jump into bed with Lance in the first place.

“Just when I was about to give up, someone said my account name, LunaLover01, and I knew it was him,” Kayla said. She sighed deeply at the flutter in her heart she felt when she remembered that moment. It wasn't entirely unpleasant, and it only made her angrier with herself. “It was your dad. And as soon as we saw each other, I tried to leave. He offered to walk me home, but I declined. In the end, we had a drink—I mean, what's wrong with coworkers sharing a drink together, right?”

There she was, doing that thing she did again, talking way too much whenever she got nervous.

“I finished my drink and left on my own,” Kayla said. She shivered, remembering the next part. “I was on my way home when Stan found me. He practically attacked me, begging me to give him another chance, and I was trying to fight him off, failing miserably when your dad showed up.”

Sarah scoffed at that but she said nothing. It was clear she believed that sounded just like her dad.

“He scared Stan off and took me home,” Kayla explained, her entire body trembling again. She continued, explaining everything that had happened since, leaving nothing out.

Of course, she didn't go into gross and gory details about how she and Lance had made love, but she did cringingly explain that it had happened.

She didn't stop until she came to the part of the story where she was sitting at Sarah's bedside, because she had been with Lance at work when he had gotten the call from the infirmary.

Sarah was silent throughout. She didn't so much as gasp or chuckle, or even sound as if she were breathing. In fact, she stared at Kayla blankly, showing absolutely no hint of what she might be feeling.

It was only when Kayla had finished that Sarah blinked her eyes closed and her face screwed up to the point that Kayla thought it had to have hurt her head.

“Get out.”

Sarah said the words so quietly that if Kayla hadn't been a werewolf, she might have missed them. But she was a werewolf, and she most definitely did hear them. And just doing so made her skin crawl.

“Sarah, I'm not going anywhere,” Kayla protested. She reached out to grip hold of her friend's hand where she had dropped it down onto the bed beside her. “You're my best friend, and I'm not going to leave you here alone and in pain.”

“Get,” Sarah ground out through gritted teeth, “Out.”

She didn't even look at Kayla now. Instead, she glared past her, the fury on her face so strong that it was as if she thought she might attack her if she looked at her directly.

“Sarah, please, you have to understand that I never meant for any of

this to happen!” Kayla protested, tears pricking the corners of her eyes.

Sensing the very real danger she was in thanks to her friend's temper, she stood up from the bed. Even an injured she-wolf was dangerous when angry, and there was no way in hell Kayla was going to physically fight her best friend, even if she did attack her.

She deserved whatever she got. She knew that. But she couldn't account for what her own she-wolf might do in that kind of situation. Animal instinct might well take over, and she wasn't sure Sarah was in any fit state for a proper werewolf fight. In fact, she thought that with a head injury like that, the shift alone could be seriously dangerous.

“I never even looked at Lance in that way before he turned up at the bar!” Kayla blurted, bile choking her when Sarah's eyes turned on her, blazing at the way she had used her father's name. She had only ever called him Mr. Leafson or referred to him as Sarah's dad before. That was how it had always been. Hoping not to draw too much attention to the fact, she hurried on, “If it weren't for Stan attacking me and breaking into my house, none of this would have ever happened!”

“Get out!” Sarah screamed the words now. Her hands tightened to fists and she slammed them on the mattress so hard that Kayla thought she heard several of the springs inside it snap. “Get out! Just get out!”

Kayla had never heard Sarah so angry. She had never felt the glaring fury that she experienced now as Sarah's wolf leered forward in her eyes, making them blaze a violent and angry amber with just a flicker of blue.

Sure, Kayla had seen those wolf eyes a thousand times before. She had even seen anger in them at times. But it was never, never aimed at her, not in any real way. They had argued over a rabbit or two in wolf form over the years, but nothing like this.

“I'm sorry,” Kayla whimpered, taking a half-step back.

The door opened behind her, but she didn't budge an inch. She didn't even look around. One sniff told her that the person behind her wasn't the only man in the world who could rescue her now.

Lance was still off somewhere leaving her to deal with Sarah on her own. That angered her as much as it upset her, but deep down she understood. He had to find Stan. He had taken things too far, and the whole

community might be at risk if he really had lost his marbles.

Still, she wished he was there with her now, not only because oddly she missed him with an ache in her heart that wouldn't let up, but also because Sarah needed her father right now. She was a daddy's girl, always had been, and nothing was going to change that.

Why couldn't you go running off after all of this went down? Kayla thought. She took another step back. Sarah's eyes were blazing angrier and angrier.

“Get out! Get out! Get out!” Sarah screamed and screamed. “Get out before I rip your damn heart out, you traitorous bitch!”

Tears streamed down Kayla's face then. They came so thick and fast that she was blinded by them.

Serena rushed right past Kayla and grabbed hold of Sarah by the forearms, trying to pin her down against the bed. “I need some help in here!”

Sarah thrashed and fought, but clearly her injuries were more extensive than Kayla had first thought. As others rushed in to help, Sarah grew weak, though not weak enough that she couldn't put up one hell of a fight.

Kayla remained frozen, watching her friend with a shattering heart.

When she had imagined how her friend might react to the news, she never imagined it would be this bad. Neither had she imagined it would feel quite *this* terrible, either.

Serena turned a strict gaze upon her and it was clear from every inch of her body that it was taking every ounce of strength for her to hold Sarah down. “Kayla, you really should leave.”

It was only then that Kayla finally managed to move again. As if Serena's words had slapped her in the face, Kayla turned and rushed from the room, trying to ignore the screams of her friend as other healers hurried to help Serena calm her.

Every instinct in Kayla screamed at her that she needed to help her friend, but what could she do when she had been the one to cause her friend's pain and rage?

She didn't stop until she had made her way out of the manor. She had

run so fast in human form that it made her lungs ache. She doubled over with her hands on her knees and panted for breath.

If she strained her ears, she could still hear Sarah screaming, though it was no longer words, only sound, and she seemed far more upset than angry, as if Kayla leaving had opened the floodgates for tears.

What have I done? Kayla thought, her own tears coming in a fresh wave. *What am I supposed to do now?*

Even the manor wasn't safe for her now, not with Sarah so angry. Besides, she loved her best friend more than anything in the world. All she wanted was for her to recover. Even if she never regained her trust or earned her forgiveness, she wanted her oldest and truest friend to be healthy.

Though she knew it went against everything she hoped to accomplish with her friendship, Kayla found herself reaching into her pocket for her cell phone. Maybe if Lance had found Stan, they might be able to come up with a plan to somehow fix everything else.

She dialed his number and pressed the phone to her ear. It rang and rang and rang. Nothing.

Damn it! She growled low in her throat. Then, just for one second, a dreadful thought crossed her mind. *What if Lance hasn't caught Stan? What if Stan caught Lance?*

She closed her eyes, fighting the thought and all it did to her body. Her racing heart, her trembling limbs, the tightness in her chest, it all terrified her.

But she couldn't afford to lose herself to fear. Lance was a werewolf. More than that, he was an older werewolf and a security guy. He wasn't Sarah or even her. Hell, he wasn't even Lewis, who had gotten himself into more than one scrape over the years with all his antics.

He was Lance Leafson. Strong, capable, mean when he needed to be, and to Kayla, he was everything. The realization made her numb inside. She had risked everything for him, even the woman she felt was her sister. She had to lend him her faith now.

All she could do was get as far away from Sarah as possible and hope that was enough to calm her friend's rage.

Whether it was safe or not, home was a damn sight safer than

wandering about Silverdale until she finally got the call that Stan had been captured.

Chapter 18 - Lance

Lance shook off his wolf form almost an hour after leaving the infirmary. Grabbing his clothes from the hollow tree he had left them in to search for Stan—with no success—he pulled them back on almost tearing them out of sheer force with his dark mood.

When I get my hands on that bastard, I'm going to kill him! Lance vowed. He grabbed his cell phone from where it had slipped out of his jacket pocket and checked the screen.

His heart skipped a beat when he saw the missed call from Kayla. A thousand different scenarios, each one worse than the last, rushed through his mind.

He was about to return the call when his phone started to ring again.

Without stopping to think, he answered, “Darius? What is it?”

Picturing the dark haired brute of a werewolf he'd had stationed outside Kayla's house to keep watch over the place, he prayed it was nothing disastrous.

“I thought you said Kayla wasn't going to be coming home tonight?”

The words turned Lance to ice.

“She's supposed to be at the manor,” he said, growling the words out through gritted teeth.

“Well, she's not there now,” Darius said. “She's just headed inside. She looked hella upset, so I made sure she didn't see me. The last thing I want is a hiding from an angry she-wolf.”

Lance scoffed at that. It was likely a good idea, especially considering he could imagine the words she and his daughter had shared after he left the infirmary. He shouldn't have been at all surprised that she had left the manor. What he was surprised at was the fact she had been stupid enough to return home before he told her it was safe.

Guilt gnawed at his insides. Was that why she had called? To try and find out whether it was safe?

If he hadn't been off in wolf form looking to rip Stan's head right off his shoulders, he wouldn't have missed the call.

“Stay out of sight. I'm on my way,” he promised, already turning in the direction of Kayla's house.

“You'd better hurry, boss,” Darius said, and Lance heard the warning note in his man's voice.

“What is it?” Lance asked, his pace quickening. He was already shrugging his jacket back off.

It was then that he heard the guttural scream coming from down the other end of the phone. In an instant, he shifted and was racing at full pelt out of the park and down the street.

All he could think about was Kayla. All that mattered was her. So long as she was safe, it didn't matter what happened to him.

He charged headlong around a corner, almost knocking an unsuspecting pedestrian out of the way. They yelled after him, but he ignored it, only putting all his extra anger into his run.

Every second counted. He knew that all too well. Maybe if he had gotten there sooner all those years ago, Daisy would still be alive today. He couldn't afford to be eaten up by guilt right now and so he used it as extra fuel instead.

Soon enough, he turned onto Kayla's street and saw that the front door of her house was already hanging off its hinges.

Scent alone told him there were three individuals in the house. Kayla. Darius. Stan.

The scent of blood told him far more, and he didn't even think as he raced up the porch steps and leaped through the front door.

He was just in time to find Kayla perched at the bottom of the stairs, her arms wrapped around herself. She was shivering hard.

Down the hall, Darius's hulking black wolf form pinned a very human-looking Stan to the wall. Yet as Lance watched, the lion shifter grabbed hold of the huge wolf in his arms and practically threw him as though he weighed little more than a ragdoll. And it was just like one that Darius hit the opposite wall, hard, hard enough to knock him immediately unconscious and leave him in a crumpled heap on the floor.

Stan turned on Lance. The recognition in his gaze told Lance he knew

his scent, even in wolf form, and before his eyes the human became a dark, horrendously scarred lion. If not for all the hurt Stan had caused, if not for the fact he probably deserved all those scars, Lance might have actually felt sorry for him.

Any hint of sympathy he felt was gone the second the lion lunged at him.

Howling with fury, Lance darted sideways, just out of reach. And as Stan stumbled past him, he darted in and grabbed the lion by the throat.

It was an awkward grip that didn't last long, and Lance cursed himself as Stan managed to rip free of his grip.

The lion turned on him again. In the close confines of the hallway, it was difficult to fight, even more difficult to defend oneself properly, and so Lance fought with everything he had just to get the lion out of the house.

He took several scratches to his flanks, howling with pain every time the lion's large claws sliced into him. But he gave as good as he got.

When he found himself pinned beneath the lion that was practically twice his size, he feared he had failed all over again. If Stan killed him, who was going to stop the bastard from waltzing right back inside to finish whatever he had come here to do?

It didn't bear thinking about. When he felt the lion's teeth meet in his throat, he didn't panic. He didn't fight. He knew exactly what to do.

And so, he went limp. The second he felt Stan's grip ease off, he smirked, an animalistic and satisfied smirk, as he ripped himself free of the lion and surged upwards.

Gripping hold of the lion's throat, trying hard to ignore the horrid taste of his cat fur, Lance bit down with everything that he had on the lion's windpipe.

He wasn't about to let up like Stan had. He had every intention of making this quick. Though a part of him would have liked to take his time, to make the man suffer, he was well aware of the danger of the bastard getting away again, and there was no way in hell he was going to allow that.

When he felt the strength draining from the lion's body, he yanked him sideways, rolling so that he gained the high ground. There he pinned the lion to the floor by his throat, not easing up.

“Lance! Stop! You're going to kill him!”

Kayla's scream was infuriating yet awakening. He'd had every intention of doing just that. After all, the scumbag deserved it.

But the truth was, no matter how much he wished he could, Lance was not a killer. And so, when he could feel just the slightest hint of a pulse throbbing against his tongue, Lance released the lion.

Stan's head thudded against the ground and only the slight rise and fall of the lion's ribs indicated he was still breathing.

Darius appeared in the doorway then, butt-naked and human, rubbing the back of his neck with a terrible grimace on his face.

“What happened?” Darius asked, skipping down the porch steps to stand over the lion.

Lance growled, shaking off his wolf form, and barked, “Get your phone and get Lewis and the others down here. I want him taken to the manor dungeons immediately.”

Lance gave Stan a good kick in the ribs just to be certain he was out cold before he rushed back into the house.

Kayla was still where she had been the whole time, sitting at the bottom of the stairs, trembling. Only this time her arms were not wrapped around her chest. She had reached up with one hand to wrap it around the side of her neck.

Seeing the crimson liquid that oozed between her fingers, he remembered the blood he had smelled as he entered the first time.

“You're hurt!” he gasped, noticing the bloodied knife that lay on the floor a few footsteps away.

Crouching before her, naked as the day he was born, Lance demanded, “Let me see!”

“It's nothing,” Kayla insisted, shaking her head, “Just a scratch.”

The amount of blood dripping between her fingers begged to differ. As did the paleness of her face.

Lance pursed his lips, about to demand she show him, but before he could do so, Kayla began to slump against the staircase.

She half-leaned backwards, half sideways, her head bouncing off the banister as her eyes rolled back in her head.

“Shit!”

As she passed out, her hand slipped from the wound at her neck. Though it looked as if she were right, it really was just a scratch, there was still a damn sight more blood than he would have liked.

Without thinking twice, Lance plucked her up into his arms. He paused only to turn and look out the door to see that Darius had one large foot planted square on the lion's chest, his cell phone pressed against his ear.

His man had that handled for now. What was important was seeing Kayla was okay. And so, he carried her swiftly up the stairs.

The scent of her blood was maddening. Just knowing that Stan had injured her made him want to go right back down there and finish what he had started, tearing his throat out.

But Kayla needed him more right now. And he wasn't going to leave her side, not until he knew she was okay.

He laid her on her bed, brushed back her long golden hair to get a proper look at her wound, and headed into the ensuite to grab some towels.

As he worked to wrap one around her neck, he tried his hardest not to think of what might happen.

It's just a scratch, he reminded himself firmly. Though it was quite a deep one, there wasn't enough blood for anything major to be hit. Lance had seen the amount of blood that caused. But still, after all he had been through with his late wife, his mind immediately became irrational.

What if I lose you too? he thought, gazing down at Kayla's pale face.

She looked peaceful, almost as if she were sleeping. If not for her paleness and the dark circles beneath her eyes, Lance might have believed she was. But even he could not fool his brain into thinking something like that when he knew the truth.

The urge to rush downstairs and tear Stan's throat out hit him all over again.

He was considering charging back down the stairs to do just that when Kayla stirred. Her eyes fluttered open and she looked up at him with a

dazed mistiness to her eyes.

“Lance, you're here,” she said, her voice barely audible. “I...I didn't think you...”

“Shh,” Lance said gently caressing her cheek. “Rest now. You've been through a lot. We'll talk when you're stronger.”

Kayla let out a little moan of relief that did terrible things to Lance's insides. Then her eyes fluttered closed once more.

Gently, Lance leaned over and pulled back the towel from her neck to check her wound. To his relief, the skin was already knitting itself back together again and the bleeding appeared to have stopped.

Breathing a sigh of his own, he leaned down further and pressed his lips to her forehead. “Rest well, and I'll be here when you wake.”

All urges to go and finish Stan off were quelled by his need to remain close to her.

Grabbing a spare blanket from the end of the bed, he covered Kayla and slipped in beside her, covering his nakedness so not to spook her when she awakened again. He considered heading back toward the park to collect his clothes, but that would take him away from her. Besides, someone was bound to find them and return them to his office or even his home, maybe even the manor. Clothes left after a shift weren't exactly an unusual occurrence in Silverdale, and there weren't many thieves and scumbags, either. Lance still wondered how Stan had managed to slip through the net.

I'll have to vet newcomers more closely, he decided. It was, after all, his job to keep all of Silverdale safe. Of course, that was the job of every member of the pack, but his especially, along with his son and Jake Silverdale. He would have to fill them both in at some point.

In fact, there were a lot of explanations to be made soon. None of them he really looked forward to, but when Kayla nuzzled into his chest, he realized she was most definitely worth it.

Chapter 19 - Kayla

The bedroom was lit only by the pale light of the moon that filtered through the window when Kayla finally awakened. Her head was resting upon something warm, something that moved gradually up and down. And it was with a little surprise she realized she could hear a heartbeat beneath her ear.

How did I get here? she thought, sitting bolt upright to look down at Lance lying beside her. He stirred immediately, eyes opening to look up at her in surprise.

She watched the relief wash over his face the moment he laid eyes upon her. "You're awake."

"I am," Kayla said, nodding. She pursed her lips, feeling a little awkward. "What happened?"

She was all too aware of Lance's nakedness. Though a strategically placed blanket covered his manhood, the rest of his glorious body was on full show. Only the fact that she was still fully clothed gave her any reassurance that she hadn't done something wonderful without even realizing it.

"What do you remember?" Lance asked, leaning up on his elbow.

Kayla rubbed her temples. She had one killer headache.

"It's difficult to remember much of anything with my head feeling like it's going to explode," Kayla admitted.

"That would be the blood loss," Lance said rather gruffly. His tone suggested that he was most definitely not happy about the fact.

It was his words that brought the memories flooding back.

"I...I came back from the infirmary because Sarah threw a fit," she said, closing her eyes tightly. She couldn't bear to see the look on Lance's face at the mention of his daughter's name. "I had barely walked in the door when Stan attacked me."

Instinctively, her hand flew to her throat. The still-wet and sticky wound she felt there was a terrible reminder of the knife she'd had at her throat.

"He...he put a knife to my throat and told me that if he couldn't have

me then nobody could,” Kayla said, her throat tightening as she spoke until she almost couldn't get the final words out.

Lance gripped hold of her hand and pulled it close to his lips. He kissed the back of her hand and whispered, “It's okay. You're safe now.”

Kayla gulped. She didn't feel entirely safe, not with Lance lying naked before her. But that wasn't entirely a bad thing, either.

“I...I remember Darius barging down the door in wolf form and pinning Stan to the wall,” Kayla said, voicing her memories in order to try and remember further. And when the next memory hit, she cried, “Great wolf god, is Darius okay?”

She remembered all too well the sickening crunch she had heard as he had been thrown against the wall.

“I think he'll be licking his pride for a little while, but he's a werewolf, he'll be fine,” Lance assured her, patting her gently on the knee. The warmth of his hand on her legs made her skin tingle.

Her eyes widened when she remembered what he had done, “You fought Stan off. How...how did you fight him off like that? I know your wolf is huge, but he's a lion, for wolf god's sake!”

At that, Lance laughed. The smirk that spread across his face warmed Kayla's heart in a way that made her want to grab his face and kiss him. She barely managed to refrain from doing so.

“You'd be surprised what a wolf can do when they are trying to protect someone they care about,” Lance said, finally pushing himself into a sitting position. Laying his hand on her cheek, he caressed her skin with the ball of his thumb. “I'd do the same thing a thousand times over for you.”

“He could have killed you!” Kayla protested.

“But he didn't,” Lance pointed out. He gripped her hand then and laid it palm-down on his chest, right over his heart. “See?”

Kayla quivered. Just the sensation of his heart beating against her palm made her wild with desire for him. *What am I going to do? I'm going to have to quit my job and leave the pack at this rate!*

“And is he...” Kayla trailed off, unable to finish the sentence. Though she was well and truly over Stan and his bullshit, she didn't like the thought

of anyone losing their life because of her. That wasn't something she wanted on her conscience.

“Don't worry. He's alive. For now,” Lance growled out through gritted teeth. “He almost wasn't, but you pulled me back.”

Kayla remembered then how she had screamed at him to stop, and she blushed. “I...I didn't want you to live with that on your conscience.”

Lance looked at her as if he understood. He shook his head and said, “You don't need to explain to me. You have a heart of gold, Kayla. Anyone can see that.”

“I wish that were true,” Kayla sighed and turned her gaze down to the embroidery on the blanket. “Sarah is never going to forgive me.”

The bite she felt in her gut as she said the words made her feel sick. She closed her eyes, hating herself for the friendship she had destroyed. For what? She didn't even know what this was if, indeed, it was anything.

“Kayla,” Lance said softly, and when his hand came to her cheek again, she opened her eyes to look at him. “You and Sarah have been best friends for as long as I can remember. She will come around.”

Kayla's stomach twisted.

“What exactly is it she has to come around to? What is this...this thing between us?” she asked, gesturing between them. Deep in her soul she thought she knew the answer, but she didn't dare to say it out loud. At least, not until she had heard it from his lips first.

Lance straightened up then and took her face in both his hands. He held her firmly, but not so firm that it might hurt her. And when he looked in her eyes, she saw his gaze was full of conviction.

“Kayla, this isn't just some mindless fling,” he said, never blinking. “After losing Sarah and Lewis's mother, I never imagined I'd get another chance but I...I think you are my mate. That is, if you will have me?”

Kayla's breath caught in her throat and she struggled to swallow it. Heart hammering, she stared back into his eyes, looking for any hint that he didn't entirely believe what he had just said to her.

But it was clear that he did, and Kayla felt the truth of it deep in her soul.

She wanted to desperately to say yes, to simply enjoy the moment for what it was, but instead she asked, “What does that mean for me and Sarah? For you and her? For all of us?”

Even Lewis would be affected by all of this. Sure, he wasn't a huge part of her life, but she did have to work with him, and he was already pretty damn annoying at times.

Lance's jaw visibly clenched and she felt his grip tighten slightly on her face. He shook his head and sighed, but when he spoke again, he met her gaze without flinching. “If we are truly fated mates, then there is nothing we can do to stop it. One way or another, we shall be together, and we must all figure that out whether Sarah likes it or not.”

Kayla's stomach threatened to upend. She hated the thought of putting such a barrier between her and her best friend. But what other choice did she have? Lance was right. Fated mates weren't known for being kept away from each other, no matter how many outside influences disapproved. There was a reason they were called fated, after all.

“Do...do you truly believe that is what we are?” Kayla asked. Though her veins were alight with the confidence that they were, she still needed to hear it. Somehow, it wouldn't be real until he had confirmed it.

“Kayla Thomas, you *are* my fated mate,” Lance announced, his voice booming in such a way that it felt as if he was claiming her right there and then.

She was so overcome with emotion that she had no idea what to say. Instead, she lunged for him and kissed him so swiftly that she felt as though her lips might bruise.

Lance gripped hold of her hips, as if to stop her from barreling them both right off the bed, but he did not push her away. Instead, his hands gripped her tightly, pulling her closer. The kiss deepened. Kayla's insides fluttered.

The next thing she knew, he had ripped off her bloodied clothes and plucked her from the bed.

“Lance, what are you doing?” she whispered against his lips even as she wrapped her legs and arms around him and allowed him to carry her into the ensuite bathroom.

“I think after the day we've both had, we could both use a shower,” Lance said, holding her in one arm as he leaned into the glass shower cubicle and turned on the jets.

They spewed to life and it didn't take long for hot steam to start rising. Shower steam had never felt so good before. It seemed to caress every inch of her body as Lance stepped into the cubicle, still holding her in his arms.

She gasped in shock as he leaned her back against the cold tiled wall. Compared to the water that cascaded down on them, it was ice cold.

“Stand,” Lance ordered, and Kayla unwrapped her legs from his waist and did as he told her. She breathed out a moan when he stroked her hair back from her neck and began to wash the blood from her skin.

Kayla watched with morbid fascination as the water ran red down the plughole. And when, finally, it ran clear once more, Lance's lips landed upon her throat.

His body pinned her to the wall, his warm flesh feverish against her own. The hunger she felt within him mirrored her own and she bit at his shoulder with her teeth, her fangs itching to sink into him. They elongated and she grazed them over his skin until he groaned with pleasure.

“Do it,” he growled in her ear, and the command sent a hot tingle running throughout her body.

Instinctively, she drew her head back ever so slightly, and just when she felt the tip of his cock slipping between her legs, she struck, sinking her fangs deep into his shoulder.

She gasped with pain and pleasure as she felt his own sink into the fleshy part of her shoulder between her neck and collarbone.

The searing sensation she felt spreading from his bite throughout her body was like nothing she had ever felt before. It was such a mixture of pain and pleasure, agony and ecstasy, that she tore her fangs from his shoulder and cried out, howling toward the ceiling and the night sky beyond.

The second Lance's fangs left her flesh, she felt the wound beginning to knit back together. It was faster than any healing she had ever experienced.

“Your neck!” Lance gasped, pausing with his cock deep inside her.

Kayla reached for her neck where Stan had sliced her and found she

could feel no wound at all.

“You...you...did you do that?” Kayla asked, and when she looked down at her shoulder, she saw that his bitemark had already healed, leaving only a scarred bite mark where he had sunk his fangs into her.

“Mine too,” Lance said, and Kayla looked to where she had just bitten him. Her heart hammered as she stroked her fingertips over the bitemark she had left on his shoulder. “You know what that means, don't you?”

Kayla gulped and nodded. “We're fated.”

It wasn't a tradition kept too much anymore, but during her time at Silverdale college, Kayla had learned of the bite of fated mates, the time-honored claiming ritual that werewolves had performed for centuries.

There was no doubt now. They were fated.

Lance kissed her with renewed passion and Kayla lost herself to the movements of his thrusting pelvis. She cupped his buttocks, pulling him closer with each thrust.

She needed him, deeper, deeper, as deep as he could go.

“Don't stop!” she gasped, moaning with pleasure as her whole body tightened with her oncoming climax.

Lance's rhythm quickened, became more erratic, and Kayla knew well what was coming. She could hear it in his increased groaning, feel it in the throbbing of his cock inside her.

She angled her hips toward him, thrusting them back and forth with each of his movements, meeting him with the same force until her insides tightened around his cock and she screamed.

“Fuck!” Lance growled out through gritted teeth, and his breath caressing her earlobe was enough to make her climax all over again.

She continued to do so over and over with every other thrust of his cock until they all seemed to melt into one big climax, her entire body trembling with the force of the pleasure.

Soon, his body pressed against hers was the only thing holding her up, and just when she thought she might not be able to take anymore, Lance's body shuddered. His cock bulged deep inside her and she felt his essence fill her.

Kayla rested her head against his shoulder, enjoying the hot water that cascaded down the back of her neck.

Though a part of her didn't want to break the pleasure-filled silence, she couldn't help but ask, "Do you really think we can do this?"

Lance placed his fingers under her chin and turned her face up to meet his. "Do you really think we can fight it?"

Before she could answer him, Lance kissed her again, setting her soul alight, and she knew there was no way she could even try to fight it.

All she could pray for now was the chance to fix things with her friend. Otherwise, her life was about to get seriously complicated.

Chapter 20 - Lance

After their lovemaking in the shower, Lance returned Kayla to her bed. Tucking her in, he laid a kiss upon her head.

When he pulled away, she looked up at him with hazy eyes, yawned, and asked, "Why don't you join me?"

She patted the bed beside her. Lance gritted his teeth. He would have liked nothing more.

"There's still a lion shifter outside I have to take care of," Lance reminded her. He couldn't quite bring himself to say the man's name, not in her bedroom, not after what they had just done.

Kayla's expression fell. "Can't you call Lewis to handle it?"

Lance sighed. A part of him would have liked to do just that so he could sink down onto the bed beside her. If not for the fact his phone was somewhere back near the park, he might have done.

"This is something I have to see to myself."

Kayla's eyes filled with understanding and she nodded. Yawning again, she said, "Please, be careful. He's dangerous."

"Not more dangerous than I am to him," Lance assured her, and he leaned down to kiss her one final time. "Rest well. You're safe now."

He watched her stretching languidly, the covers slipping just low enough to give him a peek of her ample breasts. And he was forced to grit his teeth, knowing if he didn't get out of there soon, he might never leave.

"I'll be back," he promised.

"You better be," Kayla mumbled, barely low enough for him to hear. Lance couldn't help but laugh. There was a time when Kayla wouldn't have dared to say something so dominant to him. It was new, and he realized he liked it. The idea of having someone to boss him about in that feminine way that she-wolves did, someone to tie himself to, made his heart swell.

Though he still felt a little guilt toward his late wife, it was finally becoming bearable.

She would want me to be happy, he told himself, remembering

Lewis's words as he turned toward the door.

He paused to look back at the bed, hand on the door handle and whispered, "I love you, Kayla."

But she was already asleep. The peacefulness of her soft breathing made him smile. He watched her a moment longer, spying the bitemark he had left upon her shoulder. Reaching for his own, he felt small imperfections in his skin where she had left her mark.

We can't take it back now, Lance thought, slipping from the room. There was nothing left to do but try and figure out where they were supposed to go from here. That, and what the hell they were going to do with Stan.

With that in mind, Lance charged down the stairs and out the front door. He had barely taken two steps onto the porch before something was launched into his chest.

Shocked, he stumbled backwards, grabbing at whatever it was.

"You had better get those on quick. I just spotted Sarah down the street," Darius said from where he had propped Stan up in a sitting position, now restrained with special silver-runed cuffs courtesy of the Michaels witch sisters.

Lance looked at the checkered baggy pajama trousers Darius had thrown at him. When he raised a brow, Darius shrugged and said, "I keep them in my car for emergencies."

"You went to your car and left him?" Lance growled, inclining his head to Stan.

"He was still unconscious at the time, and I had to get the cuffs," Darius pointed out while Stan glowered at Lance with a murderous expression. "He's still here, isn't he?"

Lance growled again, about to bark something about that not being the point, when Sarah suddenly appeared at the end of the driveway. She was marching with her gaze on the floor, a storm cloud hanging above her head, and Lance steeled himself for whatever was coming. His daughter had always had a temper, just like her mother's, but this was an entirely different situation from anything they'd ever encountered before. He wasn't at all sure how she was going to react.

"Sarah," Lance said carefully.

Sarah halted half-way up the drive. Her head whipped up, and the moment she spotted him standing on the porch in nothing but Darius's pajama bottoms, her eyes narrowed and her lips pursed.

She was silent for only a second before all hell broke loose. "You have got to be kidding me! You just couldn't wait until all this blew over, could you?"

She stormed up the driveway and stood at the bottom of the porch steps, glowering up at him. "Have you completely lost your mind? Kayla, I almost get. She's vulnerable, lonely, and self-conscious. I can see why she'd be weak to you, but you? What possible reason could you have for going behind my back like this?"

Lance closed his eyes, letting her batter him with her words before he said, "Sarah, it wasn't like that. Neither of us meant to hurt you. Can we talk about this later? There's something important I have to do first."

"Important? Is this not important?" Sarah demanded, gesturing between the two of them. "Am I so low on your list of priorities that you don't even feel the need to try and defend yourself?"

Lance walked down the steps to stand before his daughter. Head held high, he said, "I have nothing to defend myself for. I have done nothing wrong. Kayla and I are both consenting adults. And if you have a problem with our union, you may want to take it up with the great wolf gods."

"What the hell do they have to do with this?"

Sarah took a half-step back. Though she no longer wore the bandage around her head and Lance couldn't smell fresh blood, her hair was clotted with old blood, and she had to stroke a grimy strip from her face to look at him. Her gaze burrowed into his, waiting for an explanation.

Holding his breath, Lance moved his shoulder to give his daughter a good view of the bitemark Kayla had gifted him.

When she saw it, her face twisted with confusion, recognition, and finally realization.

"You...you are mated? You've mated with my best friend? *She's* your fated mate?" Sarah babbled, her tone shrill with disbelief. "You have got to be kidding me?"

Lance shook his head, his lips pursed. He didn't speak. There was no

need. Sarah would have whatever reaction she was going to have now, and nothing he could say or do would change any of that.

“I...I...no! I can't accept this. I won't!” Sarah protested, taking several steps back this time. She turned away from Lance.

“That is your choice. Just know neither of us expected this, and neither of us did anything to hurt you,” Lance assured her, but Sarah didn't seem to be listening. She appeared to have spotted Stan on the lawn at Darius's feet.

“You!” she snarled, and in an instant she was off across the lawn. “This is all your fault!”

Lance raised a brow. He wasn't at all sure how his daughter had come to that conclusion, though he had to admit, it had been Stan's attacking Kayla in the alleyway that night and his breaking into her house that had drawn them closer together.

“Nice to see you too, Sar—” Stan smirked, though he didn't get to finish the greeting as Sarah planted her boot right in his stomach.

“Stop her!” Lance ordered as he raced forward. Darius grabbed hold of Sarah, clamping her arms to her sides. Though he was twice her size, he seemed to struggle to hold her back as she aimed another kick at Stan's head.

It took both Lance and Darius to drag her away from the lion shifter, who coughed up blood from the single kick she had managed to land.

“Sarah, Sarah! Calm the fuck down!” Lance ordered his daughter. “Go home!”

With that, he shoved Sarah away and placed himself between her and Stan. Everything in him wanted to move out of the way and let her go to town on his ass, but he knew that if she did, Dash would have something to say about it.

“What is the matter with you?” Sarah demanded. Her hands were spread at her sides, claws flashing. Her teeth had elongated to fangs. “He attacked Kayla. He broke into her house. He hit me over the head and left me for dead! He—”

“He would have likely done far worse,” Lance said, shivering as he remembered the wound on Kayla's neck. “But we have him now, and it is for Dash Silverdale to decide his fate.”

Sarah growled low in her throat. She glared at Lance almost as if she wanted to tear into him as much as she did Stan. Then, finally, she grumbled, “He had better suffer.”

“I will make sure of it,” Lance vowed, already knowing what his vote would be when it came to dealing out punishment against the shifter. “Now go home and calm down, Sarah. You aren't doing anyone any good by coming here all riled up. You and Kayla have been friends for a long time. You'll figure this out.”

“We *were* friends,” Sarah snapped, and before Lance could say anything, she turned on her heel and sprinted away.

Lance ground his teeth angrily. Guilt clawed at his insides anew. He should have known his daughter was far more stubborn than that. Hell, she was even more stubborn than he was, and that was saying something.

Closing his eyes, he took a second to breathe.

“Trouble in paradise, wolf man?” Stan sneered at him.

Lance turned on him and hissed, “Unless you want my foot in your stomach, I suggest you keep your mouth shut.”

The amusement that lit Stan's face made it exceptionally hard for him not to simply beat him to a pulp.

“I wouldn't look quite so happy if I were you,” he snarled instead. Dropping down into a crouch, he met Stan's gaze evenly. “You'll soon wipe that smirk off when you see where you're going to be staying for the foreseeable future.”

Stan laughed. It was a horrid laugh, filled with malice and violence, and it took all Lance had in him not to simply knock him out for a little peace and quiet. “You think this is my first arrest?”

“It certainly is in Silverdale,” Lance said. He knew every arrest that had ever been made during his adult years in Silverdale. Hell, he had made half of them. There really wasn't much crime in the locked community. But every so often a bad one slipped through the net.

“You're one of the reasons humans write horror tales about our kind,” Lance snarled, hating the fact that he had lumped himself in with such a despicable creature. But to humans they were all the same. Shifters, fae, vampires, witches, they were all hunted and killed the second a human so

much as got a sniff of the truth. That was why Silverdale existed in the first place.

Lance glared into Stan's eyes as he said, "You may have been able to hide police records from human prisons, but you can't hide your crimes inside Silverdale. And let me assure you, we werewolves aren't half so lenient as the humans. If you're lucky, you'll be banished—maybe you'll end up in another human prison. If not, well, I guess we werewolves will have one hell of a fun hunt on our hands during the next full moon."

He looked to Darius and smirked as he said, "Do you remember the last time a hunt was passed as punishment?"

There was a glint in Darius's eye. He crossed his arms over his chest and shook his head. "There hasn't been one in my lifetime, but I've heard it's a lot of fun. Hunting, capture, playing with our prey until it dies of shock. You know, real animal kingdom kind of shit."

Lance watched Stan's face growing paler and paler. When he finally gulped hard, Lance knew Darius's words had frightened him.

Of course, werewolves would never do anything so barbaric; not since the medieval days had they gone through with such practices, but Stan didn't need to know that, and the idea of doing so with him was half-tempting after all the trouble he had caused.

Shoving his hand under Stan's arm, he growled, "Get up. It's time we take you in."

He then turned to Darius and added, "Give me your car keys. You stay here and keep an eye on the house until I can get someone to come and fix that door. I'll be back as soon as I've seen him into a cell."

"Are you sure? I can go," Darius protested, though he did remove his keys from his jacket pocket, handing them over hesitantly.

"Don't worry, I'll look after your precious car," Lance assured him, rolling his eyes. "Call Dash and let him know I'm bringing him in."

Darius nodded and was already removing his cell phone from his pocket as Lance marched the naked lion shifter down the lawn and around the corner to where Darius had parked his purple Cadillac earlier that evening.

For the life of him, Lance would never understand the car choice, but then again, he didn't relate to many of the young wolves these days. They

were all far too self-absorbed and materialistic. It was perhaps the only thing in common they had with their human counterparts.

Stan scoffed when he saw the vehicle, and Lance used it as an excuse to give him a good shove as he opened the passenger side door. “Get the fuck in before I decide to do something you'll regret.”

Epilogue - Kayla

Choosing a wedding dress was perhaps one of the most important choices any woman could make, even for she-wolves, and the people around that woman when she did so were just as important as the dress itself.

Kayla had very few real close women friends, and so she had only chosen three to invite to the wedding dress shop that day. Her cousin, Katrina, and her friend, Melinda, both sat on the couch as she tried on dresses. The third was nowhere to be seen.

And Sarah's absence was like a hole in Kayla's heart. Whenever she had imagined this day, she had always imagined Sarah being right there with her, practically clawing the faces off anyone who didn't agree with her choices for her best friend's dress.

But Kayla had seen very little of Sarah since the day she found out the truth. They hadn't shared a phone call since that day, and she had only seen glimpses of Sarah at pack occasions. Though Lance assured her he had been keeping tabs on her, it didn't make Kayla feel any better about the situation.

“Are you okay, sweetie?” Delilah Silverdale asked as she helped Kayla out of yet another dress. For the life of her, Kayla couldn't imagine how the sister of the pack's alpha had come to be working in a wedding boutique, but it seemed to suit her. Kayla didn't think she had ever seen such a smile on anyone's face whilst they were at work.

The raven-haired beauty looked at Kayla in the mirror as she unzipped the dress, which was a definite no-no with all its glitter and frills.

“I...umm...” Kayla stammered, unsure what to say. She was all choked up with tears in her eyes.

Delilah paused and laid a hand on Kayla's shoulder. “It's alright. All brides get a bit teary when they are looking for the perfect dress.”

Blushing, Kayla wiped the tears quickly from her eyes and said, “It's not that. It's just that I...I was kind of hoping someone else might be here to help me choose my dress today.”

Delilah offered a sympathetic look in the mirror. “Your mom?”

Kayla's eyes widened, her heart racing as she realized that thought

hadn't even crossed her mind. There was only one person she had truly, truly wanted with her today, and that was Sarah.

“No, umm...” Kayla cleared her throat. “She died a long time ago.”

“Oh, I'm sorry,” Delilah said, looking a little embarrassed. “The pack is so big, it's hard to keep track of everyone these days.”

Kayla nodded. She wasn't wrong. Every day the pack seemed to grow, making it more and more difficult for everyone to know each other, let alone everyone's business.

“Well, whoever it is, I'm sure it's their loss,” Delilah said, and smiling warmly, she added, “Would you like to try the mermaid tail next, or something else?”

“Actually, I was really hoping for something a little simpler?” Kayla suggested, her cheeks blushing harder. All of the dresses Delilah had picked so far were large and flamboyant and most definitely not Kayla.

“I think I have just the thing,” Delilah promised her. “I've unzipped you. Feel free to slip out of that and I'll be right back.”

And she was, bringing with her the sheerest, most elegantly simple dress Kayla had ever seen. Even before she put it on, she suspected it was perfect.

“Come on! What is taking so long in there?” Katrina, ever the impatient one, yelled from the boutique floor where she and Melinda were likely drinking all of the champagne. Free alcohol and werewolf tolerance certainly didn't mix well. Luckily for them, Delilah was one of them, and she didn't seem to mind that they were drinking her out of house and home.

“What do you think?” Delilah asked the moment she had zipped Kayla into the gown.

Tears pricked her eyes all over again. This time for a very different reason.

“I...I think it might be perfect.”

“Come on! Let us see!” Melinda demanded, sounding almost as impatient as Katrina.

With a deep sigh, Kayla slipped from behind the curtain and gave her friends a twirl.

The sheer fabric of the gown with its low, square neckline, off-the-shoulder design, and gentle flare of material toward the bottom of her thigh was so beautiful that Kayla felt like some kind of goddess.

“Oh, Kayla, it's beautiful!” Katrina exclaimed, leaning forward in her seat to look at it more closely.

“You look gorgeous!”

“Thank you,” Kayla said, laughing through her tears.

“Oh, sweetie, why are you crying?” Melinda asked. The pretty she-wolf with her short-cropped mousy-brown hair bounced up from the couch and came to her, rubbing her arms.

“I...I just wish Sarah were here to see it,” Kayla admitted. She had been holding it all in for far too long, pretending even to Lance that she was okay with Sarah avoiding her at all costs. But it had been almost two months since they had last spoken, and with only one more until the wedding, she feared they might never speak again.

“Oh, Kayla, forget about her!” Katrina insisted, coming to stand before them both. “If she were really your best friend, she would have been here for you. Save for your wedding day, this is perhaps the biggest day of your life.”

Kayla laughed at that. Sarah would most definitely have agreed, and Kayla would have told them that was a bit of an exaggeration before Melinda would have insisted that she agreed with them both. They'd have all laughed together and insisted upon another glass of champagne before encouraging her to purchase the dress she was wearing.

The hole in Kayla's heart grew just a little larger at the thought. “I can't blame her for not being here. I...I am marrying her father.”

Both Katrina and Melinda cocked their heads to the side.

“If she were really your friend, she'd have forgiven you months ago,” Melinda said, twirling a curl of Kayla's blonde hair around her finger. “She'd have seen just how happy you have made each other and she'd have forgiven you. I certainly would have.”

“None of you have any idea what you are talking about.”

The gruff voice that sounded close by the front door of the boutique

made all of them jump. Even Delilah looked surprised.

Kayla had been so absorbed in her own feelings that she hadn't even heard the bell above the door jingling as it was opened. Clearly, the others hadn't either.

What kind of werewolves are we? Kayla thought, scolding herself, but the moment she turned to see Sarah standing by the door, arms crossed over her chest, her mind went blank.

“Sarah? What are you doing here?” she gasped. Immediately after realizing how that must have sounded, she blurted, “I mean, I am glad to see you. Of course I am, but what are you doing here?”

Sarah cocked her head on one side, glowered at Katrina and Melinda for a second, and then turned to Kayla with a smile. “You didn't very well think I'd miss the most important day of your life, did you?”

“But I...I thought you...” Kayla couldn't bring herself to say the words out loud, that she believed her friend hated her, for fear it might remind Sarah of the fact.

Sarah glanced at the floor, kicked the carpet with the toe of her boot and asked, “Can we talk in private for a second?”

“Sure, of course. You guys don't mind, do you?” Kayla asked, turning to Delilah and the others.

“Of course not! Take as much time as you need,” Delilah insisted. She then turned to the others and added, “Ladies, if you'd like to join me upstairs in my flat, I have something a little stronger than champagne?”

Kayla chuckled as the three women hurried off at the suggestion of a good time. If she had been human, she might have been pissed at the idea of a boutique owner suggesting they go and get drunk. As a werewolf, she knew that was next to impossible.

She waited until they had gone through to the back of the shop before she turned back to Sarah.

Her friend crossed the room to stand only a few meters away as she said, “You really do look beautiful.”

Embarrassed, Kayla looked down at herself. “Thanks. I...I think this might be the one.”

When she looked up again, she was surprised to see there were tears in Sarah's eyes. "I think so, too."

"Does that mean you approve of the wedding?" Kayla asked hesitantly. Sarah pursed her lips. Kayla braced herself for whatever her friend was about to throw at her.

"Don't get me wrong. I'm still not happy about how all of this started, but even I can't fight the word of fate," Sarah said, and she closed the distance between them. Kayla was surprised when she gripped hold of her hands. "The girls were right about one thing. I have noticed how happy the two of you make each other."

"Then do you think we can ever be friends again?" Kayla asked. Next to marrying her fated mate, it was the only thing in the world that she wanted.

"I think we can manage that, so long as you can promise me one thing," Sarah said, but before Kayla could ask what she added, "Actually, two things."

"Anything!" Kayla promised, excitement fizzing in her stomach. "Anything at all! You know I'd do anything for you."

She squeezed Sarah's hands reassuringly.

"I don't ever want to see you and dad getting all lovey-dovey. A peck on the cheek here and there I can live with, but anything more than that and I'm out."

Kayla chuckled at that and the way her friend shuddered at the mention of anything more than a peck on the cheek.

"This coming from the woman who tells me all the intimate details of all your romantic encounters," Kayla said, struggling to control her laughter.

"If you go into great detail about sex with my father, I think I might vomit all over you!" Sarah groaned. "Do. Not. Do. It."

Still laughing, Kayla nodded. "Done. And the other thing?"

Sarah smirked as she said, "Do not be expecting me to start calling you mom."

This time it was Kayla's turn to shudder. "I wouldn't dream of it!"

Kayla was surprised when Sarah grabbed her and pulled her into a tight embrace. She had just wrapped her own arms around her, about to tell

her how much she had missed her, when her phone started to ring in the changing room.

“I should get that. It might be important wedding stuff,” Kayla said, blushing still at the fact she was talking to her best friend about her wedding to her father. It was going to take some getting used to for her, too.

“Go ahead,” Sarah said. “I’ll help myself to a glass of champagne before those two come back and drink it all.”

Chuckling, Kayla returned to the changing room and grabbed her phone. Seeing Lance’s name lighting up her screen, she felt a flutter in her stomach.

“Hey you,” she answered.

“Are you still at the boutique?” Lance asked. The seriousness of his tone frightened Kayla.

“Yes, why? What is the matter?”

“I’m outside.”

“What?” Kayla grabbed the curtain and pulled it closed, terrified he might have already seen her dress. “You can’t be here. You can’t see the dress! It’s bad luck.”

“That’s stupid human bullshit,” Lance said. “Besides, I don’t know which one you’ll choose, do I? So it’ll be a surprise when I do see it on the day.”

Kayla groaned loudly down the phone. “Do you always have to be right?”

“Yes. Come outside.”

“I can’t! I’m in a wedding dress!”

“Get out of it and come outside. I need to see you,” Lance ordered. His voice left no room for argument and so Kayla poked her head out from behind the curtain.

“Sarah, can you please help me out of this dress? Your dad is outside and he’s being stubborn.”

She glowered at the window in front of the shop, able to see him standing just by the edge of the window, his back turned to her. At least he

had some sense.

“Doesn't he know it's bad luck to see the dress?” Sarah asked even as she slipped behind the curtain.

“I told him that, but you know him. He doesn't listen,” Kayla sighed. She had to admit it was kind of one of the things she loved about him. After all, if he hadn't ignored her that very first night and followed her home to make sure she was okay, he never would have rescued her from Stan.

She shivered, hating the thought of what might have happened then.

“I'll be right out,” she said into the phone before she ended the call and threw it at the nearby cushioned stool.

“I hope you know what you're getting yourself into,” Sarah chuckled as she helped her out of the dress. “It's not too late to turn back now.”

“When have I ever given up on anything?” Kayla demanded, scowling at her friend in the mirror.

“Point well made,” Sarah said, and she stepped back out of the changing room the moment she had unzipped Kayla's dress.

Kayla hurried to pull on her vest top and jeans, forgetting her underwear and shoes in a hurry to see what Lance wanted.

The second she was out the door, she couldn't help herself, she flew at Lance and wrapped her arms around his shoulders, kissing him strongly before she asked, “What are you doing here?”

Lance pushed her away with his hands on her hips and said, “There's something I've been meaning to give you, but I wasn't sure when would be the right time. I couldn't wait any longer.”

Curious, Kayla watched as Lance pulled a small velvet box from the breast pocket of his leather jacket.

“Wha...what is that?” Kayla asked, a lump forming in her throat.

Lance popped open the box and said, “I want you to have this. It's a family heirloom.”

Kayla gasped as she saw the antique ring with its one large sapphire accompanied by a circle of smaller diamonds.

“It...it's gorgeous, but I can't accept it!” Kayla protested, wanting to

smack herself for saying such a thing. “It's a family heirloom! It should be Sarah's, or even Lewis's for when he gets mated.”

Kayla almost laughed at that last part. There was no way Lewis would ever get mated. He was too busy sticking his dick in anyone that would let him. No self-respecting she-wolf would ever look twice at him.

“Actually,” Sarah's voice sounded muffled for a second before she pulled open the boutique door. “It was my idea that you should have it. You love old things. I like shiny and new.”

She looked at Lance as she said the word ‘old’ and offered her father a little wink.

“Watch your mouth, young lady,” Lance growled at his daughter. “You may be a grown woman now, but you're not too old for this old wolf to show you a thing or two.”

“Exactly my point—old,” Sarah laughed, squinting her eyes playfully before she turned to Kayla and added, “What I mean to say is you like history and sentimentality and all that romantic crap.”

Kayla scowled deeply. “It's not crap!”

“Not to you, it isn't, and that's why I suggested you should have the ring when Dad came and asked me about it,” Sarah said, smiling warmly, and Kayla could almost forget that anything had ever been wrong between them.

“Oh, thank you!” Kayla exclaimed, wrapping her arms around her best friend. She hugged her so tightly that she heard Sarah blow a deep exhale.

Sarah hugged her back with the same strength until Kayla was sure that neither of them could breathe.

“Hey, am I invisible here? I'm the one who is giving you the ring,” Lance pointed out, his tone half-hurt and half-amused.

Kayla released Sarah and threw her arms around Lance. Forgetting the promise she had just made to Sarah, she kissed him hard on the lips and just barely managed to stop from opening her mouth when his tongue begged her for entry.

“Eww! You two, get a room!” Sarah growled at them both, and Kayla's eyes widened with dismay.

Shit! She opened her eyes and saw Sarah in her peripheral vision, turned away with her hand blocking her view of them. “Shit, I'm sorry.”

She blushed harder than ever before, feeling seriously guilty and embarrassed at having broken her promise already.

But when Sarah looked at her again, she was smiling, amusement in her eyes.

“I think I can let you off just this once,” Sarah said, gesturing at the ring box. “He did, after all, just hit you with one of your favorite things in the world, a really, really, really old ring.”

They all laughed together then and Kayla could feel the hole in her heart beginning to mend.

“It may be old, but it's perfect,” Kayla said, looking at the ring again. “I don't think I could have imagined better.”

“Then let's just hope that it fits,” Lance said, pulling the ring from the box. Closing it, he shoved the box back into his pocket and held out his free hand.

Heart hammering, Kayla laid her left hand in his and allowed him to slip the ring onto her wedding finger.

“Would you look at that? It fits like a glove!” Lance crowed, and Kayla laughed, happy tears pricking at her eyes.

“It is as if it were made just for you,” Sarah said, and Kayla cringed a little. She wasn't entirely sure that her friend sounded happy at seeing the family heirloom on her finger.

Holding her breath, she turned to her friend and asked, “Are you sure you're okay with this?”

Sarah smiled and laid a hand on Kayla's shoulder. “So long as the two of you are happy, then so am I.”

“I most definitely am,” Lance said, and when he gripped hold of her hips again, pulling her into him, she felt a rush of desire the likes of which had been getting more and more frequent of late.

As he kissed her all over again, Kayla realized she had never been happier than she was in that moment.

Finally, all seemed right with the world. She had her mate. Her best

friend was talking to her again. She even suspected that she had found the perfect wedding dress for the most important day of her life.

She wasn't sure that life could possibly get any better than it was right then.

That's when Lance's phone started to ring, vibrating between them in his inner breast pocket. The way it grazed Kayla's nipple did nothing to help the desire she was feeling for her mate, and she forced herself away, releasing his neck.

Lance grabbed his phone from his pocket and said, "I should take this. It's Dash."

Kayla's stomach twisted. It wasn't often the alpha of the pack called anybody without good reason. And right now, there was only one reason Kayla could think of for his calling Lance. Stan.

It was only then she realized she hadn't even thought about him since the day Lance had dragged him down into the Silverdale dungeons.

Considering she had lived her life in fear of him for years, that was a veritable feat indeed. And it was all thanks to Lance.

She strained her ears to listen as Lance answered the call. "Hey Dash, what's up?"

"I've finally come to a decision."

Kayla held her breath. It didn't take much to know what decision he was talking about.

"And?" Lance asked, glancing in Kayla's direction. The look on his face suggested he was as apprehensive as she was.

"Stan will be banished from Silverdale. Our people outside of Silverdale will be warned to keep an eye on him," Dash explained, his authoritative tone making Kayla shiver. "If he so much as puts one whisker out of line, I'll drag him right back here to face the consequences. And next time, he won't be spared."

Kayla gulped. Though the idea of Stan being left to roam the earth freely made her feel quite sick, the knowledge that he would never set foot on Silverdale soil without cuffs on was a major relief.

"He'll be released after the wedding," Dash continued before anyone

could say anything. “Whilst the two of you are on your wolfmoon.”

Kayla trembled at that. Their decision to have a traditional wolfmoon, an entire month spent in wolf form out in the woods after their wedding, made her heart race. Returning to nature to be embraced by mother earth in their truest forms felt like the proper way to begin life with her fated mate.

When they returned to civilization after that, Stan would be gone and they could go about their lives in peace. It couldn't have sounded more perfect to Kayla's ears.

She had been wrong; this was the happiest she had felt in her entire life.

“Thanks, Dash,” Lance said. “I'll see you tomorrow for the next security meeting.”

“See you then,” Dash said, and the call was ended.

Shoving his phone back in his pocket, Lance turned to Kayla and asked, “Did you hear all of that?”

Smiling through pursed lips, Kayla nodded and threw herself at Lance all over again. Overcome with joy, she kissed him as if nobody was watching, unable to stop from laughing when Sarah groaned, “For goodness' sake, you two. Can you not keep your hands off each other for one minute?”

There was clear amusement in her friend's tone then, and Kayla knew that truly, all was right in the world.

THE END

About the Author

Mia Wolf loves to write paranormal romance stories. Her stories are full of hot shifters, strong women and that undeniable attraction and steam that is in the air when two mates meet each other, fall in love, and fight the odds... Come on in, and spoil the beast in you.

Check out her [author page on Amazon](#) and be sure to click “Follow” to get new release updates.

Also [check out the Wolf Sisters on Facebook](#) for more news and hot offers.

Books by The Wolf Sisters

(All books are FREE with Kindle Unlimited)

Books by Mia Wolf:

“Silverdale Wolves” Series

Silverdale Wolves is a sizzling paranormal romance series where delicious wolf shifters compete for rank, respect and women. These strong males are possessive, demanding ... and very seductive. Once they’ve identified their mate, they won’t allow anyone or anything to get in the way...

[Alpha’s Mate](#)

[Wolf’s Mate](#)

[Beta’s Mate](#)

[Shifter’s Mate](#)

[Demon Wolf’s Mate](#)

[Bully Wolf’s Mate](#)

[Daddy’s Mate](#)

[Pregnant Wolf’s Mate](#)

[Single Daddy’s Mate](#)

Boss’s Mate

* * *

“Dragon Billionaire Mountain” Series

Somewhere on earth, there is a mystical mountain where a billionaire dragon shifter can unlock his powers...but in order to do that, he has to find his mate. Because money can buy things, but dragon love can conquer hearts...

[Platinum Dragon](#)

[Steel Dragon](#)

[Silver Dragon](#)

[Gold Dragon](#)

[Palladium Dragon](#)

[Ruthenium Dragon](#)

* * *

“Menage Dating Agency for Shifters” Series

Have you ever wanted not just one, but two mates? Two hot shifters to claim you, protect you, and make you melt? Two guys to enjoy cool days, hot nights, and steamy encounters with? If your answer is a resounding yes (and let’s face it, why would it be a no?) then sign up for the Menage Dating Agency for Shifters and fulfill your wildest dreams and fantasies...

[Double Alphas](#)

[Double Pumas](#)

[Double Wolves](#)

* * *

“Double Desert Shifters” Series

What if I told you that deep in the desert is a place that all women dream of? A place where every woman is loved by two men, and where curves are like a gift from the gods? Would you stay home? Or would you come with me to check out the Double Desert Shifters?

Double Desert Shifters is a paranormal menage romance series. The stories are standalones, each with a HEA.

[OUT NOW: Double Desert Shifters Complete Series](#) SAVE more than 70% compared to the standalone books



Standalone books in the series:

[My Two Alphas](#)

[My Two Wolves](#)

[My Two Dragons](#)

[My Two Bears](#)

[My Two Lions](#)

[My Two Mates](#)

[My Two Tigers](#)

[My Two Beasts](#)

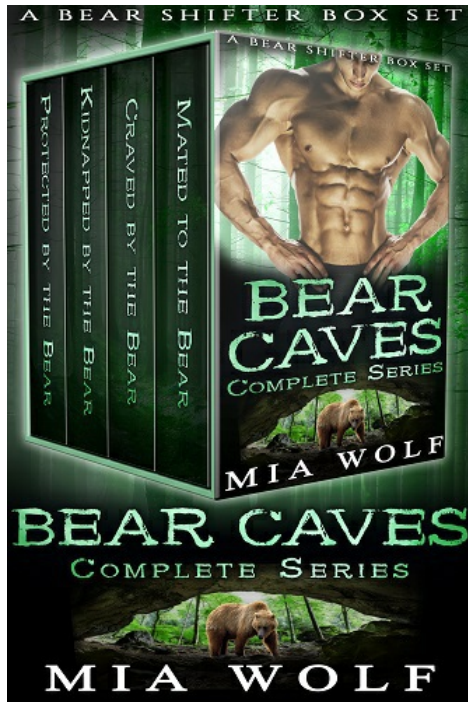
* * *

“Bear Caves” Series

Come visit the Bear Caves, a mysterious village where bear shifters live far removed from humans. This village, with its caves and its festivals houses not just any bears. No, it houses Very Sexy bears, who are not easy to please, but who will protect their mates with their lives without question.

The Bear Caves series consists of stand-alone stories that are connected through the bears who live in the village. Each story has a guaranteed satisfying HEA.

[OUT NOW: Bear Caves Complete Series](#) SAVE 25% compared to the standalone books



Standalone books in the series:

[Mated to the Bear](#)

[Craved by the Bear](#)

[Kidnapped by the Bear](#)

[Protected by the Bear](#)

* * *

[“Wolf Mountain” Series](#)

Come with me to Wolf Mountain, a village with hot, single wolves who are strong, muscled, and ... single. They don't need a mate. They don't want a mate. Until they meet the one they will die to protect...

Wolf Mountain is a paranormal romance series consisting of stand-alone

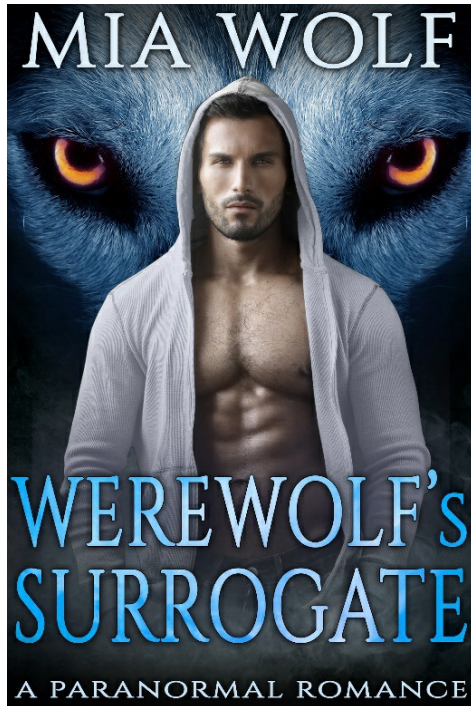
stories, each with a HEA, that are connected through the wolves who live in the village.

[Werewolf's Surrogate](#)

[Werewolf's Second Chance](#)

[Werewolf's Prisoner](#)

Start reading book 1 of the “Wolf Mountain” series now:



* * *

Books by Kayla Wolf:

“Alpha Wolf Island” Series

A group of alpha wolves has arrived on the island of Kurivon. They're here to claim the land, own the sea, and win their mate's hearts. They don't compromise, they don't negotiate, and they always get what they want...

[The Alpha's Secret Twins](#)

[The Alpha's Arranged Mate](#)

[The Alpha's Betrayed Mate](#)

[The Alpha's Mail Order Bride](#)

[The Alpha's Forbidden Mate](#)

[The Alpha's Pretend Mate](#)

[The Alpha's Bullied Bride](#)

* * *

“Zodiac Dragons” Series

The Zodiac Dragons series takes place in a wild and dangerous parallel world. In a howling gray void of fog and entropy, shifters have to find the bonfires in the darkness, where magic, love, and long lost mates are hidden...

[Gemini Dragon](#)

[Capricorn Dragon](#)

[Virgo Dragon](#)

[Scorpio Dragon](#)

[Libra Dragon](#)

[Sagittarius Dragon](#)

* * *

“Wolves of Sunny Rock” Series

Sunny Rock is a place of darkness and light, of wolf shifters and magic, of soulmates and inescapable fate. Come here, and the starry desert sky will show you what love can do... if only you let it.

[Shattered Wolf](#)

[Bully Wolf](#)

[Cursed Wolf](#)

[Wounded Wolf](#)

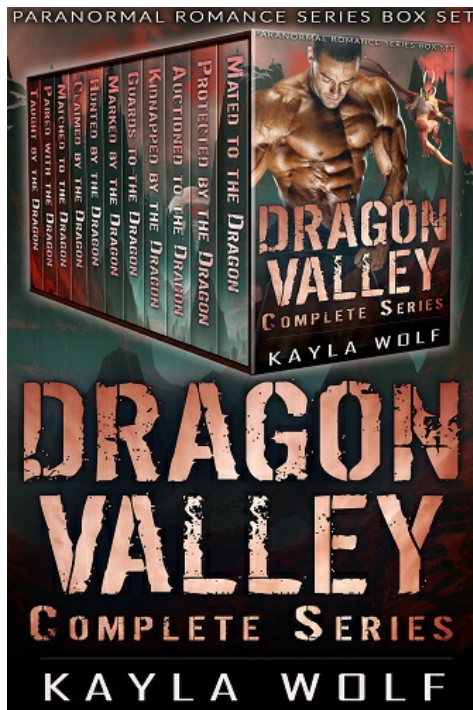
* * *

[“Dragon Valley” Series](#)

Dragon Valley keeps a secret that no one knows about: Dangerously sexy and muscled dragons have made the valley their home. But their existence is at risk. They need to find a mate or else their time might be up. Will the dragons find their mates?

“Dragon Valley” is a paranormal romance series that consists of standalone stories that each have a satisfying HEA. The books are connected through the dragons that live in the valley.

[OUT NOW: Dragon Valley Complete Series](#) SAVE 79% compared to the standalone books



Standalone books in the series:

Prequel: [Married Off to the Dragon](#)

[Mated to the Dragon](#)

[Protected by the Dragon](#)

[Auctioned to the Dragon](#)

[Kidnapped by the Dragon](#)

[Guards to the Dragon](#)

[Marked by the Dragon](#)

[Hunted by the Dragon](#)

[Claimed by the Dragon](#)

[Matched to the Dragon](#)

[Paired with the Dragon](#)

[Taught by the Dragon](#)

* * *

[“West Coast Water Dragons” Series](#)

Have you ever visited the peninsula of the Water Dragons? You will have to look hard for it, because the dangerously hot dragons living here want to keep it a secret from anyone but you... Yes, you read that right: you are invited on a wild ride by the most attractive men on the West Coast (and that’s saying something with Liam Hemsworth around...). So pack your bags, because you’re going on an adventure to a very secret place. Bless the woman who gets lost here...

“West Coast Water Dragons” is a paranormal romance series consisting of stand-alone stories, each with a HEA, that are connected through the dragons who live on the peninsula.

**[OUT NOW: West Coast Water Dragons Complete Series](#) SAVE 33%
compared to the standalone books**



Standalone books in the series:

[Dragon's Nanny](#)

[Dragon's Mail Order Bride](#)

[Dragon's Secret Baby](#)

[Dragon's Fake Mate](#)

[Dragon's Obsession](#)

[Dragon's Protected](#)

The “West Coast Water Dragons” series is a spin-off of the “Dragon Valley” series.

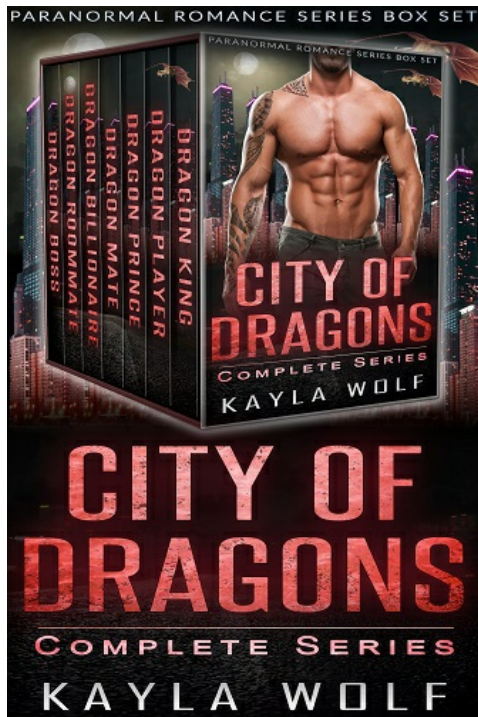
* * *

“City of Dragons” Series

The City of Dragons is the place of your dreams. Red-hot dragons left, right, and center, waiting for you to explore the concrete jungle with them. Are you ready to enter this city of fantasy, where mates, magic, and more await?

[OUT NOW: City of Dragons Complete Series](#) SAVE 75% compared to

the standalone books



Standalone books in the series:

[Dragon King](#)

[Dragon Player](#)

[Dragon Prince](#)

[Dragon Mate](#)

[Dragon Billionaire](#)

[Dragon Roommate](#)

[Dragon Boss](#)

* * *

“Everglades Dragon Daddies” Series

You know that feeling of being dragged into a swamp? The complete powerlessness of being pulled into whatever fate has in store for you? Now imagine the swamp being full of blistering hot guys... And not just any guys. No, dragons, in every size, shape, and form, to take you in and make you

theirs... Isn't that a swamp you'd gladly be sucked into?

Welcome to the thick, wet heat of the Everglades...

Daddy Dragon

Doctor Dragon

Professor Dragon

Ranger Dragon

Single Daddy Dragon

Officer Dragon

Mentor Dragon

Firefighter Dragon

Midlife Dragon

Best Friend Dragon