

SUPERNATURAL
Dating Agency

Dead
and

Breakfast



ANDIE M. LONG

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CONTENTS

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[About Andie](#)

[Paranormal Romance By Andie M. Long](#)

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CHAPTER 1

THEO

January 1st, 2019

At that moment in time, standing outside our home surrounded by family and friends, I had never felt more loved.

Looking around at everyone, I took in the proud expression on my wife's face, and the same mirrored on my daughter's. This moment had been a long time coming.

Taking the scissors, I snipped the red ribbon hung across our home's doorway.

"I now declare Goodacres Farm Bed and Breakfast officially open," I stated.

There was a round of applause and cheering from everyone apart from my wife's best friend Kim, who I noticed grumbled before turning around to her husband Darius and saying, "Bloody hell. I was convinced something would go wrong yet again."

"Ha ha. Now you owe me a blow job," Darius replied.

Sometimes I wished I could turn my vamp super-hearing off.

Shelley walked forward, placing a hand around my waist. She addressed the small crowd.

"Now, as you all know, that's not the only thing we are celebrating today. It's also my beloved's 128th birthday, so please come inside now as we celebrate a triple whammy: Theo's birthday, the opening of the B&B, and a brand-new year."

As our friends from Withernsea trooped into the house, Shelley gave me a cheeky squeeze on the butt. "Proud of you, hubby," she said.

“Thank you, my darling wife, and thank you for helping me to realise my dreams.”

She placed a hand on her three months pregnant belly. It was yet to round out. “I just hope everything turns out okay.”

I knew she wasn’t only talking about the B&B, but was also concerned about the baby, given that our daughter had grown to adulthood in a year.

“Cupid and Fate assured us this pregnancy would be a normal one. As normal as a witch/vampire baby can be. I’m sure everything will work out absolutely fine,” I reassured her.

“Let’s hope so. I need some things in life to go smoothly with how busy we both are. I can’t believe I let a vampire who sleeps in the day open a bed and breakfast. The optimum word there being *breakfast*. How did it not dawn on me that unless the residents wanted to eat at four am, we’d need an extra pair of hands?”

“I told you; I was prepared to stay up until they’d all eaten.”

“I know, but it makes you feel poorly, and that’s not ideal. Thank goodness Alyssa decided she wanted a change and has become our cook and manager.” Shelley looked over to the teenager who’d become withdrawn over the past few months. She’d begun a mating bond with her boyfriend, but he’d had to leave Withernsea when his mother became ill.

“Freya says it’s just a normal response to the mating bond not being completed, remember, and that she’ll get through it if Bartholomew doesn’t return,” I said, trying to reassure my wife.

“I know. But I’ve decided I’m going to look through the books and try to find Alyssa some new matches. Maybe there’s another mate out there for her?”

“Shelley, you just said we’re busy. Alyssa has her own family who know the ways of mating bonds and wolves. Let them support her.” I knew I was wasting my breath (hypothetically speaking of course, as I didn’t actually breathe). Since Alyssa had stayed with us following a small falling out with Darius a few months ago, Shelley had been keeping an eye on her. Alyssa had been an amazing friend to our daughter when Charlie had hit her teenage years unexpectedly and Shelley was very fond of her.

“Come on, let’s get inside. It’s cold out here and not all our guests are vampires who it doesn’t bother,” she said, changing the subject, and with that we went indoors.

“I can’t believe Alistair and I will have to stick to just my bedroom now,” my mother huffed. “Talk about cockblocking, Theo, opening the place up to all sorts. You’d better not let a ghosthunter stay here or a medium who tries to send us to the other side. If anyone tells me to go into the light, I’ll knock them into the darkness of a concussion.”

As usual, I chose to block out my mum’s chatter of her rampant sex life with her fellow ghost boyfriend.

“I promise not to let ghosthunters stay, but there is a medium and her husband coming tomorrow for a few days. She actually wanted to make sure she wouldn’t be bothered by ghosts and wants a break from them, so keep out of her way and she’ll keep out of yours. Anyway, there are legal documents customers have to sign as you well know stating they will not use any of their supernatural abilities for harm.”

“Given you refused to have people sign in blood, I’ve no faith in those silly documents. How many people sign a wedding register after professing ‘til death do us part’ and then they take off with their secretary who misunderstood ‘could you take down these particulars’.”

“Have you been watching *Honeytrap TV* again, Mother?”

“Men are weak, Theodore. Weak. Some would automatically get their dick out if a woman’s panties fell off a washing line.”

I held a hand to my forehead, feeling a band of tension forming.

“Mary, Darius’s brother Rhett just arrived, and he’s brought a few more of the pack over,” Shelley informed her.

“Wolf totty? Say no more. Must exercise my eyes so they don’t get cataracts.”

“Mum, you’re permanently stuck looking in your late thirties as you well know.”

Mum sighed extremely loudly. “Theo, must you always be so staid and boring? Live a little.”

“We’re both dead!” I pointed out, but by then she’d gone off in search of male werewolves.

It had been my original intention to open the B&B in December and offer a *Turkey and Tinsel* event. I'd thought Shelley had agreed until she'd pointed out her comments afterwards had been made with high doses of sarcasm which I'd missed entirely. It can only have been due to my excitement because I was generally used to my wife's statements of irony, mockery, and cynicism. We'd come to an agreement—ie, Shelley told me what would happen, and I agreed—that we could officially open New Year's Day, have a few friends and relations stay over and welcome the first outside guests from January 2nd.

So tonight, Charlie and Kai, Poppy and Drake, Kim and Darius, Alyssa, Ebony and Henry, Jax and Tristan, and Rav and Frida, were staying for a birthday buffet dinner and then overnight on the B&B side. Shelley had taken an extra day's leave from the dating agency to support Alyssa on her first day and continue the celebrations. Then at four pm my first proper guests would arrive.

I grinned again then at my achievement. Usually, I took a backseat to things. There were many forceful personalities in Gnarly and with my wife, Kim, Lucy the ex-demon, and Frida the current demon etc around, it was easy to fade into the background. But now here I was, Theo Landry, owner and proprietor of Goodacres Farm Bed and Breakfast. I turned to my wife. "Once more, the place is a business. Once a farm, now a place where people can come and relax."

There was an almighty thud, and I raced outside, Shelley quickly in pursuit. We found the B&B sign I'd erected at the front of the house lying on the ground.

"I knew we should have got Henry to hang it," Shelley said.

"That sign was erected perfectly adequately. I can't understand how it's fallen off," I stated, picking it up and looking it over.

"Well, it's not going to tell you, is it? Put it down for now in the hallway and tomorrow we'll ask Henry to do it."

I so wanted to protest and tell my wife how capable I was of such things, but then I quickly remembered it had taken me ages and Henry would fix it in about three minutes flat, so I went back inside to enjoy my birthday celebrations and the attention that came from being 128 and a new business owner.

Shelley had put on a fantastic spread for everyone that served all species: with blood, steak, fish, and everything else our little community required for sustenance and pleasure. Jax had offered to do the catering, but we'd said no, that on this occasion she was a guest. Unfortunately, that meant we also had to put up with her insufferable boyfriend Tristan, although he had softened a little of late thanks to Jax putting up with no bullshit.

After a hearty round of happy birthday, I blew out the one large candle on my cake. When I'd acknowledged 128 of them would have been a fire hazard, Shelley had said it was more that she couldn't be arsed in lighting that many, and that by the time she had, the ones lit at the beginning would have melted down. Instead, she'd carved the numbers 128 into the one large candle.

Kim yawned. "Gosh, I'm so very tired, I think I might have an early night," she announced, looking at her husband.

"I feel the same," he replied.

"Do you know I'm also really tired," Polly told Drake.

"Must be all the celebrating of New Year because I'm tired too," Tristan said, elbowing Jax.

I looked at my watch. "It's only seven pm. I'd thought we'd play charades and some other party games."

"I'm absolutely shattered," my daughter said.

"An early night would do us both good," Rav advised Frida.

"I see an early night in our future," Ebony told Henry.

"Oh, for God's sake, I'm going to go home," Alyssa harrumphed.

"Sweetie, don't feel you have to go home just because there's only going to be the three of us playing charades. My mum might play too," I told her.

"Mary's staying at Alistair's tonight," Shelley said. "She felt it would be too rowdy."

My brow creased. "Rowdy? Charades is silent."

"Jesus Christ, another year hasn't made him any the wiser, Shelley, has it?" Kim shook her head at me.

"Huh?" I said, not following what was happening at all.

Alyssa nudged my arm and I turned to face her. "Theo, you've given all your couple friends a luxury hotel room for the evening. They're all going to bone."

I'd heard her words and my eyes had gone straight to rest on Charlie and Kai.

“Oh, charades did you say, Dad? What fun. I guess we could have a game or two,” my daughter said, leaping forward to sit near me.

Or one game for every year of my birthday, I thought. Until I’d tired or bored Kai enough that he did actually want to sleep at bedtime.

“Alyssa, don’t go. You can come and sleep on our side of the house,” Shelley told her. “It’ll be quiet there.”

My eyes almost popped out on stalks. “B-but it’s my *birthday*, Shelley.”

“Sorry, husband, but I am genuinely absolutely knackered, and me and Alyssa both have to be up early in the morning. This business won’t run itself.”

Huh, it should have been me who was up early in the morning, and I didn’t mean to run the B&B. Everyone knew you got lucky on your birthday. My favourite singer, Kylie’s, song came into my head. Yeah, I should be so lucky...

“Okay, everyone, off you go to enjoy your rooms,” I said with a sigh. Within a few minutes there was only the five of us left.

“You go first with it being your birthday,” Shelley insisted.

Shuffling the charade cards, I picked one and turned it around.

As I saw the TV show *Fawlty Towers* named for me to act out—a show about a fictional hotel run by the bumbling Basil Fawlty—I just hoped it wasn’t a sign of things to come.

CHAPTER 2

ALYSSA

The last few months had been awful, but right now, I would have been happy to hide in my bedroom in a pool of misery rather than having to pretend to be okay in a room full of people madly in love. This was torture. It was like everyone's joy permeated the room and where it was amazing for them, I felt deeply allergic to it.

I'd been looking forward to staying in one of Theo's luxury rooms and stuffing my face with items from the treat drawer he provided his guests with, but it appeared that was not an option tonight for me because in all the other rooms they'd be having treats all right... ones I didn't want to hear anyone enjoying. I mean my brother and sister-in-law were among the horny patrons for goodness' sake. I'd had enough of those two's lusty exploits at home before they'd finally, *thankfully*, moved into their own place with the triplets.

And now I was having to play charades of all things.

But I also felt guilty about my current miserable attitude because I knew it was Theo's birthday. He and Shelley had done so much for me, but God, charades was boring.

When Theo insisted on another round, after us all already having three turns each, Shelley told him straight the party was over.

Resigned to the fact his birthday fun was done, Theo turned his attention on his son-in-law, bringing two fingers to point to his own eyes before swivelling them to point at Kai's.

"What's that, Dad? You want to watch?" Charlie quipped.

I burst out laughing at the look on Theo's face.

Charlie hugged me into her side. "That's better. I'll be making sure that smile is there more often. We're going for a night out soon, you and me. I've

been a rubbish friend of late.”

I shrugged her off. “You’re a newlywed and are also now several years older than me. Things change. I get that,” I told her. “Anyway, I’ve not been in the mood to go anywhere.”

“You’re my best friend. What’s a few years? My father’s many years older than my mum. We will be going out. This week. So get it in your head.”

“Fine,” I sighed.

Charlie and Kai left the room, but Charlie’s gaze had lingered on me, concern etched on her features until she’d gone out of view.

“Okay, Theo, are you staying up awhile?” Shelley asked him.

“Yes, in case any of our guests need me, though I seriously doubt they will.”

She kissed his cheek. “Many happy returns one last time, darling, and congrats on your business. I’m very proud of you... *we’re* very proud of you,” she said, placing his hand on her stomach.

I felt a pain like a knife through my own and I winced.

“Are you okay?” Shelley asked.

“Yeah, probably ate too much,” I lied.

The truth was that because I had an unmet bond, my body didn’t only crave love, it craved its future offspring, no matter how far in the future it would have been before that happened.

My inner wolf was in torment, and I couldn’t do anything to help her, but give her time.

The next morning was my first day as manager of the bed and breakfast. The fact I’d had no experience in such a role had not put Theo and Shelley off in the slightest. They knew I could cook, as it was something all wolf shifters learned so they could provide for their partners and children. Other than that, they’d made me a downstairs office, and told me I could also use the kitchen and living room too. I wondered if I’d made a mistake, because I just felt like I’d have a lot of time on my hands, and I was better kept busy. I guessed all I could do was see how it went. Ebony had reassured me that she’d always have a role in her boutique business for me if I ever needed to return.

“Morning, Lys. Did you sleep okay?” Shelley said, rubbing at her eyes as she walked into the room. She went straight to the fridge where she pulled out a bottle of o-neg which she drank down heartily. “Gosh, that’s better.”

She immediately looked more alert.

“Okay, so what do we have to do?” she asked.

“Nothing. No one else is awake yet.”

“Oh.” Shelley sat at the kitchen table. “I guess we just wait for people to wake up then?”

“I suppose so. I mean everything is prepared.”

“Shall we watch *Doctor Who* reruns while we wait?” Shelley asked.

“Only if it’s Matt Smith,” I replied.

“But we just finished watching those,” Shelley said. “It’s Peter Capaldi now.”

“But Matt’s doctor and River Song...” I sighed. “They had a bond, you know? Might not be wolves but they had a bond. It went through space and time.”

“Ah. Is it no better, your pining for Bartholomew?” she asked, before adding. “Tell me the truth.”

I stared down at my empty hands. “It’s lessening every day, but it’s like my wolf still mourns. She’s distant from me. I didn’t turn at the last few full moons. Didn’t get to run with the pack and do all the usual wolf things. What if I lose her?” I felt my lip tremble and was angry with myself for being so weak.

“You won’t. Your mum said it would take time, but eventually it will lessen. Your inner wolf will settle, and you’ll meet someone else to bond with.”

“I’m already bonded. To Bartholomew.” I looked up at Shelley. “Who recently ended things between us,” I confessed. It was all still so raw. It was the first time I’d truly acknowledged it was really over and my romance was not on pause.

“What? You didn’t tell me that. You said you were giving him space with his mother being ill.”

“She died.” As I said the words, tears rolled down my cheeks. “I never even met her.”

“Oh, Lys, I am so sorry.”

“Bartholomew called me a couple of days ago. Told me his mum had passed a few weeks ago and said he wasn’t coming back to Withernsea. He

wanted to stay home. He has a younger sister. She's eighteen, so an adult, but I get it. She lost her mum." I shrugged. "My wolf has been silent since. She sits like a tension headache in my mind, but there's no painkiller can alleviate it."

"You will meet someone else, Lys. But in the meantime, why don't you sign up to Frankie's database, or ask Darius, and find out what you can about mating bonds and wolves. Maybe there's something you can do, to lessen the pain?"

Shelley had a point. That's what I could do while B&B patrons didn't need me. I could do some research on the pack and wolf bonds.

I immediately felt a little better. It was as if my inner wolf was pleased that I was doing something positive for the both of us. Well, would be later. Right now, there was television to binge on.

"Come on, then, *Doctor Who* time," I said, rising from my seat. "Let's start Peter Capaldi."

After two episodes, some guests finally began to make their way downstairs for breakfast. I directed Tristan and Jax, and Ebony and Henry to the patrons dining room, grabbed my notepad and pen and went to take their breakfast orders.

"Full English for me please. Also, could I have toast, butter, and jam; a glass of orange juice; and a milky coffee," Jax ordered before I'd even spoken.

"She's worked up quite an appetite," Tristan explained—unnecessarily in my opinion—and then to make his point further in case I was in any doubt as to his meaning, he added. "Because I kept her awake for hours with my incredible lovemaking skills."

Jax blushed as bright red as the ketchup bottle set in the middle of the table with the other condiments.

"Tristan! Alyssa is only sixteen. That's not appropriate conversation for the breakfast table."

"Do you think Alyssa and Bartholomew played Monopoly when they dated?" he asked her, with heavy sarcasm.

"I've no idea, but I know if you carry on that's all we'll be doing, and

you'll be 'sent to jail' if you catch my drift," Jax told him straight.

"My apologies," Tristan addressed me. "Jax is hungry because for a person of small stature she sure knows how to put it away."

"What can I get for you?" I asked him before he received a foot or a fist in his mouth, rather than a spoonful of cornflakes.

Over at the next table it was clear that Ebony and Henry were also tired out.

"Good morning. I'm here to take your breakfast order. If you could refrain from giving me almost a blow-by-blow account of your evening, if you get what I'm saying, it would be much appreciated."

"Tristan is an ass," Ebony stated. "It was probably his stupid wailing that kept us up half the night."

"He wails?" I asked, suddenly intrigued.

"Someone does who stayed over," Henry said. "And one of the beds must need fixing because there was a lot of banging too, and I mean banging noises," he clarified.

"Hmmm. I'll let Theo know. Also, if you could fill out the customer satisfaction survey he's sending to everyone and include it there." The complaint had prompted me that Theo had asked me to remind everyone to fill in the form. I took their breakfast order and went past Tristan and Jax again.

"Theo wanted to me to remind you to fill out the customer satisfaction form," I told them.

"Would that be about his bed and breakfast or—" Tristan's sentence was left unfinished as he caught the narrow-eyed glare from Jax.

After that, things became pretty busy as I served, cooked, and tidied. Although Shelley was around, I'd asked her not to assist me unless I couldn't handle things myself. This was my job, and she was only here to oversee the first day, in case something arose which her and Theo hadn't prepared for.

The guests from last night left and then I moved onto cleaning all the rooms, changing bedding, opening windows to let fresh air in, and restocking minibars and treat drawers etc. *And I'd thought I might have time on my hands?* I mused to myself as I stood slightly out of breath after wrangling with a duvet cover. It would be good for me if every day was like this. Lots to

keep me occupied, and then on the quiet periods I could study more about the pack.

I knew we had a medium called Berry and her husband Cap due to arrive at half past three, so I'd made sure their room was ready first. Then at four pm there were four wizards booked in who were attending a wizard convention in Hornsea but hadn't been able to get lodgings there as they'd left it too late. That was it for today. The bed and breakfast could house fourteen guests, but Theo wished to start things off slowly for the first month, with a maximum of six 'unknown' guests a night.

"All done just in time for a quick cuppa before Berry and Cap arrive," I told Shelley, who I'd found laid on the sofa reading.

"I'd forgotten how nice it was to just sit still," she sighed.

"Yeah, probably best to make the most of it seeing as there are going to be people around here all the time, plus a newborn baby."

"They had better never be around here if Theo knows what's good for him," she said. "This side of the house is our home, and the other side of that staircase is the bed and breakfast. And the B&B is Theo's responsibility. I know you're now the manager, but you make sure to tell me if he starts shirking his duties. Because if there's one thing I've learned about my husband, it's that as time passes, he gets a new project. He runs Faceblood, he does investigative work for Heart to Heart, and now he runs a B&B. Then soon he'll have his share of feeds and nappies to do." She blew out an exasperated sigh. "Gosh, sorry for the rant."

"Don't be," I said. "Because I spent all night watching lovey-dovey couples and this dose of relationship reality is just what I needed."

"I'm going to do all I can to help you settle that inner wolf," Shelley said softly.

Then the doorbell rang heralding the first official guests and giving me a chance to escape before Shelley could see the disillusionment on my features.

CHAPTER 3

MARY

“What’s going on in that pretty little head of yours?” my boyfriend Alistair asked, having come up from underneath the covers where he’d been busy. Unfortunately, I’d been too distracted to concentrate, and he’d now clearly given up, probably before he suffocated underneath the covers. It was at that point I remembered we were both ghosts.

“I’m worried about Theo,” I said honestly. I pulled myself up the bed to rest against the headboard. As a ghost, I remained solid until I ran out of energy, at which point I became translucent and wispy. My eyes took in the extremely posh room décor of the five-star hotel we were in. On my own, I was tethered to the farm where I’d suffered my horrendous death in the early 1900’s, but with Alistair—who I’d met almost a year ago—we could go anywhere.

That meant we’d bonked in many a free hotel bed. The staff must have wondered what on earth had happened when they showed the next patrons their rooms and found the bedding and towels left in a heap. Sex usually fired me up and so I wasn’t always wispy after a good session, and I’d been used to keeping a clean and tidy home.

“I thought he was pretty settled now,” Alistair queried. “I mean he’s married, has a grown daughter and a baby on the way, and has, finally, opened his bed and breakfast. So why are you worried?” He’d sat up himself now and looked at me with concern in his eyes.

“I worry about *why* he wanted to open the B&B. He’ll say it’s to keep him busy, but I know my son, and I’m not buying it. There’s plenty he can be doing in that community. Shelley has the dating agency including managing Heart to Heart and is pregnant. He should be supporting her, not starting

projects that could upset their home life.”

“I’m sure they’ve had conversations about this. Shelley doesn’t come across as the type to put up with any nonsense.”

“Shelley is very aware that Theo can be sensitive. I mean when I was alive women took care of the home and children and the men went out to provide. I helped with the farm, but it was with Edward telling me what to do, and mainly I was bringing up Theo and preparing meat for storage or serving meals. He did all the finances for the farm. At that time, I felt loved and protected, but I see such a different way of life now. Shelley might complain of being tired, but she adores her job, and who wouldn’t? She brings love to people’s lives. What a wonderful thing. At the end of each day, she can come back to her own loving husband and know that thanks to her others are happy. But with Theo being old school, he’s had to adjust to the concept of a working wife. He wants to provide still.”

“So you think there’s an emasculation going on, and Theo’s running the B&B so he can provide for his patrons because his wife doesn’t need him to?”

“That’s part of it. I also think because of what happened at the farm, he wants to overwrite the horrors of the past with a fresh start. The last business there was the farm, which didn’t end well.”

When Theo had been turned, his sire had been killed. As a hungry fledgling it had taken Theo less than ten minutes to drain me, his father Edward, his auntie and uncle, their two children (ie his cousins), and the farmhands. He’d spent years in torment, and still harboured a huge guilt around this. I’d lingered here, a restless spirit who knew my son wouldn’t have done this had his sire taken him to his lair to complete his turning, and I hadn’t been ready to leave him. Theo had repeatedly tried to buy back the farm and when he’d met Shelley, she’d helped him do exactly that. Thanks to her we’d been reunited.

“It might be just the very thing he needs then,” Alistair suggested. “Seeing the farm become a business that makes it less of a childhood home, and more of a successful B&B as well as his family home with Shelley. Don’t forget that because Charlie grew up so quickly, he hasn’t been able to experience it as a family home so much. Once their new baby is toddling around and needs him, maybe he’ll not feel he requires the B&B side anymore? Then again, he could become an amazing proprietor and be the happiest you’ve ever seen him.”

“I hope so,” I replied, my voice quiet.

“I don’t like seeing you sad. Is there anything I can do to cheer you up?” Alistair asked, following it up with a wiggle of his brows.

Pushing my concerns to the back of my mind, I let Alistair distract me with his trousersnake.

Later, Alistair dropped me back off at my room at the farm. My room had always been on the other side of the house, which was now the B&B, and I’d asked Theo to leave it that way. It wasn’t too far from my original bedroom, the one I’d shared with Edward. What I loved was that as Theo had numbered the rooms, mine had worked out to be number thirteen. He’d not wanted to put a number on the door, but I’d insisted. It made it spooky, and I’d told him that could be a good feature at the B&B—a resident ghost. A room that was never booked out to a patron because it was already occupied.

I’d been warned by Theo not to scare his customers off though and so while he got established, I was happy to allow him to do his own thing. Like I’d said to Alistair, Theo needed to be the boss of this. Not have his mother taking over.

Lying on my bed, I drifted off into my ghost stasis, ready for a rest from my anxious thoughts.

“Hi, Mary,” Alyssa said as I half walked, half floated into the kitchen. “Want a cuppa?”

“A cuppa and all the previous night and day’s gossip,” I stated, as I took a seat on a chair at the dining table. The table had been there since my time at the farm. I ran my hand over the surface, thinking back to a time long ago.

The door banged and was followed by the footsteps of my heavy-footed husband. “Stew?” Edward guessed.

I nodded.

“I could smell it from right over at the barn. My stomach won over cleaning out the chickens.”

“I’ll help you with the chickens later.”

“Daddy, I help you with the chickens,” Theo said.

Edward swept him up from his seat at the table and into his arms. “Would you, Theodore? That would be great. If you help me clean them after dinner, then in the morning you could look for eggs.”

Theo nodded excitedly, and Edward smiled at me over the top of our son’s head.

Such happy moments. Such happy years.

Until the day it all went spectacularly wrong.

Alyssa placed the drink down in front of me, making me return to the present moment.

“You spaced out then,” she commented.

“Just thinking,” I said.

“Must be strange being here as a ghost when it used to be your family home.”

Alyssa might be young, but she was astute. Werewolves were brought up to be hyper aware of their surroundings from the moment they had any awareness. A sixteen-year-old wolf shifter was very different to a sixteen-year-old human child that was for sure. Her wolf had killed to protect her pack, something Alyssa struggled with. It was why she’d found a kinship with Theo. They’d both killed and were rueful about the fact, despite it being due to their supernatural nature.

“It is, but do you know what I find most annoying?” I said, wanting to escape talking about past times for now.

“Theo?” Alyssa sniggered.

I laughed alongside her.

“Sorry, couldn’t resist. Carry on,” Alyssa encouraged.

My eyes went down to my permanent state of dress. A long white flowing dress that I’d been wearing now for a hundred-and-ten years. “This dress. It

was my favourite, but after wearing it for over a century the novelty has worn off.” I touched the bun my hair was in. “Just like this. I’m exactly the same day in and day out, and I see you dressed in all Ebony’s beautiful clothes and... I get jealous. I’m permanently in my late-thirties and permanently look like this.”

The only time I was out of clothes was when I was getting busy with Alistair. I’d discovered I could ‘think them away’. But even that was prone to glitches and sometimes my dress and undergarments would reappear at an inappropriate time. I’d tried to put on clothes when ‘solid’, but one tremble of translucence and they’d fall off. In the end I’d given up trying.

“Mary, you are beautiful. You have an ethereal quality that people would die for.”

“Well, I did die for it, and I don’t recommend it.”

We were quiet for a moment and then Alyssa’s eyes widened. “We have four wizards staying a couple of days. I’ll ask them if there’s anything they can do. Spells evolve all the time, right? Maybe they can help you be able to change your image, even if only for a short time.”

I clapped my hands together. “Goodness, you think they might be able to help? Shelley’s a powerful witch but she hasn’t been able to do anything.”

“It doesn’t hurt to ask. Leave it with me,” she said. “Now drink your tea and I’ll fill you in on all the comings and goings of last night and today.”

I pulled a face. “Let’s leave out the comings, and just chat about the goings,” I said, and then we burst out laughing again.

“And what are you two giggling about?” Theo queried, awake from his vampire slumber and entering the kitchen to get his daily o-neg.

“Horny patrons,” I told him.

“Can you keep your chatter age-appropriate, Mother,” Theo scolded.

“Don’t be silly, darling. The age of consent is sixteen in the United Kingdom. I’m sure Alyssa here is well aware of sex. I mean, for a start she lived with Kim and Darius.”

“Okay, I admit, it’s me who doesn’t want to hear my mother talking about sex.” Theo grimaced.

“Received and understood. Are you all ready for your first proper day as proprietor?” I asked him.

“I sure am. Everyone arrived, okay?” he asked Alyssa.

“Yes. Berry and Cap have gone to Red’s Steakhouse for dinner, and the wizard gang have gone into Hornsea to meet up with the rest of the group.

There's a meet and greet event going on. Everyone said they looked forward to meeting you later, and they'd grab a drink at the bar."

Theo had got the farm fully licensed.

"Thank you so much, Alyssa. Have you had an enjoyable first day?"

She beamed. "I really have. It's been much busier than I thought it would be. Thank you for offering me the post, Theo. I think I'm going to love it."

She hovered around the table for a few more minutes and I realised it was because of me.

"You get yourself off home now, lass," I told her.

"I'll ask the wizards tomorrow, I promise," she said, getting up from the table.

"Appreciated."

Alyssa said her goodbyes and left.

"What is she asking the wizards?" Theo asked.

"Just if they know of a way I could change my style."

"I don't want my guests being annoyed," he said. "They're here to do their own thing."

"I won't do anything that will upset your business, I promise," I replied.

"Want another cup of tea?" he asked, and then Shelley joined us, and we chatted amiably about the bed and breakfast and babies, and I thought that despite my appearance, being able to haunt the farm meant I was in other ways incredibly blessed.

CHAPTER 4

THEO

After an amazing birthday, I'd had an incredible sleep, and had woken refreshed. Then I'd remembered my B&B was open! I'd felt like a kid on Christmas morning as I'd gone downstairs. My superior vampire nose notified me that Alyssa was in the kitchen and my wife in the living room. Ordinarily, Shelley would have been my first port of call, but I was just too excited for a B&B update.

I should have known my mother would have been in there gossiping.

Once Alyssa had left, Shelley came in, and we'd chatted for a while. It was nice that some of the topic of conversation was on my new business. Usually, everyone else had stories to tell about their day and I was just there as the good listener I was (superior hearing skills too). Now I was getting to join in... in a fashion.

"So the guests are all booked in. I'm glad they all showed up," I stated.

"I know, I was here when they arrived. Alyssa did a great job of handling things today," Shelley noted.

"And now my shift is here," I said.

"And the guests are out. Typical," she added.

"How's my baby momma doing today?" I changed the subject because shortly I would be going to my office to do work for the B&B and then I'd be greeting the guests as they arrived back. After that, I'd be able to talk to people about what work *I'd* done for the biz.

"I'm good. It's actually been lovely. Alyssa had everything in hand, so I've had a nice rest."

"I spent the day with Alistair," Mum said. "I wasn't interested in sexual exploits at first as I had things on my mind, but once Alistair had offered a

sympathetic ear, I felt much better and then he offered his penis, and it was business as usual.”

There was a clatter, and I walked outside to find our large hallway clock lying on the floor. Luckily, it wasn't broken.

“I'm beginning to wonder if I should let Henry do all the DIY in the house as it seems I can't even hang a clock on a wall now,” I declared, carrying it into the kitchen.

“That's been up for ages. It must have got knocked in all the preparations to open,” Shelley answered.

“I'm going to just leave it in here against the wall for now as I don't want it cluttering the hallway on our first evening with real guests. They might think the whole house is ramshackle.” I sighed with annoyance.

“Don't be silly. All the rooms are exquisite,” my mum uttered reassuringly, “and while we're on that subject, I'm going to my own room. Have fun with your guests tonight, son, and I'll catch up with you tomorrow.”

“If Alistair visits this evening, please keep it down,” I re-warned her.

“He's not. I'm on my best behaviour with you having guests in the rooms around me.”

“Thanks, Mum. That's appreciated.” It really was. Mum and Alistair weren't known for reining it in.

Mum walked over and gave me a hug before releasing me. “I'm very proud of you, Theo. You know that, don't you? A good husband, father, and now B&B owner. Other than you murdering me, you've been the perfect child.”

Shelley cracked out laughing. My mum was always coming out with similar quips. She did it to try to bring humour to the situation, but the truth was, it was still very difficult to come to terms with what I'd done at the tender age of eighteen. To be taken from a loving family home, murdered and turned myself, and to then turn and murder my family and staff I'd known my whole life... Though it was distant enough that I could get on with my undeath—and I knew it wasn't *my* fault, but an unfortunate situation—I just couldn't see how it was in any way funny.

“Haha, Mother,” I said, kissing her cheek before she left the room.

“You okay?” Shelley asked, knowing how sensitive I was on the subject of my turning.

“I'm with my wife and it's the first proper day of my new business, I'm

on top of the world,” I said, though it wasn’t strictly the truth.

After spending a couple of hours with Shelley in the living room, I excused myself to do some work in the office. Firing up my laptop, I clicked into the surveys that I’d sent to my friends who’d stayed last night.

Only Henry and Kim had filled in the forms. I’d have to chase the others up. They were probably all sleeping off their stay after not sleeping during it. I opened the first survey reply.

Your stay at Goodacres Farm: Satisfaction Survey

Name: **Henry Marston**

How was your welcome to Goodacres Farm? ***Fantastic. Always lovely to see Theo and Shelley.***

How did you find your room? ***Incredible. Amazing room. I think the decorating and carpentry in the room must have been done by a very knowledgeable and expert person (oh it was... me :) hehehe. No seriously, Theo, you have exceeded expectations with what the room provides, eg the treat drawer with its drinks and snacks.***

Were there any problems with your room or stay? ***Bit embarrassing to say, but I know you well enough to know you want ALL feedback. There was some wailing. On and off for a few seconds at a time, but at several times during the night. Now, given the circumstances it was probably a strange mating sound??? But it sounded more like a ghostly wail. Did your mum return? Also, there was a banging sound, as if a bed was broken. It was probably a knocking headboard, but we fixed cushioning behind them all didn’t we? Perhaps just give all the rooms another quick check?***

Would you recommend us to others? ***Already have.***

Anything else you’d like to add? ***Congrats, my friend. It was a pleasure to have been part of getting the B&B ready. Ebony and I are very proud of your achievement and wish you every success, (and I’ll be around Friday to come and mend the sign).***

Thank you for completing the survey. Your responses help with the ongoing running of the B&B.

Theo Landry
Proprietor.

I got a buzz every time I saw my name and title on anything connected to my new business. Possibly because I really did imagine at one point that it was never going to open. Bursting with pride at Henry's words while pondering on what the noises could be, I looked at Kim's comments.

Your stay at Goodacres Farm: Satisfaction Survey

Name: ***Kim Wild***

How was your welcome to Goodacres Farm? ***Alcohol was involved so spot on.***

How did you find your room? ***Theo directed us.***

Were there any problems with your room or stay? ***Nope. Darius and I were VERY satisfied, as were others given the wailing we heard!!!***

Would you recommend us to others? ***What's in it for me? Another free stay? Babysitting of the triplets?***

Anything else you'd like to add? ***If I become pregnant as a result of the evening, could I claim compensation, (again in the form of babysitting, or free stays but this time without my husband).***

Thank you for completing the survey. Your responses help with the ongoing running of the B&B.

Theo Landry
Proprietor.

I should have known Kim's comments wouldn't have been worth reading. She had also mentioned the wailing though.

Knowing it wasn't anything to do with my mum, who'd stayed out all night with Alistair, I decided to check all the beds and doors etc to ensure nothing was banging or maybe in need of oiling, and the windows to make sure wind wasn't whistling through and causing a 'wailing' noise.

Finding everything seemed perfectly okay, and all rooms had been returned to a new guest ready state by Alyssa, I put the noises down to the guests having a good time and returned downstairs.

"I'm going to sit in my bar. Would you care to join me?" I asked Shelley.

"Yeah, sure. Let me just watch this episode of *Would I lie to You?* first though. Only I missed this one, and it's got Bob Mortimer on it."

My eyes narrowed. "Who is this person?"

Shelley rolled her own. "He's a comedian who's really funny. He tells the most outrageous stories, and everyone thinks they're a lie and then they turn out to be true."

"Hmm, I should befriend him. This is also true of myself. I often find myself regaling shop folks with a tale about my time as a model in the 1950's when I had to fake my own death, only to find they don't believe me." I sat next to her. "Scoot up. I'll watch it with you and then we can go to my bar."

The show was most enjoyable, but I was told quite sternly by my wife that I was to leave Bob alone unless I wanted a restraining order. Given I'd already had one served against me by the previous owner of my farm, I decided it would be better just to appreciate I'd found a new TV series to watch, and not to bring any bad press to my door given my new enterprise. It was a shame Bob wasn't supernatural as I could have just absentmindedly sent him a B&B leaflet and left it up to him whether he came to stay or not.

At around half past nine, we entered the room that had become my bar area. There was a lock-up bar with a bell on the counter for in case I wasn't around when guests required a drink, and then the rest of the room was like any lounge in a B&B with comfy sofas, coffee tables, a bookcase, magazines, and a television. There were also some board games etc.

I switched the lights on, and Shelley sat on the sofa.

“Can I get you anything?”

“No, I’m fine, thank you. Just the pleasure of your company is all I need.”

Ensuring the bar was unlocked and ready for if any patrons came to join us, I then sat on the sofa next to Shelley.

“I know I’ve already said it, but you’ve done an amazing job on the B&B. I’ve glad you’ve got to realise your dreams of running one, Theo.”

“Thank you. I know it’s only the first day, but I’m excited to see where it goes. Maybe one day I’ll even bring some of the farm back and we can cook with our own eggs etc.”

Shelley smiled. “Theo, you need to stop thinking so much about the future, and for that matter, the past too. Focus on the now. That’s me and you in a room having a snuggle on the sofa waiting for your guests to come back.”

“You’re right as usual, wife.” I pulled her into me, and we snuggled until we heard the front door opening.

All of our guests had arrived back at the same time. Berry and Cap, and then Julio, Clint, Ferd, and Kane entered the room, finding seats before Berry and Julio came to the bar.

“What can I get you, Berry?” I asked, loving playing host.

“White wine for me please, and a pint of John Smith’s for Cap.”

“Have you enjoyed your day?” I asked.

“Very much so. We went to the café you told us about. Best coffee I ever tasted, and the chocolate doughnuts were to die for. The steakhouse was also excellent.”

When Berry had first enquired about the B&B, she’d actually come for a visit. She’d explained that often when she stayed anywhere, she got spirits annoying her and so didn’t get a rest. It meant that it was worth her while to do some mediumship in a place first to ensure that her stay was a pleasant one. Of course, I made sure Mum was out that day with Alistair.

“Mum has promised to be on her best behaviour and her boyfriend isn’t staying over,” I confirmed.

“Excellent. I shall look forward to a good night’s sleep.”

Berry took the drinks back to the table and I served Julio. Then for the

next hour or so Shelley and I chatted with our guests before I took last orders and locked up for the evening. As I stood in the doorway looking at my guests all sitting relaxed, I smiled to myself.

It had been a fantastic first 'official' day at Goodacres Farm B&B.
I just had to hope their evenings went well too.

CHAPTER 5

ALYSSA

“Hey, sweetheart, how’s the first day gone?” my dad asked as I walked through the back door that led straight into the kitchen. He was standing at the worktop chopping vegetables. I kicked my shoes off and threw my coat and bag on the back of the chair.

“Busier than I thought. I think I’m going to enjoy it at the farmhouse.”

“That’s good, honey,” Mum said as she walked in from the hall. “A fresh start is just what you need.”

My hands balled into fists behind my back. Yeah, a fresh start. Like a new job would suddenly stop me from mourning the loss of Bartholomew. I knew Mum was only trying to help, but her desperation to fix me just added guilt to my sorrow.

“Have I time to go for a run before dinner?” I asked.

“Sure. It’ll be an hour or so yet,” Dad quantified.

“Great, I’ll go get changed into my running gear.” I picked up my coat and bag.

“Make sure you put those shoes away too. They don’t belong in the middle of the kitchen floor,” he added.

“Okay, Pops,” I answered. But we both knew he’d pick them up and put them in the hallway before I did.

“Are you going to run in the woods?” Mum asked as I passed her side.

“Maybe, but I’m not putting pressure on my wolf. If I can’t change at the full moon, I doubt I can change now.”

“No harm in trying though, right?” She squeezed the top of my arm and gave me a sympathetic smile.

I smiled back when really, I just wanted to scream.

Running was helping. Every evening, I would get my gym kit on, my trainers, and I'd either run through the woods, or go in the other direction and run down the seafront.

After saying goodbye to my parents, I walked down to the play area near the caravans and did my warm-up, saying hello and passing pleasantries with other pack members and their cubs. Ready to put distance between me and my fellow wolves, I turned in the direction of the seafront and took off, gaining speed and feeling the breeze in my hair and the burn in my legs. I loved having nothing to think about other than the sensations I was experiencing. Time off from my restlessness.

Minutes passed: five... ten... fifteen... before my body began to protest continuing at that pace. My lungs burned and my breath came in heavy gasps.

"Goodness, take a seat, before you fall down," a woman said, looking at me with concern.

I waved my hand at her in an 'I'm okay' manner because I couldn't actually speak at that point, but she still pointed to the bench.

Dropping down onto the seat, I pulled out my water bottle and had a few good drinks of it before pouring a little over my forehead.

"Thanks, but I'm fine," I managed to eek out. "Just a bit out of breath."

"Surely it's not good to push yourself that far?" the woman queried.

I shrugged. "It was what I needed."

If anything, her brows furrowed further at my words.

"Honestly, I'm fine," I attempted to reassure her. "You can get on with whatever you were doing before I turned up red in the face and panting." I gave her a smile for added effect.

"Well, I'm not sure what I'm doing, but it's good to know you're okay," she said.

It was my turn to look confused. "I don't understand."

The woman sighed. "I'm not from here and so I'm unfamiliar with the area. But things happen for a reason, right? I've ended up drawn here and I'm sure it'll become clear why soon. You're the first person I've met. Is Withernsea a nice place? I've heard good things about it."

"I love it." I held out a hand. "I'm Alyssa. I live over at the caravan park."

She held her hand out tentatively, like I might have a contagious disease.

I took mine back. “It’s okay, shaking hands isn’t necessary. We’ve all been more hesitant since covid, haven’t we?”

She nodded. “Thanks for understanding. I’m a little nervous about everything at the moment. My life’s not been easy the last few months, but I need to embrace this fresh start. It’s lovely to meet you, Alyssa. I’m Penelope.”

“Welcome to Withernsea,” I said. “So where are you staying?”

“Erm, is it okay if I don’t say?” She looked down at her feet. “We only just met and I’m not sure about things yet.”

“Of course.” Oh my goodness, was she on the run from someone? A husband maybe?

There was a pause in conversation then, until Penelope said, “Do you want to talk about anything? You looked like you were running so hard you were trying to escape something.”

“That obvious?” I guessed she recognised what she no doubt had done too.

“Yeah.”

I’d have felt a bit better if Penelope had sat beside me, but she stayed standing to the side. She really did look nervous. Like she’d spook if you shouted ‘Boo’. I hoped she had somewhere to stay and wasn’t sleeping rough. I took in her features: pale skin but with a blush to her cheeks, soft grey eyes, and dark-blond hair in a long bob. I’d put her at around forty, a similar age to my mum. Maybe eventually, I could get her to come talk to my mother. On second thoughts, Mum would probably find out her husband’s name and go bite his jugular out next time she turned if he was a wife beater.

That took me straight to a flashback I could have done without.

A werewolf from a rival pack had threatened my brother and was attempting to take his mate. I’d never felt fury like it as I dropped down from the ceiling of the warehouse, turning into my wolf.

Though Jett Conall took a swing at me that knocked me to the floor, I knew he had no chance. I’d been stealing away in an evening to train with an aerial circus. My body was ripped, toned, and lithe. Jett’s overconfidence at the warehouse being surrounded by his pack had suffered a knock when I’d come through the unprotected roof.

Shelley’s blue webs took out the spell on the Hogsthorpe pack and

suddenly they didn't want to attack the Withernsea one anymore.

And that's when I saw my prey disarmed, and leaped from the ground, tearing at Jett's jugular. Blood spurted like a fountain and Jet slumped. His wolf form now still.

But it wasn't over.

As his mother howled in anguish and leapt for me, I killed her too.

I'd had premenstrual tension and the 'red mist' combined with the biological need to protect my brother in wolf form had turned me into an alpha female. My brother had told me he would take the alpha role until I turned eighteen and then would offer it to me: the first alpha female of my pack. I'd said I didn't want it. Wanted to go back to the circus.

I'd been a young fool.

I'd never returned to the circus because every time I thought about being up in the air, I had flashbacks of launching down and killing. Scared I might turn and kill the circus folks, I'd stayed around the pack and stayed around Withernsea. Having Charlie and then meeting Bartholomew had helped me immeasurably; made me feel more like a teenage girl than a wolf.

But I was both.

Back then I was nervous of my wolf, and now I was scared she'd never be happy again and might never re-appear.

"It's okay. You don't have to tell me. I shouldn't have asked you," Penelope said, interrupting my thoughts of the past.

"No, actually, I would like to talk about it," I told her. "I've had my heart broken. I loved a boy and he moved away. He's not coming back. It was my first relationship and I'm struggling to get over him, that's all. Running helps me forget."

"Does it really?" she asked. "Or does it just delay it for a while via distraction?"

"It's pretty new, the break-up. So for now it just delays things. But one day I hope I'll be able to run freely, just for the exhilaration of it."

"And it's definitely over?"

“He phoned me and said he wasn’t coming back here. Family reasons he said, and he has had a terrible time. His mum died.”

“Oh,” the woman said, looking shaken.

“Yeah. Quite suddenly too. So Bartholomew is staying in Hull with his sister.”

“Maybe he just needs time?” she offered.

For a moment I had hope. “You think?”

“It’s possible, isn’t it? Death is such a shock. I’ve recently experienced it myself. Maybe you just need to give him that time.”

I shrugged. “He seemed pretty definite about things.”

“It’s something to think about. Right, I’d better go,” Penelope said, looking around her. I wondered if she was homeless.

“If you don’t have a place to stay, go to the church. Alexander, the vicar, is lovely, and will help you find a place.”

“The church. Actually, I do need to visit there. Can you give me directions?” she asked.

I did so.

“Thanks for letting me talk. I hope things work out for you,” I said.

“You too. It was lovely to meet you, Alyssa. Maybe I’ll see you again when I’m more settled.”

With that she turned away. I got up, stretched, and then I began running again, back to the house. But as I got nearer to the woods, I began to think about my conversation with Penelope about giving Bartholomew time. Was it possible that when things settled, we might be able to start again?

I felt a ripple and a shudder and dropped to my haunches. My wolf burst out in all her glory. I’d given her hope about the bonding, and in turn she’d given me a temporary reprieve. Delighting in my wolf form, we ran around the woods until I could run no more, and when I eventually got home, and was scolded for being late, I didn’t care one bit.

Once I had chance to tell my parents I’d become my wolf, they’d also been delighted.

“Oh, thank goodness. The bond is finally weakening,” Mum said.

I didn’t have the heart to tell her that wasn’t the case at all.

CHAPTER 6

PENELOPE

I'd known I was ill, was dying, and then I'd found myself in a white room free of pain. An angel had told me I had one thing to do before I could move on. She'd told me my son was in love with a wolf-girl but would sacrifice his happiness for his family. The angel, Sophia, said that the wolf-girl was destined to be a great leader of the wolves and my son was her fated mate. Obviously, I'd thought I was hallucinating. The medications I'd been on were strong, so it had been an easy assumption to make.

Until I found myself on Withernsea seafront. A place my son had talked about so many times. I'd felt incredibly guilty that he'd had to care for me through my darkest days, knowing he'd been happy there, but had had to return to care for me.

As I stared at the girl as she told me her name, it hadn't sunk in at first that she was *the* girl. Until she said his name. He'd always called her Lys.

Therefore, if I believed I'd seen an angel, then this girl was a wolf. And whereas before death I would have laughed, now I was standing in Withernsea scared to shake a girl's hand in case mine passed through hers.

Because if I was here, I was a ghost.

I needed guidance and the place where I was sure I would find it would be the church.

"You don't need to go to the church. I'm here to help you."

I quickly turned around to find the owner of the very cut-glass voice was a glamorous woman with a sharp dark bob.

"I'm Ebony and we need to talk," she said. "Follow me."

Ebony and I walked down the street until she came to a boarded-up property looking out over the sea. Taking out a key, she opened the front door and indicated for me to follow her inside.

My jaw dropped a little as I walked into the hallway, as I'd expected to see a place infested with damp and rats, but inside was in the latter stages of renovation.

"We've kept the boards up outside with it being empty, but it's not far off completion now," Ebony stated. "This is my husband's latest project. He's begun renovating houses in Withernsea that have suffered neglect. He's going to breathe new life into them."

"Can he breathe new life into me, because I think I'm a ghost," I replied.

"Let's go take a seat in the front room. It has a beautiful view." Ebony gestured to a doorway and we both stepped inside the room. There was a sofa set right next to the window, and with a gut feeling I could trust Ebony, I attempted to sit down. It worked. My bum felt solid and managed to stay on the furniture.

"I thought ghosts passed through things?" I asked her.

"I will explain," Ebony stated.

So I waited.

"My name is Ebony Marston, and I am a seer. I get visions of the future, but only part. I shall tell you what I've seen, but beyond that I'm none the wiser. Earlier, I had a vision. You were here on the seafront talking to Alyssa and telling her to not give up hope on Bartholomew."

"That's right. I had a dream, only now I don't think it is a dream... An angel told me my son and Alyssa were fated to be together and that's why I was here. To make sure that happens."

"That's good news, because Alyssa has been deeply affected by your son leaving. Hopefully, we can find a way to reunite them."

"You can help me?" I asked.

"I don't know what role I play in this, other than to guide you in some way. I'm afraid my visions are completely unhelpful at times. All I can tell you is what I saw, which was you talking to Alyssa. So go carefully with anything you do, and while you're in Withernsea you can stay here. I've got you a mobile phone with my number in it if you need anything, but you should get used to things pretty quickly."

Ebony went on to tell me about being a ghost and how I'd only go translucent if I expended too much energy. She said she knew of another ghost who was tethered to her home, but of others who could roam freely. She guessed I'd be able to move around Withernsea, but that I should try travelling around to test my boundaries.

“What, go for a walk now?”

“Or tomorrow. Just see how far you can get. If you're not allowed, you'll just not be able to take steps forward. You'll feel stuck.”

“Do you know Alyssa then?” I asked Ebony, suddenly aware that just because she'd seen her in a vision didn't mean she knew the girl well.

“Very well. She worked with me at my boutique until recently. Alyssa appears strong, and physically she is. But underneath it all is a young girl suffering from boyfriend woes. Her mum is trying to help her and now she has you. I'm sure she'll be okay...”

But her voice trailed off because as she'd already said, her visions didn't give her the whole picture.

Looked like I'd need to look out for Alyssa and somehow try to reunite her with my son. But first, I needed to see what I could do as a ghost.

CHAPTER 7

MARY

I stayed in my room for hours reading and watching television, until I heard the guests come to bed. I couldn't resist hanging around outside their rooms, doing a little eavesdropping. Around two am, when Shelley had gone to their bedroom and I knew Theo would be alone downstairs, I went to find him.

'So far so good, son,' I informed him, taking a seat on the sofa at the opposite end to Theo. He was on his laptop tapping away at the keys.

'What do you mean?' he asked absentmindedly, intent on whatever was on the screen.

'Berry and Cap were saying how lovely the place is and that the bed was comfy, and the wizards were glad that the Hornsea hotels had turned out to be booked up because this place was a gem.'

'Mum, I told you to leave the guests alone.'

'I have. I was just passing outside their doors and overheard. What are you doing anyway?' I changed the subject.

'Some research for Heart to Heart on a dragon shifter who's recently moved to Withernsea. He can't find love and so I'm trying to uncover some background details that might tell us why. Looks like his father was a serial philanderer who left baby dragons everywhere, so it's possible that's connected, but I'll keep looking.'

'Perhaps he hasn't met the one yet and it's as simple as that,' I said.

Theo paused for a moment and then put his laptop down.

'Was Dad the one for you?' he asked. 'And if so, where does Alistair come into things?'

I'd been waiting for him to finally get up the courage to ask me about my

relationships. Theo had adored his father and it must have been weird to get his mum back in his life but not his dad. Plus, then I'd started dating another ghost.

"In some ways it just feels entirely separate," I told him. "Your father and I were together from the late nineteenth century and now it's the year 2019. You were our teenage son and now you're a married man and a vampire. I often feel like one of those times was a dream and I'm not sure which one."

"I get that," he said. "I feel the same way when I think of my childhood. Like, did it actually happen?"

"It did and those times were blissful, Theo. And I feel very fortunate to be able to be reunited with you in the afterlife."

"Why do you think Dad wasn't a restless spirit?"

"He must have been able to accept the fact he'd been killed and to move on, whereas I couldn't let go of my tether to you. So I stayed around the farm. I grew stronger every time you returned here. We were meant to be reunited. I really believe that. I loved my husband, but there's no love like the one a mother has for her children."

"And you don't feel compelled to move on now you know I'm happy?"

I shook my head. "No. Lucy offered you know? Said as an earth angel that if I wanted her help to move on in the future I just had to ask. But I want to see my grandchildren and experience more of this world before I move on, because what if I regret returning?"

Theo sucked in his top lip, a tell that he wanted to ask me something potentially awkward.

"Let me guess... you're wondering if I'm staying for Alistair because I love him more than your father?"

Theo nodded.

"No. Your father was my one true love and Alistair is sex. I'm fond of him and he's fond of me, but we're just having fun. My life back in the day as a woman was so very different to what times are like now. I didn't get to ask for what I wanted in the bedroom."

"Please don't talk about your sex life with Dad please." Theo mock shuddered.

"I'm not. I'm just saying that with Alistair I can leave this house and have fun and ask for what I want. I get to see what female life is like in this modern age and while women struggle to juggle everything, a lot now have a voice."

“Times have changed so much. As I’ve lived my vampire life, I’ve seen it happen. Shelley has taught me a lot as I remain a tad old-fashioned in my ways.”

I smiled because he did, and it gave him an added charm.

“It’s very confusing though because I let a door go in Shelley’s face once and she shouted at me for not holding it open for her, and yet when I took a jar off her to unscrew the lid, she snatched it from me saying she wasn’t a weak woman and could do it herself. This was prior to her becoming a vampire.”

“There’s no one perfect path for any of us, Theo. Life does not come with an instruction booklet. We can only do our best.”

“I know. Now of course, Shelley is a strong vampire and witch and doesn’t need help with many things strength related.”

“She still needs your love though, Theo. You have a strong role in her life. You’re her soulmate.”

“Was Dad yours then?”

“In life yes. Yours is different though. You were undead and Shelley became undead. There’s the supernatural element to your bond, that your father and I did not get. Maybe when I eventually choose to pass over, we will, but who knows? I’m dating here... maybe your dad’s dating in Heaven?”

“I’m sure he’s not doing in Heaven what you’re doing here on earth. What will he think to that when you are reunited? That you slept with another man?”

“He’ll have to lump it. I regret nothing, Theo. Do you think I should have stayed celibate?”

He shook his head. “No. It’s very strange watching my ghostly mother in a romance with someone who isn’t my father, but I’m just glad you’re happy. Dad isn’t here, but you are.”

My heart burst with happiness then because deep down inside I’d felt that Theo disapproved. This conversation was clearing the air between us. I felt lighter.

“You’re floating off the sofa, Mum,” Theo told me.

I looked down to where there was a good eight inches between me and the sofa now. And my sizing was accurate because I’d become very familiar with eight inches of late.

“Oops.”

Theo took my arm and gently pulled me back down.

“I’m so very happy that I have your approval with Alistair,” I told Theo. “But your dad will always be my one true love.” I got off the sofa. “I’ll leave you to your work now. All this emotional chatter has weakened me a little so I’m going to go get some sleep. Rest assured, and I’m speaking literally here, your guests will be left undisturbed by me. I shall set an alarm to be around when Alyssa arrives, given Shelley will be going back to work.”

“Thanks, Mum,” Theo said, leaning over to kiss my cheek. The kiss landed, but a moment later I felt myself going wispy for a second.

“I love you, son,” I said before heading back to my room.

“Morning, Lys,” I said, now full bodied and able to walk into the kitchen. Given the guests were supernatural, they’d know I was a ghost, but as Berry had wanted a ghost free stay, I wasn’t planning on being around her. I didn’t know what might happen if I chatted with a medium anyway. What if she accidentally (or even purposefully—we didn’t really know the woman after all) sent me to the other side.

“Hi, Mary. Cuppa? I’ve just filled the teapot.”

“Yes, please.”

Alyssa reached into the cupboard for my favourite teacup. “Shelley went in early this morning to get a head start for after the festive season. Apparently, there are a lot of break ups over Christmas and people resolving to find love.”

“The only New Year’s resolution I’ve made is to not make any,” I told Alyssa. “How about you?”

“I’ve resolved to give my all to this new job,” she said, passing me my cup of tea. I noticed how she didn’t talk about her love life. I knew from listening in on conversations what a difficult time she was having at the moment.

“So we both set the most boring resolutions ever. Let’s make one for each other,” I suggested. “Something that pushes us out of our comfort zone.”

Alyssa raised a brow. “Hmmm, okay. If I get the wizards to be able to spell your clothes, you have to let me style you.”

“Okay. Now for you. I know you’re pining for Bartholomew, but you

have to go on a date with at least two other men within the next two weeks,” I challenged her.

“What? I’m only styling your clothes.”

“Not my fault you chose that.”

“No, I’m changing my mind. You have to go on two dates too.”

I smirked. “Good luck on finding two ghosts in the vicinity when one of our guests actively doesn’t want any around.”

“Oh pish.” Alyssa pouted. “What if I want to go see Bartholomew and check out if he is really over me?”

“I thought he’d made it clear...”

“Over the phone. What if he saw me face-to-face? He might change his mind.”

Alyssa’s face was so hopeful, and she was such a lovely girl. I hated to think she might end up upset all over again.

“Go on two dates. Let Shelley match you up. If they go nowhere, then go see Bartholomew. But try to step out of your comfort zone first. He was your first love, and it might be that causing the pining rather than a mate bond.”

“You think? It really, *really* hurts.”

“Grief does, and I know he didn’t die, but he abruptly left your life.”

She considered my words. “I’m guessing it really hurt when you realised you were a ghost, but that Edward wasn’t?”

I nodded.

“Okay then. I’ll ask Shelley to find me two dates. Now I’m off to start breakfast and ask the wizards if they can get you some new clothes. I’ll let you know later.”

“I’ll be off to see Alistair shortly. Enjoy your day and I’ll pop back around four-ish to catch you before you leave.”

Alyssa nodded and then left.

But I wasn’t going straight to see Alistair. I was going to do some more spying on the guests first, because most truths were said behind closed doors.

“There was banging and wailing. I’m telling you that *he’s* here,” I heard Berry tell Cap.

“Don’t be silly, Berry. It will have been the wizards. They were putting it

away last night. I'd bet they kept bumping into the furniture and cursing."

"How you slept through it all amazes me."

"Don't forget it could also have been Theo's mother. She's in room thirteen, remember?"

"I suppose so. I'll mention it to Theo, for her to ensure she's quiet."

Was that right? I thought. Berry would get me to be quiet, and yet she was the one who thought someone might have followed her here.

Looked like I'd be doing some fishing on Berry, because she was acting very fishy herself.

CHAPTER 8

THEO

After another satisfactory slumber, I again woke up with a stomach fizzing with excitement. The wizards were leaving tomorrow morning, so I needed to catch up with them to see how their stay had been, whereas Berry and Cap were here for the week.

Shelley, of course, was at work, but I could hear voices coming from the kitchen, so I went in search of Alyssa for an update, hearing that once more she was with my mother.

“How goes it all today, ladies? Are we happy? Are our guests happy?” I smiled.

“No,” my mum and Alyssa said at the same time, causing the smile to slide right off my face.

I took my o-neg from the fridge and sat down at the table with them.

“What’s the matter?” I asked, looking at both.

“The wizards can’t alter my clothing, so I have to look like this still,” Mum complained.

“Is that all? I thought there was a major catastrophe,” I said.

“You try wearing the same clothes for a hundred years,” she harrumphed.

“Mum, I do look the same. Okay, I can change my clothes, but my appearance doesn’t alter either. There have been occasions over the years where I would have quite liked a mullet or a perm, but I had to accept it wasn’t going to be.”

Alyssa snorted, and I looked at her with a frown.

“Sorry, Theo. I’m just imagining you with a mullet and a perm.”

“I’d carry it off with aplomb, I’m sure.” I huffed.

“I can’t change my appearance or my clothes,” Mum complained. “Any

guests allowed to see me will think I'm a right weirdo since I look like I'm permanently in a nightie. I'll tell them I'm rehearsing as Miss Haversham for the West End."

"Look, I'll ask Frankie when he's back from his travels if he's come across anything about ghosts changing their appearance, but I've no idea when he'll be back. Okay?"

Mum sighed. "It will have to be, won't it."

I turned back to Alyssa to roll my eyes, but she was tapping urgently into her phone.

I waited.

"Sorry, Theo. Just thought of something I needed to tell Charlie."

"Is she okay?"

"Yep, fine. We're going out tomorrow night to *Beached* for a meal."

"Oh, that's lovely. Glad to hear you're getting out and about again, Alyssa. Are you feeling a little better with the bond situation?"

"I am. Mary's even encouraged me to go on a couple of dates."

"Really?" I looked at my mum. "Well done, Mum."

She smiled. "She's going to see Shelley."

"That's perfect," I told Mum before casting my gaze back to Alyssa. "Shelley had already spoken to me on New Year's Day about potentially finding you a new suitor."

"She had?" Alyssa double checked.

"Yes. You know what my wife is like when it comes to anyone who's not lucky in love. She wants to assist."

"That's great." Alyssa took a deep exhale. "All I have to do now is go to see her. Trouble is, I work when she does now."

"Call her and see if she's free any day this week after four. I'm up then so you can leave early."

"Oh thanks, Theo. That would be great. I'll make the time up."

I waved her statement off. "Don't be daft. If it brings the same joy to you that I get from being with my beloved, I'm all for it."

"You're a huge romantic, aren't you, Theo?" Alyssa stated.

"I sure am. Love makes the world go round, you know?"

"I think you'll find it's the sun that makes the earth move," Mum retorted.

"That's not what Shelley says when I make the earth move," I countered back.

Then I noticed Alyssa looking like she wanted to be anywhere but here.

“Sorry, Lys.”

She now waved my words off. “It’s not your fault I’m grumpy over love at the moment. Wait until my mating bond properly kicks in again and this time it’s requited. I’ll be smitten.”

My mum placed a hand over Alyssa’s. “It will happen for you soon, sweetie. I’m sure Shelley will get you a match.”

Alyssa gave my mum a smile that didn’t reach her eyes. Then she quickly turned to me.

“Henry’s been and fixed the sign and put the clock back on the wall. He had to come earlier than planned. Said he’ll catch up with you soon.”

“Okay, and how have the guests been?”

“They were all woken by the banging and wailing,” she told me.

“What? But how? I checked *everything*. There’s nothing that could make the noise.” I gave my mother a pointed look.

“I didn’t do anything, Theo.”

“Were the guests really unhappy?” I asked Alyssa.

“The wizards didn’t seem that bothered. Said they sunk a few beers that night and mainly slept through it. But Berry complained of being very tired today.”

My hand went to my mouth. “What if they leave one-star reviews? Everyone will cancel and then I’ll have no business.” Standing up, I began pacing the floor.

“I heard Berry saying someone might have followed her here and be causing it,” Mum said.

“Mum, don’t start making things up in order to deflect from the fact it’s you,” I scoffed.

“I’ve told you it’s not me.” Mum’s teeth were grinding in annoyance.

“I’ll come and check all the rooms with you before I leave,” Alyssa offered. “I may spot something you didn’t.”

“That’s true, love, because blokes can’t see what’s in front of their face, can they? I bet it’s something obvious Theo hasn’t noticed, like the fact he’s pissed... me... off.”

“Actually, I can see you’re disgruntled, Mother. It’s just they’re hearing wailing noises and you’re the only ghost.”

“I’m the only visible ghost,” Mum said. “There could be more of us.”

I shook my head. “Berry checked. There are no others here.” I realised my mistake immediately the words came out of my mouth.

“The medium has checked for ghosts? You let her do her stuff here? What if she’d tried to banish me so she could have peace and quiet?”

“There was nothing like that. She just checked while you were out and there was nothing. I made sure you weren’t here.”

“Right, you deliberately let her come here when I wasn’t around. The evil vampire side of my son is alive and well after all. I’m going to contact Alistair and I’m staying out all night, so when there’s more wailing in the night, you’ll know it can’t be me. Oh... hang on... I was out the night it started, so how do you explain that?”

“You probably came back to nosy and didn’t say anything.”

“Son, I’m a ghost but I don’t bang and wail to upset guests. However, I don’t like the fact you feel you have to hide me. Here it’s not so much a bed and breakfast but a dead and breakfast. You need to face facts that there’s a resident ghost. Unless of course you don’t want me here. Perhaps I’ll have to contact Lucy after all.”

It was then we realised that Alyssa had left the room.

“We can’t be arguing in front of the staff,” I said.

“That’s easily solved. I’m not speaking to you again until you apologise,” Mum spat out, and then she disappeared from the room.

Drinking my now room temperature blood, I stared at the kitchen wall, wondering how I could rectify the strange noises, as it was of vital importance that this business made guests happy.

“I must apologise for having a row with my mother in front of you,” I said, finding Alyssa in her office, typing into her computer.

“Don’t stress. It wasn’t a proper argument, just a family quarrel. We have them all the time at home, except sometimes we then change into our wolf bodies and have a play fight to get it out of our system.”

“Ah. Shame we can’t do that.” I placed a finger to my lips and tapped it. “Or maybe we can. I saw people in these suits once on the television. What were they called? Sumo suits, that’s it. Maybe my mother and I could try those?”

“Theo, what is with you? You’re usually so serious but you’ve been talking about mullets and perms and now sumo suits. Maybe you need to go

for a run. That's what I do when I have energy I need to expel."

"Vampires don't run. I can whizz anywhere. You're the second person to say I'm serious. Well, actually, my mother's words were staid and boring."

Alyssa bit her lip. "I'm not saying you're boring. You're just more... cautious."

I was about to tell her I sometimes dressed up as the Black Magic man and brought chocolates and other treats into mine and Shelley's bedroom, but quickly realised the inappropriateness. I settled for, "I go out in my spy kit occasionally."

"You did it to follow Charlie when she was with me. I remember. That's cool, but it's more being a protective father than adventurous, isn't it?"

"So what do you do that is adventurous?" I queried.

"Nothing right now, but I joined the circus, didn't I? That was amazing. Learning how to twist and turn in the aerial ropes."

Alyssa became distracted and I knew what had happened.

"You have to find a way to let the guilt go, Lys. Or to be able to live with it at least."

"I'm trying."

"It's all you can do." I leaned against the doorframe. "This was my family home. A place of love and laughter until I destroyed that. Now I have a chance to recreate it as a place of love and laughter."

"You have, Theo. You and Shelley live here and so did Charlie."

"There was a successful family business here too. I won't settle until the B&B is in full swing with happy customers. You have to try to work out when you'll be able to feel you've made your peace with your wolf. With that side of your nature."

"Then the B&B being successful won't bring you the peace you crave, Theo, because you're not acknowledging that you have a killer instinct within you," Alyssa said. She got up from behind the desk. "Shall we go do the tour before it's time for me to leave?"

I nodded, pushing her words to the back of my mind, but knowing I'd need to think of them later.

I'd actually hoped Alyssa *would* find something obvious I'd missed but it

wasn't to be.

"It has to be my mum. It's the only explanation," I said. "She was on her own on this side of the house and clearly isn't happy that she now can't come and go as she pleases."

"Or come and *ghost* as she pleases," Alyssa joked.

"Quite." I smiled, acknowledging the quip. "There's nothing else for it. I will have to stay here tonight on this side of the house. Then when I hear the banging and wailing, I can follow the noise immediately and rectify the situation.

"That sounds sensible," Alyssa said. "Right, I'll see you Monday. Leave me a message or send me a text if there's anything I need to know."

"I will. Thanks, Alyssa."

Just as she was leaving the room, I spoke again. "You're right. I need to accept the dark side of my nature. I'm just not sure how yet."

She turned back to me.

"If either of us finds a way, let's let the other know, hey?"

I nodded and she left the room.

My emotions swirled for the girl. At least I carried this burden at age 128, whereas poor Alyssa should have been sweetly sixteen. I had to help her as well as myself. But how?

Shelley came home from work and went straight into the living room where she flopped onto the sofa. I brought her a blood as she was having an extra bottle a day while she was pregnant.

"How's your day been?" I asked.

"It's been great and also problematic. Jessica announced that her and Lachlan are getting remarried. They're planning on eloping and having a private affair..."

"But...?"

"Cupid had a feeling remarriage was imminent and has been planning the pinkest, most-outlandish wedding you've ever imagined, even though I told him they wouldn't want it and it wasn't his wedding to arrange."

"Oh dear."

"I've managed to get him to make provisional plans for a reception

should it happen and leave the wedding to the couple. He was happy with that, but then told me he'd need my, Max, and Samara's help to put it into action when the time came. I mean don't I have enough on? Plus, Samara's pregnant too."

"I really don't know why you're worrying about this when Max is involved. I think you should quickly recall the opening of the new dating agency building."

Shelley put a hand to her head. "Jesus, of course. It's going to look like a bubblegum factory exploded."

"Not your problem. Lachlan knows his father, and Jessica knows full well what she's remarrying into." I massaged the back of her neck. "I know you're a matchmaker, but it's not fair of Cupid to try to make this your problem. You have to stand firm."

"You're right. I'll tell him Samara and I aren't available, but he can have Max's help. You're the best, hubby." She leaned up and kissed my cheek. "So, what's the latest B&B wise?"

"More wailing and banging again. Mum denies any involvement and so I'm going to have to spend the night on that side of the house tonight to see what's happening."

My wife crossed her arms over her chest. "Theo, you said this wouldn't impact on us much. You've stuck to not providing an evening meal, but you opened a bar despite saying you wouldn't which means we're having to spend our evenings with guests—"

"—It's only happened once," I interjected. "Most of the time I'll just rely on the bell, pop and serve them and then come back."

But I knew I wanted the guests to wish to spend time with me and feel I was the greatest B&B owner in the history of B&B owners.

"I just hope you find the cause of this noise because I'm not happy about us sleeping apart, Theo. That side of the house is for guests."

"You could sleep there with me," I suggested hopefully.

"I'm pregnant and reading a good book. I'd rather not be disturbed."

"Fine. You incubate our baby and read your book and I will make sure I determine what this noise is. Then it will all be sorted and normal life shall resume."

Shelley snorted at that. "Our life? Normal?"

She had a point.

The wizards came to the bar again and dismissed my apologies about the noise, saying it hadn't interrupted their stay. They did accept a twenty percent discount on their booking though which I hoped would mean a good review.

When Berry and Cap returned home though, I noticed how pale and drawn Berry looked. I'd rushed to the door when I'd heard their key in the lock, in order I could apologise.

"Alyssa told me about the noises. I'm terribly sorry. We have checked the place over again and found nothing."

If anything, Berry went paler at my words.

"I'm going to sleep in one of the rooms here tonight so I can attend to any noise the moment I hear it," I said.

"That's much appreciated," Cap acknowledged. "Other than that, the place is great. So comfortable."

"Are you coming through to the bar? Drinks on me for your inconvenience," I asked.

"Thanks, but we're fine," he said. "Berry wants to settle down early."

"I'm beat," she added. "We had a busy day out and with having a disturbed sleep..."

"I understand. Hopefully all will be well tonight, or at least, I'll get to the bottom of what's happening."

After bidding them goodnight, I went into the room I planned to stay up in. It was close to both the wizards' room, and Cap and Berry's. I laid on the bed and settled in to wait.

I heard the wizards laughing and joking. They'd brought some beers back it seemed and were playing cards. It reminded me of when I used to play with Frankie, Darius, and Reuben, except Reuben had turned out to be Satan. Still, they'd been good times even if the devil himself had been present.

Berry and Cap hadn't said much more than goodnight. I wondered if they'd been arguing before they'd come home.

There wasn't a murmur until three am when suddenly a wailing noise sounded out from down the hall. A pitiful noise like someone deeply upset. Then came the banging. Leaving the room, I followed the sound, realising it was coming from my parents' old room. When I'd moved in, Mum had chosen a different room to reside in. I figured she didn't want reminding of her past with my father, so I'd shut it off. I'd not checked the room because

I'd thought there was nothing in there to wail and bang. I could see the window from the outside of the house and it appeared fine. However, I'd been remiss not to check. Now I found myself using my vamp strength to break off the lock and open the door.

I pushed it open, expecting to find the anticipated broken window.

But that wasn't what I found there at all.

No, I found a tall, dark-haired man on the floor, sobbing and wailing.

"Dad?" I asked.

CHAPTER 9

SHELLEY

I did feel guilty letting Theo sleep alone on the B&B side, but he'd got to handle this himself. With Alyssa managing the place most of the day, it was over to my husband to make sure it ran fine in the evening. I'd made it clear I didn't want my evenings completely taken over by bed and breakfast business. It was one thing to swap updates of our days, but another to have to help, and if I went to sleep there it's what I would end up doing.

The dating agency had been busy, and I was trying to enjoy some time with my baby, even if he or she wasn't much more than a very small belly bump. With Theo over on the other side of the house, I ran myself a lovely warm bath and got ready to have a pamper evening.

After bathing, I towel dried off, lathered myself in body moisturiser and put on a comfy pair of pyjamas before settling down under the sheets. I felt tired and so even though it was only around eleven pm—early for me—I closed my eyes and let sleep take me. I didn't usually need much more than an hour or so's slumber, but while pregnant I was having a little longer.

I woke to my mobile phone ringing with my designated Theo ringtone. Opening my eyes in a snappy, alert, part-vampire way, I leaped up and grabbed my phone.

"Theo?"

"Can you come over to the B&B side? I have a problem."

I sighed. "What kind of problem? Because I'm not coming to mop up sick if one of the wizards drank too much."

"That would be the least of my problems," he replied, his voice a mixture of frustration and anguish. I began to get concerned. Had something happened to one of his patrons?

I heard a wailing noise in the background. Was this the weird wailing that had been reported or a poorly resident?

“Who’s making that noise?” I asked hesitantly, as part of me just didn’t want to know. Knowing could lead to bad news.

“My dad.”

Of any answers I’d been expecting, that wasn’t one of them. “Pardon?” I’d clearly misheard.

“It’s. My. Father. Making. That. Noise.”

“What are you talking about, Theo?”

“Theo, where is she? Where’s your mum?” wailed out. And then the reality of the situation hit.

“Oh my fucking God. Is your dead father there?”

“For the third time of telling you, YES. Edward Landry is in da house.”

“On my way.”

It was time to meet my father-in-law. Our new resident ghost.

It took less than a minute for me to whizz over to Theo. When I saw his face, guilt sank into my chest immediately for not being by his side tonight. How could I have known his dad would appear though?

Walking through the open door, I closed it behind me and looked at the man knelt on the floor. He looked like I would imagine an older brother of Theo’s to look like. Edward’s ghost was permanently forty-something.

He began to wail again, and Theo also wailed out, “Help.” That was enough for my ears.

“Edward, QUIET, we have guests trying to sleep. Theo, grow a pair,” I whisper-hissed.

Edward did shut up and instead stared at me, looking me up and down. “So you are Shelley, my son’s wife. What has happened to women’s attire? You look like one of my sheep.”

I folded my arms across the chest of my cream fluffy pyjamas. “Edward, we have much to talk about, but you’re not doing it here.” I sighed. “Unless you’re trapped to this room.”

“I have been trapped to this room for years. Invisible to all,” Edward said. “But now you can see and hear me. It is a miracle.”

There were a few things I'd call it. Miracle was not one of them.

"We'll escort you to the living room, Dad, if we can," Theo said. "Stand up and follow me."

Edward was still on the floor, gazing into space. It was like we were at the theatre watching a one-actor monologue as he reached a hand out dramatically.

"I have been trying to get you all to see me for so long and now it has happened. After all these years," Edward announced. He let Theo pull him up, staring at their joined hands as if he couldn't believe the touch was real. Edward followed Theo out through the doorway, turning back around to me, his eyes wide. "I could not leave this room, Shelley. Years I have been in here. Now, look at me, I am walking around my home once more."

How long Edward had been around the place and what had changed for him to now be visible and audible was a mystery to be solved indeed, but for now, the main thing was to get him to our side of the house so the B&B guests could sleep undisturbed for the rest of the night.

And I'd said I didn't want the B&B interfering in our lives!

When I'd thought my father-in-law was on the 'other side', I'd meant the afterlife, not the B&B.

Finally, we were all in the living room. Edward looked around, his face scrunching up.

"What year is it now?"

"2019," Theo told him.

"I feel very strange because the bedroom still echoes with its past. I see the things that used to be there. Yes, before you ask, I *am* aware that I am a ghost, an apparition, a spirit. I also know you must be a spirit because it's impossible for you to be alive in this year of 2019."

"We'll explain things when you've had a little more time to adjust, Edward," I told him. "For now, let's just get you comfortable here. Look around the place a little. This side is our family home, and the side where your old room was is now Theo's bed and breakfast. We'll find a new room for you on this side if you're staying."

"I'm not going anywhere. Don't even think about calling in a priest. I'm

not an evil spirit. Now I'm back I want to get to know my son and reunite with my wife. So on that matter, where is Mary?"

"She's out with—"

"—a friend," I quickly interrupted Theo.

"That's what I was going to say, Shelley," Theo huffed. "Mum has found another ghost who she can travel around with as they aren't tethered anywhere. Otherwise, she's stuck in the house."

"But when will she be back? I mean, she has stayed out all night with this friend? What will people think?"

"No one will think anything because it's now 2019 and women can go out on their own if they want to. Plus, all the *people* you'll have known will be dead," I told him.

He gazed upward, back into his West End performance of 'Woe is me'. "I don't remember dying. Just appearing in the room with your mother. She couldn't see me, though I could see her. We just were there. It's like there is no time. You're not waiting. You just *are*. But your mum could get out of the room, and I could not. Now I can. *We can be reunited*," he declared with the added dramatic flourish of bringing both his palms together and to his chest. It took everything in me not to yell out *namaste*.

Instead, I quickly looked at the floor because I did not want to meet Theo's gaze.

"I miss my love so very much," Edward continued.

"So, Theo's a vampire, not a ghost like yourself," I threw out quickly to distract Edward from thoughts of Mary and her current location, which was probably legs akimbo somewhere.

Jumping up, Edward made the sign of the cross and yelled that he needed holy water, before diving behind the sofa.

Theo leaned over the back of the sofa. "Father, that is all absolute nonsense. Vampires are not affected by holy water or churches. Shelley and I had our daughter christened in one. I'm not going to harm you, so come and sit back down."

Edward did so, although he did it slowly. "Sorry, Theo. As if you would harm your own father," he said. "Even as a vampire I can tell you are still the sweet boy you always were."

I gave the carpet another inspection, wondering how we went from here. But Edward continued and changed the subject. "You have a daughter?"

Phew.

I nodded. “Yes. She saved Withernsea from a war and is now happily married.”

Theo’s father rubbed at his forehead. “I think perhaps I should speak of what I remember and how things have been and then maybe you could fill me in on the years that have passed afterwards?” he suggested. “Only I’m struggling with the ages of you all. I clearly need a lesson in vampires. I’m assuming that you’re one too, Shelley?”

“I’m descended from a witch and a wyvern, and then became a vampire. But then I passed my wyvern side to my daughter.” It was then I noticed Edward’s forehead rubbing had turned to pulling his hair at the roots.

“Anyway, we can talk more on that later. We’re all fine and Withernsea supernaturals largely accept each other. We have a great community and that’s all you need to know right now.”

“Good, good.”

“Go on, Dad, tell us what you remember,” Theo prompted, and I saw his Adam’s apple jig as he clearly swallowed. My poor husband. How do you tell a loved one you killed them if they don’t remember?

Edward’s monologue returned as he went back in time. Though he was telling us his story, he could not hold eye contact, his past dragging him under until he was back talking to the air.

“It was bitterly cold, and we’d gone outside as a farmhand had reported yet another animal dead. Drained and abandoned they were. It was so very strange. Not a drop of blood left in them. Movement had been heard in the top barn and so I’d sent Theo to investigate. After that, the next thing I remember is waking up in the house and realising I was a ghost. Your mother was there in our room with me, but she had no idea I was there too. It was peaceful though and I knew time kept passing although I had no concept of it. Every day was similar. Mary would leave the room, but not for long. She’d come back and chatter to herself. About new owners and then one day she spoke of you visiting. She prayed you’d see her, and she cried every time you didn’t.”

I didn’t need to look at Theo to know the guilt would be back on his face.

“Then one day she was ecstatic. You were back and she had seen you. She spent more time out of the room then. After a time, she didn’t return much at all. Just the occasional popping in and sitting looking around. I am so relieved you said she has a friend. It’s good she has had someone to talk to, a confidante. I shall look forward to meeting them and thanking them for

keeping my wife company.”

Wow, what an interesting beige carpet I have on this floor.

“But what has changed that means you can now be heard and leave the room. That’s what we need to discover,” Theo said. “Your noise has woken up my residents.”

“Oh yes, the bed and breakfast. How long has that been running?” Edward queried.

“Just a couple of nights, but they have been complaining about the mysterious noises that I now know are down to you,” Theo told him.

“Can we carry on with what else you remember about your past?” I asked Edward. “Is there anything unusual that you can remember from before you died? Did you discover what had happened to the animals?”

Edward was silent for a moment. “Years ago, a gentleman with a very pale pallor came and asked about our home. Said it would be the perfect place for him to live. He took an unusual interest in Theo too, asking how old he was. You were a teenager then, Theo. I remember that day well. How concerned I was as he was a *very* strange person. He’d keep trying to stare at me, asking me to concentrate on his face. I told him to leave. I wouldn’t look at him directly because he gave me the jitters. In the end, he said he’d return in the future. I tried to make it clear that over my dead body would I ever sell the place to him. It was yours to inherit, son. He threatened me then, saying he’d never mentioned paying and ‘over my dead body’ was a distinct possibility. I told him to get off my land. That this place was our farm, our family home, and that’s how it would stay. Forever.”

“I know it’s a long time ago, but could you remember your exact words?” I asked him.

Edward shook his head. “I cannot.”

I sucked my top teeth for a moment and then I closed my eyes and let my webs sink in around the house, feeling them wander into the room I’d always left alone—Theo’s parents’ room. Sure enough, I felt the tingle of magic there.

“You created a curse or an enchantment somehow,” I informed Edward, whose eyes were wide having seen the blue webs leave my hands. They went wider when I mentioned the word ‘curse’. “It can’t be a coincidence that since the B&B has opened, you can now be seen and heard, so I assume that’s the root cause of this. Your intention for the house to be nothing other than a family home and farm has been challenged by Theo’s new business.

The original person you threatened isn't here, but a new business owner is. It just happens to be your son."

Edward nodded his head in agreement as all became clear. He turned to look at Theo. "She's a woman of high intellect is your wife, son. You've done very well for yourself there. Did she come with a good dowry too?"

My arms folded across my chest and my jaw set taut. *Not this old-fashioned shit again.* Ready to give Edward a piece of my mind, I laser focused my eyes on him to find his were twinkling with amusement.

"I'm messing with you, lovely. You'll find I do have quite a sense of humour. It has simply been in abeyance while I've been an unsettled ghost. Now you've explained what's been happening and why I'm back, I feel I can be more myself."

"So you know times have changed dramatically since you owned the farm?" I enquired.

"Oh yes, Mary has come into the room chuntering away to herself many a time about how things were different. I'm not sure I'm fully reconciled with it all yet. However, I love my wife and so will adapt to anything she may wish to tell me about her that is changed now." He clapped his hands together. "So, can you contact her at all, son, and get her home? Then we can be one big happy family again. Me and your mum, and you and Shelley, with Goodacres back in action."

"You could help with the B&B," Theo said, a smile appearing on his face.

"Why would you want to still run that now I'm back? We can get back to the good, old days. One big happy farming family, plus Shelley of course."

Theo looked at me aghast.

"I think it's time you were told our side of things," I said. Then I got up and headed for the door.

"Where are you going, Shelley?" Theo asked, his brow creased, and his voice getting higher with his increasing panic.

"I've remembered I've a lot to do at work," I told him.

"But it's not four am yet and you don't work Saturdays," my desperate husband protested.

"I have to go in today as Cupid took up so much of my time yesterday. I thought I'd told you," I lied. "You'll be busy anyway, getting your father up to date with *everything* that's been happening since his last remembered thought."

“Everything?” Theo visibly swallowed again, this time actually touching his throat.

“Oh it’s so lovely spending time with you, son. Let Shelley go and get her work done, and we can continue getting re-acquainted with each other. I would like to learn how you became a vampire, and of course more about how Mary spends her time outside of the house.”

“That’s perfect then,” I said. “See you both later.”

I escaped before Theo dived at my legs, begging me to help him.

My heart wanted me to stay in that room and support him, but my head knew that Theo had to learn to deal with things on his own. In this situation he couldn’t find a new distraction. He had to face his truth.

And I would be there for him afterwards. Of course, I would. But this—facing his father—he needed to do alone.

Grabbing my o-neg from the kitchen, I quickly drank it down before whizzing to work.

CHAPTER 10

ALYSSA

I spent Friday evening with my family. My brother Rhett had come to eat dinner with us and so I was able to relax as my mother's focus was on nagging Rhett about whether or not he'd found a mate yet.

"I don't know what it is with you boys. Darius was on the shelf, and you're headed the same way. Whereas Alyssa bonded at sixteen."

"And look how well that's turned out for her," Rhett said, before his eyes met mine and he mouthed, "Sorry."

I just shrugged. I knew what it was like to be under my mum's interrogation. My brother was a good guy, so I'd give him a pass to throw me under the bus.

"Do you ever think it might be because you mention it every five seconds and also declare my single status and amazing eligibility to the female wolves and their relatives all the time, Mum?" Rhett continued.

"What's wrong with that? Darius is now the alpha of the pack, has a gorgeous wife, and three beautiful children," Mum protested.

Rhett arched a brow. "His wife came from outside of the pack. I know he was friends with Sierra, but Mum, the way you describe us is cringe. Truth is, I don't get much action in the pack as you're always going on about what a good son I am."

"Well, you are."

"Yes, but everyone knows if they get us, they get you."

"Oh boy. Bomb detonated," Dad said, getting to his feet.

Mum stood up and put her hands on her hips. "Sit down, William," she ordered. Dad was being addressed by his full name which showed there was trouble afoot. He did as he was told.

“Would you care to explain what you mean, son, by your words?” she said with a saccharine sweetness.

“Not particularly. I’d like to put them back in my mouth, change to my wolf and run off,” Rhett said with brutal honesty.

“Pity then that you’re going nowhere.” Mum closed the dining room door and came back to the table. If my brother tried to make a run for it, he wasn’t getting past Mum.

“Mum, you are the most loving, amazing, supportive mother...” Rhett began.

“I know that already. That’s why I don’t see the problem.”

“It’s because of your support. It’s so unfailing and incredible that instead it comes across like you’re desperate to get me off your hands. The women of the pack either think I must be awful in real life and you’re trying to get rid of me, or that you are such a son worshipper that you’ll not cut the apron strings and they’ll be marrying you too.”

“So they think they need factor fifty, full protection against the son worshipper?” I explained helpfully, unable to resist a quip when it came to my mind so easily.

My mum’s face showed that she didn’t think it was funny.

“Let me get this straight. The fact I know that you’d make a good mate and I inform people of this, is the reason you don’t have one?”

“More like the reason I have to go outside the pack for some schmexy times. But of course, if I don’t date pack, I’m unlikely to bond with pack.”

“But you haven’t bonded with anyone outside the pack either.”

“Damn straight. I’m having some fun before I have to settle down. Have you seen Darius lately? With being the pack alpha, having three children, and mainly, having Kim, he’s permanently knackered.”

“He’s so happy though,” Mum retorted.

“So am I, and I’m also full of beans,” Rhett countered.

“Fine,” Mum said with authority. “I won’t big you up anymore. In fact, I’m going to do the exact opposite and then you can see that the problem is not me. I’ll expect an apology when your reputation stinks and for you to beg me to praise you again.”

“Okay, Mum. Let’s give it a try,” Rhett said. “In the meantime, you can tell everyone how wonderful Alyssa is instead.”

“Yes, I can,” Mum replied, but her voice was slightly strained. She retook her seat, and the table went unusually quiet.

“It’s because I’m an alpha female, isn’t it?” I said, my voice low. “Because I killed another wolf. The other pack are wary of me.”

“It’s more that you’re seen as wilful and unpredictable,” Dad explained. “We didn’t know you’d gone to the circus. You’ve always stood up to authority. We admire how you’re independent, but others are used to docile women who are happy to be doted on and to have a family. The Phelan women just aren’t made that way, and I for one love that. I like you and your mother’s strengths. I get to care for your mother like my male wolf craves, but the fact your mum can be quite feisty makes her more beguiling. It’s like the mating bond is 99% quenched but there’s always that extra 1% I strive for, crave.”

Rhett and I were trying to avoid the fact our parents were clearly on the cusp of boning.

“That’s what Darius has with Kim too, isn’t it?” I said, realising what had probably attracted his wolf to her.

“Yes,” Dad said.

“I’m all for a feisty female. All the ones I’ve met so far are just... bland,” Rhett added. I saw when the truth dawned on him. “That’s why I’ve not bonded. They’ve all been too boring.”

“Whereas I need someone who will accept me for me. Bartholomew did. That’s why I bonded with him,” I stated.

Mum patted me on the back. “And someone else will, love, in time.”

“I know.” I nodded my head along with my words. “Shelley is going to help find me some matches. I’m going to go on a couple of dates.”

“Oh that’s so good of her,” Mum said. Her and Dad were really fond of Shelley and Theo. “That’s settled then. Alyssa is going on a couple of dates, and I’m not going to praise Rhett anymore. Dessert?” Mum asked.

Rhett and I declined when Dad raised a brow at Mum.

“I think I’ll go home now,” Rhett declared. “Want to stay at mine tonight, Lys?”

“Yes please.” Staying on the sofa at Rhett’s caravan was much preferable to hearing my parents at it.

“So how are you really?” My brother asked when we left the house. “It can’t

be easy being there on your own with them.”

“It’s okay,” I replied. “I’m enjoying my new job, and then up until this week I’d been so pre-occupied with losing my ‘mate’ I’d not been paying much attention to what had been going on around me.”

“You said mate just then like you’re not sure Bartholomew is—or was.”

“It was something Mary said to me. She wondered if I was pining over my first love rather than Bartholomew being my true mate. That’s why I’m going on the dates. It was Mary’s suggestion.” I didn’t mention that after these dates, if I still felt bonded to Bartholomew, I was going to go see him. While my brother might think it was a good idea, he was more likely to warn me from doing so given how I’d been the past few months.

“That sounds a great idea. And you never know, you might properly bond with someone, meaning Mum can direct all her focus on you and leave me alone.”

“Umm, but she is leaving you alone. She said she’s going to back off.”

Rhett chuckled. “Oh, Alyssa, how young and naïve you still are. Mum said she was going to stop praising me. In other words, she is now going to slag me off to show me the error of my ways, of my being critical of her, until I beg her to return to her former utterly devoted praising.”

The truth of his words sunk in.

“They say I’m a badass alpha female, but I think my mother is the top wolf around here.”

“Yup. She knows when to keep quiet and when to speak up. That’s the difference, and she uses passive aggressiveness to get her way often too.”

I thought about Rhett’s words. Mum managed to be alpha and yet maintain a happy and equal partnership with my dad. Maybe there was a way for me to live a partly independent life after all and not just become one of the pack.

And the need for independence was never felt more when I looked at where I would be sleeping that night. On a sofa surrounded by pizza boxes, dirty mugs, abandoned beer tins, and smelly socks.

I’d not expected to find myself at the dating agency the next morning, but an early morning text from Shelley had me eagerly leaving Rhett’s place the

moment I'd read it.

"Sorry if I look a little dishevelled, only I slept on Rhett's sofa as Mum and Dad were horny," I explained as Shelley let me into the premises.

"Poor you. Sorry if I look dishevelled, but I very quickly escaped my house and the impending drama that was about to ensue. Luckily, we don't leave any wood around our house that can be used as a stake."

I was instantly intrigued. "What drama? Is it one of the guests? I'd bet it's Berry. She seems most likely to have drama out of everyone."

"It's Theo's... father. He's the one behind all the banging and wailing. He's a ghost." As I followed Shelley back to her office and took a seat, she brought me up to date with what had been happening.

"Oh wow. What on earth is going to happen when he finds out about Mary?"

"Why do you think I left? The man's about to discover his son murdered him and his wife is having sex with another ghost. Thank goodness she took another bedroom when we moved in because otherwise Edward would no doubt have heard all the gory details about Alistair."

Suddenly, Shelley went silent.

"What is it?"

"Edward said he was with Mary, but she started to be there less once we moved in. Less. That means she's still been going in that room, her old married one. She told us she wanted it left alone. I realise now she must have meant for us not to change it. She wanted to keep it as it was."

"It's no different to any widow really, I should imagine," I said. "You miss your old love, even if you move on."

"Yeah, true. Anyway, sorry, I didn't mean to blather on about my home drama, although it does keep you up to date with the goings on at your place of work. Let's get around to why you are here now though. Dates! I'll fire up the computer and put your details in and we'll see what the algorithm suggests."

Shelley took some details from me and inputted them. "While it's doing its thing, I'll go to the kitchen and fetch you a nice cup of Jax's coffee shall I?"

"Oh, yes please," I said, my mouth watering as it realised that a) I'd not had a drink yet today and b) it was Jax's home blend on offer.

Shelley left the office, and I sat tapping my foot for a moment. It was no good. I couldn't sit still wondering what the computer was doing. Getting to

my feet, I walked to behind Shelley's desk and moved the mouse so that the screen came back on. My top matches were displayed.

And right at the very top, my number one match was Bartholomew Simpson.

He was still in the database.

Was that because he was again looking for love, or more likely he'd just not got around to cancelling his membership?

It didn't really matter. It just delivered yet another blow.

CHAPTER 11

MARY

Alistair had kept waking me up for more nookie, and after six orgasms I now wanted to sleep properly. Dawn was breaking and I wanted to get a few hours in so I could ‘recharge’ ready for back at the B&B. I’d said I would look after the B&B on a weekend alongside Shelley, who no longer worked on a Saturday.

“I’m going to head back, sweetie,” I told him.

“Okay, I’ll see you again soon,” he said, kissing me on the lips. But it wasn’t the ones on my mouth he kissed so it was another thirty minutes before I eventually managed to get away. I swept into the house feeling boneless from all the o’s but as sex could recharge me, I was solid enough for the time being. It was then I heard the shouting.

“*What do you mean you drained me? I’m dead, because of you? Is that what you’re saying, Theo?*” Though the voice was muffled, coming from the living room, I’d managed to work out the words.

Theo had killed someone? Oh my god. I feared this might happen again someday. Not a patron surely? My inner mama bear roared into action. I would take the blame if it came to it. I’d go to a supernatural ghost prison if such a thing existed and was necessary. You never know it might be time for me to try some girl-on-girl action or a prison guard/prisoner real life role play.

I floated through the door, and then froze in place as I came face-to-face with my husband.

“Mary. Oh, thank God, my love.”

He threw himself at me, kissing me all over. Well, not all over *a la Alistair*, but the top of my head, my forehead, my cheeks, temples, mouth.

“What the actual fuck?” I said, causing my dear hubby to back away and look at me with a grimace.

“Is she possessed, son?”

“No, Dad, she’s just embracing modern language. We swear sometimes. It’s not clever, but frequently the word ‘fuck’ says succinctly what a clean sentence cannot.”

Edward turned to Theo. “So you killed me? What the actual fuck?” He looked at me. “I said that correctly, right?”

I nodded. “Ten out of ten. Now sit back down on the sofa, fill me in on the events that have led up to this moment and we’ll explain what happened with Theo,” I ordered.

“*Mary*... it’s kind of like I have a new wife... you’re very... spirited.”

“Maybe because I am a spirit,” I sassed back. Then I turned to my son who looked so damn stressed. He was clearing his throat, swallowing, pacing, frowning, and fidgeting. He kept mumbling to himself and then shaking his head.

“Theo, sit down. Your mother’s here. We’ve got this,” I said firmly.

Theo’s rabbit in headlights wide eyes focused on me and I watched his shoulders relax somewhat. He sat on the sofa.

“Can you sit?” I asked my husband.

“Yes.”

“Good.” I sat down alongside Theo and pointed to the chair opposite. Edward took my lead and sat down also.

“Do you remember that weird guy who visited the house that time and threatened you?” I asked.

Edward nodded.

“He was a vampire. He came back and turned Theo. Now with the normal way of what’s called siring a vampire, the new fledgling will be fed until they can handle the blood lust. But Matthew, our main farmhand, staked the vampire. Theo was a hungry new-born, and we were all like big, juicy, milk-filled breasts to him.”

“You could have said bottles, Mum.”

“Do you want to handle this or shall I?” I challenged.

“Your mum’s right. I understand it better thinking of big, juicy, milk-filled breasts because I remember how good hers looked when she was having you. A cold glass bottle just doesn’t give the same image, son.”

Theo stayed quiet but looked a little green.

“Anyway, Theo killed us all, but it wasn’t his fault. If anything, Matthew inadvertently caused it, but I think we’d have all ended up dead anyway. If Theo’s sire had stayed undead, I’m sure we were next on his list to either be turned ourselves or drained. Given his interest when he visited was only on Theo, my guess is we’d have been killed. Who knows what the vampire would have done to us anyway, so maybe when fated to die, Theo actually did it the most painless way. I can’t imagine his sire would have made it so quick.”

“Why have you never explained it like this to me before?” Theo asked. “It makes me see the whole situation in a different light. Not that I still don’t feel extreme remorse, but seeing that you probably would have died anyway, and a worse death at that.”

“Because, Theo, you’ve got to work these things out for yourself and stop torturing your mind with it all. I do try to reassure you and so does Shelley, but this is something only you can make peace with. It’s only now, chatting with your father, that I’m seeing a bigger picture. I’m your mother, but I don’t hold all the answers. We all continue to learn day by day.”

Theo nodded. “I’ll take it from here, Mum. Shelley said I needed to stand on my own two feet with things and stop letting others help me out. She’s right. It’s just I forgot others don’t hold all the answers, we’re all just muddling through.”

Finally, it looked like Theo might be beginning to understand how he needed to accept himself fully. As both man and vampire.

“I spent many years trying to exist with the guilt of having murdered my family and I was desperate to buy the family home, which had gone up for sale and been acquired by the Gilbert family by auction.”

“Gilbert? That was the surname of the veterinarian who would have been around the day everyone died. Did you drain him too? John Gilbert?” Edward asked.

“I don’t know,” Theo answered. “I only knew who was around at the time before I was turned, so I know I drained my aunt and uncle, two cousins, and some farmhands, but after that I don’t know. I was in a frenzy.” Theo looked determined. “I’m big on research but I’ve always avoided looking into the

news from that period. It's now time for me to do so. To find out exactly what was reported and who I drained. It's possible that the Gilberts who bought the house did so because I killed their relative. I can't not know the answers to this. It's time I properly confronted my past and then maybe I can accept what happened."

"How did you get the house back?" Edward asked Theo.

"Shelley helped me. Jim sold it back to us."

I noticed Theo didn't impart the fact that Shelley had put a glamour on him so that Jim Gilbert thought he'd sold the place to Simon Cowell. Seemed like Theo had had enough of complete honesty for one day.

"Why don't you go get some sleep now, son?" I didn't so much as suggest to Theo, as order him. "I need to speak to your father about my life since I've become a ghost."

Theo didn't need any more encouragement to leave, given he knew what would be coming up in conversation. It wasn't until he got to the door that he stopped and turned to me.

"Are you sure you don't need me by your side, Mum? Maybe it's time I supported you for a change."

"I appreciate the offer, and another time I might take you up on it, but your face turned sallow at the words juicy breasts and I'm about to say a lot worse, so I think it's better you sleep."

Theo nodded, and then told his father he'd hopefully see him later. I guessed at this stage we didn't know if Edward was going to be around for good. Then he left and it was just the two of us.

"How do you want me to deliver my update? Very carefully like a ewe delivering her calf, or quick like a ewe in distress and the vet just yanking that fucker out?" I asked Edward.

"I'm going to choose carefully if that's okay. I'm a little apprehensive of what you're going to say and so I'd like a gradual build up."

"Gotcha."

I sat quietly for a moment as I thought of the best way I could possibly start this conversation.

Edward squirmed in his chair.

"Right, okay. When I realised I was a ghost, I had no idea you were there with me at all. None. I believed you had moved onto Heaven. As you know there's not a time concept to things. All I knew was I was unsettled, and I'd float around the house trying to get the owner to see me. Of course, they

never did. Then one day I heard a voice, and I just knew it was Theo, but he couldn't see me either. He'd ask to buy the house and the owners would throw him out, threaten him with the police. When the house passed to their son, Jim, he wouldn't sell to him either."

I broke off to consider my next words a little.

"Then Shelley came with him, and after that they bought the house, and they could see me. Actually, see me. The Landry's once more owned Goodacres Farm and it had clearly changed things. Since then, I've lived here, being able to be seen when I'm not exhausted. I can't change my appearance but as I spent time with all these modern-day people, I changed. Became a different woman: confident, assured, *free*."

"You were always confident and assured, it's just the past didn't give women a voice, and I see they have more of one now. But free? Depending on your use of that word, you *weren't*, *aren't* necessarily *free*," Edward stated.

"You need to understand that I thought you had moved onto Heaven and so I've mourned you, missed you severely, but accepted that you were gone and I was a widow. A ghost, but a widow."

"Ah," Edward said solemnly. "I don't think I'm going to like what you say next, am I?"

I shook my head. "I was lonely and as Shelley runs a dating agency, she could see that. One of her colleagues got me a date with another ghost. He came here for a meal on Valentine's. We hit it off, and, well, we did some other things too."

I saw Edward's hands ball into fists.

"I know how I'd feel if it was the other way around, but I can't change the past any more than anyone else can. You were gone, Edward, and I was still here. So... I moved on. But now... you're back, and I've always said you were my soulmate." I placed my head in my hands. "This is such a mess."

Edward sighed loudly. "Mary, I'm not going to lie. The fact you've lain with another man cuts deep, but you thought me gone, so you have not betrayed our wedding vows. It's til death do us part, so you've a pass there. I forgive you for seeing this man on Valentine's. What's important is the here and now. Now you know I'm back we can be reunited, can't we?"

"I didn't just see him on Valentine's though. I've continued to date Alistair since. Because we got 'together', I was able to leave the house, as long as I was with him. It's been over a year now. But it's just been sex,

Edward. I'm fond of him but I don't love him."

Edward began pulling at his hair. "Al... Ali... Alistair?" he eventually managed to utter.

"Yes, w-why?" Watching my husband's reaction was making me extremely apprehensive.

He shot to his feet and began pacing the room. "For the last year I've been assuming there was some maid here who kept sneaking into a nearby room with a butler or something in her spare time. I couldn't make out your voice through the walls, but I have repeatedly heard, 'Oh my god, Alistair, again, again,' and 'Alllliiistaaaaiirrrr. Yes, yes, yeeessssss'." He mimicked it and it looked like the famous scene from *When Harry Met Sally* except my orgasms had been real.

"I've been listening to you climax with your boyfriend. Fuck my fucking new existence," he stated.

For once in my life, I wished I'd go wispy so I could escape Edward's angry and tortured gaze, but of course I didn't. What on earth did I do now?

CHAPTER 12

SHELLEY

As soon as I walked back into my office with the coffees and found Alyssa staring at the screen, her expression crestfallen, I knew what had happened. Bloody algorithm!

“Lys, come and sit back down and get your coffee and we’ll discuss what the computer has come up with,” I said with authority. She moved like she was sleepwalking, only half aware of her actions and then she slumped into the seat opposite my desk. The girl couldn’t catch a break and my heart went out to her.

I read the results myself. Bartholomew had come up in first place. Poor Alyssa. He really was her perfect match.

I sat back and took a sip of my coffee.

“Bartholomew must have not cancelled his direct debit on his membership. He’s not been active on the account though for a very long time. I’m going to email and sort out refunding him. I really do need some more assistance at the agency. I’m usually on the ball about chasing up inactive accounts, but things have been so hectic of late.”

“It’s fine. Let’s just forget about him and move onto who’s second on the list,” she replied dismissively.

I felt my expression soften and made an effort to speak kindly but with authority too. “We’re not going to skirt over what the algorithm said, Alyssa. We’re going to talk about it all. Now, you want to date two guys to see if Bartholomew was just a crush. I got Theo to change my settings as I don’t usually have sixteen-year-olds on my books. However, knowing you as I do, I decided it would be a good idea to see if this helped you with the bonding. It’s said your top match is Bartholomew. We can’t ignore that. It’s a sign to

me that it's more than likely you have bonded with him, rather than it being a crush. Asking as your friend, rather than a dating agency owner, how does that make you feel?"

"Frustrated," Lys replied. "But I'm determined to go on some dates. If I give dating other guys a try and take time to listen to my wolf more, I'm hoping I'll come to a decision soon about whether or not to go see Bartholomew and fight for him. Even if that means I have to move to Hull and leave the pack."

"But you wolves are so close knit," I stated.

"We are, but Bartholomew is close to his sister. Wolf shifters don't trump other species. If anything, humans are so very delicate. My wolf would be happy, and she'd know in time she'd make her own family, and I wouldn't be too far away from home..."

Alyssa's words trailed off.

"But you wouldn't be supported by your own mum and be celebrating the new life within the pack; that all-encompassing, somewhat suffocating, family spirit?"

"Yeah. That's made me think of Mum's cheerleading of my brother Rhett. She just loves us all beyond measure. That's all she's guilty of. Being a proud mum."

"Most of us mums would sacrifice ourselves and anyone else in order for our children to be happy," I said. "As long as your mum knew you were happy, she'd accept the fact you lived away from the pack."

"I guess." Alyssa paused for a moment and stared into space. "I wonder what Bartholomew's mum was like? It's a shame I never got to know her," she said.

"If it comes to you going to see Bartholomew then you can ask him about her. You can still get to know her through photos and memories."

"True."

"I know it's not the same, but you have to work with what you have. Anyway, your plan sounds very sensible to me, Lys. You go on the dates. If they don't work out, then go to see Bartholomew. You see if there's a way forward or not."

But rather than looking more positive, Alyssa's shoulders remained slumped and her expression downcast.

"Oh, Alyssa. You will get through the other side of this. Talk to me. What's on your mind?"

I saw her hand tremble. “You know what I was like. How maudlin and distraught I’ve been. What if the dates don’t work out and so I go to see Bartholomew and he rejects me, leaving me broken again? What if I stay that way and can’t get back from that?”

“You were broken, no doubt about it, but look at you now. Here at the agency enquiring about going on dates. You’ve got through it and you can do it again.”

Alyssa met my gaze and looked away.

“Okay, maybe not through it. But you’re facing it. One way or another, you’ve got to reach a conclusion, and right now, you’ve not ended things with Bartholomew, even though he’s ended things with you. His reasoning might be clouded due to his grief, but fantastic match or not, he can still choose to reject you. Love doesn’t always triumph unfortunately.”

“Let’s talk about the other matches,” she said, changing the subject.

“We’re going to focus on the next two on the list. Your first match is Glynn Maple.”

“Glynn from my pack Glynn?” she said, her nose wrinkling.

“Yes. You are an eighty percent match.”

“All I can remember is that when he was younger, he used to wet himself a lot,” Lys stated.

“And does he still do this now?”

“No.”

I held out my hands in a ‘there you go’ manner.

“Okay, set us up. Who’s the other guy?”

“Your third match is Boone. He’s a brownie. A kind of fae. He’s a seventy percent match. When would you like to go on these dates?”

“I’m off out with Charlie later on this afternoon, so how about one on Sunday and one on Monday? I might as well get them over and done with,” she said.

I sighed. “That’s not the right attitude to dating, is it? Over and done with? Alyssa, we are setting you up with the potential love of your life. You need to go on these dates ready to give them your all. Your future husband could be one of these two guys.”

“You’re right. I must give them a fair hearing.”

“I’ll sort the dates out and get back to you. Where would you like to meet them?”

“Erm... Red’s Steakhouse for Glynn, and for Boone... what do fae men

like?”

“Brownies like places to be exceptionally clean. Also, know they can be easily offended.”

“How long has Boone been on your books?”

“A while now and that’s how I know he can be easily offended! However, the computer says he’s a decent match, so I advise you see how it goes.”

“Okay. Gosh, he likes things clean. That rules out many places I know and especially my bedroom.” She laughed. “That’s a joke by the way.”

“I know your dad and older brother; I know it is.” I laughed though too.

“What about Jetty’s?” Alyssa suggested.

“Erm, no, he’s banned from there.”

“Why?”

“He tried to help them clean away their dishes. Things got a little out of hand.” *Like he licked the bowls clean.* “Hey, how about you meet Boone Sunday and Glynn Monday? They do litter picking on the beach from eleven on Sundays. You could help the environment while getting to know Boone.”

“Yeah, okay. Let’s do that.”

“That’s all then, Alyssa. We have two dates for you. I wish you all the best and please keep me informed as to how they go. How about you come meet me Tuesday at the dating agency? I’ll stay later.”

“Theo said I could finish at four if needed, so I could get to you about four-fifteen?”

“Great. Let me put that in my diary.” I clicked into my computer. “Done.”

“Now, let’s sort your life out,” Alyssa declared.

“What do you mean?”

“You’ve run off to the office in order to avoid the fact pandemonium is probably happening in your house at the moment. Mary might have returned, given she is supposed to be looking after the place *with you* on a Saturday. The wizards are due to check out at midday and who’s going to deal with that if neither of you are there?”

I leaned back in my chair and sighed. “It’s all too much, Alyssa. I’m having a baby. My weekends should be a rest, not me covering the B&B. Plus, what about your annual leave or if you’re sick? Theo needs another member of staff. I need maternity cover. Kim’s coming back as I go on mine, but we need someone to cover Sam’s.”

“Isn’t Lucy due back?”

“I don’t know. Not heard from her and Frankie in a while. I might just send a text and see what her plans are.” Though I remembered the time Lucy and Kim were last together on my previous maternity leave, changing my policies and getting into competition with each other. “I need to give it some thought, but not take too long about it.”

Alyssa nodded. “I’ll be checking in on you too.”

I smiled.

“Come on then.” I stood up. “I’d better go see what’s happening.”

I attempted to enter the house like a cat burglar, making no sound, but the moment I passed through the door, Mary ran out of the living room.

“Oh, thank goodness. Shelley, I find myself not knowing what to do. I need the advice of another woman.”

“Where’s Theo?” I asked.

“I sent him off to sleep.”

“And Edward?”

“I asked him to go back to his room or to explore the house or something. He wasn’t happy, but I said I needed time to become accustomed to the fact he was back and to think.”

The bell dinged then from the B&B side. “I’ll go,” I told Mary. “But I promise I’ll be back, and we can talk.”

I’d literally been saved by the bell, even if only for a short time.

“Hey, Kane,” I greeted the smiling wizard who stood waving a key. The others had congregated near their car outside and were trying to assemble luggage.

“Morning, Shelley. I know we had until twelve but we’re ready for the off.” He lowered his voice. “We’re all missing our wives and kids, although none of us will admit it. We were all full of the ‘guy’s trip’ but found we can’t drink like we used to.”

I took the key from him and settled their bill.

“Seriously, we don’t need a discount. We expect to hear noise from other

residents in a B&B,” he protested.

“Well, ours turned out to be the ghost of my father-in-law. Hopefully things will quieten down now.” As I said the words, I wasn’t sure I believed them. “But Theo insisted on a discount, so you get one. If I can ask you to complete his survey and leave a review, I’d be grateful. My husband’s rather nervous about it all with it being so new.”

“I certainly will. We thought the place was fantastic.”

“That’s good to know.” I became distracted by the activity outside the window. “Erm, what’s going on out there? They keep taking cases out and putting them back in.”

“We found a great boutique. *Ebony*’s. Never seen menswear like it, and then we bought enough of Jax’s blend to last us a decade. Of course, we then had to get some things for the wives and kids too, and now... we can’t fit it all in the car.”

“And you’ve not thought to do a spell to make everything shrink-to-fit?” I queried.

“I have, but clearly, *they* haven’t. Seems like beer has fogged their brains. Luckily, I’m the designated driver,” he said. “Thanks again, Shelley. I’m sure we’ll see you again next year.”

With that, Kane walked outside chuckling to himself. I carried on looking through the window until he’d done the spell and fell about laughing as his friends groaned. It dawned on me then that these guys had had a great time together and the B&B had been part of that. I realised that in some ways, Theo’s B&B wasn’t that far removed from my dating agency. We both wanted to get people together with a happy outcome.

I heard Edward wailing again and sighed heavily.

Maybe I should do a Theo and go to bed and let them get on with it?

But I knew I couldn’t. In my heart I was a matchmaker, and I wanted to know if there was a ghost of a chance for Mary and Edward.

CHAPTER 13

THEO

Yes, I needed sleep, or I'd feel ill. But as I got ready for bed, I felt restless. My father was here. My mother was downstairs having just found out he was back. What if my father disappeared again? Resigned to the fact I'd feel like I had a really bad hangover, I left our bedroom when I heard Shelley call out for my mum.

I loitered outside the living room door eavesdropping.

"Okay, Mary. I've dealt with the B&B stuff for now, so tell me what's on your mind," Shelley asked her. On this occasion I felt my nosiness was warranted as I was going to go see my father and if Mum wasn't interested, I was going to talk to him about it.

"I'm so utterly shocked," Mum confessed. "Edward's been there all those years, and I never knew. What must that have been like? I know time doesn't pass the same in the afterlife, but still, he could see me, Shelley, but I couldn't see him."

"You can't change the past, so the first thing you need to do is give yourself a pass over any guilt from that, Mary. You couldn't get Theo to see you at first either."

"That's why I feel bad. I know what it's like. How frustrating it is."

"Maybe so, but that's not what's important right now, is it?"

"No. Not really. I feel so confused. I don't feel like I cheated on him, and yet I feel guilty I've had a lover, and he knows. He's *heard*, Shelley. He's heard me shouting out Alistair's name."

"Oh dear," Shelley said. Outside, I shivered with distaste at the fact I was listening to my mother talk of her sex life *again*. But I wanted—no, *needed*—to know her thoughts, so I stayed where I was.

“You don’t have to make decisions on things overnight, Mary, and as much as he’s always been the one, you don’t know if Edward is the same now. Time as an unseen ghost could have changed his personality. Plus, what if *he* begins to want to see the modern world a little? He might want to sample life beyond you. How will you feel if Edward wants to take a lover?”

“Oh my, you think?”

“It’s a possibility.”

“We might end up in a throuple or a quad.” Jesus, my mother sounded excited about this possibility.

“He might also disappear again as quickly as he came here, or you might re-unite and move on,” Shelley added. It went quiet then.

“Do you think the fact he’s returned could not be because of Theo opening a B&B, but because I should be moving on? I accept why Theo did as he did and I hold on to be around my grandchildren, but that’s for the living as a rule, isn’t it?”

“I’m not sure normal rules apply when your grandchildren are born from the undead. All I can tell you is that no one knows the futu—” Shelley stopped. “Except, Ebony. I wonder if she might know or have an inkling as to why Edward is here and how this will go. Let me phone her. I’ll put her on speaker so you can hear.”

There was movement and then I heard Ebony’s voice.

“Shelley, *darling*. Are you calling about Alyssa, because it will all work out, but I can’t give you any details.”

Alyssa? She knew stuff about Alyssa?

“No, it’s not but do you think you might have called to tell me that before? I’ve been worrying.”

“Do you think that between being a newlywed and running an ever-expanding clothes empire, I have time to update everyone on my many visions? I prioritise, and everything okay with Alyssa means low priority.”

“That answers my question then. I called to ask about Mary and Edward, but all must be going to work out okay there or you’d have called us.”

There was silence.

“Ebony? *Ebony?*”

Henry’s voice came on the line. “Give her a sec, she’s having a vision.”

“Oh, okay.”

It was at that point the door opened. “Just come in, Theo, for God’s sake,” my wife said, rolling her eyes heavenward.

“You knew I was there?”

“I can smell you and hear you, you idiot. I’m a vampire. The only reason I left you there was so your mum could speak freely. Then I remembered she speaks freely anyway.”

I sat on the chair nearby.

Ebony came back on the line. “Shelley? Sorry about that. Things with Theo’s mother and father... I saw an unsettled spirit...”

“Yes, that’s my father,” I interjected.

“Theo...” Ebony said.

“Yes?”

“Could you allow me to finish, sweetheart, otherwise it might all fade.”

“Sorry.”

“This spirit is in your house. I get father...”

Course you do, I just said that.

“I get extreme anger, wanting revenge. An unhappiness with you being the man of the house. This spirit wants you out.”

“What? That can’t be right. My father isn’t like that.”

“I have no specifics, Theo. This is what I’m getting. That’s it. Okay, lovely to talk, but I must dash, byeeeee.”

As if she hadn’t just dropped a bomb, Ebony went back to business as usual. Because it was, for her. She could only deliver her visions and then had to distance herself from them unless indicated otherwise.

The three of us sat staring at each other.

“Maybe Edward is different then. We need to tread carefully around him. Be cautious,” Mum said.

“I’ll look at what protection spells I can put in place to keep us safe while we get to the bottom of things,” Shelley added.

“Do you think it’s true? That Dad wants me out of the house?” I asked, glancing up at both the others to see what they thought. But I knew there *was* truth to it because he’d said about us getting things back as a *farm*.

Shelley and Mary shared an uncertain look, but neither said anything. Of course, they didn’t know the answer any more than I did.

“I’m going to go see Dad,” I told them both, and I got up and left the room.

It was sod's law I would run into Berry and Cap. They'd not wanted a breakfast indoors this morning as they'd decided to watch the sun rise, so I'd made them a breakfast picnic instead.

"Good morning. How was the sunrise?" I asked them.

Berry yawned. "It was delightful, but given the noise began again at three and then we were up so early, we are shattered and going to have a siesta."

My father, typically decided to bang on the door then.

"Theo, this can't go on," Berry snapped. "We'll have to go to look for somewhere else to stay later. I'm sorry, but this isn't working out. You cannot run a B&B with constant noise and interruptions."

"I'm so sorry." I placed a hand on my chest. "It's my father, who's back from the dead."

"What?" Berry looked pale. "But I checked and there were no spirits here."

I shrugged my shoulders. "He's been able to appear since I opened the B&B."

If it was possible, Berry went even paler.

I gave up then. Maybe my B&B was never going to run smoothly. Finally open, my father had arrived to upset everything and now was on a warpath to get me out anyway. Maybe I should just quit, and fade into the background as a house husband and father?

I felt my shoulders slump. "Do it. Find somewhere new and I'll give you a full refund. It's impossible for me to guarantee that my dad will keep quiet. Ebony says he's out for revenge and wants me out of the B&B. I think it's probably just that he wants the place back as a farm. Anyway, I understand."

Cap's forehead creased. "What exactly did Ebony say?"

"She said father, anger, wanting revenge. Wanting me out."

"Fuck," Berry mumbled under her breath.

I had to admit my surprise at hearing her curse.

"As a medium, if there's anything you could do, Berry," I enquired. "But not sending him on, maybe. God, I don't know. I'm at a loss myself right now. Sorry, I know you wanted to come and rest and be free of spirits annoying you, but..." I didn't finish my sentence as she knew what those words would be.

"You go and see your father," she said, as we heard the banging again. "I need some time to think, and I really need some sleep, so ask him to keep it down," she added, moodily.

Cap gave me an apologetic look on behalf of his wife, but he didn't need to. None of this was their fault. It was all mine.

For killing my family.

"You need to stop the banging now," I told my father. "You win. I'll close down the B&B. Your revenge is exacted. If you want me to leave the place, just say so. Or do you want me to run the farm? I don't mind. It won't seem like a penance. I'd considered it anyway."

"What on earth are you talking about?" Dad asked.

"You being angry, wanting revenge, wanting me out. Your noise has finally made my customers want to leave. You win."

"I haven't been banging anything. I've been sitting here thinking about things."

"Oh, Dad, stop lying. Just be honest with me. You despise the fact I killed you and now you wish to make me suffer." I sat on the floor, my arms clutched around my folded knees.

"Don't be ridiculous, Theo. I'll tell you something though, this self-pity come never ending guilt thing needs to stop. It's monotonous and I've only heard it for a few days. I used to kill animals all the time. I'm not sat outside in the barn asking for the pigs and cows' forgiveness, am I? You were an animal who hunted another animal. That's how I see it. No point in harbouring a grudge as you can't bring me back to life. Anyway, there's a chance I can now be with your mum as a ghost forever, so all's well that ends well."

"Stop lying," I yelled at him. "There's no need. You win. I'll stop all this. Tell me how you want the farm and I'll make plans. I'll cancel the rest of the guests, okay? I'm done. I've spent all these decades full of guilt and trying to carry on and I'm just exhausted with it all," I ranted. "I. Am. Done."

My father reached out to put a hand on me, but it passed straight through. Then Mum appeared with Shelley. "What the hell's going on?"

"I give up," I told them both. "I'm closing the Bed and Breakfast. It's what Dad wants."

I heard a door open, and I stepped outside knowing what it would be seeing as I'd been yelling. Cap walked towards me. "I'm so sorry for the

noise again. I'll go and get your refund sorted."

"That's not why I'm here," Cap said, gesturing if he could walk into the room. I nodded my head. Once there, he turned to my father. "What noises have you been making?"

"I have been wailing," my father said. "Which I'm sorry disturbed you, but if you'd been locked in a room for one-hundred-and-two years missing your wife, you'd wail too."

"And then the banging," I added.

"Nope, I've not been doing that," Dad said.

"Yes, you have."

"No, son. I know what I've been doing, thank you."

"And making things fall off the walls," I added.

"I've just been wailing," Dad snapped.

"I've been banging, but not on the walls and doors," my mum said, winking at Cap.

"Not the time, Mary," Shelley said softly.

"Just tell the truth, Dad, please," I begged. I needed to get out of here and go to bed. I'd had enough. I might even go to the caves for a month. I was beyond done.

"I believe he is telling the truth," Cap said. "Your seer is right, but you've got the wrong father."

"Huh?" I said.

"I think you're being haunted by Berry's dad," Cap stated. "Jim Gilbert."

CHAPTER 14

ALYSSA

I was excited to see my bestie. It had been a while and though I still felt a bit awkward about the fact Charlie had age jumped again, she was right, us supes all aged differently. It was our brain age that mattered.

As I walked into Jax's, Charlie was already there. She sprung to her feet and flung her arms around me.

"I missed you, biatch. Sorry about being in a loved-up haze while you were going through shit. I am so very, very sorry."

"Charlie. No more apologies. I asked your mum not to bother you. Actually, I made her promise."

"And you shouldn't have. That's what best friends are for, Lys. I should have been there for you in your time of need."

"You're here now."

She smiled. "I am. Tell me all."

We spent the next hour chattering away, catching up. Yet in some ways it was like we'd not had a short period of time apart at all. Charlie told me about life under the sea and how her husband Kai's carpentry business was going from strength to strength. She said Duke Brishon was currently behaving himself and taking care of the sea without drama.

"I'm actually a little bit bored," she confessed. "I miss the land side."

"What does Kai think of that?"

"He thinks I should look for a job to occupy me while he's working. I might be Queen of Withernsea, but there's not a lot going on with that at the present time. I need to see Mum and Dad more too. They've such a lot on their plate and I want to help. My sibling will be here soon." She sighed. "God, I'm making this all about me when you're going through so much."

“It doesn’t make your concerns any less, just because I’m having a tough time,” I justified.

“Maybe so, but I want to be here for you, so let’s talk through these dates you have coming up. I know Boone. He’s really good looking, but he is tricky. Brownies are mischievous, and fae have a lot of rules. Don’t dance with him and don’t eat any faerie food, okay?”

“I need to be careful. Got it. I can sleep with him though, right?”

“Alyssa Dakota Phelan!”

“I’m just messing with you. I’m certainly not ready to complicate any dates with sex.”

“I think that’s wise, but just in case, no there are no hidden catches to nookie with him. There are if you sleep with Glynn though, aren’t there?”

I nodded. “It’s taken a little more seriously. Like if I go out to dinner with him, I’m definitely indicating part one of courtship. If I let him cook for me, that’s very intimate and allowing him to show me he can provide. Sex is us seeing if we’re compatible. I’m okay with the out to dinner part. That’s just showing I’m interested in seeing where things go, but that’s all.”

Charlie leaned back in her seat and appraised me. “Seems like you have the dates thing worked out in your head, but let’s chat about Bartholomew now. And I want the truth. Not some watered-down version you’ll have given Mum, but all the gory details. No leaving things out thinking it’ll make me feel bad I wasn’t here. We start from now, okay? The past is in the past.”

I knew I needed this. Needed my best friend to hear all the messy parts of my brain and heart.

“Your mum says this dating is to see if I’m just pining for a first love, rather than an unmet bond, but I think I already know the answer. I’ve been completely and utterly broken, up until the time where I saw a woman on the seafront. We got chatting and she advised I go talk to Bartholomew.”

“And have you?”

“No, because then Mary and I were challenging each other to do different things and she challenged me to go on two dates, just in case it was a first love broken heart, and I think that’s wise. But if these don’t work out... gosh, maybe even if they do go well... I think I owe it to myself to go and see him. Let Bartholomew end this face-to-face if that’s what he wants. He ended things by phone. It’s not good enough. I want to see it in his eyes, that’s he’s done. Since I’ve come to the decision to see him, my wolf has quietened and returned.”

“Oh,” Charlie said. “Because you’ve given her hope. Not with the dates, but with the prospect of seeing Bartholomew again.”

I nodded. “I’m scared about what will happen if I see him and he resolutely ends this. Let’s face it, there’s a high probability of that happening. Then what do I do?”

“I’ll stay by your side, Lys. If I have to, I’ll wipe your mind of him. I’ll talk to your wolf.”

And that was where Charlie showed she was Queen. She had part of all the supernaturals of Withernsea within her; had been bestowed with their powers so she could save us all. She was part-wolf shifter, part-vampire, part-everything, and stronger than us all.

“Thank you.”

“Only if I have to, okay? Not for just a broken heart, but for a broken soul and wolf.”

I nodded.

“I’m going to get us another coffee and a chocolate doughnut each. When I’m back you can tell me what you challenged my grandma to do.”

“So you see, I feel guilty, because the wizards said there was nothing they could do. That’s how things went for ghosts.”

“Within their powers, yes. But when you’re the most powerful witch in Withernsea, one of the most powerful there is, then perhaps it’s different. Also, I have access to people those wizards don’t. Just a second,” Charlie said, grabbing a sparkly white pager from her bag. She pressed it and soon after her mobile rang.

“Sophia, hi. Sorry to bother you with something that’s not exactly an emergency for you, but it’s my grandma. Am I able to use my powers for something good that’s not exactly world saving? I just want her to be able to dress normally. Also, my grandad’s back and might be in the same boat so can I extend this favour?”

I could hear the chatter slightly from the other end of the line. Hard to believe Charlie was currently talking to an angel in Heaven.

“Thanks so much. I know. I think we’re all kind of expecting that might be the case. Speak soon, bye.”

When she ended the call, she looked a little crestfallen.

“You can’t do it?” I queried.

“No, I can. But Sophia pointed out to me that this might be leading up to the time when my grandma actually moves on. Depending on what happens with my grandad.”

“I’m sorry, Charlie.”

“It’s best that she does. It’s what you wish for with unsettled souls, that they find peace. But I’ll miss her... and Dad... he might lose his parents for a second time.”

“But he’ll get a chance to say goodbye properly. To be Theo losing his parents, not a feral fledgling,” I pointed out.

“Shit. I think that’s a large part of what this is about. Dad making peace with what happened in the past.”

We felt silent for a moment. While Charlie was lost in thoughts of her family, I was thinking of how I had to make peace with my wolf. With what happened in the past and with what might happen in the future. At present it was like there was a divide between us, but I was her and she was me.

“Okay, that’s enough with the serious stuff. Time for fun,” Charlie ordered. “Drink your coffee and eat your doughnut and let’s go see Dad. I’ve got everything we spoke about. This is going to be hilarious.”

Hilarity wasn’t the tone set in the Landry household when we arrived. Theo and Shelley were in the living room and Theo was pacing the room.

“What’s going on?” Charlie asked, rushing to her mum’s side.

“We have a ghost in the house. One Jim Gilbert. He’s passed on and it’s not good news. All because he thought he sold his house to Simon Cowell. Just before he died, Jim came out here with plans to call on Simon. Had ideas to be good friends with him. So imagine his reaction when he saw it was Theo and I who’d moved in. Shortly afterwards, Jim suffered a fatal heart attack. Your dad is now feeling guilty for the man’s death while at the same time wondering how he can get him out of the house once again. The tables have turned and now Jim is being a pain, trying to get his home back.”

“I wasn’t a pain when I tried to get the house back,” Theo said.

“You received a restraining order,” Mum countered.

“What are you going to do?” I asked, sitting on the sofa beside Shelley.

“Not sure right now. Cap is going to talk to Berry when she wakes up, who just so happens to be Jim Gilbert’s daughter. Apparently, he’s been haunting her at home to come do something. It’s why she booked in here. When she came for her earlier visit, it was to check out exactly what spirits were here. She hoped her father wouldn’t be. She did want peace from ghosts, one in particular.”

“But the noises began the night before Berry got here,” I said.

“That’s because Jim visited and saw how happy Theo was with his birthday and his B&B. His anger peaked and made him able to be heard and to be able to move things, hence the sign falling off etc.”

“And he’s here now?”

“The banging is down to him, not Edward. Edward was wailing, that’s all.”

“Dad, sit down. We’ll sort all this out,” Charlie said. “Jim Gilbert is no match for me.”

That stopped Theo in his tracks. The tracks he was wearing into the carpet.

“Charlie, it’s not as simple as that. I did Jim Gilbert—the Gilbert family—wrong. His relative was a vet here the day I was turned. I drained Jim’s ancestor.”

“Sit down, Dad,” Charlie repeated, pointing to the chair. “We’ve just been talking about this at the café. I think what’s happening right now is you being forced to face the past once and for all. The facts of your turning. The effect on the Gilberts. And making peace with your parents. Even if... it might mean they move on soon.”

Theo didn’t so much as sit in the chair as fall in it. “M-move on?”

Charlie nodded. “Maybe, Dad. It’s a possibility that the three ghosts in this house are all here because of you, and they shouldn’t be. Where are Grandma and Grandad anyway? I’d like to meet him.”

Of course, Charlie hasn’t seen her grandfather yet.

“They’re talking about things in their old room. Mary’s trying to work out if Edward is still like her husband of old, or whether he’s changed.”

“I’ll go introduce myself,” Charlie said, “and ask them to come join us so we can talk more about what might be occurring.” She disappeared but returned rather quickly, looking red-faced.

“They’re not talking,” she said. “Whatever decision Grandma’s come to,

she's either okay with Grandad, or knowing her, giving him a test run to compare him to Alistair."

Theo started gagging. "Please, someone, take my mind off all this right now."

"Funny you should say that, Theo," I said, producing a few packets from my handbag.

"What's that?" Shelley asked.

"Do you remember how you said you'd rock all those haircuts, Theo?" I reminded him. "Well, Charlie ordered you some. And..." I held up another package. "We got inflatable sumo suits. How about we leave all the stress of life behind for a mo, and have some good old-fashioned fun?"

It was a pleasure to see Theo's eyes light up with a spark of interest. "Prepare to accept the fact I look handsome in everything," he declared.

Shelley rolled her eyes and put her right hand out for the first wig. "Stick this on, hubby. I'm just going to get my camera."

CHAPTER 15

MARY

As Cap returned to Berry, and Shelley took Theo back to their side of the house to try to calm him down, it left me with Edward.

I scraped a hand through my hair, feeling a little awkward. “Wow. Three ghosts present in the B&B,” I said.

“Will you sleep with that one as well?” Edward said, snarkily.

My mouth fell open and I looked at him in disbelief. I took a seat on the end of the bed. Edward stayed standing.

Willing myself not to snap at Edward but to tread carefully, I kept my voice soft. “I thought you were okay with the fact I’d been with Alistair? In *Friends* terms, we were on a break.”

“Which friends? Who’ve you been gossiping to now?” Edward chuntered.

“It’s a television programme. Oh, never mind. What I’m trying to say is it’s what happens now that’s important. Not what’s happened in the past.”

Edward pouted and his nostrils flared slightly. “Is it over with Alistair?” he ground out.

I maintained a steadfast eye contact with him. “That depends on your plans. Are you going to take the opportunity to meet with female ghosts and experience sex with someone else? I’d understand if you wanted to.”

His eye contact with me was unwavering. “No, Mary. I am not.” He came to sit beside me on the bed and took my hand. “Do you remember when we first met at that dance?”

“What dance? We met at a funfair,” I said, turning towards him so we were face-to-face.

“No, actually, we didn’t,” Edward stated, followed with a soft smile. “I

met you at a dance, months before that, but you were the belle of the ball, and you didn't know I existed. I saw you a few times before I got up the nerve to make a move. Got you to see me."

I frowned. "You've never said this before."

That nervous smile was back again. "I wanted you to believe I'd always been the confident man you met that day at the funfair. After my death I've been waiting for you to see me again." He squeezed my hand. "You're all I want, Mary Elizabeth, and all I need. All I ever needed. As for bedroom antics, well, I'm willing to pretend that you closed your eyes and thought of me when you were with *him*. Now you can show me all that experience... if you want to that is," he said, his voice quietening off. Edward was nervous.

I squeezed his hand back. "You're my soulmate, Edward. You are all I've ever wanted. When I met you at the fair, I felt my dreams had come true. Then we had Theo and I had all I needed. If you're not looking elsewhere, then neither am I."

Edward let my hand go and went down on one knee. "Will you stay my wife, Mary, in the afterlife?"

"Yes," I said. "Yes, I will."

We fell onto the bed, and I began showing Edward some of the tricks I'd learned. Around ten minutes later, I saw my granddaughter's face appear in the crack of the bedroom door.

"Ooops." Charlie disappeared.

I indicated for Edward to fasten his trousers back up. "Looks like it's time for you to meet Charlie," I told my husband.

"We can announce our news," Edward said excitedly. "Then later, can we carry on where we left off?"

"Of course. There'll be plenty of time for that. But... do you think we might disappear soon? We might move on?" I'd braced myself as soon as we said we'd be together, thinking I might blink out of existence, but so far, we were still here.

"If we're still here now we've reunited then we've still something to do," Edward replied. "I'm thinking it's about making sure our son is okay and getting rid of that other ghost."

"I think you're right."

Edward reached for my hand once more. "Come on, introduce me to my granddaughter."

Thank goodness when she'd seen him, he'd been on top of me under the

duvet or she might not have been able to look him in the eye.

“Okay, don’t forget we need to tread very carefully with Theo. He’s an extremely sensitive soul,” I reminded Edward. Then we heard guffaws of laughter coming from the living room.

“Huh?” I said, but Edward just walked straight through the doorway to join the others.

I heard him guffaw too and rushed in behind him to see what was so amusing.

“Oh, Christ,” I stated, biting my tongue hard to stop me from giggling too as Theo looked quite affronted.

“What is amusing?” he said, turning around to everyone, his mullet wig, complete with a tight perm on top, perfectly in place. “I look absolutely sensational.”

I caught his eye and he winked. The little sod was winding the rest of them back up.

“I had a mullet when I was a professional footballer in the nineteen eighties,” Theo stated. “I was known for my talent with balls.”

Everyone sniggered again.

“Edward, this is Charlene, your granddaughter,” I announced, interrupting wig modelling for a moment.

Charlie stood up and hugged him. “It’s very nice to meet you, Grandad.”

“And you, my beautiful granddaughter. A queen no less. You’ll always be your grandfather’s princess too, dear, even if I don’t stay on earth long.”

Shelley caught my eye at his words, but I shook my head. Now was not the time to dwell on such things.

“So what is happening in here then?” I asked her.

“The girls have brought Theo some wigs given he said he’d rock them all. This is the first he’s tried on. We’ve three more to go.”

“Oh, what’s next?”

“Mohican, complete with fake bald sides.” She slung it at Theo who caught it in a flash. He walked up to the mirror above the fireplace, removed the other and affixed it in place.

Peals of laughter rang around the room again as he turned around.

“Oh God, Dad, take it off, please. I can’t breathe,” Charlie said.

“You don’t need to breathe, you’re part vampire,” her father stated deadpan. “Now look again. I was a famous guitarist in a goth band in the nineties and looked exactly like this. Women threw their knickers at me on stage.”

“Probably for you to put them on your head to hide that hairstyle,” Shelley joked. “Anyway, how come I don’t know about you being a footballer or a guitarist?”

Theo ignored her and played some air guitar.

Alyssa sniggered. “This is the best laugh I’ve had in ages.”

From there, Theo next put on a sixties-style long wig. He sat cross-legged on the floor and began chanting.

“I suppose you were a hippy in the sixties as well,” Shelley sighed.

“Of course.”

“Did you swing, Dad?” Charlie asked.

“Yes, sweetheart. I liked the slide better though,” he answered.

“That’s not what I meant,” Charlie corrected, but one look at her mother’s face and she shut up. I could tell my son had known exactly what she meant and had dodged the question so as not to make Shelley jealous, with the little smirk that danced on his lips and disappeared with a blink of my eyes.

“And what’s the final wig?” I asked.

Theo was handed a glam rocker wig, and when he put it on he looked like he was in one of those eighties bands. It was blonde and made him look paler than ever.

“Were you by chance a rock star in the eighties?” Shelley asked.

Theo nodded. “I was the lead in a *Bon Jovi* tribute band. I regularly got to say to women *lay your hands on me.*”

Instead of laughing with everyone else, Shelley’s eyes flashed red. Theo guffawed. “Oh Shelley, it’s good to see you jealous. But think on this... have you ever heard me sing? No, you have not, because my voice is diabolical. I’ve never been a guitarist, a rock star, or a footballer, and though I was around in the sixties my hair has always looked exactly like this.”

“Awww, Mum. Dad loves only you,” Charlie said, as Theo swept his wife up in his arms.

He kissed her and then pulled his wig off. “I do think I prefer my own hairstyle, but I’ll keep all these if that’s okay for in case my wife wants me to role play in the future... or have a laugh at her husband’s expense.”

“Thanks for joining in with the fun, Theo,” Alyssa said. “The other day when you were saying you would have quite liked to rock a mullet or perm gave me the idea of wigs, so I immediately messaged Charlie.”

“It’s given us some much-needed laughter,” Edward said.

“That’s not all,” Alyssa said. “We also talked about sumo wrestling in a fake sumo suit.”

Theo looked horrified. “I was *joking*.”

“Sorry, Dad,” Charlie said, showing him the inflatable costume. “It’s happening. You and me.”

In the end, we went outside and all had a turn with the suits and bouncing into each other.

Finally exhausted with both laughter and exertion, we trooped back inside to the kitchen where o-negs were enjoyed by Theo and Shelley while the rest of us had a glass of water or juice.

I watched Edward savour every drop of his orange juice.

“We can eat and drink!” he exclaimed.

I nodded. “There’s no nutritional value in it. We don’t need to. But we can eat if we like.”

“I want more. What else can I have to eat?” Edward asked.

“I beg you, Mother,” Theo said. “Do not say it. I know it’s on the tip of your tongue.”

“It’d be on the tip of your Dad’s tongue actually,” I quipped.

“Why do I even bother?” Theo remarked.

“Grandma, Alyssa was telling me about the fact you’d like to be able to change what clothes you wear,” Charlie enquired.

“It does get a bit dreary seeing myself with the same hair and clothes day in, day out, but it’ll be the same for your granddad, always in his farming clothes. I’m just glad he doesn’t smell of the pigs.” I smiled at Edward.

“What if I told you I can change that? I can alter things so you can change your attire?”

“Seriously?” I asked.

“Yes. I spoke with Angel Sophia and my magic is strong enough for me to alter your ghost chemistry. But should you move on to the afterlife, you and Granddad will both return to the clothes you’re wearing now.”

“What do you mean, move on?” Theo gasped.

Shelley got hold of his arm. “They’re going nowhere at the moment, it’s just a ‘what-if’. Let’s focus on the fact Charlie’s going to be able to give your

mum some freedom with how she looks. That's amazing."

"And me. I can wear a suit like Theo does." Edward grinned. "And not a sumo one!"

Everyone laughed and then my granddaughter came and stood near me and took my hand. "I'm going to stare into your eyes, Grandma, and say some words. You'll be able to wear what clothes you like and so you can check out the internet, but what would you like me to glamour on you until you can go shopping?"

I whispered in her ear.

"Okay." She said some words and I felt a tingle. Not a sexual one though like I was used to. A magic one.

"Wow," Edward said, and more sounds of astonishment came from the others.

I stood in a little black dress, with matching stiletto shoes, a red handbag, and a red lip. I'd wished to look sexy and sultry and as I walked over to the mirror and saw my curled hair, I realised Charlie had given me exactly what I wanted. I looked amazing if I thought so myself.

"Mary, you look incredible," Shelley said. "Who knew a femme fatale was hiding under those layers of cotton?"

And that was when Alistair chose to appear.

"Jesus Christ! Mary, is that you? You look sexy as fuck. What a lovely surprise for our date. Hope there's another delightful surprise hiding underneath it."

In all the chaos, I'd forgotten I'd arranged a date with Alistair today.

"I've a surprise for you. I'm Mary's husband," Edward growled out. Then he swung his fist in my lover's face.

CHAPTER 16

THEO

I'd been rather stunned seeing my mum look so glamorous. Plus, my mind was full of Jim Gilbert haunting me now. After having just heard the fact my parents might move on to the afterlife, what I hadn't been expecting was for my mother's lover to turn up next, shooting his mouth off.

Fortunately, vampire speed kicked in as part of my nature and I got hold of my father's fist before it connected with Alistair's nose. It wouldn't have done any damage, but it would have hurt him.

"Whoa, mate. Husband? Is this Edward, Mary, really?" Alistair asked.

"It is," she confirmed.

"Sorry, pal." Alistair held out a hand to my dad who looked like he'd been offered a bowl of vomit. "I've heard so much about you. Hope you understand about our dalliance while you weren't here." He dropped his hand and turned to Mum. "I don't date married women, Mary, so I'm afraid this is goodbye."

Mum nodded. "It's been fun, Alistair, but my heart and soul belong with Edward."

Alistair looked Mum up and down again, and I moved forward ready to use my own fists if he didn't stop.

"You're a very lucky man, Edward. Don't mess things up," Alistair said and then he disappeared.

"I want to duel him or something," Dad basically growled out.

"He's gone, Edward, for good," Shelley told him.

"You mean he's moved on to the afterlife?" Mum asked, astounded.

"No, Mary, just to other women's beds."

"Ah."

“Are you jealous of that, Mary?” Dad asked her.

“In a minute I’m going to punch you in the nose, Edward. Have we not just had a whole conversation about this?” She appraised him. “Actually, I’m a little turned on by your alphahole-ness.”

“My what? Mary, I still have a lot to learn about the modern day.”

She grabbed his hand. “And I shall teach you.” With that, they were gone.

“I’m going to go now too,” Alyssa said. “I need to think about what I’m going to wear on my dates.”

“I’m going to stay here a while if that’s okay?” Charlie told her. “I want to catch up with my parents a bit longer.”

“That’s fine. Coffee again soon?” Alyssa asked her.

“You betcha. I want to know how those dates go. You’d better text me.”

The girls hugged and then Alyssa left.

“Jesus, parentals, you have a *lot* going on right now,” Charlie said.

As usual, my wife decided to get out her notepad and read out the bullet points of her present situation. It was what she did when she got overloaded.

“I have to help Theo with the B&B on the weekend. I’m working Monday through Friday at the agency and as well as being pregnant myself, I also have Samara going on maternity leave at the same-ish time. I wouldn’t be surprised if Jess follows suit also. Valentine’s day is ahead, and we know what that’s like for the dating agency. The influx of applications will come in any day now. We have a new ghost parent here and an angry ghost in the building somewhere. Is that everything, Theo?”

“We have a lot going on right now,” I said, repeating Charlie’s words back to her.

“Well, I’m going to get some of that sorted right here and right now,” our daughter declared. “As your daughter and the all-powerful Queen of Withernsea, I shall do all within my power to assist.”

“That’s appreciated, Charlie, but you have your own life now. We’ll work things out,” Shelley reassured her.

“I’m also bored,” Charlie announced.

“Oh,” Shelley said.

At the same time, I went, “With Kai? Are you moving back home?”

Charlie just laughed. “No, Dad. Kai and I are a forever thing. But he has to work and I’m finding myself between wars. *Joking!* Gosh, the looks on your faces! I need a job of my own and I don’t want to go back to Ebony’s. Knowing what I do about all the supernaturals, I think I could help you,

Mum. I know Grandma Margret has offered too, but I'm sure she has other things to do. It'll be nice spending time with Auntie Kim when she's back from her maternity leave."

"You'd like to work at the agency? That would be amazing, Charlie. I'm going to see if Lucy is due back anytime soon to cover for Sam too, so potentially that's our maternity leaves covered."

"If I like it, maybe you can find a role for me there when everyone is back from their mat leave. I'm sure there's always the possibility of expansion."

I sighed heavily.

"What's up, Dad?"

"Jim bloody Gilbert is what's up. We might be driven out of our home. My B&B hasn't really survived its first week. I've cancelled the guests that were due the rest of this week because how can I run the place with a noisy ghost? Maybe I should just come work with you as well, Shelley?" I announced.

My wife looked horrified. *Charming.*

"I could deal with the technical side of things. Databases etc."

"Dad, we will deal with Jim. Not only that but I've had some thoughts about your B&B. I do think you've taken a bit too much on, what with you being in bed half the time. I know you have Alyssa, but it still doesn't cover the whole week, does it? Plus, think about it. When the baby's here, do you really want to be constantly running around after other people?"

"Are you suggesting I close my B&B too?" I felt wounded. Did no-one believe in me?

"Not at all, Dad. I'm just thinking outside the box and thinking of how you just spoke of helping Mum, along with my ideas on expansion. You could run speed dating events here like they used to do in town. Speed dinners, with chance to book a bed for the night too. One person, one room, though some might 'sleepwalk'. Maybe you could do other one-off, but regular things? A ghost night, with Grandma playing her part if she's still around. Just consider not having guests booked in every day of the week."

"What do you think, Shelley?" I asked my wife, getting excited about the idea of themed events.

"I'm happy if you're happy, Theo. But what about your original B&B idea?"

"It sucks, Shelley. I love you've supported me every step of the way, but our daughter's idea is fantastic. We can do events and schedule things around

the baby. Alyssa can handle all the PR and if she has spare time, she can help me with the investigations I do for Heart to Heart.”

“I think Alyssa would enjoy that,” Charlie noted.

The bell dinged on the B&B side then.

“That will be Berry and Cap. I’d better get this conversation over with,” I said.

“No, Dad. *We* will talk to them to get this situation sorted out,” Charlie told me.

The love I had for my daughter was immeasurable. I smiled at her and my wife and held out a hand to both.

“Come on. Let’s do this,” I announced, finally ready to deal with the past and the present.

I directed Berry and Cap to the bar area, and we all trooped along. In my head the Death March began playing.

“I’m Charlie, Theo and Shelley’s daughter,” Charlie introduced herself. “I’m also the Queen of Withernsea.”

“Like a pageant thing?” asked Cap.

“Like an I’m possibly the strongest supernatural that exists thing,” she answered.

“Wow,” said Cap. His wife’s face paled again.

“So you’re Jim’s daughter?” I asked Berry.

“We’re sorry for your loss,” Shelley added.

“Thank you, but actually, my father was always a pain in the butt, and I’ve not lost him. I’m actually seeing him more than ever now he’s dead,” Berry huffed. “He won’t leave me alone, he says, until I’ve got you out of his house.”

It was at that point my father appeared. “I think he’ll find it’s *my* house.”

Charlie intervened. “We need to talk to Jim and get this sorted. Can you use your mediumship to bring him here please, Berry? I will ensure this room is protected and he can do no harm.”

“I’ll do anything to have peace in my life again,” Berry said. “And Theo, I owe you an apology because when I came here saying it was to check for spirits, it wasn’t. It was to meet you and get a feel for the place so I could

ruin it. So I might try to get your business closed down and you out, in order to be rid of my father's spirit. But when it came to it, I didn't have it in me. You're all so nice."

"I'm sorry too," Theo said. "For the fact I drained one of your ancestors back in the day. But I'm finally realising it wasn't my fault. Not really. Hopefully we can get this talked about and put to bed today."

"I'll begin my prep," Berry stated.

Charlie began to form a protection spell around the room. I got Cap a beer because the guy looked a little peaky. He was a human after all; only allowed in the B&B as he was well aware of supes, being married to his medium wife who communicated with the undead of all kinds.

Shelley just watched us all and chatted with Dad, warning him not to throw any punches or she'd blue web him.

Finally, we all sat on the floor, a space having been cleared. Berry asked us all to hold hands and close our eyes.

"I now invite my father Jim Gilbert to join us in the room," Berry said. "Father, know that your voice will be heard, your form will be seen, but any acts of wilful destruction and I will break the circle, leaving you frustrated and no further ahead with your journey to Heaven."

"But in the meantime, that lying shithead gets to have a happy life?" Jim said, appearing on the sofa beside us. He shimmered in a soft orange glow, not fully embodied. He glared at me. "You got this house with trickery. You are not Simon Cowell. I thought I'd get to meet him. Might even be friends with him. For real."

"We're going to go back to the past, Jim," Charlie interrupted. "I'm going to show you life at Goodacres Farm and what happened to my father, grandmother, grandfather, and your own ancestor. If anyone feels they can't watch this, they can close their eyes and not see it. However, you will not remember the horror of the situation, the gore, you will just develop a deeper understanding of what happened."

We all sat and in the centre of the circle it was like a sepia-coloured movie played out. It showed the vampire threatening my father, him coming back and siring me, and then my turning on my family after the farmhand dusted the vamp.

But more than that, it showed how I hung around the place for years in mourning, and how after time passed, I repeatedly returned begging to buy the house back.

Then Charlie changed the picture and we saw Jim and Berry's relatives. How they tried to communicate with their deceased relative to find out what happened to him. How the females of the family trained as mediums to no avail. How Jim married, but his obsession with the Landry family broke up his marriage and lost him his daughter.

"I didn't even know you'd been married," Theo told him. "I must have been away during that period. I'm so very sorry I caused your family all this suffering."

Jim closed his eyes for a second. "But you didn't, Theo. I see that now. The vampire who killed you was to blame. And he is dead, so the Gilberts are avenged. I can move on."

"Really? You no longer bear a grudge towards me?"

"Other than I'm really pissed off I didn't meet Simon Cowell," Jim moaned.

"What about if I have a word with my friend Sophia and we allow you one evening with Simon. Wherever he is? He won't see you, but at least you'd get to spend time with him?" Charlie asked him.

"You could do that?"

"I can't promise. I think I'm going to be told to ask for no further favours soon but seeing as you're now ready to move on to Heaven, I think she'll allow it."

"Is it also possible I could spend a little time with my daughter?"

Berry spoke. "I will close this circle so that the Landry family can leave, but I'll then open up a new line of communication between the two of us, and Cap."

"Okay, Berry, I hope to speak to you shortly. Thank you, Charlie. Please let me know about Simon."

"I will."

Berry closed the circle, and we left them to it.

I walked outside the room, and I felt one hundred times lighter. Because not only was Jim gone, so was the guilt I'd carried around with me for years.

I wasn't responsible back then. Not in the slightest.

My fledgling vampire nature was left to go wild, through a farmhand trying to do his best to protect us all.

Since then, I'd never taken a life. Always used donated blood.

I was a good man. A loving husband and father. I'd been a good son.

I understood that now, and it was time to live life in the present with hope

about the future.

CHAPTER 17

ALYSSA

I got home to find Mum in the kitchen with Rhett. With the way she was slamming cupboard doors, I gathered something was going down between the two of them. I tried to slope past both and head upstairs.

“What was it you said about me then, Mum? Come on, I want to thank you.”

“I said *leave it*, Rhett.”

Changing direction, I announced I was thirsty, got a glass and went to the sink.

“Thought you had a fridge put in your room?” Rhett snarked at me.

“I just fancied some water. Is it against the law?” I sassed back.

“Nothing to do with being a nosy bitch then?”

“Rhett Phelan, do not call your sister a bitch.”

“Nosy mare then. Ooh, Mum, go and tell all the pack how I use filthy language.”

“Be off with you. Go home and stop winding me up before I give you a thick ear.”

Rhett full on belly laughed and with a wink at me, he left the house.

I leaned against the kitchen counter. “What was all that about?”

“I decided to teach Rhett a lesson, didn’t I, and started telling the women of the pack about his bad behaviour.”

“What bad behaviour?”

“I made it up, so he’d come back begging for me to say kind words about him again.”

I smirked. “What exactly did you say?”

“I said I didn’t know what had got into my youngest son. That he’d

started being aloof, rude, and surly, and I pitied any woman who ended up with him because he might treat them like dirt. Rhett came to see me and thanked me for whatever recommendations I'd made about him because six eligible women from the pack had made a move on him in the last twenty-four hours."

I laughed.

"It's not funny, Alyssa."

I side-eyed her. "It is."

She started laughing too. "You're right, it is. Bloody typical women or what. Tell 'em a man's a twat and so they all want him. I'm leaving him to it now. He can find his own woman and the pack can go screw themselves instead of trying to score with my kid."

"I think that's wise," I told her. "So now you're not matchmaking Rhett, do you fancy helping me pick out some clothes for my dates, Mum? One is litter picking, the other is a meal."

"Sure do. By the way, the pack have been talking. You've a date with Glynn then?"

I nodded. "Don't marry us off in your head, Mum."

"I can't get past thinking about the fact he used to constantly piss himself, Lys, to be honest," she answered.

CHAPTER 18

MARY

After much celebrating of my reunion with Edward (ie a massive sex session), later I left Edward in our room and went in search of Theo. I found him sitting quietly in the living room, staring at a photo album.

“Can I join you?”

“Of course. I’m just looking at Charlene’s baby photos and wondering what our next baby will look like.”

We spent time poring over the sweet pictures. It was bittersweet for me because I just knew, deep down inside, that I wouldn’t get to meet my new grandchild. I’d be able to peek from Heaven I was sure, watch from above, just not be part of things. But a peace had begun to flood through me, something I’d not felt before, and it was putting distance between me and Withernsea. It was exactly how I’d imagined moving on to feel.

“You’re leaving, aren’t you?” Theo said quietly.

“I believe so, Theo.” I explained to him how different I was feeling.

He looked up at me, tears beginning to run down his cheeks. “Mum, I’m going to miss you so much.”

“I know, sweetheart, and I’m going to miss you too, but it’s the right thing. We’ve made our peace with everything that happened, haven’t we? Now it’s time for me and your father to leave this place and move on.”

“B-but I don’t want you to go. I’m used to seeing you every day.”

I hugged my son hard, and his shoulders shook with his grief. “I know, but it’s time for you to focus on your own family now. Anyway, I’ve not gone anywhere yet, so stop snivelling and how about a game of charades?”

We spent the next hour or so miming different TV and films to each other, and then we talked some more. Berry and Cap had left and so the B&B

side was now empty once again.

“I wanted to be seen, Mum. To feel I had a role in this world, but I realise I already do. I’m a husband, a father, and a son. Family is everything. Anything else is just a bonus. Now the guilt of the past has lifted, I feel lighter inside. Maybe I won’t be so serious from now on?”

“Just continue being Theo Landry. You’re perfect as you are. Even if...”

Theo thought my next words would be ‘you murdered me’, but they weren’t.

“...I’m not visible to you. I’ll always be watching from somewhere, my dear son.”

“I know, Mum,” he said. “I know.”

Later that morning, Shelley came into the kitchen where I was making Edward his fourth cup of tea, which he was enjoying alongside an array of items from Theo’s treat supplies left in the pantry.

“Morning, Shelley,” Edward said cheerily. “I love Toblerone best so far, with Aero a close second.”

Shelley went into the cupboard and got out a squeeze tube of chocolate sauce for pancakes. She put it on the table next to him. “I think this might end up being your favourite,” she said, giving me a wink.

After grabbing her o-neg from the fridge, she came to sit near us.

“Theo told me about your chat last night,” she told me. “Do you really feel you’re going to move on soon?”

I nodded. “Edward and I are feeling, how can I put it... floaty, peaceful.”

“Couldn’t that be just from all the sex?” Shelley asked.

Edward gazed at me longingly, and then at the chocolate sauce.

“Later. You’ve indulged enough right now,” I told him. He pouted. I turned to Shelley. “No, it’s more than that.”

“Well, it would be good to do something nice together as a family before you go. I thought I’d ask Angel Sophia if she could give us a heads up about if you are definitely moving on, and to allow us to get together before you do.”

“I’ve been having my own thoughts. I’d very much like to marry Mary all over again if it were possible,” Edward said, grabbing hold of my hand. “I

know it can't be official here at the farm, but we could still do a ceremony, couldn't we?"

"Ooh, that's an amazing idea," Shelley said. "Mary, now you can dress up you can find yourself the most beautiful wedding dress."

I began to get seriously excited.

"Let's do it! Please talk to Sophia, and let's go for it. Full on. The wedding of the year."

Shelley grinned. "The wedding of the year and it's still only January!"

CHAPTER 19

ALYSSA

Early on a Sunday morning—ten am to be exact—I turned up on Withernsea seafront for my first date: litter picking. Why on earth had I agreed to this? I knew it was a good thing for the environment, but it was also cold, raining, and borrrriinnng. However, when a good-looking guy began walking towards me, I suddenly decided I'd put up with it. Tall, dark, and handsome, the guy was so built I reckoned he must work out for at least four hours a day. He had movie star teeth and a dazzling smile.

“Are you Boone?” I asked, with my fingers crossed, because if he wasn't then my date might get binned off quicker than some abandoned beach plastic.

“Sure am. And you're Alyssa?”

“Yeah.”

“And when did you stop wearing nappies?”

It took me a full ten seconds to decide my hearing hadn't failed me.

“I beg your pardon?”

“How old are you?”

“Almost seventeen.”

He sighed. “I suppose I'm going to have to tell the dating agency my real age. Sorry, darling, I'm sure you're lovely, but you're far too young for me.”

“How old are you?”

“Thirty-four really. Told them I was twenty-two. Tried dating women around my own age but they're all too independent. I need a woman who lets me clean and tidy up after her. Women these days are all, ‘Oh I can do that for myself’. Anyway, shall we start?” He indicated towards the rest of the cleaning team.

“Sure,” I replied. Knowing no way was this man a match for me, but I’d do my good deed for the day anyway.

Boone took my picker and bag off me. “I’ll do that.”

I was about to protest and say I could do it myself. Then I remembered his main nit-pick about older women and also that I didn’t want to pick nasty litter up anyway.

“Okay,” I replied.

While we walked around, Boone chattered away, but I wasn’t listening. After a while, he must have realised and he got stuck into tidying up, making a competition of it and going on about how much he’d collected at the side of everyone else. I allowed myself to fall back, so that the team including Boone faded into the distance. And I’d had a lot in common with this man? I failed to see where.

“Hey, Alyssa,” a voice said, and I turned to see Penelope, the woman I’d met on the beach a while ago. She looked a lot better. More settled.

“Penelope. How are you?” I asked.

“Good. I found a place to stay, right on the seafront over there.” She pointed in the direction of a few buildings.

“That’s great. You’re staying then?”

Penelope shrugged. “Not sure yet, but for now I am. I like it here.”

We both stood, quiet. I didn’t know what else to say.

“You were litter picking then?” She nodded up ahead in the direction the others had gone in. “Did you not enjoy it?”

“Not really.” I kicked the sand a little. “I was on a date and the bloke was an idiot.”

“A date? Did you go see the boy you were talking about?” she enquired.

“Not yet.” I sighed. “I agreed I’d go on two dates first, to see if it changed how I felt about Bartholomew.”

“Oh, right, and...?”

“This first one was a disaster. He’s obsessed with cleaning. The computer said he matched me seventy percent. I don’t see how. Then again, he lied about his age so who knows what else he lied about.”

“What’s the computer?”

“It belongs to the dating agency. Guess who it matched me with as number one?”

“Bartholomew?”

“One hundred percent correct.”

“But you’re still going on the other date?”

“I am. It will give me some perspective. Anyway, I’m going to head home now and go back to bed. My next date isn’t until tomorrow evening.”

“Okay, well, I hope things work out for you,” she said.

“You too,” I replied, and then I started running home.

“Glynn dropped by earlier,” Mum said, when I walked in. “He can’t make it tomorrow now and wonders if you’ll go out with him tonight instead?” She passed me a piece of paper with his number on it.

“Why not?” I said, pressing the numbers on my keypad and calling him to rearrange.

If nothing else tonight, at least I was going to get to eat the most delicious steak ever. We sent out for takeaways a lot from Red’s because they knew exactly how to cook it so that it was mouth-wateringly good.

Glynn said he’d come to pick me up from the house, but I asked if we could meet outside the steakhouse instead. I didn’t want anyone from the pack cheering us on as we set off, and some would do. It’s what they were like. In fact, if my brother got wind of our date, he’d definitely be there to torment me or Glynn.

As I arrived outside the restaurant, Glynn was already there, and he gave me a bashful smile. He had a kind face and nice eyes, and I felt like he could possibly grow on me, but there was no instant attraction there. No flash of a mate bond. But then there hadn’t been with Bartholomew either. That had happened later.

“Hey, Alyssa. You look lovely,” he said.

“Thanks. So do you.”

We’d both clearly made an effort without going too far. Smart casual was the order of the day. I had a nice pale-pink blouse and my best jeans on, and Glynn was wearing taupe chinos and a smart white t-shirt.

He held the door open for me to go inside.

So far so good.

“Welcome to Red’s Steakhouse. Do you have a booking?” the server asked.

“Oh,” Glynn stated. “I do, but it’s for tomorrow.” He turned to me looking sheepish. “I hope we can get in. I forgot to change it.”

I shrugged although I knew I’d feel like crying if we didn’t get to eat some juicy steak. Trouble was, Red’s was always fully booked.

“I can squeeze you in, but the table is near where the serving staff come out and near the loos so it’s a high traffic area,” the server said. I saw on her name badge she was called Zara.

“That’s fine with me,” I told Glynn.

“Yes, we’ll take it,” Glynn told Zara.

“Come follow me then and I’ll get you seated,” she said, walking us to the table.

She hadn’t been kidding about the location of the table. It had clearly been squeezed in to fit in more customers and therefore make more profit. People walked past us every five seconds. It wasn’t exactly the right ambience for a date. But Glynn didn’t seem to mind.

“So, erm...Ali...son,”

“Alyssa.”

“Sorry, Alyssa. My memory isn’t very good. I forget things a lot. You’ll have to forgive me.”

“No worries,” I said.

“I had a bang to the head a couple of years ago and I’m perfectly okay, but it’s left this memory impairment. It doesn’t happen a lot though. Hopefully I’ll remember tonight,” he explained.

I smiled back, but already red flags were being waved. I didn’t remember anyone saying anything about a head injury and our pack talked. A lot.

We placed our orders and chatted while we waited for the drinks to arrive.

“How long have you been single, Alyssa?” Glynn asked me.

“A few months now. You?”

“Awhile. I’ve never really had a long-term girlfriend. Originally, it was because I was remembered as the laughingstock of the pack. Then lately it’s because I forget I’ve been dating women and start dating someone else.”

“Yeah, I can see that could cause problems,” I told him.

“I very much looked forward to our date because I know you have your own crosses to bear,” he said.

“Come again?” *What was he talking about?*

“Your brother, Rhett, came to see me. He told me not to bring up how you saved the pack because you find the circumstances behind it difficult to discuss.” He stopped and put a hand up to his mouth. “Oh dear, that’s my forgetful brain again. I’ve just done exactly what he asked me not to do.”

Zara brought our drinks then.

“You’ve forgotten my slice of lime,” he barked at the server.

“Glynn!” I scolded, in shock at his outburst. I turned to Zara. “Sorry, would you be able to get him a slice of lime?” I asked. She nodded and walked away.

I scowled at Glynn.

“That was rude, and if you have a brain injury that makes you forgetful, you should be sympathetic to the staff if they are.”

“You’re right.” He looked contrite.

When Zara returned with the lime, he looked up at her. “My apologies for my shortness. It was uncalled for.”

“Thank you,” she said. “I’ll be out with your food shortly. Any change to your usual?”

My eyes snapped from Zara to Glynn. When she left, I asked the question waiting on the tip of my tongue. “Your usual?”

“I’ve been here a few times before,” Glynn admitted. “That’s why I was annoyed she forgot the lime. I always ask for it.”

“They see a lot of people every day though. Staff can’t remember everything.”

He held up his glass for me to chink mine with his. “Here’s to our first date. Step one of courtship, a meal.”

I chinked but inside I felt sick. This was all wrong. I didn’t want to be here with Glynn. I wanted to be with Bartholomew. To make matters worse, I looked out of the window and saw Penelope staring in. She hurried off, looking uncomfortable that I’d met her gaze. There was something weird about that woman that I couldn’t put my finger on.

“I’m just going to visit the ladies’ room before our food comes,” I told Glynn, and I walked over, almost colliding into Zara.

“I’m so sorry,” I told her.

“You’re fine. Word of warning though,” she said, nodding over at Glynn. “He told you about his memory loss yet?”

“Err, yes?”

“Always tends to happen when he needs to pay the bill. Also, he never forgets I’ve turned him down and is an arse to me every time he comes in. You don’t look happy to be with him, so for what it’s worth, I think you should climb out of the bathroom window.”

“Thanks for the heads up, but I think I’ll deal with him a different way,” I replied, grinning at her. “I owe you, okay?”

“Just teach him a lesson. That’ll be enough for me,” Zara replied.

In the bathroom, I texted Rhett.

Alyssa: Stupid question, but has Glynn ever suffered a head injury?

Rhett: Oh not that again. He used to say that when he pissed himself. That he couldn’t help it, it was an after effect of violence. By the way, I may have warned him that you would not be a notch on his bedpost. He has form for stringing women along.

Alyssa: And blaming his head injury for forgetting he’s dating them all at once?

Rhett: the clever bastard. I might have to feign one too.

Alyssa: Apparently it also makes him forget his wallet...

Rhett: He appears stupid, but he might just be wiser than us all. Do you want me to come rescue you?

Alyssa: No. I can look after myself.

Rhett: I know you can, sis, but just in case I’ll let you know... I’m actually outside.

Alyssa: What?!

Rhett: Did you think I was letting you meet that dickhead without me being nearby? Mum tipped me off he’d changed the day of the date.

Alyssa: I’d have expected that of Darius, but not you.

Rhett: He’s here as well.

I looked at my phone stunned. And then I texted back.

Alyssa: Thank you. Both of you.

Rhett: You might have saved the pack but you’re still our little sister. Yes, you’re a badass, but you’re also soft, kind, and loving. And you have two big brothers who will always protect you, even when everyone else might fear you.

I cried then. Alone in that bathroom, a few tears escaped as I realised my brother’s words were right. Yes, I had my wolf who protected us when threatened. Yes, my wolf loved hard. But my brothers were no different. Outside now ready to step up for me because they loved hard too. It was just

who we were.

Werewolves who'd do anything for those we love.

And that was the point where I made peace with what had happened with Jett Conall and his mother.

“Sorry about that. You know how it is when you urgently need a wee,” I said to Glynn when I arrived back at the table. “How did you deal with that anyway?”

“Deal with what?”

“The fact you used to piss yourself all the time.”

He stared at me, stock-still for a moment. Then he flicked his fringe. “It was due to the head injury. Made me forget to go to the toilet.”

“I thought you only banged your head a couple of years ago, or did you forget you said that too?”

“I’ve had two head injuries. One when I was younger and then the one a couple of years ago. It’s exacerbated my memory loss again.”

“Wow, how unlucky. So does it still happen then, the peeing yourself?”

“No, I make sure I visit the loo frequently now, and I restrict my liquid intake.”

“Just so you know, I think there’s nothing wrong with you having urinary incontinence,” I said out loud.

His eyes went wide.

“Alyssa...” he panicked. I looked around and other customers were staring over at us.

“Hey, you still remember my name,” I said, still loudly, lifting my glass up to clink with his. “Oh, sorry, maybe I’ve got a head injury too. I forgot you’re limiting your liquid intake so that you don’t pee yourself again.”

A few murmured voices and giggles emerged.

“Could you please keep your voice down,” Glynn pleaded.

Zara brought our food, and I tucked in heartily. On my way back I’d paid for my share of things and I wasn’t missing such gorgeous grub.

Glynn ate his and then requested seconds. I picked up my bag.

“This isn’t working for me, Glynn. I’m going to dash. I’ve paid for my half of our meal,” I told him.

He quickly patted his pocket. “Oh crap, Alyssa, I’ve forgotten my wallet. Would you be able to pay my share too?” he false begged.

“You’re right, you have forgotten,” I said. “But it’s not your wallet you’ve forgotten. It’s that I’m Alyssa Dakota Phelan, who saved the pack from being taken over by the Hogsthorpe pack. The woman who bit the jugular out of two evil wolves. And also, the same Alyssa whose two brothers are waiting outside.”

“P-please. Can you help me out, just this once. I promise I won’t do it again.”

I grinned smugly. “You won’t because I’m going to make sure every woman in the pack knows you don’t have a head injury at all,” I said. “It may be time for you to move on, Glynn, somewhere you can start again with a new honest path. I’m thinking Scotland sounds nice. Nice and far away. I’m thinking Darius, as my eldest brother and the pack alpha, might help you with that.”

I got up to leave and Glynn shot out of his seat too, grabbing hold of my wrist. “Alyssa, please.”

I threw my drink across the groin of his trousers, and he leapt back. A big wet patch soaked across, just as a little boy walked past with his dad, heading for the loo.

“I’m very good at pottying, aren’t I, Dad. That man has wee-weed his pants. No sticker for him.”

And then with a salute to Zara, who’d gone over to deal with her non-paying customer, I left the restaurant and ran up to my brothers, giving them the biggest hugs I’d given them in a long time.

“I love you two so damn much,” I said. “Thank you for loving me right back.”

And as we strolled back to the caravan park, chatting away, inside I knew who else I loved so damn much.

Bartholomew.

I’d tried the dates and it had made me realise I truly loved him. It was time to face him and find out if there was any way for us to be together.

And if not, I had my family who loved me, and the wolf part of me to protect me, and I knew, eventually, I would be okay.

CHAPTER 20

SHELLEY

I was running late and just about to leave to go to work when Alyssa turned up. In all the emotional upset and excitement, we'd forgotten to tell her that there were no guests to rush here to deal with.

"Morning, Shelley," she said. "Has Theo left me any instructions?"

"We've no guests and he's rethinking his whole business model," I told her, before bringing her up to speed on everything that had happened since she'd left on Saturday.

"So, I don't really have a job," Alyssa sighed.

"I'm sorry we're messing you around, Alyssa, but we didn't see all this upheaval happening. Theo still wants you to work for us to arrange the events he's planning for his B&B and with his Heart to Heart research."

Alyssa shook her head. "Theo's more than capable of organising that himself. It's fine. I'll go back to the shop and work for Ebony. To be honest I've been missing being there. I only took the job with you, so I was away from being near Jax's, but I'm also missing the café, even if Bartholomew's not in it."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, I'll go see Ebony later."

"Okay, but if she says no, you come back here."

"She'll not say no. I was an amazing assistant." Alyssa smiled.

"So how did the dates go?" I asked her. "Unless you'd rather wait until the appointment we made tomorrow to talk about them?"

"No, now's fine," she said, telling me all about the behaviour of Boone and Glynn.

"That's Glynn banned from the dating agency, regardless of if he moves

pack,” I said, feeling extremely annoyed that he might have done his memory trick on some of my other clients. “And I’ll be giving Boone a final warning for his lies about his age.”

The doorbell rang.

“Excuse me a moment,” I told Lys. Walking to the front door, I opened it and found Ebony on my doorstep.

“Hello, darling,” she said, pushing past me and walking straight through to the kitchen.

“Come in,” I said sarcastically under my breath.

“Ebony! We were just talking about you,” Alyssa said.

“Oh, sweetie, I know. I saw all this in a vision. I know you’ve had a strange couple of weeks, but it’s all had to happen to get you on the right path. Being here near Mary got you to try dating other men, so you could test your true feelings regarding Bartholomew. Being away from my boutique and Bartholomew’s prior workplace at Jax’s gave you the space you needed to think. Plus, the awful dates showed you that the love of family is what’s most important. Something that Theo has also realised,” she said, looking at me.

“He has,” I confirmed.

“Now, I’m going to let you in on something about the future, Alyssa. Your eldest brother is a great alpha but as time moves on, he will no longer wish to be in that role. He just wants to love his wife and children, and not be sucked into wolf politics. You, however, were born for the role. The first female alpha of the Withernsea pack.”

“Really? That’s my fate?”

“Deep down inside you know this is true,” Ebony said. “But while you’re waiting for that future to emerge, I’d be very grateful if you’d come back as manager of Ebony’s.”

“I’d love to,” Alyssa replied, before turning to me. “If that’s okay with you?”

“It’s more than okay.” Walking over to her, I hugged her. “Just know there’s always a room for you here.”

“Thanks, Shelley. So, Ebony, do you want me to start now?”

Ebony smiled smugly at her. “Don’t be silly, Alyssa. Have you forgotten what other part of your future needs sorting out?”

“Y-you mean...?”

“Go see Bartholomew, Alyssa. I think you’ll find all the answers you

need in Hull today.”

Alyssa didn't need telling twice. With a quick hug to each of us she basically flew out through the door.

“Alyssa deserves a happy ever after,” I said. “Right, don't think me rude, but I need to go to the office. I'm already running late.”

“Put Charlene in as manager of the dating agency,” Ebony stated. “Then it doesn't matter which staff you have in place; they'll all behave knowing the Queen of Withernsea sits amongst them. She'll be able to handle all the supes on your books too. Your daughter is of the land and sea, she needs her feet on the ground half the time to be happy.”

“Okay. Anything else?”

“You need to move Boone to the undateables side. To Heart to Heart.”

“I meant anything else for me and Theo. We've had quite a time so far this year.”

“After the darkness comes the light. Those are my words to you, my darling. Also, I hope you're okay with pink. Lots and lots of pink.”

“Oh my god. Am I having a girl again?” I said, clutching my stomach.

“I've no idea, but I know you're arranging a wedding,” Ebony stated. “I've got Mary's dress in the car. I know it fits; I've seen her in it. Can you come fetch it?”

“But I haven't even arranged any of it yet! You're messing with my head, Ebony Marston.”

Ebony just shrugged. “And you think all these visions don't mess with mine? Oh, also, I've brought you some lovely maternity wear.”

“Oh, have you seen me with my growing bump?” I enquired.

“No, I've seen you looking like this.” She pointed to my baggy t-shirt and elasticated skirt. “Now, how do you want to pay?”

CHAPTER 21

ALYSSA

While waiting for the coach to take me to Hull, I spotted Penelope walking towards me looking sullen.

“Wish me luck,” I said. “I’m doing it. Going to see Bartholomew.”

“You are?! Oh, that’s amazing,” she said, her eyes brightening.

“Are you okay? You looked fed up,” I asked her.

Penelope fidgeted a little. “Withernsea is lovely,” she said. “It’s just, it’s not my home.”

“And can you not go home?” I prodded, in what I hoped was a careful tone.

“It doesn’t appear so. I’ve tried. But...” her voice trailed off. “Anyway, how did your date go last night? I saw you through Red’s window and then I saw you hugging two men outside. It’s not my business, but did you increase how many dates you were trying?”

My forehead creased. *What was she talking about?*

Oh.

“Penelope, the two men outside were my brothers. They’d decided to spy on me because they didn’t trust my date. And they were quite right. He made up memory problems to try to get out of paying for dinner.”

“Really? What an idiot.”

“Quite. Anyway, it made my mind up about Bartholomew, and, my friend Ebony says I’ll find all the answers I need today in Hull. I’m quietly hopeful that things will be okay.”

“I hope so, Alyssa. I really do.”

“Where is it you’re staying again?” I asked her. Penelope gave me an address.

“When I get back, I’ll come see you, and see what I can do to help you get back home, or if not, to help you get a little more settled.”

“You are such a lovely girl. Hopefully, all will be fine. Go get your man, Lys,” she said.

Lys.

She’d shortened my name. I didn’t mind though. I was Lys to family and friends, and I felt Penelope could become a friend. I really ought to introduce her to my mum. I’d bet she could help her settle in.

I went to give her a hug, then hesitated when I saw her freeze. After a second or two, Penelope relaxed and placed her arms around me. “Good luck,” she said, giving me a quick hug. The coach appeared from around the corner and when I looked again, Penelope had gone, and I couldn’t spot her anywhere.

Taking my seat and a deep breath, I closed my eyes and hoped all was going to be okay.

I’d called in at the café before coming to the coach stop and double checked with Jax that I had the right address, so when I turned up at the semi-detached house in Hull, I knew I was knocking on the right door.

A young woman with short blonde hair answered the door.

“Yes?” she said, before I saw her gawk at me more closely.

“Are you ALYSSA?”

“I am.”

“Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god. I recognise you from the photos on Bartholomew’s phone. Come in, come in.” She gestured inside. “Sorry, I haven’t introduced myself. I’m Katy, his younger sister.”

I followed Katy inside, removing my shoes in the hallway. “Please tell me you’ve come to take Bartholomew back to Withernsea with you. He’s driving me mad. Ordering me around like he’s my dad and then the rest of the time he’s moping about the place. I’ve told him I’m fine, but he refuses to leave me here.” She was talking at such speed I wondered if she had actually taken a breath yet.

She led me into a cosy living room and gestured for me to sit down. “Cup of tea?”

“That would be lovely. Strong, just a splash of milk, no sugar, thank you.”

“I’ll be back in a tick. Oh, by the way, Bartholomew’s just out at the supermarket. He shouldn’t be long.”

“Okay,” I said to Katy’s retreating back.

On a side table there were lots of photographs and so I got up to sneak peeks at possible photos of Bartholomew when he was a kid. I immediately spotted him aged about nine with a bucket and spade. Then my eyes moved to the next photo. A photo of Katy with... Penelope.

What the hell?

Picking up the photo to take a closer look and ensuring I wasn’t wrong about the woman’s identity; I was still holding it when Katy returned. She looked over my shoulder.

“My mum was so beautiful. I can’t believe she’s gone.”

“W-what was your mum called? I never knew.”

“Penny,” Katy said simply, and then we heard a key in the front door. “Ooh, let me go forewarn him you’re here so he can check his appearance in the mirror.” She laughed. “Back in a tick.”

But I barely heard her because I was replaying all my meetings with their mother in Withernsea.

‘Can you not go home?’

‘No, I’ve tried.’

That’s why she was so hesitant to shake my hand or hug me. In case she went flimsy.

Suddenly, all became clear.

The reason she was in Withernsea.

Was me.

“Lys,” Bartholomew said as he walked in. His eyes feasted on me like he’d seen water in a desert but was yet to discover it was real. He kept a distance away from me and then his expression changed, his jaw tightened, and he said, “You shouldn’t have come here. You’ve wasted your time.”

“Stop being an absolute dickhead, Barty,” his sister yelled. “The love of your life has come to our home. Why are you acting like this? You’ve been a

miserable lump for months, and that's not just because of Mum." She focused on me. "Take a seat, Alyssa, and you too, Barty. I'm going to say my piece and then leave you two to it."

I did as I was told, and watched as Bartholomew hesitated, before sighing and taking a seat opposite me.

Katy came to sit beside me on the sofa.

"I have diabetes," she told me. "That's why Bartholomew doesn't want to leave me. Because when Mum was poorly, I neglected myself a little and ended up in hospital."

"I'm not leaving you, Katy. Your studies are here too, and this house is too big for you to manage alone."

"I want to live in student accommodation but he's being an idiot about it all," she said. "I'm an adult but he's acting like I'm a child."

"Because he loves you and he's scared of losing you too," I stated. I turned to Bartholomew. "Does Katy know the truth about me?"

"That you're a wolf. Yeah. That's so bloody cool," she said.

"Do you believe in ghosts?" I asked Katy.

"Before Withernsea I didn't believe in them," Bartholomew said. "Now I know otherwise."

"I've never seen one, but if Barty says they exist, then they must do," Katy replied.

"I've met your mum," I said. "In Withernsea. She says she can't come here, but she's currently resident there."

There was a stunned silence.

"This isn't funny, Alyssa," Bartholomew snapped.

"Do I appear to be laughing?"

"That's why you were staring at the photo so hard. Because you recognised her," Katy said.

I nodded.

"I think you both need to come to Withernsea with me. To discover if you can see and talk to her too."

"I'll get my bag," Katy stated, running upstairs and leaving me alone with Bartholomew.

"I'm sorry," he uttered bleakly.

"Don't be sorry for loving your sister so much you'd give up your own happiness, Bartholomew. I'd be the same. I risked my own life to save my family. But maybe there's a way we can have everything we want? Will you

come to Withernsea to find out?”

He nodded. “I just need to grab a few things.”

Ten minutes later, we were headed back to Withernsea, Bartholomew driving. I just had to hope that Penelope would still be around when we got there.

The car journey had been awkward, the silence between Bartholomew and I only punctuated by Katy’s excited chatter about getting to see her mum again and to finally step foot in Withernsea. A place her brother had apparently never stopped talking about until he’d returned home and banned the subject.

I directed Bartholomew to the outside of the address Penelope had given me. I saw his sharp exhale and the tremble of his hand as he locked the car doors once we’d exited. Despite the fact I wished to grab his hand and squeeze it in reassurance, I refrained. We weren’t a couple anymore.

Standing outside the door, I knocked. As I heard footsteps, my own heart raced, then my face fell as Ebony opened the door.

“Penny’s in the living room, come in,” she said.

“Oh my god,” Katy exclaimed, staring at her brother. “Is this really happening?”

He took her hand, and they followed Ebony through to the living room. I trailed behind them. Ebony dropped back and whispered to me.

“Just relax, darling. Everything is as it should be. Now we’ll go into the kitchen because those two need alone time with their mum.”

Reluctantly, I did what Ebony asked, though my heart and my wolf yearned to go be beside my mate.

CHAPTER 22

PENELOPE

I had enough strength to hug my son and daughter hard before a translucence began to creep over me.

“Mum, are you leaving?” Katy panicked.

“I don’t think so, honey. I think it’s just I’ve used a lot of energy on these hugs.”

My children sat down staring at me as if I could provide all the answers as to why we were here. But I was just as in the dark as they were.

“Why Withernsea, Mum? Why did you not return home?”

“I’m not entirely sure,” I confessed. “But I believe it’s connected to Alyssa.”

Bartholomew found it hard to keep eye contact with me.

“I’ve kept bumping into her. She loves you so much, son. Her wolf has held her in torment for months. She’s been pondering the question of whether you were truly her mate or if you were just a first love. I believe she has the answers now. What she doesn’t have is her mate.”

“I need to look after Katy,” he declared stubbornly.

“No, you don’t,” Katy shot back. “Mum, tell him!”

I could have wept then, for the fact I knew this familiarity was part of my past.

A knock came at the door, and Ebony walked in. She came and sat with us.

“Your mother isn’t only here for Alyssa,” she stated, looking at both of my children. “She’s here for you two.”

We all looked at her, waiting for more. What did she mean?

“This house you’re in. It’s almost finished. It has two double bedrooms,

one for each of you. My husband needs to take on an apprentice as his business is expanding faster than he can cope, and this house has a reduced rent for employees.” She winked at Bartholomew. “I’ve discovered you can do your course online,” she told my daughter. “And in your spare time, maybe you’d like to apply for the part-time hours Jax has available in her café? She replaced Bartholomew when he left, but she’s still in need of an extra pair of hands.”

“What do you think?” I asked my children.

“I think *hell yes*,” Katy replied.

Bartholomew looked from Katy to me and back again. “I’ll still be a pain in the butt checking on you.”

“Of course you will, you’re my big brother. Now, please go find Alyssa for God’s sake and tell her the news.”

I saw him hesitate.

“Your mum’s not leaving yet. Go get your girl,” Ebony told him. With her words of encouragement and reassurance, Bartholomew raced out of the room.

I looked at Ebony and smiled.

CHAPTER 23

ALYSSA

I was nervous left alone in the kitchen. I'd said I'd leave when Ebony told me she needed to go talk to the Simpsons, but she'd shook her head and said I needed to stay. So here I was, torturing myself over what ifs and maybes.

Then the door opened and Bartholomew headed towards me like an dart aiming for a bullseye. Before I knew it, he'd picked me up and his mouth was on mine.

I growled and so did my wolf.

"Alyssa, forgive me. I had to put my sister first," he said when he finally broke the kiss.

"I understand, but what now?" My heart was beating so fast as I waited for his answer that I thought I might pass out.

"Now you're mine," he said, "and I'm never letting you go again."

"Really?"

He nodded. "I'm your mate, correct?"

"Yes."

"Then I think it's time I learned more about the pack, don't you? Time for me to reassure your family that I'm the one for you."

My heart leaped and inside me something unfurled. Like the contentment of my wolf seeped through me until I felt whole again.

I might be fated to be the first female alpha of the Withernsea pack, but I'd have my man and my family at my side.

Everything I could possibly need.

CHAPTER 24

THEO

February 14th, 2019

Having friends in high places, ie Heaven, really did work out if your ghost parents wanted to get remarried on Valentine's day.

And when Cupid himself was a friend of your wife's then that meant love was certainly all around us as we waited for the ceremony to get under way. As was lots and lots of pink. Even my mum's wedding dress was bright cerise, decorated with an abundance of pale pink roses on the swathes of taffeta.

Dad wore a matching pink tie, and his cheeks also matched such was his joy. Watching me, watching my parents, Shelley walked towards me.

"They are so in love still after all these years," she said.

"As we shall be too." I drew Shelley into my arms and kissed her passionately.

"Oooh," Shelley declared.

"Have I caused you to orgasm on the spot with my manliness, wife?" I queried, startled by her quiver.

She grabbed my hand and placed it on her stomach. "No, you great moron. The baby just kicked." I waited a few moments and then I felt it. The little flutter, just discernible if you were seeking it.

"I'll put your insult down to hormones," I stated. "While delighting in this new development."

Cupid walked over. "It's time. Please take your places."

Henry, Bartholomew, and I had worked quickly to transform the outside barn into a wedding venue. Having a vampire on board made things happen a

lot faster and I'd also enlisted Frankie to help too when he and Lucy had returned from their latest travels last week.

It was funny how things turned out. Charlie had dealt with my father's curse so that any business could be run on Goodacres Farm. Now I could add supernatural weddings to my repertoire. I'd done an online course to get ordained, though today Cupid himself was taking the helm.

Shelley and I took our seats, and we watched as a nervous groom stood at the top near Cupid, preparing to re-take his vows.

His bride walked up the aisle, smiling fondly at her husband-to-be-again, before rolling her eyes at Cupid.

"Lachlan and Jessica..." Cupid began.

I turned to Shelley. "I still can't believe you persuaded Jess to let her ex-father-in-law remarry them."

"I pointed out the sheer amount of grief she'd get if she didn't. Mary's enthusiasm for the double wedding has ensured that Cupid has been happy for Jess to wear a simple pale-pink cocktail dress rather than a full-on meringue, and her and Lachlan are escaping shortly after for a long weekend in Paris."

We watched them be declared man and wife. Lachlan had only just kissed his bride when his father grabbed both of them in an embrace and swung them around. "I'm so happy," he declared to all of us watching. His daughter-in-law didn't seem to share his enthusiasm, as she wriggled and shrieked to be put down.

The first wedding done; it was time for my father to take his place at the front. I moved to stand beside him as his best man. Shelley was now at my mother's side, set to give her away as daughter-in-law of the bride.

"You ready, Dad?" I asked him.

"You betcha, son."

Mum walked to Dad's side and Shelley and I took our seats once more.

"We are gathered here today," Cupid stated, "to celebrate the remarriage of Mary Elizabeth and Edward. They have prepared their own vows."

"Oh no," Shelley said, before covering her mouth and making out she was coughing.

My father started his vows.

"Mary, I have loved you from the first time I ever set eyes on you. The first time around we stated until death do us part, but death cannot part us again either. I swear to be yours forevermore. Whether we can see each other

or not, my love will always be there.”

It was now my mum’s turn.

“Edward, I thought you had not returned to the farm with me, yet I should have known you would always be by my side. I never stopped loving you, and I’m so happy we are reunited. I also vow my love will always be with you forever.”

“Wow, she behaved,” I said.

Shelley looked as shocked as I felt.

“Now I must ask, are there any persons here present who would reject this marriage?” Cupid asked.

“Yes!” Alistair ran in. “I object. I cannot get over this woman. She is incredible. Don’t marry him, Mary, I beg of you.”

Mary placed a hand to her head in a dramatic fashion while I dashed to my father’s side, holding him still.

“Oh, Alistair,” Mum declared. “I know I’m an amazing woman, but I love this man beyond words. I’m so sorry to disappoint you, but I’m his.”

Alistair looked dejected. “I understand. Farewell, Mary. Please forgive my interruption everyone,” he said before walking back out.

“You can get off me, Theo. Your mother set this all up,” Dad said.

“What?!” My mouth dropped open. “Mother!”

“Look at everyone. They’re lapping it up,” my mum declared. “If I’m leaving today, Theo. I’m going in style. Just a shame neither your dad nor Alistair was willing to fight in the aisle.”

“She wanted to put mud down too,” my father stated.

“Is it possible we could continue with the wedding?” Cupid asked.

My mum winked at him. “Course we can, honey. Oh, by the way, I got extra eclairs for the buffet, seeing as you said they were your favourite.”

That seemed to satisfy Cupid’s frustrations.

“I now declare you husband and wife,” he quickly said, once my parents were facing him.

As my parents kissed, he was already heading towards the food, licking his lips.

We’d set up the buffet in a marquee erected at the side of the converted barn.

Cupid had piled his plate high and was heartily tucking in already. My mum and dad walked towards us, and I noted that they were accompanied by Angel Sophia.

“We’re going on our honeymoon, son,” Mum said.

Between my brows creased.

Shelley took my hand. “We felt that was an easier way for them to say goodbye,” she said softly.

“Oh.”

I couldn’t believe it. The time had come. My parents were leaving, and I’d never see them again. I swallowed.

Mum swept me into her arms. “I won’t be far, Theo, and I will always be there. Just like in my vows to your dad, I say the same to you: even if you can’t see me, I’ll be there. I’m just living a little further away, that’s all.”

She kissed both my cheeks and then moved onto Shelley. I noted Charlie had also come to stand nearby. Before long there was a queue of those who knew my mum saying their goodbyes.

My father had hung back a little. “I’m not as confident as your mum. But one thing I can assure you is that she’s in safe hands with me. All I have left to say is that, Theo, I’m so proud of the man you’ve become. I never doubted for a second that you’d be a fantastic husband and father. You learned from the best after all.” He winked, before hugging me tight.

Mum turned to Angel Sophia. “Can’t we have our wedding night before we go? Like can we go upstairs, before we go upstairs?”

“Mary, Heaven will make you feel post-orgasmic all the time,” Sophia declared.

“Oh, right. Beam us up then, Scotty,” Mum told her.

“I worked with Cupid on something,” Sophia told our small crowd. “We did this special despatching with Penelope earlier, and Bartholomew and Katy found it comforting. Mary and Edward, please hold hands, and know I will be accompanying you to Heaven.”

We waited and watched as little pink and red love hearts swirled around my parents. Their faces beamed with pure love as their bodies began to glow with a white light, before fading. Two hearts joined together and then popped into pink heart confetti that also faded out.

They were gone.

But although my grief was there, I knew Cupid and Sophia had made sure we were full of love and peace too.

It wouldn't be Withernsea without drama at the wedding reception and this one proved no exception.

"What's going on?" Shelley spat out at Cupid and a dark-haired man I'd never seen before.

"This man is clearing the food away when I haven't finished eating," Cupid announced angrily.

"Boone!" Shelley pulled at her hair. "I told you to wait."

"I know but he's so messy," Boone replied. "It's doing my head in."

"Who is this person?" I asked my wife.

"This is Boone. Boone, this is my husband Theo, and this is Cupid. Bearing in mind you wish to find love; it might be better if you don't *piss the main man off*."

Boone paled.

"I'm sorry, sir. I'm a brownie, and this is what we like to do. Clean."

Cupid's eyes appraised the table. "Brownies. I'd forgotten about those," he said, launching towards the plate of chocolate goodness and forgetting about Boone altogether.

"My office. Tomorrow morning," Shelley ordered Boone. "In the meantime, you can go tidy Mary's room as she doesn't need it anymore."

"Thanks so much, Shelley," Boone said, and he dashed off.

"You okay?" my wife asked, concern etched on her features.

"Yeah, it'll take some time to get used to my parents not being around, but I'm fine. Thanks for checking in with me, sweet wife."

"No problem," she said with a cautious smile, and I realised that's not what she'd meant.

"What's going on?"

"Nothing," she blurted, but her eyes shot to the back of the barn.

I whizzed quickly back there, finding my daughter in a clinch with her husband.

"Charlie, sweetheart, it's time for charades," I yelled.

The End

Will Boone ever manage to find the love of his life?
Find out in *A Fae worse than Death*, out 29 February 2024.
Pre-order here: books2read.com/u/mgROk7

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Andie xo

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Andie M. Long is author of the popular Supernatural Dating Agency series amongst many others.

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