



Howl OF FAME



NY TIMES & USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR
MILLY TAIDEN

HOWL OF FAME

PARANORMAL DATING AGENCY

BOOK 65

MILLY TAIDEN



CONTENTS

[Howl of Fame](#)

[About the Book](#)

[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](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Also by Milly Taiden](#)



HOWL OF FAME

PARANORMAL DATING AGENCY

*NEW YORK TIMES and USA TODAY BESTSELLING
AUTHOR*

MILLY TAIDEN

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ABOUT THE BOOK

When alpha wolf shifter Mason Phillips seeks the help of Gerri Wilder, matchmaker extraordinaire, he thinks she's sent him on a wild goose chase. He only has a business card to a local bakery, Jane's Sweet & Treats. **When he lays eyes on Jane...he knows exactly why Gerri sent him.**

Jane Williams did the whole marriage thing, and it blew up in her face. She was done with men. Then a sexy-as-hell man walks into her shop, turning her world upside down. **But she will not submit herself to another man who wants her to be his maid.**

No fears, though. Mason has a few tricks up his sleeve to woo her, as does his wolf half. But, damn, if his mate isn't stubborn about her independence. **Unfortunately, her sense of freedom is what will get her killed if Mason doesn't deal with his former pack, who are hell-bent on destroying not only him but all he has built.**

—*For Aiden's friends.*

Thank you for keeping me young.

ONE



“Oh, no! Not just no. Hell! Freaking! No! Don’t you even look at me like that!” Jane Williams scolded her friend Gerri Wilder.

“How did I look at you?” Gerri stared back at Jane like she had no idea what the hell she was even talking about.

“I know that look. You’re eyeing me up like you have something, or should I say, someone, in mind for me.” Jane rolled her eyes, not even wanting to go there again with Gerri. “I’ve been telling you for years that I’m not interested in becoming one of your clients. Besides, I don’t have a paranormal bone in my body. So how could I be someone you work with? I’m fully and thankfully human.”

“True. You don’t have a paranormal bone in your body, but you could. Very easily.” Gerri laughed and gave Jane that sassy look.

“Pervert!” Jane laughed. It wasn’t that she was opposed to sex with a shifter, she was opposed to sex in general. Sex for her meant having to deal with a man attached to said penis, and that was a big thanks but no thanks.

“And that’s different from normal, how?” Gerri asked.

Jane rolled her eyes. “Yeah, yeah. Give it up. I’m not interested. I’m too old and cranky to date. I’d likely scare off anyone you tried to set me up with. Dude would straight up run away, back to his momma.” Jane was fine with her single life. She’d been married and divorced and sure as fuck wasn’t about to put up with anyone’s shit ever again. No matter how

big his dick was or how good he was in bed. She was done with men in general. Period. End of discussion.

“I’ll never give up on you, girl. The perfect man is out there for you, and you know I’m right. You’re just afraid. Hey, I get it. Having your heart broken sucks.”

“I’m not afraid of getting my heart broken. I just don’t want to have to work and wait on someone or cook for them for the rest of my damn life. I’m so over all of that. I like just taking care of myself and doing whatever the hell I want. It’s liberating. So, so, so damn liberating. I’m finally living my life for me instead of someone else.”

“Not every man will treat you like fuck face did.”

“I know, but that knowledge still doesn’t change my mind. Don’t you get it? I’m happy. I’m happy with my life. Finally. It’s taken years for me to get to the point in life where I love *me*. Where I don’t feel like I have to have someone in my life just for the sake of not being alone. There’s nothing wrong with being single. I wish people ... cough cough ... you ... would realize that.”

Jane had been through hell with her ex-husband, and she had sworn as she was going through the divorce that she was done with men. Straight up done with them. She hadn’t dated since, and it had been years since she signed the dotted line on those damn papers, gaining her freedom. March 21. It was the date she regained power over her life and became truly free.

She had celebrated it every year for the past ten years. As far as she was concerned, it had been and still was, the best day of her life. No one could change her mind about that. Some people said their best day was their wedding day or the day their kids were born. For Jane, it was the day she signed her separation papers.

“I never said there was anything wrong with being single, but I do think you are still healing from your past trauma. I know that eventually, you will want someone to share your life with. You’ll want someone by your side who loves you unconditionally, no matter what,” Gerri explained.

Jane rolled her eyes. “Relationships might be like that for shifters, but not humans. As far as I’m concerned, in the human world, romances like that are nothing more than fantasy, and I can get that from a book. So, I’m all good. I promise.”

Jane wished she could make Gerri understand that she had no desire to hop into any sort of relationship with a man. Not even a friends-with-benefits kind of relationship. She liked coming home from work and chilling, not having to rush around to prepare a three-course dinner for an ungrateful slob who sat around and scratched his balls while she slaved over a hot stove. Fuck that. Double fuck that. She would never go back to that level of absolute bullshit again. If she had to stay single to ensure her own peace of mind, so be it.

“Not every guy is as shitty as Craig was. Trust me on this,” Gerri tried again to convince Jane, but she didn’t want to hear it. Didn’t care if it was the truth or not. Gerri would not change her mind when it came to this particular subject.

“I’m sure you’re right. But that still doesn’t change the fact that I am absolutely not interested in any way, shape, or form. I like everything I have going on in my life. I don’t need anyone because I don’t feel like I’m missing out on anything or anyone.”

“Fine. I’ll let it go. For now.”

Jane didn’t miss the way Gerri had eyed her up. She knew better. Gerri was not going to let this shit go. She was going to push and push until Jane finally snapped. Just like all of her other friends pushed her to move on and find a man. No one could understand why she wanted to be single. Why she wasn’t out looking for another man. They just didn’t get it, and they, more than likely, would never understand.

That was okay with her. They didn’t have to get it. They just needed to accept her decision to live her life the way she wanted ... man free ... and get over it.

It had taken Jane her entire life to be comfortable in her own skin, curves and all. Mentally, she was finally in a healthy place and exactly where she wanted to be in all aspects of her

life. She felt good. She liked getting out of bed and going to her bakery. She loved who she was and what she did. So why was it such a problem for everyone else?

“The hell you will,” Jane replied. “I know you better than you know your own self. You will ride my ass about finding that special someone until I finally give in.”

Gerri gasped as if Jane hadn't just told her the God's honest truth.

“Please. You know I'm right.”

“Whatever,” Gerri said with an exaggerated eye roll.

“All I'm saying is that you shouldn't hold your breath when it comes to me wanting to find a man. Shifter or not, I still think you need fucking air to breathe.”

“I don't know why you are being so obstinate when it comes to this. I know you don't mind being single, but you have to feel like you're missing something. Anything?” Gerri asked.

“Honestly, no. I'm good. I know you find it hard to believe, but it's the truth, nonetheless.”

“I find that to be so odd. Normally, people want that special someone to grow old with. To share their lives with.”

“I get it. You're in the business of helping people find their happily ever afters. But I've found mine. Everyone's happily ever after is different. You've just never met anyone like me.”

Jane had never spoken truer words. She knew her worth and was perfectly fine living out the rest of her life in her own company. She had friends and family and a thriving small business she loved. What more could she want?

TWO



“Do you think you will be able to locate my mate?” Mason Phillips asked as he sat in front of the woman who ran The Paranormal Dating agency. Her services came highly recommended by several of his friends. Skepticism still rang loud in his own mind and heart, but only time would tell if this woman could do what she really claimed to be able to do.

“Absolutely. I’ve already located her. As a matter of fact, I know her personally. She’s one of my dearest friends.” Gerri smiled up at him.

Mason’s heart stopped when he heard those words. “She’s a friend of yours?” He couldn’t keep the surprise from his tone.

“She is indeed. But that also comes with its own unique challenges and issues,” Gerri said with an exaggerated sigh.

“What does that mean?” The fact that his mate was Gerri’s friend had to be a good thing. Right? She could make a call, introduce them, and boom ... mate! Easier than he had ever imagined. They could wrap it up by morning if everything worked out as he expected.

“As far as your relationship, it means nothing that she’s my friend. But what I will tell you is that she’s not ready to be anyone’s anything.”

“Wait until she meets me. She will change her mind.” Mason motioned to his face and his body. “I look damn good, and I know it. Who wouldn’t want this? My mate will take one

look at me and say yes to whatever I ask.” He was certain of his abilities with women.

Arrogant? A bit.

Cocky? Yes.

Confident? One hundred percent ... fuck yes!

Mason knew what he brought to the table. He was strong, successful, good-looking, and he had a big dick. What woman wouldn't want that?

Gerri rolled her eyes. “While I appreciate that you are a typical alpha male, I think a bit of humility would suit you well when it comes to your mate.”

“It'll be fine. Just tell me who she is. I'd like to claim my mate as soon as possible. My man Giles can call her and set up the date. It will be perfect. And easy. Mark my words.”

Gerri arched an eyebrow, her eyes widening. “How quickly do you think your mate will fall into your arms and say yes? And are you really planning on having your butler be the first person to contact her? Really?” He could hear the skepticism in her voice. It was fine. He didn't mind. She didn't understand him or how the ladies reacted to him.

“Twenty-four hours.” His answer was quick and blunt. There was no need to make any further explanations. Again, he knew his own skills and abilities when it came to wooing women. He would woo the fuck out of his mate and show Gerri how the hell it was done.

She snorted. “Yeah, good luck with that.” She pushed a business card across her desk toward him.

“Jane Williams. Jane's Sweets & Treats” He read the card and glanced at Gerri. “I don't understand. I'm not in need of a baker.” What the hell? Why didn't this infuriating woman just give him the information that he wanted and be done with it?

“I realize that, but it is what it is. Now, if you'll excuse me. I have other engagements that I need to get ready for. Have a good day, Mr. Phillips.”

“Wait! What? Aren’t you going to finish your job and give me more information?” Mason jumped up from his seat.

“I’ve given you all you need. I will not interfere at all in what needs to occur naturally. Best of luck with your mate.”

Mason shook his head. “Seriously?”

Gerri stood and showed him to the door. “Seriously. Again, best of luck.”

When he stood there and looked at her as if she’d shifted into a giraffe, she gave him a light push on his back, sending him on his way.

“Seriously?” he asked again. This time to a closed door.

GERRI WALKED BACK to her desk and sighed. Mason Phillips was about to get a hard lesson in life and women. Especially if he thought that Jane was going to roll over and play good girl. She wasn’t sure his ego would survive Jane. She knew Jane better than Jane knew herself. What Gerri wouldn’t give to be a fly on the wall for their first interaction.

She giggled to herself, imagining the look on Jane’s face when Mason went all peacock on her, strutting around, trying to convince her that she was the one for him. Thinking back over the conversation, she probably should have warned him that Jane was fully human.

Gerri shrugged. “Serves him right.”

She picked up her cell phone and stared at it for a minute before placing it on her desk again. She had thought about texting or calling Jane to warn her about the incoming shitshow that was about to turn her life upside down, but she feared Jane would never forgive her meddling. She wouldn’t interfere any further than she already had.

In Gerri’s defense, she had dropped the subject of hooking up Jane with anyone after their last conversation well over a month ago. Mason had come to her on his own. Gerri had

nothing to do with arranging a meeting with him. Her conscience was clear when it came to that. Still, she did feel a tiny bit of guilt knowing what or rather who was heading Jane's way.

Her friend was about to have her life turned upside down in a big way. Gerri couldn't stop the smile that spread across her face. Whether Jane knew it or not, Mason was exactly what she needed to shake up her entire world. And Gerri had the very distinct feeling that Mason was going to be hella' good at driving Jane insane.

THREE



“Good morning,” Jane called out as Amelia and Yulia, her two full-time workers, arrived at the bakery to start their day. It was Monday morning, and they had several large orders to prepare before their customers arrived to pick them up.

“Good morning,” they said in unison.

Amelia tossed her apron on before asking, “What’s on the schedule for today, boss lady?”

Jane glanced down at her iPad. “We have four dozen donuts, mixed. Eight dozen bagels. Five dozen cupcakes and three cakes. I already have the cakes and cupcakes in the oven. I’m working on the bagels now. If the two of you want to start on donuts, that would be great.” She didn’t know what she would do without Amelia and Yulia. They had both become such an integral part of her day-to-day operations.

“Easy peasy. We’re on it,” Yulia finished tying her apron around her, and the two of them set off on their task.

“What did everyone do this weekend?” Amelia asked.

“Laundry. And chased the kids around the house,” Yulia replied. “I was glad when my alarm went off at 3:30 this morning just so I could get a break from home life.”

“Ha! Is it really that bad?” Amelia asked.

“Girl, just wait till you pop three hellions outta’ your coochie. Then we’ll talk. Taking care of three kids under the age of five is exhausting. It was super fun when my Lilly

begged for a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, then proceeded to have a full-on meltdown when I handed it to her.” Yulia rolled her eyes.

“Did she decide she didn’t want it?” Jane asked.

“Oh, she wanted it. The problem was the jelly. She wanted it on the bottom of the sandwich.” Yulia shook her head, remembering the ridiculous situation and severity of her daughter’s tantrum.

“What? That doesn’t even make sense,” Amelia said.

“So what did you do,” Jane asked.

“Grabbed the plate, walked into the kitchen, and flipped the damn sandwich over. She wiped away the crocodile tears and thanked me for making her a new sandwich when I gave it back to her.”

“Oh, God!” Amelia laughed.

“That wasn’t even the best part of the weekend. Little Max realized he had balls and flipped his shit. It freaked him out so badly that he started trying to rip them out of his body. I couldn’t even deal with that. I dropped him on my husband’s lap and told him to deal. Lilly heard what was going on and demanded to know why she didn’t have balls. Cue the second meltdown before noon. So, yeah. Work is a nice break. Please tell me that one or both of you had a sexy date and an amazing weekend. Let me live vicariously through one or both of you.”

“I didn’t do anything fun. My sister came over on Saturday, and we watched a movie, ordered pizza, and a couple bottles of wine,” Jane said.

“Didn’t you have a hot date you were looking forward to, Amelia?” Yulia asked.

Amelia’s face turned beet red. She tried turning away, but it was too late. Both Jane and Yulia had seen it.

“Spill it. What happened?” Jane demanded.

“Ugh! I don’t even wanna talk about it,” Amelia sighed.

“That bad?” Jane asked, sympathetic to Amelia’s plight.

“Girl, you just don’t have a clue. Either of you.” She motioned back and forth between Jane and Yulia.

“If Mark and I ever get divorced, I’m staying single. I’ve heard enough horror stories over the years to know that I don’t ever want to go down that road again,” Yulia replied.

“I would consider becoming a nun if I didn’t like dick so much. I just can’t seem to not need it. I’m just having a hard time dealing with guys these days. I do not understand them at all. Nor do I really want to try. It’s all just games and bullshit and a bunch of weirdos.”

“So, what happened?” Yulia asked.

“Fine!” Amelia sighed again. “We met on a dating app, but not like Tinder. Because I’m actually looking for a relationship and not a hookup. We met and seemed to click instantly. We have a ton of things in common. He looks super cute in all of his pics and the video chats we had. So I wasn’t worried about any of that when we actually met. What I wasn’t prepared for were the noises he made when he ate or how rude he was to the waitress. Then there was the fact that he was a chauvinistic pig.”

“Oh, no! What did he do?” Jane asked.

“First, you all know that I can’t handle when someone chews with their mouth open, but this guy was extra when it came to that. Like, next-level grossness. He sounded like a damn cow chewing his cud. I could literally see the food sloshing around in his mouth. The smack, smack, smack of his lips grated on my nerves. I thought I was going to lose my shit. If that wasn’t gross enough, he picked his teeth clean with a fork after he was done eating. Chunks of steak stuck between his teeth flew onto the table and plate. It was all I could do to keep my own dinner down.” Amelia shuttered, recounting her tale.

“Oh, that’s nasty. Did his mother not teach him better?” Yulia asked.

“I have no idea. He was so rude to the waitress too. I hate people like that. I ended up leaving a note and a nice tip.

Hopefully, it made up for his behavior.”

“Did you speak to him about any of it after the date?” Jane asked.

“Nope. I’ve been a full-on ghost with his never-ending stream of texts and phone calls. I have no desire to spend my time with someone like that. He probably kicks puppies too. I just don’t need people like that in my life.”

“This is exactly why I will never date again,” Jane said. “I don’t have to and will never again deal with men who act like that.” Listening to Amelia’s horror story only gave Jane the proof that she needed to keep the status quo and stay the hell away from any and all men. It confirmed what she already knew. Being single was the best thing for her mental and emotional health. Who wanted to deal with that bullshit? Certainly not Jane.

FOUR



Mason parked across the street from Jane's Treats & Sweets, wondering for the millionth freaking time why Gerri had sent him to this place. He watched as two females entered the shop with a key. Once they were inside, one turned and twisted the metal tumbler on the glass door, locking the bakery back up.

He pulled his phone from his pocket and googled to see what time they officially opened. "Twenty more minutes," he said aloud. Maybe then he would find out what the hell the mystery was that Gerri had been so coy about. Why she had refused to answer even the simplest of questions. He scrolled through his emails, needing to kill some time before he went out of his damn mind.

Conversations that he'd had with his friends passed through his mind. Everyone he knew who had worked with Gerri had been head over heels happy with their mates. They had all promised Gerri was the real deal when it came to matchmaking, but he was still skeptical as fuck.

How could the woman know anything about him or what he was looking for in a mate, having only met a single time for fewer than ten minutes? It was impossible as far as he was concerned and more than likely on a damn wild goose chase. If that was indeed the case, he was going to be straight-up pissed.

Mason glanced up from his phone just as a couple of people made their way into the now-opened bakery. He turned his truck off, grabbed his keys, and hopped from the cab.

Crossing the street in a few quick strides, the scent of freshly baked goods hit him almost instantly, making his stomach growl in response to the mouthwatering aromas wafting from the bakery.

The two young women he saw entering earlier caught his attention but failed to maintain it. It wasn't that they weren't pretty. They were. Just nothing spectacular, in his opinion. The one was short and blonde with a rail-thin figure and striking blue eyes. The other was a redhead who was a bit taller with more curves and a wedding ring on her finger. Definitely not for him.

The one who caught his attention and held it was a beautiful brunette with a smile that lit up the entire bakery. Mason sucked in a deep breath. *Is the smell of peaches and cream coming from something here in the bakery or the woman?* He asked his wolf, who had been uncharacteristically quiet in his mind for weeks.

His wolf inhaled once, then a second time before charging forward, trying to break free of the hold Mason had on him.

MINE! his wolf shouted.

Well, well, well. This was a stunning turn of events and one that Mason had not expected. Gerri had been right all along. He would indeed find everything he needed at Jane's.

All he had to do now was keep his wolf in check and pick his mouth up off the floor.

The sound of her laugh was a symphony to his ears as she greeted her customers, talking and joking with each. He could tell by the way they looked at her that they were her regulars and held a deep admiration for the woman.

"Welcome to Jane's. How can I help you?" the woman asked as he stepped up to the counter.

"I'll have an everything bagel with cream cheese, a large black coffee, and your number." He smiled at her with what he knew to be his best *you know you want me* look.

"One bagel and coffee coming right up." She smiled back without batting an eyelash. Somehow, she had completely

managed to ignore his request for her number.

“Don’t forget to toss in your number. I’d like to take you out for a night on the town.” How could she say no to that?

“While I appreciate your candor, I’m going to have to pass. But thank you.” Without giving him a chance to answer, the woman grabbed a large paper cup and filled it with coffee. Popping a lid on it and setting it on the counter, she didn’t even bother to look up at him as she prepared his bagel. Once it was bagged, she made her way back to the counter to ring up his order.

“Other than my number, is there anything else I can get for you?” she asked as he handed her a ten-dollar bill.

“Yes. I’d really like to get to know you,” he persisted, knowing damn well that she was his mate.

“Uh. No. You really don’t want to get to know me. I’m not on the market for dating anyone,” she countered.

“Are you married?” he asked, double-checking to see if there was a ring on her finger. He let out a sigh of relief when he saw her ring finger was bare. Just the thought of her having someone at home waiting for her drove him insane with jealousy.

“No. I’m divorced. I’m not dating anyone. I don’t date. Period.” She was firm with her answer, allowing no leeway for further discussion. “Next?” she asked, dismissing him.

He stood there with his mouth agape, looking like an idiot. No woman had ever said no to him. Not a single one. And they certainly never dismissed him. He was normally the one fending off advances. A strange feeling passed through him.

“Excuse me.” A woman’s voice sounded behind him. She was clearly waiting to place her order and get her day started, but Mason couldn’t seem to walk away from the sexy woman who should be excited to go out with him.

“Sir, please. There are people behind you who would like to place their orders,” the woman said.

“This conversation isn’t over.” Mason grabbed his bag and stepped to the side. He had planned on eating his bagel in his truck before heading to work, but to hell with that. He pulled up a chair at a small table where he could keep an eye on the stunning woman behind the register.

He wanted to know more about her. Scratch that. He wanted to know everything about her. Starting with her name and how many times she could orgasm in one night. His cock throbbed in his jeans, wanting the beauty on her back and moaning his name as he slid balls deep into her.

Sadly, all that fun and fucking was going to have to wait. For reasons Mason couldn’t even begin to fathom, his mate had zero interest in him. The thought alone chapped his ass and made him want to toss her over his shoulder and slap that fine ass of hers until she gave in. But he kept himself in check and his ass glued to the seat.

When he finished his bagel, he went back to the counter to refill his coffee and grabbed two dozen donuts for the office. Once again, he had asked to take her out, and she shot him down in seconds flat.

Frustrating woman. No matter. Now that he knew who she was, it was game fucking on. He would win her. Hell, he’d woo her if he had to. Either way, the mysteriously frustrating woman would be his. Just as the Fates had intended. He just had to figure out how to get her to give him the time of day.

FIVE



“Who the hell was that?” Yulia asked as the stranger left the bakery. She eyed Jane in a way Jane did not want to be eyed.

Yes, the guy had asked her out, and she had shot him down quicker than she could blink. Sure, he was hot, but she had zero interest in him or going out for a night on the town with him.

“I have absolutely no idea,” Jane struggled to catch her breath. One look at the handsome customer and heat tore through her body. It had been years since she’d had such a visceral reaction to a man ... any man. It was like something in her body instantly came to life, reminding her that she was a female with needs. Needs that hadn’t been satiated in a long, long time. Fuck, fuck, fuck. She didn’t want or need to feel any of those things again.

“Well, he sure was interested in you.” Amelia laughed.

Ugh. They were not going to drop this shit.

“That’s nice. But everyone here knows that I don’t date. Period.” Jane wanted to shut them down cold. If she gave so much as an inch, they would take a mile, and the next thing Jane knew, she’d be saying yes to the hottie just because her friends talked her into it.

“Do you even have eyeballs, woman? How could you say no to that?” Yulia asked. “Hell, if I wasn’t married, I would have been all over that. You couldn’t have missed the fact that

he was freaking hot. As in, whoops, I just dropped my panties. Let me bend over and grab them, H O T.”

“What she said.” Amelia sighed and fanned herself. “He’s dreamy. I feel like I might swoon.”

“He also looked to be about ten years younger than me, which would just be exhausting. My original statement stands. I don’t date.” What Jane left out of her statement was ... that if she did date, she would have grabbed him, thrown his hot ass on the counter, and had her way with them right after giving the girls the day off and tossing all the customers to the curb. But, hey, that was for her to know. Amelia and Yulia definitely didn’t need to know, or they’d turn into mini-Gerri’s and hop on the *find Jane a date* train. She so did not need that to happen.

“So what? Who cares if he’s younger? It just means he has more stamina when it comes to taking care of you, if you know what I mean.” Yulia giggled and arched an eyebrow at Jane.

“You are so naughty.” Jane tried to hold back, but a girlish giggle escaped her mouth.

“Hell yeah, I am. And proud of it, babe! Don’t worry. I have enough naughty to share with you. I’ll help you get back on that bologna pony. You’ll be sayin’ giddy up in no time.” Yulia rocked her hips, mimicking a sexual motion.

“Oh, God. Please don’t ever let me see that again.” Jane laughed at Yulia’s antics.

“Whatever,” Yulia joked.

“I think it’s sweet. He was obviously very interested in you,” Amelia said. “Maybe you should find out what he wants ... at the very least. Talk to the guy. What could it hurt?”

“I think it’s clear what he wants. Did you see the way he looked at her? Like she was freaking breakfast, lunch, dinner, and a midnight snack. He wants to eat her up,” Yulia snarked.

“Nobody is eating anybody up. Back to work. We’ve got orders to get ready.” Jane wanted nothing more than to change the subject. She didn’t want her sex life, or lack thereof, to

become a frequent topic of conversation. Pass. Thanks. Time to put on her boss pants.

“Fine. Fine. She’s cracked the whip. Time to focus and get the job done,” Amelia said, dramatically acting as if Jane was some sort of slavedriver.

“I’m heading back to the kitchen. Are you all okay taking care of things up front?” Jane asked.

“We got it, boss. Do what you need to do,” Yulia replied.

Without another word, Jane passed through the double metal doors and headed straight for the sink to wash her hands before getting started. Once her hands were clean, she donned a pair of gloves and packed cupcakes into boxes. Her mind strayed to the handsome customer who had been so adamant about taking her out. At first, she had ignored him, not knowing what to say or how to respond to such a simple request.

It had been years since any man had even bothered to look at her, let alone ask her out. Not like she had wanted them anyway.

But this man ... W.O.W.

He sure was something to look at. He had to have been at least six and a half feet, with a chiseled body and an ass you could bounce a damn quarter on. He’d been dressed in jeans and a black T-shirt that looked as if it had been painted on. It was easy to see the flex of his muscles under his shirt with every move he made.

His close-cropped dark hair highlighted his bright blue eyes. His soft and very kissable lips were framed by a light goatee. She shivered when she thought of the light scratchiness that would accompany his kisses.

Jane shook off the sudden bout of lust ravaging her mind and body. Where the hell it had even come from, she had no idea. But now that her body was waking from the long slumber it had been since her divorce, she found it almost impossible to push back the feelings and sensations overwhelming and distracting her from her job.

For the first time in years, Jane felt ... giddy, wanting to see him again.

Ugh. She didn't want to want a man. She wanted to stay single for the rest of her life. She wondered if she had scared the man off for good or if he would turn out to be a glutton for punishment and find his way back to the bakery.

For the rest of the day, Jane had managed to shake the thought of the man who had asked her out. It wasn't until much later in the evening that his smiling face popped into her mind again, just as she lay in her bed. She stretched out across her king-size bed like she did every night for as long as she could remember. Tossing and turning, she punched her pillow, trying to flatten it a little so she could pop her arm under the pillow and lay on her side.

When she finally faded off into the deep slumber, she had so desperately looked forward to, images of the man's face filled her dreams.

SIX



Mason paced back and forth across his bedroom carpet. The rest of his day had been a mix of highs and lows.

His emotions were a hot mess, and that was so not like him. He was Mason Phillips. Calm. Cool. Collected. It's who he was. He'd worked hard all his life. Focused on what he wanted and made it happen. He started off working at his job in the mail room, and now he was the CEO of Aberdeen Security Solutions with a controlling stake in the company.

There was a knock on his door.

"Come in," he said.

"Is there anything I can get you before I retire for the night, sir?"

"No. I'm good. Thanks, Giles."

"Sir."

The door closed. Mason resumed his pacing and got back to his thoughts about his mate.

The word no had never been in his vocabulary when it came to something or someone he wanted. Yet his mate wouldn't even give him the time of day despite his attempts at flirting.

"What the actual hell," he asked aloud, his voice echoing off the barren walls. His master bedroom contained a bed, nightstand, and lamp. The rest of his home looked just as spartan as his bedroom. It wasn't that he didn't have the money to decorate. He did. He just had no idea what to do

when it came to decorations, so he'd opted for the barest of necessities. In other words, the quintessential bachelor pad. Complete with a nearly empty fridge. He was pretty sure there was a block of cheese and a couple of beers. Maybe a couple of slices of day-old pizza.

It was freaking pathetic, but his job kept him busy. Why not work extra hours when you had nothing more than an empty house to come home to?

The idea of a mate had escaped him for years, having thought he'd never find his. In his youth, he had traveled the world searching for and never finding her. He'd given up on the idea that she had ever existed to begin with. When his friends found their mates with the help of Gerri Wilder at the Paranormal Dating Agency, he was skeptical as fuck. Right up to the point that he had found his mate. Thanks, of course, to Gerri.

Now that he had found her, he wanted her. But she wanted nothing to do with him. At all. There had to be a way for him to reach her. To say all the things he wanted her to know without her refusing to listen. Their situation was a true conundrum. How was he supposed to convince the stubborn woman that she was the one for him if she wanted nothing to do with him and dismissed him so easily?

Mason stripped bare and headed for the shower. Maybe that would help clear his mind from his frustrating mate.

The hot water poured over his frame. Tilting his head back, he closed his eyes and let the water wash over his head and face. The second his eyes closed, his mate's face popped into his mind. His cock hardened to the point of pain. Her scrumptious scent of peaches and cream filled his nostrils. He had to open his eyes to make sure she hadn't stepped into the shower with him. Sadly, she hadn't. Yet, he could sense her. It felt as if she were right there with him.

"I wonder," he said out loud, pondering if he still had a certain ability that he'd long ago given up because of the sheer power of his gift. He didn't like entering others' minds ... especially while they slept. Often seeing or learning things he

had no desire to know, Mason had worked hard his entire life controlling his so-called gift.

Leaning back against the shower wall, he palmed his erection and stroked it up and down, thinking about his mate and those sweet curvy hips of hers. He wanted to wrap his fingers around them while he pumped in and out of her. Imagining her tight sheath gripping his cock with each thrust.

“God, yeah!” he groaned as his seed poured from the head of his cock and down the drain. He couldn’t remember the last damn time he came that fast. The only problem ... his cock was still hard as a fucking rock.

Great.

Mason toweled off and headed for his bed. It had been a long ass day, but he knew sleep would elude him until he dealt with the issue of his raging hard-on. His *gift* called to him again as he climbed into bed and closed his eyes. His mate’s face filled his mind, the sound of her voice ringing in his ears. Drawing in a deep breath, he opened his mind to do something he swore he’d never do again.

Mason lucked out when he connected with his mate instantly in her dream state. Keeping himself invisible, he watched as she dreamt of him. No matter how hard she had tried to deny that she’d had any interest in him, clearly, she had. If not, she wouldn’t be dreaming of him now.

Their conversation replayed on a loop until she finally gave in and said yes to his request to go out. His mouth hit the floor when she stepped from behind the counter and smiled up at him. That was exactly the way he had expected her to react to him the first damn time.

SEVEN



All Jane wanted to do was say yes to the sexy-as-hell customer who had asked her out. Would it really be that bad to finally say yes for once? Stepping out and away from the counter, she came face to face with him.

“So, you’ll say yes to me in your dreams but not in real life?” he asked with a sexy smirk on his face.

“Something like that.” Jane smiled up at him. He was a good foot taller than her, which was perfectly fine with Jane. She liked feeling soft and feminine next to a man, and she definitely felt that standing beside him.

Her sexy stranger didn’t waste a single second, pulling her into his arms. He was hot and hard in all the right places, sending her into a sexual spiral she hadn’t felt in what seemed like for-freaking-ever. The scent of musk and wild male washed over her, drugging her senses. His lips were soft and warm, his tongue searching out hers. The kiss sent a volley of heat straight to her core. Good God, she could get lost in his kisses and would gladly do so.

Jane pulled back, worried about her customers seeing her make-out session. One quick glance confirmed they were the only two in the bakery. It was one of the best things about knowing when you are dreaming.

“I’m Jane. What’s your name?” she whispered. When she had first laid her eyes on him, she thought that he had looked a good deal younger than her ... by like a decade or so, but she had thankfully been wrong. The slight gray stubble was there

in his five o'clock shadow. As were the tiny wisps of gray scattered through his hair.

"Mason." His mouth crashed over hers again. This time with more force. The first kiss was soft and light, exploratory. This kiss ... yeah, it packed the heat and made her want to drop her panties and bend over for him right there in the middle of her bakery, consequences be damned.

Hell, it was only a dream. Right?

Jane wanted him. Far more than she had wanted anyone in more than a decade. Mason had managed to do what no other man had done since her ex. He set her body ablaze. It felt as if the blood in her veins had turned to molten lava, flowing freely through her. She welcomed the heat threatening to consume her.

"I need you, Jane," Mason growled in her ear. His hands moved swiftly down her curvy hips before parting her thighs.

"Mmm," she moaned, loving the fact that he was so damn vocal about his intentions.

"Do you want to feel my cock inside you, Jane?"

"Yes." The word slipped from her mouth before she could stop it.

Mason quickly spun Jane around with her back to his chest. Lifting her arms over her head, he yanked her shirt from her body. He kissed and licked the back of her neck and shoulders.

"I want to see you with your hair down." He reached up and set her hair free from the ponytail that held it firmly in place. Running his fingers through her long chestnut locks, he tugged her head back gently. "I can't wait to hear you calling out my name when I bury myself balls deep into your pussy."

Jane loved the blunt vulgarity Mason used when telling her what he wanted. It was such a breath of fresh air compared to her ex, who used medical names for body parts. It made any sort of dirty talk creepy when it was supposed to be sexy. Hearing that one wanted to lick your vulva wasn't a turn-on. At least, not for Jane.

Mason's fingers slipped under the waist of her jeans. He nimbly unbuttoned and unzipped them in less than a second. Pushing them from her hips, she gingerly stepped out of them and left them in a pile at her feet, along with her discarded shirt.

"Black lace. So fucking hot. I approve," he said as his fingers slid under the lacy material of her panties.

"I'm glad," she purred as his fingertips brushed over her pussy. She relaxed against him, spreading her hips wider to give him better access to her core.

"You're so wet for me," he said as he continued to kiss and lick her neck, throwing in a few nibbles for the fun of it.

"I am." Why bother lying or playing coy like she had no idea what the hell he was talking about? They were both adults who knew what they wanted. At least in her dream, Jane was free to be as bold as she wanted. No harm, no foul. It was kind of like what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. The same concept applied here, considering it was a dream.

Mason parted her lips with his fingers and slid one into her channel.

"Oh, God!" she said, leaning her head back against his shoulder.

"Well, not God. But I don't mind the comparison," he teased.

"Smart ass," she laughed, but that laugh soon turned into a series of soft moans as he slid a second finger inside of her and began a steady pace, scissoring them in and out of her heat.

"I may be a smart ass, but I'm a smart ass who can't wait to taste you." Mason pulled his fingers from her heat and quickly lifted her onto the counter. "Lie back and relax," he commanded.

Jane, who usually never took orders from anyone, did as he had asked and leaned back against the cold counter. Mason parted her legs gently before wrapping them over his shoulders and digging in.

“Fuck!” Jane shouted as his mouth closed over her pussy. He licked and sucked and licked more until she tossed her head back and forth on the counter, moaning his name.

Her fingers tunneled through his hair, pulling his head closer to her pussy. God, it had been so damn long since anyone had given Jane this amount of pleasure. She was pretty sure that she’d come instantly. Thankfully, she was able to hold off, that was until he slid two fingers into her and sucked her clit into his mouth. Then, it was game over for Jane.

“Mason!” she shouted, her hips lifting off the counter. Bright lights danced in her vision as her climax slammed into her. Her limbs trembled. Her breaths hitched in her throat as she tried to suck desperately needed oxygen into her lungs.

“So damn sweet. You taste like pure sugar and honey.” He pulled back and positioned his cock at her entrance. “As much as I love the way you taste, I need to be inside you.”

Mason slammed home in one swift thrust, causing Jane to cry out at the unexpected, yet welcomed intrusion. He was hard and thick, stretching her in all the right places. It wasn’t like she hadn’t taken care of herself over the years. She had.

She had a modern collection of all the best and newest adult toys on the market, but what she’d realized at that moment was that not one of them could compare to what she felt with Mason inside her.

He pulled out to the tip and slammed right back, making her body slide across the smooth surface of the counter.

“You are far tighter than I would have expected you to be,” he growled.

Jane could have sworn his eyes flashed from dark blue to light blue. It had to have been a glitch in her dream. That was the only thing that could possibly explain the discrepancy.

It didn’t matter. None of it. He could have grown a damn tail, and she wouldn’t have cared. All that mattered to Jane was the pleasure Mason was giving her. She was so close to her first climax. God, how she wanted it. Wanted to feel that blissful weightlessness that would accompany what was going

to be a mind-altering orgasm ... one that she desperately needed.

Something rang in the background. Jane couldn't figure out what the hell the noise was that she had heard.

"Stay with me," Mason said.

The noise grew louder and louder with each passing second until Jane could no longer ignore it.

"DAMN IT!" Mason shouted as he opened his eyes. Glancing at his bedside clock, he had been surprised to see it was five in the morning. He'd spent the better part of his night invading Jane's dream before being kicked out when her damn alarm went off.

He had tried like hell to keep her with him as long as possible, all things considered, but her alarm had made it impossible. He tried to seek her out once more, but it was no use. She was no longer in a dream state. Meanwhile, his cock was still rock hard, wanting his mate more than the sleep that kept threatening to pull him under.

Mason grabbed his phone and set the alarm for three hours. It would be just enough sleep before he set his next step in motion.

EIGHT



Jane sat straight up in bed. Her alarm clock's shrill sound still rang in her ears. She slapped the old clock on her bedside table to shut it up as she tried to wrap her mind around the dream that she'd just had. Her heart raced, her skin still feeling every touch her dream lover had given her.

"Sweet Jesus." She sucked in a deep breath, needing to clear her head so she could start her day, but after a dream like that

Jane climbed from her bed on wobbly legs, still shaking off the all-too-real dream. Her mystery lover had turned out to be none other than the flirty customer who had wandered into her shop. While he had been hot as hell and had asked her out, she had turned him down in real life. However, in her dream, she was ready to give it up and give him a yes quicker than she could blink.

It was definitely a complete turnaround from her deep-seated belief that she intended to spend the rest of her life single. The dream had awakened something in her, something that she had missed for what felt like forever.

The touch of a man.

Not just any man. A man that seemed to click with her on a chemical level. From the moment she had met Mason ... if that was even his name ... she'd had a hard time telling him no when he'd asked her out. The word yes nearly flew from her tongue the first time he'd asked. Though she'd been surprised,

it had taken all her willpower to tell him no when she had so desperately wanted to say yes.

Jane still wasn't sure what had been more shocking ... the fact he had asked her out or that she had wanted to say yes more than anything. It was so unlike her. Being alone wasn't and had never been an issue for Jane. She craved the peace, the solitude, and the quiet. She loved doing whatever the hell she wanted whenever she wanted. She had finally found herself. Now, this hot-ass dude popped up out of the blue, threatening to break that harmony she had found.

Abso-fucking-lutely not!

It didn't matter to Jane what it took. She would fight these feelings tooth and nail to maintain the status quo in her life. She wasn't about to let some dude, hot or not, fuck up the contentedness she finally had in her life. No way. Not gonna happen.

Jane was so determined to push away the dream and the thoughts of the sexy customer that she bounced through several recipes she planned on making as soon as she got to the bakery. She kept her mind busy through her morning routine and on the short drive to the bakery.

"Good morning," Yulia called out as she met Jane in front of the bakery.

"Ugh. I don't know about that. It's far too early to make any determination on whether it will be a good morning or not."

"Someone woke up on the wrong side of the bed today," Amelia teased as she met the others.

"Yeah, it happens. Even to the best of us," Jane grumbled. She really didn't want to talk about why she was in a bad mood or about the dream she'd had. She'd actually rather do anything but that. "Let's get the coffee going, so we can all wake the hell up." She twisted the key in the lock and popped the door open.

Waiting for her friends to get inside, Jane sucked in a deep breath of the cool, fresh morning air before pushing the door

closed and turning the tumbler on the lock. They had about an hour until the bakery opened, which meant they needed to hustle.

“I’ll get the coffees going,” Amelia called out as she pulled various flavors of java out of the cabinet and turned on several machines.

“I’ll help you get the baking started,” Yulia said.

“Perfect.” Jane grabbed her apron and tossed it on, quickly tying the strings behind her back. After washing her hands, she dried them off and donned a pair of gloves as Yulia pulled the various doughs from the fridge. Jane set the ovens to the correct baking temperature and got the fryers started as the dough warmed.

Silently talking her way through each of the steps kept her mind off the hottie and all the naughty things they had done in her dream. She grabbed her iPad and scrolled through the orders for the day, wanting to make sure she had all of her ducks in a row.

JANE HAD no idea how much time had passed or even what time it was when she finally made her way out of the kitchen to refill her coffee cup. The second she pushed her way through the double metal doors, the hair on her arms stood on end. The scent of *him* filled her nose over all the wonderful and fresh bakery scents.

He’s here.

“Who’s here?” Amelia asked, looking quite confused.

“Huh?” Jane snapped out of it. Damn. She hadn’t meant to say that out loud.

“You said, ‘He’s here.’ Who’s here?” Amelia glanced around the small dining room. “Ohhh. Never mind. The hottie. Yeah. He’s here.” She smirked at Jane and continued on her way without another word.

Thank God for small favors, Jane thought, really not wanting to explain anything.

She tried like hell to ignore him. *Don't look at him. Don't you dare do it!*

Too bad she never was very good at listening to herself or taking her own advice. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw that he had turned to face her. She tried to look away ... at anything else.

What a miserable failure.

Instead of looking away, she turned to face him and gasped. The look on his face ... it mirrored the one from her dreams.

“Fuck,” she whispered as goosebumps raced across her skin and heat flooded her core. Her face flushed as images of everything they had done flashed through her mind. A knowing smile crossed his face and left Jane wondering if the man who had somehow invaded her dreams was some sort of psychic.

There's no way he can know what I'm thinking.

It was just a dream. A dream where she was free to live out her fantasies to the fullest extent of her imagination. He must've been smiling about something else altogether. There's no way he had a window into the way her mind, thoughts, or dreams ... for that matter ... worked. It wasn't like he knew anything about her. Hell, he probably didn't even know what her name was.

Without saying a single word, the man got up from his seat, grabbed his coffee, and made his way to the exit. With one last glance back and a sexy-as-shit nibble of his bottom lip, he nodded at her and left.

Jane felt like putty. Seriously, her legs felt as if they were going to collapse right out from under her.

“Damn, girl!” Yulia sighed. “If any man ever looked at me like that, I'd probably consider leaving my husband for him, ... and you keep telling him no. I wish I had your willpower.”

“Me too. Me too.” Jane sighed, wondering if his kissable lips would be as soft and warm as they had been in her dream or if they would be even better in real life. God, how she wanted to find out. And that realization shocked her to the core.

Sure, she had seen lots of attractive men over the years. But not one of them had managed to stoke the flames like this mystery man. She wanted him more than she had wanted anything in a very long time.

Just the knowledge of that left her feeling off-kilter. It wasn't something she was used to, and Jane wasn't sure she liked this new and exciting feeling racing through her body.

There had to be some way to push back against it. To get back to her status quo. Her place of sanity. Before these stupid ass dreams made her lose her damn mind.

NINE



As soon as the sun went down, Mason bid Giles goodnight and raced to his bedroom, excited for what was to come. He couldn't remember the last time he had been so excited to go to bed by himself. He wasn't about to let a single second slip by tonight. No way in hell! Last night, he had been apprehensive about using his gift. Not tonight. He was primed and ready to go tonight, needing to see so much more of his mate.

The look on her face this morning at the bakery had been priceless. That sweet, sweet blush of hers made his cock harder than a fucking rock and stand at attention. He had tried to play it cool but had failed miserably. He wanted her to know that he knew. He wanted her on her toes, wondering what the actual fuck? He'd achieved that goal and then some. After all, Jane was fully human.

What better way was there for him to acclimate her to the idea of magic than appearing in her dreams and being her fantasy lover? He should have been ashamed of himself, but he wasn't. If it was the only way he could be with his mate, for now, he'd take it. It was far better than the cold shoulder that she had given him over the last couple of days.

In his youth, his exploits within the pack had been legendary. Like some real howl of fame shit, bouncing in and out of pack mate's dreams. Playing with the ladies and pissing off a lot of the guys. He had gotten away with it for years until his pack had finally figured out what Mason had been up to.

The alpha of his pack had given him the boot with no questions asked. His parents, family, and friends had turned their backs on him and never spoken to him again. They had written him off and shunned him as if he had never existed. At that moment, he swore he'd never use his so-called gift again.

And he hadn't in more than two decades.

But now that his mate was in the picture, he would do anything. He would do whatever it took to win her over, starting with her dreams ... if that was the only way he could get to her.

Lying back against his pillows, he closed his eyes and searched for his mate, but she was nowhere to be found.

His wolf whined in his mind, wanting any experience with his mate that he could possibly have ... be it in dreams or in person, it didn't matter to him. He just wanted what was his. Any time with her, he would gladly take and beg for more.

Mason hopped off the bed and paced the room. "It's still early," he said. Unsure if he was speaking to himself or his wolf, as they both needed calming. He was just as much on edge as his animal. It was becoming increasingly difficult to keep both of them in check. His wolf kept pushing forward, demanding his freedom. Mason kept pushing the animal back, swearing he was the one best suited for the task at hand when it came to dealing with their mate.

Maybe there was time to let his wolf off the leash, so to speak, to let him out to run before he tried diving back into his mate's dream ... that was if she ever closed her eyes tonight. Mason found it extremely frustrating to know nothing about her or her daily routine.

His wolf whined in his mind again.

"Fine. But just for a little bit. I want every second we can possibly get with her tonight."

Against his better judgment, Mason made his way out to his back deck. Sucking in a deep breath, he closed his eyes and allowed the ancient magic deep in his bones to take hold.

A gust of wind picked up as his magic burst from his body, breaking and reshaping his bones. He didn't fight it. Instead, he allowed the magic to swallow him whole. When he opened his eyes, the ground was much closer as he stood on four feet instead of two.

Taking the backseat to his wolf was second nature for him. He liked to keep a tight leash on his emotions and his wolf. It was just the way he worked. Sadly, his wolf often had a mind of his own, which was common among alphas. It's why being booted from his pack hadn't hit him as hard as it would have for a submissive animal.

Mason had not been born to follow another. He had been born to lead and could feel it deep in his psyche. After relocating, several wolves had sought him out, looking to start a pack of their own. As a natural leader, Mason had accepted their offer. His pack had started small before growing into the thriving community he led today. He feared that if word ever got out about who he was or what had happened at his former pack, he'd lose all that he had built

His wolf threw its head back and let out a bone-chilling howl.

Mason went on instant alert, unsure of the scent his wolf picked up. Had he found an enemy? Another shifter who wasn't supposed to be in their territory? His wolf took off quicker than a bullet out of a gun, dashing through the forest behind his home and into the neighboring field.

What are we chasing? he asked his wolf, but there was no reply, only the sound of air rushing past his ears and the thunder of his feet against the ground.

His wolf let out a series of whines as they raced across an open meadow and into a small sub-division. A familiar scent filled his nostrils and made his heart speed.

He wondered how it was even possible. How his wolf had found her, he had no damn idea. And he wasn't about to question it. Instead, he pushed his essence forward, expecting to take control of his body and the situation.

Nope, his wolf replied. I found her.

It's not like you can stroll up and talk to her, Mason argued, but it was no good. His wolf had stuck him firmly in the passenger seat.

Watch me, his wolf huffed.

TEN



Jane sat on her back deck, watching the sun go down. It had been such a beautiful evening. Far too nice to sit inside. If it was one thing she loved, it was a gorgeous sunset. A beautiful pink hue filled the sky as the last rays of the sun tucked themselves behind the volley of mountains in the distance. Wisps of orange scattered along the tops of the rows of wheat in her neighbor's field. It was simply stunning and one of the best things about where she lived.

Row after row of wheat separated and closed right back up, catching Jane's attention. *It's probably just a deer.* She thought and went back to relaxing. She saw wildlife in her backyard all the time. Deer, coyotes, and foxes. No big deal. She even saw a bear with her cubs once.

It had been a busy day. Her feet were sore, and her shoulder ached. What she wouldn't give at that moment to have a man she could stand being around long enough to rub her feet or shoulders. Even then, it would be pushing it. Back rubs led to sex, sex led to feelings, and all that happy shit. The last thing Jane needed to catch was a case of feelings.

Hard pass.

Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed something on her back deck. She gasped when she realized it was a large dog. His coat was a mix of gray and tan with white streaks throughout.

"What are you doing here, puppy?" she asked the dog.

He wagged his tail and whined softly at her.

“Are you friendly?” she asked.

He trotted over to her, proud and confident as can be.

“I’ll take that as a yes.” She laughed as the dog placed his head on her lap. Jane couldn’t help but to scratch the overly friendly dog behind his ears. “You are a good boy. Maybe I should consider getting a dog instead of a man.” The thought had crossed her mind a few times over the years, but she had never felt like it was the right time. Not when she worked so much. She hated the idea of leaving an animal home alone all day with nothing to do. It seemed cruel to her.

The dog whined softly again to get her attention.

“Where did you come from? I bet your owners are looking for you.” She checked to see if he had a collar or any sort of identifying tags on him. When she found none, she sighed, unsure of what to do with the dog.

The dog pulled back and sat, staring directly at Jane like he was waiting for her to do a trick or something.

“Don’t look at me like that. I’m worried that someone is missing you.”

If it was someone’s family pet, they’d likely be worried. If he had belonged to her, she would have searched the ends of the earth to find him. Though he didn’t have a collar or anything to prove that someone owned him, he was very well-behaved and quite friendly.

She wouldn’t consider those to be traits of a wild dog, but what did she know? Maybe someone dropped him off in the country because they no longer wanted him. She couldn’t count the number of times she had seen people do that with both dogs and cats.

He whined at her again.

“Are you hungry?” she asked, fully expecting the dog to answer her question with a yes. “I don’t know why, but I keep expecting you to speak to me.” She laughed.

The dog barked a couple of quick arfs at her in quick succession.

“Well, how about that? I wonder what other tricks you know.”

The dog stood and stared at her, his head tilting back and forth like he was following every word she said. It was the cutest thing she had ever seen.

“Do you know how to sit?” she asked with a smile on her face. There was just something about dogs that she had always loved. Especially the ones who did the head tilt thing.

The dog sat and stared at her as if he were waiting for the next command.

“Shake,” she commanded.

The dog’s front paw lifted off the deck. She bent over and shook his paw.

“Can you roll over, too?” she asked.

The dog dropped to the deck and rolled onto his back.

Jane laughed. “You’ve got to be someone’s pet. You are so well trained. I don’t have any dog food, but I’m sure I can find something for you in the fridge unless you’re picky.” She opened the patio door, and the dog followed quickly on her heels.

“I thought you’d wait outside for me, but I guess I was wrong. Fine. Please make yourself at home, but you better not make any messes in my house. I mean it.” She wagged her finger at him. “I’ll be super pissed if you do, and you’ll get the damn boot quicker than you can wag your tail.” She was absolutely serious. There would be no messes made in her house.

He tilted his head and huffed at her.

“I just want to make sure you understand the rules, buddy,” she said with an arched eyebrow.

He lifted his head in the air, then lowered it slowly, acting as if he understood what she had said. She hoped like hell he had understood her.

“You are the strangest dog I’ve ever met.” Jane opened the fridge and pulled out a container. “You’re in luck. I have a chicken breast I cooked up the other day and never ate it. Would you like it?”

The dog barked at her, seeming to confirm that he did indeed want the couple of days old, cold chicken.

“Fine. I guess beggars can’t be choosers.”

The dog’s mouth popped open, and his tongue spilled out, looking like the luckiest dog on the planet. He watched her intently as she chopped up the chicken breast and set a plate on the floor for him, along with a bowl of water.

“I’m going to get changed. I’ll be right back. We can watch a movie together or something.”

Jane headed for her bedroom, wanting to get out of her clothes and into her jammies. Being comfortable was her only goal, but she didn’t want to leave the dog alone for too long. She had no idea if he was house-trained or not. The last thing she wanted was for him to get into the trash can and toss garbage around the house. If that happened, she’d kick him out quicker than he could roll over.

“Wow! You keep surprising me,” she said when she saw him lying in the hallway, waiting for her to return. “You need a name.” Jane grabbed her bottle of water and padded over to the couch, quickly finding her comfy spot. Grabbing the blanket strung across the back, she tossed it over her legs before grabbing the remote and flicking the TV on.

“What about George?” she asked, looking at the dog.

The dog looked at her with a less than amused expression.

“Fine. Not George. But whatever your name is, I hope you don’t mind, but I’m midway through a Twilight marathon.” The sound of the movie blared over the TV.

“Are you going to sit there on the floor and stare at me all night, or are you going to get up here and watch the movie with me?” Jane patted her hand against the blanket, calling the dog up on the couch with her. It was probably a bad habit to

start, but she didn't care. There was nothing better than snuggling up to a dog while you watched a movie.

He quickly listened and hopped up behind her legs, his head resting on her hip. Her hand automatically went to his head, petting.

“If we don't find your owner tomorrow, you're going to end up being my dog. If I do find your owner, well ... I think I'm going to have to make a trip to the pound to see if I can find myself a sweet boy like you.”

Jane hadn't felt more relaxed in ages. Maybe getting herself a dog as a companion would be great for her occasional loneliness and mental health. She sunk deeper into the couch and into her movie.

“How about Sam? I know, you look more like a Jacob, but he's way too young and sassy. Sam is much more stable and still quite handsome. So, Sam it is.”

The dog huffed at her.

“Whatever. I don't know what else to call you,” Jane said, taking a good long look at him like she was trying to figure something out. “Maybe, you're part wolf. At first, I thought you were a husky, but now that I get a good look at you, you look more like a German shepherd and maybe a wolf mix.”

He huffed again and shook his head as if he were telling her no.

“Either way, if you end up staying, I'm getting you one of those doggie DNA test kits. Now, let's watch the movie.”

ELEVEN



Mason stared up at his mate, his head resting on her hip. The son of a bitch had actually done it. His wolf had found a way to break through Jane's icy exterior faster than Mason had ever thought possible. Now, here they were, snuggled up next to her ... their head resting on her hip while she snored softly.

Mason faced a real dilemma. He wanted to dive into that pretty little head of hers, right into her dreams, but he needed to be in his human form in order to do that. He'd have to give up his position of relaxing on her, feeling the heat from her body and the occasional stroke of her hand over his fur ... even in her sleep. Did he give up his current reality with the hopes of seducing her again in her dream?

On the one hand, he wanted that sexy time interaction with her. On the other hand, he was quite content where he was. So was his wolf.

You've had your time with her. I want to dive into her dreams and get her used to wanting us, Mason said, trying to make the case with his wolf.

Not on your life, human, his wolf said.

Mason sighed deep in his mind, knowing damn well his wolf would fight him on this issue, and it wasn't a fight they could have with Jane present. Not unless he wanted to give up his secrets right out of the gate. That was not something he wanted.

He turned his attention back to the TV. *Ugh!* He would literally watch anything else. What was it with chicks and this series? At least they made the wolves look good. It got him to thinking. Jane clearly had a thing for wolf shifters if her comments and her choice of this movie were any indications of how she felt regarding the whole topic. There was also the name conversation that he had to consider. She had said he looked more like a Jacob than Sam, but Jacob was too young and bratty, or was it sassy? So, she liked men who were more mature.

No wonder why she hadn't been impressed with him the first time they had met. He could be confident, if not downright cocky at times. But what the hell? He was good-looking. He worked hard on his appearance and was proud of the man he had become. Maybe tomorrow at the bakery, he would act as if he did today and not say a damn word to her. Maybe he'd let her chase him. That would be a first.

Mason started to nod off despite all the screaming coming from Bella missing Edward. He closed his eyes, imagining what a life with Jane would be like. Coming home and chilling with her on the couch. Making love to her all hours of the day and night. That was the life he wanted with his mate.

Now, he just had to get her to see that she was the one for him. How he was going to do that was beyond him when she wanted nothing to do with him as a man and everything to do with him as a wolf.

As much as he'd love to spend the night snuggled up against her, it couldn't happen. At least, not in his wolf form. It would be extra bad when she woke up and found him in human form with his head on her hip. He wasn't sure his wolf wouldn't give up at some point during the night and loosen his hold on his control, allowing his human form to come forward. It had happened before, and he had woken up freezing in the middle of a forest.

Let's go, Sam. Mason snickered at his wolf, making sure to call the animal by the name Jane had given him.

Fuck off, his wolf replied.

Whatever. All it took was some cold chicken, and she turned you into her lap dog. But we need to go. You know what happened the last time I decided to let you stay in control while I slept. You almost got us killed. We're not doing that again. Now, let's go. Mason pushed at the animal with all the mental might he could muster, warning him that he wasn't playing around.

Fine! his wolf replied, stretching his limbs.

AFTER SNEAKING out of Jane's house and running back to his house, he ordered a pizza and hopped in the shower. Thankfully, Giles had already retired for the evening, and Mason didn't have to answer any questions. As much as he had wanted to stay with her, it was a no-go.

He did feel bad for the fact that she would wake up wondering where Sam went and how he managed to get out of her house, but it wasn't something he could worry about long-term. However, he would allow his wolf to go back and visit her as long as she allowed it.

After a quick shower, he scarfed down the entire pizza while he answered a few work and pack emails. It was all shit he had put off that needed to get done. Needless to say, his attention had been thoroughly wrecked since he'd met his mate. Normally, he'd throw himself into work and pack matters, but he had little taste for those things. He needed to lock down and seal the deal with his mate, so his life could get back to business as usual before either started to suffer from his lack of attention to detail.

He'd worry more about that later. Right now, he needed to see what Jane was up to in her dreams. He stepped out of his pants and left them piled up on the floor, quickly adding his shirt to the mix, and hopped into bed.

"Now, where are you, gorgeous?" he asked as he closed his eyes and concentrated on forming a connection with his mate. He half expected to find her in her bakery again. This time

though, she was wading through a field of wildflowers. She looked happy and as if she didn't have a single care in the world.

God, she was gorgeous. With her long brunette locks swirled around in the light breeze, and she batted them out of her face as she bent down to smell one of the flowers. She must have caught the sight of him out of the corner of her eye as she stood and turned to face him.

“What are you doing here?” she asked.

“I was looking for you,” he answered honestly.

“I'm glad you found me.” She smiled up at him as she closed the distance between them.

“Is that so?” His heart raced. He could barely contain the smile spreading across his face. He loved knowing that she liked him ... even if it was only in her dreams. It meant that her subconscious was open to the idea of getting to know him, even if she actively denied it.

“It is.”

Damn, her smile was radiant, and her baby blue eyes sparkled in the sun. He wanted to pull her into his arms and make love to her and never wake up from the wonders of her dream.

“Kiss me,” she commanded.

Who was he to deny his mate's commands?

Mason's lips closed over hers. Slowly and tentatively at first. He loved her sweet candy taste. His tongue slipped into her mouth when she let out a soft moan. His hand wrapped around the back of her neck, and he pulled her close. He was rewarded with the scent of her desire.

“I want you,” he pulled back from the kiss and growled.

“I thought you'd never ask,” she said, yanking his shirt over his head. He tossed his head back when she began kissing and licking his neck and his chest, teasing his nipples.

“Jesus,” he moaned. “You’ve got far too many clothes on, baby.”

“I do, don’t I? Maybe, you can help me out of them.” She lifted her arms over her head and waited.

Mason didn’t waste a second, grabbing her top and yanking it off her. His eyes darted to her black lace bra covering her heavy breasts. A little black bow sat right in the center of the material.

“As much as I love the presentation and the bow, the bra has got to go,” he said as he kissed the tops of her breasts.

“I quite agree.” Her hands tunneled through his hair, her nails scraping his scalp.

With a flick of his fingers, her bra landed next to her feet. His mouth closed over one of her nipples and then the other. The tiny buds quickly hardened with each swipe of his tongue.

He pushed her skirt off her hips and to the ground. Then his fingers worked their way between her legs.

“Mason!” she cried out.

“Hold on tight, baby,” he said as he pumped his fingers in and out of her tight, wet channel.

“Oh!” she moaned before his lips crashed over hers once again. This time his kiss was hard and demanding, making her shake in his arms. Her skin was hot to the touch, driving him wild. He wanted to be deep inside her. And not just in her dream. In real life as well.

TWELVE



“**W**hat the fuck!” Jane sat straight up, her heart pounding against her ribs. It was the second dream featuring the hot-as-hell customer from her shop. Sweet Jesus, the way he touched her. The way he made her body feel.

“Sam?” she called out as she freed her legs from the blanket and stumbled off the couch.

Her mind was a mess. Her emotions were on overdrive. She felt like her damn body was going to implode if she kept having these all-too-real dreams about her mystery lover. Every inch of her body tingled. The dream, like the previous one, felt so damn real. They were driving her absolutely mad!

Maybe it was her subconscious telling her that she needed to accept his invitation to go out. Or maybe it was because she had all this pent-up sexual energy that she had given no outlet lately, and her brain was conjuring up these sexy-ass dreams as a way to tell her it was time to take care of business.

“Sam,” she called out again, but the dog was nowhere to be found. Grabbing her phone, she checked the time. She had three hours before she had to be up for work. She checked the doors to make sure he hadn’t made his way out through an open door.

“Where the hell did that dog go?” She rubbed her eyes as she made her way to her bedroom, hoping to find the dog on her bed or something, but he wasn’t there.

Dead on her feet, Jane fell onto her bed. With a swipe of her arm, she yanked the blankets over her head. She fell back to sleep the second her head hit her pillow.

“DID YOU NOT SLEEP GOOD AGAIN?” Yulia asked as Jane filled her coffee cup for the fourth time.

“It’s these dreams I’ve been having.” Jane circled her neck. “They seem so real.” She didn’t know how else to explain it without going into graphic detail. The last thing she wanted was to explain her sex dreams with the hottie who had asked her out. She’d surely never hear the end of it. And God forbid if Amelia found out ... that would be a fate worse than death.

“Those are the worst. They mess with your head for days on end,” Yulia said.

“They really do.” Jane leaned against the counter and sipped slowly at her coffee.

“I’m here if you want to talk about it.” Yulia grabbed two carafes of coffee and went to begin customer refills.

Just as Jane was about to head back into the kitchen, her dream lover sauntered in through the door. Her heart skipped a beat, maybe three. Her head spun just from seeing him. She could no longer deny how much she wanted him. How much she needed him.

Jane came up with a plan. If he asked her out again, she was going to say yes. Just to see if that stopped the dreams she was having. She couldn’t take it anymore. Her body felt like it was on a hair trigger, ready to explode at any given second. It had been years since her body felt like this. She thought she was long past these types of feelings or needs.

She stepped up to the counter to take his order as he closed the distance between them.

“Good morning, gorgeous.”

“Good morning.” His greeting surprised her, but she somehow managed to maintain her cool and keep her voice steady, not wanting to give away her thoughts or emotions. But, sweet Jesus, the smile on his face melted her heart and perhaps her panties. He was so damn sexy. So freaking hot.

His black T-shirt hugged his torso, showing off every muscle with each of his movements. His arms, damn. Those thick, sculpted biceps of his should be wrapped around her, holding her tight. And those jeans of his. How they hugged his perfect ass.

As far as looks went, Jane couldn't deny he was the total package. She wanted to feel that stubble of his brushing against her face as he kissed her, against her inner thighs as he went down on her.

Fuck! She felt like she was losing her damn mind.

“What can I get you?” she finally asked after staring at him for way too long. She worried she'd have to wipe away a strand or two of drool that may have leaked from her mouth.

“A large caramel latte, a bagel with cream cheese, and a yes from you for a dinner date.”

“You're persistent. I'll give you that,” Jane replied as she started getting his order together. She had come up with the plan of agreeing to a date with him, but now that he had asked once again, she wanted to play a bit harder to get. To make him really work for it. If he was going to drive her crazy every night in her dreams, it was the least she could do.

“Is that a bad thing?” he asked with that panty-melting grin of his.

“No, it's not a bad thing. But it is an alpha male sort of thing.”

“You've got me there, gorgeous. I can't deny the alpha in me. I won't even try. Besides, is there something wrong with going after what ... who you want?”

She wondered for a brief second why he paused. It was almost as if he was choosing his words very carefully for some reason.

“I see.”

“Do you?” he asked.

“I think so,” she replied with a flirty smile, loving the banter between them. There was no denying the chemistry they had with each other. But what Jane didn’t know was if that chemistry was natural or if it was because of the dreams that she had been having about him.

Does it really matter? Look at the man. Think about how much fun it would be to climb on top of him and ride him until the sun comes up.

THIRTEEN



It took every ounce of Mason's willpower to keep his feet planted on the ground and not hop over the counter, scoop Jane into his arms, and have his way with her. Her scent was driving him wild. She was turned on. He could nearly taste it. He wanted nothing more than to toss her up on the counter, like he had done that first time in her dream, and take his dessert. But he didn't. He held firm, feeling like he should have been crowned a saint or some shit.

What surprised him the most, though, was her sudden receptiveness to him and her sudden and effective flirting. Fuck! His cock was harder than a damn rock and throbbing in his jeans. And it was all for her.

"So, dinner tonight?" he asked, praying for her to finally say yes to him.

When she didn't answer right away, he worried that she had another date lined up or plans with someone else. After all, it was Friday. Maybe her weekend was already booked.

The mere thought of her going out with another man, of her spending the weekend in someone else's arms, made him want to rip off a few heads and ask questions later.

"I think I'd like that," she finally replied, calming him instantly.

"Good. I'll pick you up at seven." He handed her one of his business cards. "Text me your address, and make sure you wear your sexiest dress." He plopped a twenty-dollar bill

down on the counter and grabbed his coffee and a bagel without looking back.

If he did, he would have bounded over that counter and tossed her over his shoulder, going all caveman on her. Though he didn't deny the alpha inside of him, he doubted she'd appreciate that type of PDA in front of all of her customers.

He felt his phone buzz as he climbed into his truck and slid his coffee into his cup holder. A full, cheezy-ass smile broke across his face when he saw her address show up on his screen. He didn't need her address. He knew it. But he wasn't about to give up that info. Not yet, anyway.

Mason started his truck and threw it into drive, and steered his way toward his office. His heart felt lighter than it had in years. His mate said yes! Sure it was just dinner, but it was a start. A foot in the door, so to speak. Yeah, he'd been in the door in his wolf form, and she'd either hopefully have a good laugh with him about it, or she'd want to lop his head or dick off. Either way, this time, he had an in as his human self, and he was going to make the most of it.

His mind was a flurry of activity as he thought about where he would take her to eat. The flowers he would select and present to her. The suit he would wear. He had all day to plan it out, wanting it to be the perfect date.

“GOOD MORNING, MR. PHILLIPS,” his assistant said as he passed her desk with a slight spring in his step.

“Good morning, Veronica. How are you today?” He paused at her desk before disappearing into his office.

“I'm good. Did I miss something? You seem like you're in a better-than-normal mood.” She smiled up at him.

“Is it that obvious that I'm not my normal grumpy self?” He laughed.

“Kinda ... Is that bad?”

“Not at all. Let’s just say I have a very real reason to be happy.” For once, he felt like his life was finally coming together. Sure his business was great. The pack was great, but he had never felt fully whole. Not until meeting Jane. Which was odd. Because it wasn’t like he had a commitment or anything from her. Just a yes to dinner. But it was enough for him. Her one single yes gave him hope of what was to come.

“I hope she’s the one,” Veronica whispered as he walked away.

Mason let it go, not wanting to come off as a dick when he was, for once, in such a great mood. No way. No how. Of course, she knew it had something to do with a woman. No doubt his mating scent coated him, even after the short visit to Jane’s to grab his coffee and bagel. Veronica was a wolf like him and part of his pack. Her nose worked just as well as his.

Whatever. The pack would learn soon enough that he had found his mate, and God willing, she would accept the pack once they were mated. He was getting ahead of himself.

She would first have to accept his paranormal nature. Something that could be quite hard, if not impossible, for humans to wrap their heads around. The only thing he hoped would be his saving grace when it came to all things paranormal was that she was already friends with Gerri, so hopefully, Jane was one of those lucky humans who were in the know. That would make his life so much easier.

FOURTEEN



Jane rushed home after work. Excited about her date, she paid little attention to her actual driving, which was a bad thing. She needed to calm down, to refocus. It was just dinner. The whole point of saying yes was to see if that would get her sexy customer out of her dreams. Though, she had to admit they were the hottest dreams she had ever had ... even if they did drive her up the damn wall.

She pulled into her driveway, and much to her surprise, Sam was lying on her front porch. It was almost as if he had been waiting for her to come home. He stood when he saw her pull in, his fluffy butt wiggling with excitement.

“Aww,” she said, really hoping that he didn’t have an owner. She really could get used to that type of greeting when she came home from work.

He greeted her with a small yip. Reaching down to scratch his head, she said, “How did you escape last night?”

Jane turned to unlock the door and let herself and Sam in. “I’m really going to have to pick up some dog food for you if you’re going to stay. Probably a couple of bowls too. Maybe some stuffies for you to play with or a ball.”

Sam followed her into the house. The first thing Jane did was kick off her shoes and yank her bra off. The dog looked at her as if she had lost her mind.

“Don’t look at me like that. Those things are a bitch. If you were a woman, you’d understand. You’re probably starving,

aren't you?" She made her way to the fridge to find some food for the dog.

"I'm sorry I won't be able to snuggle with you on the couch tonight, but I have a hot date. One I'm actually looking forward to. I haven't been on a date in more than a decade. I've given up on men, but there's something about this one. He's so hot. But I just don't know.

"I've promised myself to never get into a situation like I was in before. But what if it's different this time?" she said. "But what if it's exactly the same? I don't want someone who expects me to work all day and be their maid at night. Or have dinner ready for them when they walk in the door. Ugh. I really hope this guy isn't like that. Or maybe I should just calm down because it's just dinner, and this is our first date."

Jane cut up her last chicken breast for Sam and refilled the bowl she had given him for water. He quickly gobbled up the offering and drank some of the water.

"You're such a good boy." She yawned. "I need to take a nap before I start getting ready for my date." Jane checked her phone. She had five hours. Plenty of time for a catnap.

Sam followed behind her as she made her way to her bedroom. She slid off her jeans and top and quickly replaced them with a pair of shorts and one of her softest tank tops.

"Oh, don't be such a prude. I'm sure you've seen women change before. I swear, though, you make some of the funniest and most expressive faces for a dog. I'm not sure that's normal," she said, climbing under the covers.

Sam hopped up on the bed beside her.

"You better not have fleas," she said as he snuggled against her.

He let out a soft growl.

"I'm serious. The last thing I want is bugs in my bed. So if you do have them, keep them to yourself. I'll add dog shampoo to my grocery list, along with the dog food and toys."

Jane was on her side, with one arm under her pillows and the other wrapped around Sam.

“This is perfect,” she said as she drifted off to sleep.

TWO HOURS LATER, Jane woke to Sam licking her face. Forgetting that she had fallen asleep next to him, she woke with a start.

“What the ...” she pushed Sam away and covered her head with the blankets.

He pawed at her and let out a soft bark.

“Okay, okay. I’m awake. Geez! You’re far more effective than an alarm clock. I guess it’s time for me to get up.”

Sam hopped down from the bed and barked louder at her.

“What?” she asked, following as he trotted to the back door.

“You need to go out? Are you going to come back?” she asked, really hoping that he wouldn’t run off like he had last night.

He whined at her.

“Gimme a second.” She ran to grab her phone. Sam trotted after her.

“Smile,” she said, pointing the phone toward him. She laughed when Sam showed his teeth in his best doggy smile.

“Perfect! I just wanted a picture of you in case you don’t come back from wherever it is you go.” She opened the back door and let him out. “Be careful and watch out for cars.” Her heart felt heavy, letting him run off like that, but what choice did she have? He clearly wanted to go out. It wasn’t like he was her dog. He probably had a nice warm home to go to.

Jane shrugged it off, knowing that she needed to get herself together if she was going to go out tonight. Thoughts of Mason filled her mind. That sexy-ass smile of his really did

melt the ice she'd built around her heart. The feelings she had for him were so unlike her. That's what surprised her the most. Her interest in him.

She had been asked out plenty of times over the years. Never once had she ever considered saying yes to any of them. Not until she'd met Mason. There was something different about him besides his obvious good looks. She had been drawn to him the second she laid eyes on him. It was a visceral reaction that she had tried and failed to deny.

Each interaction with him and each dream she had about him stoked the flame she clearly had going for him. Excitement bubbled up the more she thought about the fact that she had said yes to him and she would see him in a few hours.

FIFTEEN



“O h,” Jane moaned into Mason’s kiss. Dinner with him had been spectacular, far better than she could have even anticipated. It pissed her off. She wanted an excuse to walk away from him, for her interest to dry up and vanish as quickly as it had come on. Sadly, that hadn’t happened.

Their conversation had been engaging and fun. He made her laugh easily. And that had pissed her off even more because here she was, yanking him into her house, knowing full well what was going to happen once she kicked the door closed behind her.

Mason scooped her up into his arms and carried her back to her bedroom without having to ask for directions. His actions sent a red flag waving her in mind, but she pushed it aside, too caught up in his kisses to even care.

Setting her gently on her feet, Jane untied the front of her dress and let it fall open, giving Mason a full view of black lace panties and matching bra. She grinned as he sucked in a deep breath.

Pulling her into his arms, he lathered her with kisses from her neck to her chest and back up. His hands were all over her body, caressing and massaging, driving her wild. She wanted skin-on-skin contact. Her hands dove under his shirt, pushing the material up his chest and over his head until she had a full view of his sculpted chest. Her mouth watered, wanting to taste every damn inch of him.

Mason pulled back and kicked off his shoes before unzipping his pants and stepping out of them.

It was Jane's turn to suck in a deep breath. "You are perfect," she whispered.

"Funny, I was going to say the exact same thing about you." He pushed her dress off her shoulders, letting it fall to the floor next to his clothes.

Her lips were on him in an instant, kissing a path down his chest to his hardened length. His fingers twisted through her hair, and he let out a gasp of surprise when she swiped her tongue over the head of his cock.

"Mmm. Damn, baby."

She smiled up at him and wrapped her fingers around him, pumping him up and down. Heat flooded her core as her mouth closed over the head of his cock.

"Fuck!" Mason sighed, tossing his head back.

Jane loved his reaction to her and the power she had over him. She sucked him deep into her mouth, starting a steady rhythm of up and down, circling her palm around his length with each bob of her head.

"I don't know how much more I can take," he groaned, pulling her up from her position.

"Pity. I was having fun," she pouted, already missing the taste of his cock on her tongue.

"I'm sure I can come up with a few more ideas for fun." He tossed her over his shoulder like she weighed less than a feather.

Jane let out a playful squeal. "Put me down, you beast!"

"Your wish is my command," he quickly but gently dropped her on the bed and crawled up between her legs, kissing her inner thighs along the way.

"Mmm. That feels nice," Jane moaned and nearly jumped out of her skin when his mouth landed on her pussy.

“Damn, baby. I could do this all day, every damn day,” Mason growled.

“Is that so?” she asked playfully.

“Indeed. Now lie back and relax. Let me take care of you.” He hooked her legs over his shoulder and dug in.

Jane tossed her head side to side across the mattress, needing everything Mason was giving her and more. She couldn't remember the last time she'd had any sort of desire for all the naughty things he was doing, but damn, if she didn't love every freaking second of his attention.

Her body was primed, ready to go off at a moment's notice. Any change in pressure would send her shooting to the stars. Just as she thought he was finally going to let her come, he pulled back.

“Not yet, baby. I want you to explode when I finally let you come.” He slid a finger into her pussy, followed by a second, and pumped them in and out.

“Oh!” she cried out.

“You are so fucking tight. So damn wet! I can't wait to slide my cock into you.” He circled her clit with his tongue.

“I'm so close. Oh! Mason!” Jane's legs began to shake as her climax drew closer and closer. Her breath hitched in her throat.

“Is this what you want?” he asked, sucking her clit into his mouth as he scissored his fingers in and out of her channel.

“Yes!” she cried out. Her hands fisted in his hair, her hips twisting back and forth.

“Are you sure?” he slowed his pace back to a teasing speed.

“Yes, I'm fucking sure!” she growled, not knowing whose voice popped out of her mouth. It was almost as if she had been possessed by a sexual fiend who chose that very moment to make herself known.

Mason seemed to have gotten the message, taking her demand to heart. He picked up his pace, his mouth once again on her clit. “Come for me, baby.”

“Yes! Yes! Yes!” she shouted as her climax slammed into her and sent her soaring among the stars. White lights danced in her vision. Her body shook from the force of the eruption releasing from within.

“Mmm. That’s it, baby. Give it all to me. I love the way you taste,” Mason said as he enthusiastically lapped up her honey.

“I need you inside of me,” she begged, not giving a single fuck about how desperate she sounded. She wanted him. All of him. And she wasn’t willing to wait another second.

“Are you sure?” he asked, scooting to his knees.

“Positive. I need you. Now.” Jane was tired of fucking around. It had been far too many years since she had been with a man. If he made her wait any longer, she would push him over and have her way with him. Her body was on fire, desperate for him.

“Good, because I don’t think I can wait another second for this,” Mason said as he inched into her tight sheath.

“Ohhh,” she moaned. “More,” she begged.

“Yeah?” He gave her another inch, teasing the hell out of her.

“All of it,” she once again begged.

“You’re so tight, baby. I don’t want to hurt you,” he replied, biting the side of his cheek.

“I’m not a fucking porcelain doll.”

“Only if you’re certain.”

“Sweet Jesus, please!” Her body felt like it was going to implode if he didn’t give her what she needed.

“If you insist.” Mason slammed home. Her headboard bounced against the wall.

“Yes!” she shouted, loving the way his cock stretched her to the max.

Mason pulled out to the tip and slammed right back in, her body shaking with the force of his thrust.

“Damn, baby. You fit me like a fucking glove. You are so damn tight. You feel so good.” He circled his hips and pulled out to the tip again before slamming home once more.

Jane couldn't remember a time when sex had ever felt so good. It had been mediocre at best with her ex-husband. And before that, well, it wasn't as if she had slept with all that many guys. Yet, somehow, Mason had broken down her defenses.

“Stay with me, baby. Enjoy the moment. Don't get too caught up in your own head.”

Thankfully, Mason drew Jane from her thoughts before she traveled too far down that particular rabbit hole at the most inopportune time.

“Don't you worry about me. I'm right here with you ... all the way.” She wrapped her legs around his back, her arms around his neck, and held on tightly as he began an almost brutal series of strokes and thrusts, pounding in and out of her at an impressive speed.

“Fuck!” she cried out as she climbed closer and closer to her climax.

“Do you like the way I feel inside you?” Mason asked.

“Yes!” Jane moaned, feeling her brain losing all capabilities of deciphering the English language.

“And do you like it when I do this?” he asked, twisting his hips and plowing deeper into her pussy.

“Oh, God!” she cried out.

“I'll take that as a yes,” he said, nipping at her lips and slamming back into her.

She was losing her mind. Never had she been so turned on. Never had sex felt so good, to the point that she felt like she

was floating above her own body. Everything that Mason did, every wiggle of his hips, every thrust, every lick, every kiss, every damn nibble, sent her flying higher and higher.

Jane felt her body explode as Mason snaked his hand between their bodies and rubbed her clit. It was just the right amount of pressure she needed to hurl her straight to her next climax. Every nerve ending in her sang in unison. She trembled beneath his weight.

“I can feel your pussy squeezing tighter. Fuck!” Mason moaned.

“I ... I, oh, God! I’m coming.”

“Yeah, you are!” Mason picked up his pace, ramming his cock into her hard and faster until he felt a gush of her honey running down his cock.

Jane’s chest heaved as she tried to suck in the oxygen her lungs needed. She fought for each and every shallow breath so she didn’t pass out. Glancing up at Mason, she noticed a quick flash in his eyes and heard a thickening in his voice. It all happened so quickly. She thought she had imagined it.

“I want you on your hands and knees.” His voice was rougher than she had ever heard it. It sounded more like a growl from a beast than the man she was in bed with.

Mason pulled out and flipped her over onto her stomach in one quick move. Pushing apart her legs with his knees, he licked a path from her pussy up to her ass and back down.

“Oh!” she cried out as his tongue slid inside her channel.

“Mmm. I love the taste of your honey on my tongue, but I need to be back inside you.” Mason slid his cock over her swollen lips and then up to her ass. He pushed the tip in and eased back.

“Oh,” she moaned at the feeling of his cock easing into her tight hole.

“Do you like to be fucked liked that?” He repeated his action, pushing the tip back into her pussy before easing out once again.

“Yes,” she whispered, unsure if that was something he was into or not.

“Good, because at some point, I plan on burying myself balls deep in your ass.”

“I can’t wait,” she said, feeling bolder than she ever had in her entire life.

“Don’t tempt me, or I might just fuck your ass now,” he growled before slamming back into her pussy.

“But I like this too. Very much.” She rocked her hips back against him, loving the feel of him in this position. He was so deep, stretching her to the fullest ... or so she thought.

“And do you like this?” he asked, sliding a finger into her puckered entrance as he pumped his cock in and out of her pussy.

“So much!” she moaned, tossing her head back.

His fingers fisted through her hair, and he tugged gently.

Fuck, if it wasn’t one of her favorite things on the planet ... to get her hair pulled while she was being fucked ... yes, please!

“More!” she cried out, bucking back against him with more speed and force. She felt so full, and she loved every thrust.

“Damn, baby. I’m not sure how much longer I can hold out,” he growled and playfully slapped her ass.

“Come with me,” she suggested.

“Is that what you want?”

“Yes!” she shouted.

Mason wrapped his arms around her waist in a punishing grip as he slammed himself into her. If he hadn’t been holding her up, she would have flown right off the bed from the power behind his shove.

Within seconds, Jane flew to the heavens once again. This climax was harder and more intense than the previous ones.

She felt like her body had broken apart, leaving each of the pieces floating in the depths of space.

“God, baby. You are amazing.” Mason said as he collapsed beside her and pulled her into his arms.

“Thanks. So are you.”

SIXTEEN



Mason paced around his living room, wondering how everything had gone to hell in a handbasket so quickly.

His date with Jane had been beyond belief. They had clicked instantly. Their chemistry had been off the charts, but then again, what had he really expected with his mate? After all, the fates had created this woman for him. Of course, she would be perfect in every way possible. It shouldn't have surprised him, but it did.

He had expected to have to work for an engaging conversation. Instead, it came naturally. As did their laughs. Their sense of humor matched perfectly. And the way she smiled up at him ... it made his heart pound and his cock throb. It took every bit of willpower he had to keep his hands off her. Somehow, he had found a way, even with his wolf beating against his brain, telling him to claim his mate. Right there at the dinner table, if he had to.

After dinner, they went for a walk and ended up making out in his truck like a couple of horny teenagers. His wolf had pushed even harder. He had to fight to keep his beast at bay.

Their hotter-than-hell make-out session was incredible and left both of them wanting more. Which led them back to her place, where one thing had led to another, and before Mason knew it, she had gotten him naked and had managed to give him the best damn blowjob of his life ... nay existence.

Not only did he love the way she sucked his cock, the sex ... fucking hell. It had been the best ever. Jane was sexy beyond belief, and once her clothes came off ... The things she

could do in bed still made his head spin. She wasn't afraid to tell him what she wanted if he didn't give it to her fast enough. Fuck, the whole experience made his cock hard all over again, just replaying it in his mind.

He could still taste her on his tongue. The flavor of her liquid candy would live in his mind forever. They had made love for hours on end, and it had been the most spectacular time of his life. Yet, in the end, she had still kicked him out. An act that he found himself still reeling about. Especially when he thought women were all about cuddles and shit after the sex.

Jane had had zero interest in it. The whole experience had felt more like a wham-bam-thank-you-ma'am than a romantic night spent making love to his mate.

She'd had her way with him, then tossed his ass out of not only her door but her life by declaring that she had absolutely no desire for a relationship. That what they had was *fun*, but that was it.

It was almost as if the roles had somehow been reversed. He was normally the one to fuck it and truck it. Not the other way around. He wasn't sure he liked that particular part of the night.

He wasn't mad. He was in disbelief that she had somehow found a way to turn him down after such an amazing night together. The whole thought of it crushed his ego and broke his brain. Up to the point that he had met Jane, he'd never had a woman reject him. Not once.

Of all the women in the world, it had to be his mate who felt this way. For now, he would give her the space she had requested. He wouldn't ask her out again, but he would let her know that he wasn't about to give up on her. No fucking way. There wasn't a single chance of that ever happening.

Being with Jane only once would never be enough. Not because she was his mate. He craved her. And it wasn't just the sex that had him jonesing for his next fix. It was everything about her. Her laugh, their conversations, the sexy way she smiled at him. And yeah, the sex. He had to have

more of that with her. As in every damn day. Twice a day. Hell, he wanted his cock permanently buried in her heat twenty-four seven, three sixty-five.

He padded to his laptop and popped it open, wanting to find a way to let her know how much he had enjoyed their time together and to keep her thinking about him. He'd back off from invading her dreams for a night, maybe two, to make her crave him again. The next time they had sex, he wanted her begging for him. Even then, he might play a little harder to get.

Mason searched all the local florists before deciding on the best way to send his message. When he was done, he closed his laptop and made his way out onto his back deck.

Jane may not want anything to do with Mason, but she sure did love and worry about Sam. He knew there would be hell to pay when she eventually found out about his dual nature, but that was something to worry about later. For now, he would take any foot ... or paw ... he could to get in her door. It didn't matter to him or his wolf.

The second his wolf caught the thoughts pressing through his mind, he charged forward, demanding control of their body. Mason didn't fight it. He allowed his animal to come forward without giving it so much as a second thought.

The second his paws hit the ground, he raced away with one single thought in their shared mind. Getting to their mate.

SEVENTEEN



Jane was still coming down from her post-coital high when she heard a light scratch on her kitchen door, followed by the saddest howl she had ever heard. Jumping up from the couch as quickly as she could, she hobbled to the kitchen.

After the night she'd had with Mason, she'd be lying if she said she wasn't a bit tender in all the right places. She wasn't about to utter a single complaint. Not when it was a welcome soreness of having been well taken care of and loved.

"I was wondering if you'd come back to me or if you'd found someone better to spend your time with," she asked as she opened the door. "I've been worried about you." Jane couldn't help it. She felt a profound connection to the dog.

Sam trotted in like he owned the place. He paused to give her a gentle lick on her hand, then he continued into the living room, hopping right up on the couch and making himself comfortable.

"I'm not sure if you're here for my company or my couch." She laughed and climbed back under her blanket. She flicked through the channels, stopping at the History Channel and their late-night reruns of *Ancient Aliens*.

"I know they all sound crazy, but I love this show. It's fun, and the theories are as crazy as they come." She sighed. "Plus, the dude's hair cracks me up. I just can't take him seriously when he looks like that."

As hard as Jane had tried to pay attention to the show, she couldn't. Her mind was filled with thoughts of Mason. Her body still tingled from his kisses, his licks, his touches, his ... everything. She wondered for the thousandth time if forcing him to leave had been the right thing to do. Hell, they could have been snuggled in bed or on the couch.

No, having him leave was best. At least for now in her mind. Having him stay with her and hang out together would have made it seem like they were in a relationship or dating. She wanted to keep it casual. Just dinner and sex.

Okay, even to her, that sounded bad. Like really bad.

But she couldn't help it. The whole thought of dating someone or falling in love again scared the bejesus out of her. It wasn't something she wanted. Hadn't wanted it for a long time. She should have told him no when he had asked her out, but dammit, she just couldn't seem to utter the freaking word. Not with the dreams that had been bombarding her and his daily stops for coffee and a bagel.

It was like she couldn't get Mason out of her mind. Not when she dreamt about him all night and thought about him all day. So, she had given in and said yes, hoping that spending an evening with him would clear her mind of him. That he would somehow piss her off or make her see that he wasn't all that and quickly lose interest. Sadly, that hadn't happened. Her plan backfired in her face.

Their chemistry had been off the fucking charts. It was the craziest thing she had ever experienced. It was like they were made for one another.

Now, instead of the whole out-of-sight, out-of-mind thing, he was all she could think about. She wanted him more now than she had before their date, but she wouldn't give in. She didn't want that sort of life. The life where she was beholden to someone else. Where she was bound to care for a man again.

No matter what her friends had tried to tell her about finding the right man and having an equal footing in a relationship, she didn't buy all that bullshit. Not for a minute.

She would not bend over backward again for another man while she got diddly squat out of the relationship. It was precisely why she had chosen to stay true to herself and single. So she could have the life she wanted. Not what someone wanted from her.

Sam whined, seeming to pick up on her sudden mood change.

“It’s okay. I just have a lot on my mind. Human stuff. Relationship stuff that you wouldn’t understand.”

Sam whined again.

“I’ll be fine. I’m just trying to figure things out in my mind. It’s not a pretty conversation in there right now. You see, I met this guy ... after having sworn off men forever. He kind of just snuck up on me, and I’ve been having these really crazy dreams about him. I feel like I’m losing my mind.”

Sam whined again and put his head on her lap, trying to comfort her.

“Aww. Aren’t you the sweetest thing?” She scratched his neck. “But if you are going to stay here, there are a few things we need to do.”

Sam cocked his head and looked at her. She tried not to laugh at his expression. It was almost as if he was trying to figure out what he had to do to stay with her.

“Don’t look at me like that. I can’t take you seriously when you do. Anyway, I’m going to need to call the vet and have her check to see if you’re microchipped or not. If you aren’t, we need to get you your shots, and discuss those dangly bits hanging from your backside.”

Sam hopped off the couch and barked at her.

“What? Did I offend you by saying that if you’re staying, you need to get your balls chopped off?” she laughed.

“Please. It’s not like you’re going to need them if you’re going to be a house dog. Besides, they say male dogs are better overall if they have them lobbed off.”

Sam let out a low growl.

“Fine. Fine. I’ll drop it. Now, get your ass back up here so I can snuggle you for a bit before I fall asleep, and you disappear to wherever it is you go.”

Jane tried to stay awake. Bless her heart, she really did, but the day had taken a toll on her, and now, the blackness began to pull her under.

EIGHTEEN



“How the hell did I get in here?” Jane asked as she woke to the sound of her alarm clock going off. The last thing she remembered was watching *Ancient Aliens* with Sam snuggled up on the couch next to her. She patted the bed, looking for Sam, but of course, he was nowhere to be found.

“I’m really going to have to set up a few cameras to see how this dog does his disappearing trick.” She thought as she climbed out of bed to get ready for work. Though it was Saturday, and she was tired as fuck, she still needed to get her ass to the bakery. Yulia would open, but she still needed to do the inventory and get her orders for the vendors ready for the next week.

Jane was on autopilot as she drove to work. Her mind was still overwhelmed with all things Mason. Images of their night together flooded her mind, making raw heat fill her core. How was she ever going to get him out of her mind if she couldn’t stop thinking about him?

It was a true conundrum.

“Hey, Jane,” Yulia called out as she walked through the front door.

“Good morning. Did I miss the rush?” she asked.

“It’s been pretty steady all morning, but we’ve got it. You look different today.” Yulia eyed her up and down.

Jane suddenly felt Amelia’s eyes turn toward her. As well as a few of the customers who were enjoying coffee and fresh

donuts.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. I’ve looked the same since the day both of you started working here.” Jane tried to brush them off, not wanting to get into it.

“No. There’s definitely something different, but I can’t put my finger on what it is.” Yulia chewed on her bottom lip, trying to figure out what it was.

“No. There really isn’t. I’ll be in my office if you need anything.” Jane grabbed a coffee and made a quick beeline to get away before Amelia or Yulia asked any more questions about subjects she didn’t want to answer.

After a few minutes, she breathed a sigh of relief when she heard several customers enter the shop. The busy chatter gave her the reprieve she had been looking for, with Yulia and Amelia far too busy to worry about what was different about Jane.

An hour or so later, Jane heard Amelia’s excited squeal and Yulia’s “Oh my God,” but she decided to ignore whatever it was that had drawn their attention until there was a light knock on her office door.

“Come in,” she said. She clicked the save button on her spreadsheet and turned to the door.

She had expected Yulia or Amelia to come through, but not both carrying huge vases of flowers.

“What’s this?” she asked, shock covering her face.

“We were hoping you could tell us,” Amelia said as she set the vase on the table across the room. She plucked the envelope from the little holder stuck in the flowers and handed it to Jane. “Don’t open it until we get back!”

Yulia set the large vase of roses beside the ones Amelia had set down before following Amelia out of her office.

“Yeah. You just need to come out here and see this for yourself,” Yulia said, popping her head back in.

Jane stood and went out to see what all the commotion was about.

“Oh, hell.”

“Looks like you have an admirer,” Amelia smirked.

Jane’s mouth hit the floor when she saw dozens of baskets and vases overflowing with fresh-cut flowers.

“I’d say. I think you’ve been holding out on us.” Yulia laughed. “Should we start guessing, or are you going to tell us who?”

“What did I walk in on?”

Jane’s head swiveled to the newcomer. *Fuck!* It was Gerri with the widest smile Jane had ever seen her friend give.

“Hey, you. What can I get you?” Jane chose to ignore all the questions and go about her business.

“My usual and a few answers,” Gerri replied with an expectant look.

Jane was in trouble, and she knew it. She may have been able to shut down Amelia and Yulia, but ignoring Gerri’s line of questioning ... yeah, right. Hell was sooner to freeze over.

“I’ll grab it for you and bring it to Jane’s office. If she isn’t going to talk to us, she needs to talk to someone,” Yulia said and got to work filling Gerri’s order.

“Fine.” Jane motioned for Gerri to follow her to her office.

“I think someone has a story to tell,” Gerri said as she took the seat across from Jane at her desk.

Jane took a sip of her coffee, trying to figure out how much information she wanted to divulge. Yes, she’d had sex, but that was it, despite the outlandish display of flowers she had received. She opened the card and tossed it across the desk for her friend to see.

My heart beats for only you.

-M

“Wow!” Gerri said as she read the card and set it back on the table. “It looks like you found someone who cares a great deal for you.”

“He can’t. We’ve only just met,” Jane said, trying to reason away the card and flowers. There was no way Mason could have any serious feelings for her yet. Could he?

“Sometimes that doesn’t matter. Sometimes all it takes is one look to know who your mate is,” Gerri said with a shrug.

“Maybe for shifters, but I’m human. You know that.”

“You are, but maybe he’s not.”

“What do you mean by that?” Jane’s head snapped up. She knew the look on her face had to be one of surprise. Was Gerri suggesting that Mason was something other than human?

“I mean exactly what I said. Maybe this mystery man isn’t human.”

“The dog!” Jane screeched.

“What dog? I’m confused,” Gerri replied.

She sounded like a crazy person, but she didn’t give a fuck. What she needed to know was if Gerri was on to something or if she was just reading way too much into things.

“Sam. The stray who suddenly showed up at my house last week. Is he ...” Jane couldn’t even bring herself to say the words or ask the question.

“What does this dog, Sam, look like?” Gerri asked.

Jane jumped up from her chair and grabbed her purse off the table, remembering the picture of Sam she had taken. She flipped through her photos until the image of the giant dog popped up on her screen.

“This is Sam, the dog,” she said, handing her phone to Gerri.

“Uh, honey. That’s no dog,” Gerri said with a laugh.

“What do you mean?”

“I can’t believe I’m about to do this or that you’re this clueless.” Gerri stood and locked the door.

Jane was so damn confused. “What are you doing?”

“Just watch and don’t freak out, okay?”

“Fine.” Jane crossed her arms and parked her ass on the corner of her desk, waiting for Gerri to show her whatever it was that she was doing.

She felt the air in her office thicken. The tiny hairs on the back of her neck stood on end. She had only ever felt the feeling once before. Jane swore if she would have blinked, she would have missed Gerri shifting from human to wolf.

Jane glanced from her friend to her phone and back. A sickening feeling formed in her gut.

“Are you fucking kidding me?”

NINETEEN



Mason's day had been absolute shit. Anything that could've gone wrong did, and it wasn't even lunchtime. What had started out as a beautiful day turned on its heel the second his phone started ringing. Several of his clients had unexpected issues with their security staff that seemed to pop up out of the blue, but Mason had known better. There was no such thing as a coincidence. How could over two dozen people not show up for work on the very same day?

He paced his office, trying to figure out what the hell was going on, when he heard his cell phone buzz with an incoming notification.

Did you think we wouldn't find you?

Did you think we'd let you get away with it again?

We know where you are. We know what you do for a living.

You should have run farther.

He read the message three times to make sure that he had read it correctly the first two times.

"Fuck!" he growled before tossing his phone back on his desk.

His enemies had found him. Those who he had wronged decades ago had come calling, demanding justice for shit he had done when he was a kid. Mason could only imagine what they had told his pack for this mass exodus to have happened. The men and women who worked for him belonged to his

pack. They were a rough and tough bunch he'd gathered together to work for his security firm.

Mason wasn't sure if he was more hurt or pissed that they'd just walk off the job without talking to him ... without getting his side of the story. He'd known them for years. Had considered them friends, family even.

"Veronica, can you please call the whole pack to meet at my place in an hour?" he asked, stepping out of his office.

"Sure, Mr. Phillips. Is everything all right?" she looked worried by his request.

"Not really. I want you to close up the office and meet me there in one hour." He grabbed his phone and jacket and headed out.

"Okay," she called out behind him.

Mason didn't slow his pace. He knew he had to figure this shit out. It needed to be done once and for all. He was tired of living in the shadows and worrying every second of his adult life whether this day would come.

He had just found his mate. Even if there were issues in the new relationship, he was not about to let his past interfere with his mate, his pack, or his business. He wasn't about to let anyone fuck with his life for another minute. Mason couldn't change what he did when he had first learned of his powers. He had been punished and shunned. He had never contacted anyone from his former pack ... not even his damn family.

He had done as he had been told and walked away. He never once looked back. Instead, he had chosen to learn the tough lesson they had sought to teach by abandoning everyone and everything he had ever known, along with his gift. It had nearly killed him and his wolf, but that was their burden to bear ... nobody else's.

"WHAT'S GOING ON?"

“Why are we here?”

“Is there some sort of threat?”

His pack had questions, and by the look on their faces, he damn well better have the answers.

“Let’s give it a minute. We’re missing quite a few,” Mason said.

“I don’t know where my mate is,” Dorothy said. “He should be here.”

“He never showed up for work today. Him and a few dozen others,” Mason replied, less than amused by the lack of consideration his people had shown.

“What do you mean he never showed up for work? I dropped him off when I took the kids to school because I needed the car for a doctor’s appointment today.” Dorothy looked terrified by the thought that no one knew where her husband was.

Several of the women stood. Women whose husbands also worked for Mason’s security firm. “What the hell is going on?” several of them asked.

Mason quickly re-evaluated what he had thought about those who hadn’t shown up for work. “All of your husbands left for work as well?” he asked.

“Yes,” they all nodded that they had.

Mason sucked in a deep breath, wondering where the hell to start.

“I need you all to listen to me for a few minutes before you judge me too harshly.”

“Where are our husbands?” one of the women shouted.

“I don’t know, but we will find them,” he said. “Now, I need to tell you all about something that happened just over twenty years ago and how I came to be alpha of this pack.”

“What you did decades ago doesn’t matter. We just want to know what’s happened to our mates,” Dorothy said.

“I think it’s all related,” Mason said. He paused for a moment to gather his thoughts on the depth of the situation he now found himself in. He had been wrong. Very wrong. It had been silly of him to think that his pack would have so easily abandoned him, but he really couldn’t help it.

His former pack had kicked his ass to the curb quicker than he could blink. The trauma from that event would likely be with him for the rest of his life. No matter what he did, no matter how hard he tried to ignore it. It would always be there in his soul.

“When I was just a kid, I had found out that, like many of you, I had been born with a unique power. I could enter the dreams of anyone I had a connection to. No one in my pack had ever explained how gifts or powers worked. No one had ever heard of a power like mine.

“At the time, I thought it was the coolest thing ever. I could jump in and out of dreams of different pack members, my family, and my friends. I didn’t realize at the time how intrusive or wrong it was for me to do that. Some of the girls in my pack had started to dream about me and had started having feelings for me even though they were in relationships with others.

“When I realized what my powers were doing to others, I gave up on them, but it was too late. The damage was already done, and there was nothing I could do to fix it.” Mason paused and looked around the room.

He had been certain that he’d look up and see a bunch of horrified faces staring back at him, but that wasn’t the case. Most looked sad.

“Anyway, when the alpha found out about what I had done, entering people’s dreams like I had ... Well, let’s just say the punishment was swift and severe. I was beaten and shunned by my family, by the pack.”

“How awful,” someone said as a few gasps sounded in the crowd.

“What does this have to do with our husbands?” Dorothy asked.

“I got a text today from my old pack. A threatening text. I think they are behind this rash of disappearances,” Mason explained.

“But why now? Why are they threatening you after all these years?” one of the missing worker’s wives asked.

“I honestly couldn’t figure it out when I first got the text. But now that I’ve had some time to think about it, I’m almost positive it’s because I’ve found my mate, and they want to make sure that I don’t pass on my *gift*,” he said. “They are attacking my pack and me, hoping that I’ll abandon my mate and run.” It was the only conclusion he could come up with. Why else would they choose now to come after him? To try to destroy his life?

“And are you going to run, or are you going to stay and fight? Choosing your pack and mate?” Dorothy asked.

Mason’s heart thumped so hard in his chest that it sounded like someone beating on a drum. He felt his wolf surge forward, his eyes glowing. His beast wanted control. He wanted to reassure his pack that he would not run. Mason fought the urge to shift, but it was getting harder with each passing second.

“I’m done running,” he growled and gave up the fight with his wolf. He allowed his animal to surge forward and assume control of their body and mind. His pack needed their alpha, and he would not deny them in their time of need.

TWENTY



“I should have figured this out sooner. I feel like such a damn fool.” Jane buried her head in her hands, wanting to avoid eye contact with Gerri.

“Honey, don’t feel that way. I’m sure Mason thought he was being cute. And really, it was very sweet of him. He wasn’t doing it to be mean or to try to trick you. Most shifters aren’t like that. From what I understand, you kept turning him down, and he wanted to find a way to be near you. He was drawn to you by the mating connection,” Gerri explained.

“I don’t even know what that means.” She let out a weak laugh. She didn’t know if she should be hurt, flattered, or pissed beyond belief that Mason had shown up in his wolf form at her house to sucker her into letting him in.

“It means that shifters are different from humans when it comes to dating and romance. What you may think of as creepy stalker behavior from a normal man that’s the way it works in our world. Once a shifter finds his mate, his life is no longer his own.

“As Mason has written on this card, his heart beats for you. That is the absolute truth and the simplest explanation as to what you mean to him. He lives his life now for you and only you. You are his life, his future. There isn’t anything he wouldn’t do to show you how much he loves you. To protect and keep you safe from those who would use you to harm him.”

“But he tricked me into feeling for this poor lost dog.” Jane tried to wrap her head around the whole situation. “Wait a minute! Did you set me up?” Jane gasped.

“I ... I,” Gerri stammered.

“You did! Even after I asked you to leave me out of your dating agency.” Now she was pissed. She had specifically asked Gerri to stay out of her romance and dating life, or lack thereof. Gerri had been her friend for as long as she could remember, and she had never once shown her disrespect by ignoring her wishes.

“It’s not like that. I didn’t go out and actively look for someone for you. Mason had heard about my services and showed up on my doorstep as a client.”

“So you sent him knocking on my door? Nice!” Jane tried and failed to keep the anger out of her voice. She was seething at her friend.

“No.”

“How did you even know that I’m his supposed mate?” Jane asked.

“I just know these things. I can’t explain it,” Gerri said.

“That doesn’t make it true,” Jane shouted.

“Honey, whether you like it or not, it is the truth. I have never lied to you and wouldn’t start now. You know that. You know me. How long have we been friends?” Gerri asked, placing a comforting hand on Jane’s shoulder.

Jane shrugged it off. “I’m beginning to think we’ve been friends too long. I think you should go.”

“Jane ...” Gerri pleaded with her.

“Just go. I need to think about all of this.”

Jane watched as Gerri grabbed her coffee and her purse and turned to leave. She was so damn mad that smoke could’ve come out of her ears. How could Gerri have done that to her? Gerri had known she didn’t want to date anyone.

That she wasn't looking for any sort of a relationship. Yet, one of her best friends had set her up.

"I know you're mad at me, but I think the real problem here is that you are terrified that you finally found a good man. One who will love you for who you are, not what or who he wants you to be. Mason is nothing like your ex. You know it. I know it. You're just scared of having your world turned upside down."

With that, Gerri walked out and left Jane to collect her thoughts. Yeah, she was pissed and hurt. But damn it! She also knew Gerri was right. She hated that her friend knew her better than she knew herself. Since the moment Mason had walked through her door, something inside of her was changing. Her thoughts about wanting someone in her life were different. Her fear of being treated the way her ex had treated her was shifting.

Mason had gotten under her skin in both his human and wolf self, and it pissed her off that she had fallen for both of them so easily. That even with all she had learned after telling Mason that he had to leave last night, she still wanted him more than anything else.

Jane closed her laptop, needing to get out of the office and away from everything. She threw her laptop in her bag and said goodbye to Amelia and Yulia. The rest of her work could wait until tomorrow. She had done the most important tasks of placing orders for the week, and that was all she really had to get done.

Jane left through the back door and headed straight for her car. She had no sooner thrown her laptop in the backseat when she felt a pair of strong arms wrap around her and lift her off her feet. She kicked with all her might, trying to free herself, but every attempted blow failed to get her captor to release her.

"Let go of me," she shouted, tossing her head back and connecting with the teeth of whoever had her.

"Shut the fuck up, bitch. You're coming with me."

“Who are you?” Jane shouted, not recognizing the man’s voice.

“Your worst nightmare,” the man growled into her ear.

Out of the corner of her eyes, Jane saw a flash of an animal coming at them at a high rate of speed. She braced for impact, not knowing if the animal was going to collide with her or the man who held her.

The man screamed as the animal took a chunk of his leg and dropped to the ground. He released the hold he had on Jane, and she jumped away from him and the animal.

“Gerri!” Jane gasped when she saw the wolf growling at the man.

Gerri quickly shifted back to her human form. “We need to get out of here. Now! Move!”

Jane saw Gerri’s lips moving but couldn’t hear a word she was saying.

“Shit! Give me your keys.”

Jane reached into her pocket as the world around her started to spin. How she got into the passenger seat of her car, she had no idea.

“Hang on tight, honey,” Gerri said as she started the car and backed into the man who had tried to abduct her.

“Did you kill him?” Jane had somehow found her voice and used her words to ask the obvious.

“He’s a shifter. He’s not dead, but he’s going to have a hell of a headache in a few minutes,” Gerri said, speeding out of the parking lot and onto the road.

“Who was that man? What did he want with me?” Jane asked, finally starting to feel less like she was going to pass the fuck out.

“I don’t know who he was. My guess is it has something to do with your mate.”

“Stop calling him that.” Jane glanced out of the back window to see several other men coming to help the guy who

had tried to kidnap her.

“Well, that’s what he is. Now we need to get out of here before they catch up with us. There’s no way I can fight off a dozen wolves.” Gerri turned a sharp corner, then another, making sure no one was following them.

“Where are we going?” Jane asked.

“To see your mate and find out what the fuck all this bullshit is about.”

TWENTY-ONE



One by one, every single member of the pack shifted within seconds of Mason assuming his wolf form. He let out a loud howl, calling any others in the area who hadn't made it to the meeting. Mason spoke through the mental connection he had to his pack.

We are under threat from an outside force. One we will not roll over and submit to. This is our pack. We have worked hard to get where we are as a people. And I, as your alpha, will not let anyone take that from us. We will find those whom they have taken and put down anyone who stands in our path.

Several yips and howls sounded. His pack members agreed to everything he had said. They were normally a peaceful pack, but when someone challenged them, they would fight.

Eli, Greg, and Chuck, I want you to take the lead in protection duty here. Run the perimeter and make sure you don't catch anyone trying to sneak onto the property. Rosa and Wanelle, I want you to keep the kids in the daycare and make sure they are safe and accounted for. Kelce, I want you to gather up our senior members and bring them here so we can look out for them. I don't want them caught in the crossfire. Lastly, Rick, I want you to run down any leads on new wolves in the area. Check with all the local hotels and motels. See if there's an influx of new visitors to the area. I find it hard to believe that we've had over two dozen grown men disappear and that no one saw or heard a damn thing!

Those who had been mentioned took off to fulfill their duties to the pack with no questions asked. Everyone knew

what was at stake and would not fail. Of that, he was perfectly sure.

Everyone else, I want you to take a few trips through town and across the countryside. Men in groups of three. Women in groups of four or more to ensure everyone's safety. I don't want anyone else captured. If you see something, call Sharon. She's in charge of coordinating messaging. Sharon, you know what to do. Grab your group and get set up.

Sharon nodded and tagged a couple of wolves who stood beside her.

Mason's ears twitched as he heard a car speeding down his gravel driveway. He darted out of the lodge he'd built for pack gatherings to see who it was. One by one, his wolves flanked him. It was all about strength in numbers.

Mason was surprised to see Gerri and Jane jump from what looked like Jane's car. Why would Gerri bring her to his house? Jane was a human. She had to have been shocked to see a yard filled with wolves.

"You need to shift now. We need to talk," Gerri said.

Mason glanced at Jane and then back to Gerri, wondering what the hell was going on. Did Jane already know he was a wolf? Had Gerri already told her?

"Mason, do as she says. Someone tried to abduct me today," Jane said, crossing her arms.

Well, that answered that, didn't it?

Mason shifted back to his human form so he could talk to the women and find out what the hell had happened. She had said that someone tried to take her ... what the hell?

A MILLION THOUGHTS popped into Jane's head all at the same time. She had been hesitant to get out of the car when she had seen all of the wolves standing outside the large building.

Holy damn! she thought but pulled herself together. They were just humans who shifted into animals. Not wild wolves. They still had their humanity. Or so she'd hoped. She recognized Sam ... err, Mason immediately. He was larger than the others and stood out in front as if he were in charge.

"Is he the leader of the tribe?" she asked Gerri before she cracked her door open.

"Pack, honey. He's their alpha."

"Oh. Right." Jane opened the door and slid out of the car, following Gerri's lead. She glanced around at the pack as they stepped closer and closer. She tried to calm her racing heart, not wanting anyone to know how nervous she was. The wolves were beautiful ... stunning even, with their thick colorful coats and their bright eyes. They were far more interested in her than Gerri, who they hadn't even so much as blinked at.

Great! All eyes on me!

Jane wanted to call out to Sam ... uh, Mason, but she didn't. She waited for Gerri to explain why they were there.

She had to play it cool, so she crossed her arms over her chest and asked him to shift as Gerri had. She didn't know why, but she wanted to see his transformation with her own eyes. It was one thing to be told the man you were sleeping with was a shifter. It was another thing altogether to see it for yourself.

Once again, Jane felt the tiny hairs on the back of her neck stand on end. Seconds later, Mason shifted from his wolf form to human right before her eyes. There was no denying he was a shifter. As much as she wanted to not believe what Gerri had told her about him, her friend hadn't lied. Though she knew in her heart that Gerri had spoken the truth, Jane had still hoped she was wrong. That Mason was just an ordinary human like her.

"Tell me what happened," he demanded, closing the distance between them and pulling her into his arms.

Jane wanted to push him away, still mad at him for not telling her the truth about who he really was, but she didn't. She felt safe with his strong arms wrapped around her. She loved the heat surrounding her when he held her tightly. As much as Jane wanted to stay cocooned in Mason's heat, she pulled back so she could explain what had happened.

"I was getting ready to leave the bakery, and I had just thrown my laptop in the car when some guy grabbed me. I have no idea who he was, and when I asked, he told me to shut the fuck up. I don't know what I would have done if Gerri hadn't been there to save my ass."

"Did you see him? Did you get a look at his face?" Mason asked.

"No, I didn't see him. My back was to him the whole time. And after Gerri attacked him, I really don't even know how I even got to my car. I just remember sitting there and hearing Gerri tell me to hold on tight," Jane explained.

"I saw him," Gerri said. "Right before I took a chunk out of his leg, then ran him over with Jane's car. He wasn't anyone I'd ever seen before. His scent was off too."

"Weird. I wonder who it was they sent?" Mason asked.

"What's going on? What are you talking about? Who's sending someone to abduct Jane in broad daylight?" Gerri asked with more gusto than Jane had ever heard her use.

"My former pack," Mason said to Gerri and Jane before turning back to his pack. "I'll be back in a few minutes. Get started with the tasks you were given."

Jane watched as the wolves nodded to Mason and went about their business.

"Let's talk in the house. There's a bit more privacy in there," he started toward a large log home.

This day was becoming more surreal by the moment for Jane. Of course, Mr. Hot and Hunky had to secretly be a wolf shifter who lived in the middle of the woods in what was effectively a log mansion. And he wasn't just any wolf shifter.

He just happened to be the king of the herd or whatever the fuck he was that Gerri had said.

“Giles, can you give us some privacy?” Mason asked before turning to Jane to explain. “He’s one of my butlers.”

“Of course.” She acted as if it were a normal thing to have a butler or several. Who didn’t? Right?

“Please.” He motioned for her and Gerri to have a seat on the couch. “Can I get you a drink?” he asked.

“Whiskey and make it strong,” Gerri replied.

“Jane?” he asked.

“Same.”

“Coming right up.”

Jane watched as Mason poured three drinks and carried them over to her and Gerri. He handed two of the drinks off and kept one for himself before taking a seat in the chair across from the couch.

“Thanks. Now, explain,” Gerri said and took a sip of her whiskey. “Ahh, the good stuff.”

“Only the best,” Mason said before continuing. “My old pack is coming after me.” He took a sip of his whiskey and set the glass on a coaster.

“What do you mean by that? Why would they do that?” Gerri asked.

“Because I found my mate, and they don’t want me passing on my gifts to another generation,” he said.

“What gift could be so horrible that they wouldn’t want you to pass it on?” Gerri asked.

“I’m a dream weaver,” he whispered.

TWENTY-TWO



“**Y**ou’re a what?” Jane nearly choked on her drink. Did that mean what she thought it meant? What the hell else could it be? Was that the reason she’d had the sexy dreams about Mason? Had he been responsible?

“I’m a dream weaver,” he said again, a little louder this time, making full eye contact with Jane.

“You didn’t!” she gasped, jumping to her feet.

Gerri eyed the pair up before setting her drink down. “I’m going to go say hi to everyone and see how I can help out,” she said before rushing out of the house.

“Please, Jane. Let me explain.”

“I can’t believe it. You lied about being a shifter. You acted like a dog to get me to let you in. I confided in you! Then I find out that you somehow have the ability to jump into my dreams, making me have sexy dreams about you!” Her blood boiled in her veins. She wanted to throttle him for everything he had done.

“It doesn’t work that way, Jane. I didn’t make you have sexy dreams. Nor was that ever my intention. When I hopped into your dreams, I was already on your mind in a very sexy manner.”

“Liar!” Jane shouted, not wanting to admit the truth.

“You can hear the truth in my words. You know in your heart and in that damn stubborn head of yours that I’m not lying. You just don’t want to admit how much you want me.

How much I turn you on. You'd rather stick your head in the sand and let a good thing pass you by," he shouted back.

"Why didn't you tell me you were a shifter?" she asked.

"Because we've had *one* date, and I didn't know you knew about us. I would have told you. Sooner rather than later. It's just too hard to hide from someone, and I don't really have any desire to hide who I really am when I'm in a relationship with you."

"And the whole showing up as a dog on my back deck?" she asked, still pissed but slightly less. His answers were just too damn good for her liking. "How did you even know where I lived? Did you follow me home from work?" she asked.

"That was purely an accident."

"Uh-huh." Jane rolled her eyes.

"I swear. I shifted into my wolf form to run off some of the sexual tension I was feeling. My wolf picked up your scent, and the next thing I knew, you were scratching my head and offering me cold chicken. It's not like I tried to look like a poodle or Yorkie. I was a *wolf*. I'm sorry you don't know your animals," he said with a shrug.

Jane's mouth hit the floor. "That's how you remember it?" she asked.

"That's how it happened." He challenged her. "What the hell did you think I was?"

"A husky, maybe, or a German shepherd mix. I don't know."

"Seriously?" he said with that sexy-ass smirk of his that had a way of melting her panties off her body every time it showed up on his face.

"Fine, but the next night and the night after?" she asked.

"My wolf wanted to be near you to make sure you were safe. He really likes you. I still can't believe you named us Sam and wanted us to get neutered. Really, woman? What the actual hell!"

The tension left Jane's body, and she began to laugh at the ridiculousness of the situation she found herself in. "Okay, the way you reacted to that should have been a dead giveaway, and it might have been if I hadn't been so damn tired that night. My mind was everywhere. I guess that's my only defense as to why I never realized that Sam ... uh, you ... were an actual wolf."

Mason closed the distance between them and pulled her into his arms. She sighed with contentment when all she wanted to do was kick him.

"We make quite the pair. Don't we?" he whispered into her ear.

"Yeah, I guess we do."

Mason kissed a trail of hot kisses down her neck to the top of her chest. His fingers tunneled into her hair as he held her close. "I want you so badly, but now is not the time. Not when I have over two dozen men missing."

"What can I do to help?" Jane pulled back.

"Nothing. It's too dangerous. I want you to stay here and stay safe while we go out to search for my men." He kissed her forehead and walked out to the door.

"Giles can get you anything you need."

"Uh, thanks. I guess." Jane's anger returned. Tenfold this time. What the hell? She wasn't some helpless twit who needed to sit at home, out of the action, while her man did all the heavy lifting. Yeah, she was human, but she wasn't without resources of her own. Being jumped outside her bakery had been a one-off because she hadn't been expecting it. Now that she knew someone was after her, or several someones, possibly, she knew what to look out for and could protect herself ... probably.

Jane paced the room, feeling like she was trapped despite the stunning house. She hated being cast aside by someone who thought they knew what was best for her. Been there. Done that. And she was so fucking over it.

Her ex-husband always seemed to know what was best for her and sidelined her so many damn times that it wasn't funny. She watched as several large groups of wolves headed out on what she assumed to be the hunt. Mason led one of the groups. He saw her standing at the window and gave her a slight nod.

"Is there something I can get for you, ma'am?" Giles asked, scaring the crap out of her.

Jane shook off the fear racing through her body. She was sure Giles was a good man. After all, he worked for Mason, but she didn't know him. Therefore, she didn't trust him. "Umm, no. I'm good but thank you. I just need to go out and grab my phone from my car."

"I can fetch it if you'd like, ma'am."

"No. I can grab it. I'll just be a minute." She had to get the hell out of Mason's house. Under any other circumstances, she might like spending time there, but this was not that time. What was she supposed to do? Sit? Stay?

Yeah, that wasn't in her nature. She hopped in and took off the second she made it to her car. Jane had no idea where she was going, but she couldn't stay there.

TWENTY-THREE



Mason set off with a contingent of his best fighters. He had picked up the smell of one of his missing men a few miles back, and now, they were hot on his trail. They had followed the scent as it weaved to the outskirts of town, where they found themselves just on the edge of a piece of land that had an abandoned warehouse.

Quiet, now. We have the element of surprise, and I'd like to keep it that way, Mason said through his pack connection as he assessed the situation. A volley of scents assaulted his nostrils. Along with his missing wolves were at least a dozen and a half others who he couldn't identify.

Henry, fall back. Text Sharon and let her know our location. Have her get as many men out here as possible.

On it, boss. Henry sprinted off, following the orders that Mason had given him.

Spread out and surround the warehouse. Patrick, you lead one group. I'll lead the other. No one enters or leaves. Quietly take them out as needed. Report all entry points back to me, so we can see what we are dealing with.

The wolves formed two lines. Mason led the first group and headed to the east of the building, and the other group, with his second-in-command, Patrick, headed to the west.

Once they encircled the building, they found a total of five entry points. Four guards had been swiftly eliminated. They had managed to get in place without anyone inside realizing what was happening outside the building.

Mason picked up the scent of his former alpha, along with his parents. This was so not the reunion he'd hoped to have with his family. He'd hoped that one day they would be able to realize that he had just been a stupid kid, playing with a power he didn't understand. Instead of shunning him, they could have taken the time to teach him about his gift. He could have learned how to control and use it properly, but they couldn't be bothered.

The thing that still bugged the fuck out of Mason was ... who did he inherit the gift from? His mother or his father? It had to be from his father, as gifts of this nature were passed genetically on the male side.

My family is inside. I'm going to try to talk to them. I want everyone to stay put for now.

I don't like it, Patrick said. It's clearly a trap. How do you know they won't kill you the second you walk through that door?

They won't. They have some sort of sick point to prove before it comes to them trying to kill me, Mason explained. He was done arguing.

If it sounds like things are going south, storm the warehouse and take out as many as you can.

Will do.

JANE HATED TO ADMIT IT, but she should have listened to Mason and kept her ass safe and sound at his house. But no. She had to prove that she could handle anything that came at her as long as she was prepared for it.

What a joke that had been. She sure as hell hadn't been prepared for the wolf-man who had broken her window and dragged her out of her car at a stop sign. They had been watching her and waiting for her to be alone again.

She'd tried fighting, kicking, screaming. But this time, there was no Gerri around to help her out. Now, she was tied

up in some rotted-out warehouse with whom she could only assume were the missing members of Mason's pack. She was well and truly fucked as the only human in the bunch, she was far less sturdy than those surrounding her.

The ring leader of the so-called group looked as if he could use a good scrubbing and a haircut. His greasy locks fell to his shoulders. His ripped T-shirt and jeans were caked with dirt and what looked like dried blood, as were his arms and neck. But what scared Jane the most was the evil she saw in his jet-black eyes.

"Why am I here?" she asked.

"Because you're the key to getting Mason here," the man said.

"Why would I be the key? We've been on one date." She wanted to play dumb. There was no reason he needed to know that she knew she was Mason's mate. Though her thoughts on that subject were still up in the air. She liked him, but she was pissed at him, and she still wasn't looking to hop into any sort of relationship.

"Yet, we found you leaving his house."

"My friend drove me there," Jane stammered.

"Your friend, the famous matchmaker and mate finder. We know all about her."

Jane didn't know what else to say. The man seemed to know all about her and Gerri. Though how he did, she really couldn't even begin to guess.

"Why would you dirty yourself with a man like my son?" one man sneered at her.

"I don't know what you mean." Jane challenged him.

"I can smell his fucking scent all over you. He is the worst form of wolf in the world. One who uses lies and deception to get what he wants. He muddies our species with his tricks." The man spat on the floor next to Jane.

"You have no idea who he even is. There is nothing dirty about Mason. He's a kind mind with a pack that seems to care

for him very much.” Though she didn’t know Mason well, she knew enough to know that he was a good man. She had never once gotten the evil vibes from him that she was getting from his father.

“I know everything there is to know about him. He is a monster who should be destroyed to keep his curse from being passed on to a new generation.”

“Well, it’s good to see you, too, father. Please, don’t hold back on my account,” Mason said.

Jane sucked in a deep breath when she saw Mason there by himself.

“Mason, you have to get out of here. It’s a trap!” Jane tried to warn him.

TWENTY-FOUR



Mason's heart dropped when he saw Jane tied up and sitting on the cold concrete floor of the warehouse.

How they had gotten a hold of her, he didn't fucking know. One thing he did know was that heads were going to fucking roll if they harmed one damn hair on his mate's beautiful head.

He had thought Jane would be safe and sound at his house, considering all the security he had in place there. He was going to have a chat with Giles when this was all said and done.

"Do you really think we would let you get away with this?" his father asked.

"Get away with what? I didn't try to come back to the pack or family who shunned me. I started my own pack. My own life. Why are you here? Why now? I haven't broken any of your rules."

"Your mate."

"What about her?" Mason asked as if it were no big deal.

"You cannot be allowed to pass your curse down to another generation," his former alpha said.

"Really, Jax? That's why you're hounding me? Did you say the same thing to my father when he wanted to mate my mother?"

"What?" Jax said, crossing his arms over his chest.

“I know damn well that you’re not as stupid as you look,” Mason said. Jax could try to play the bullshit card all day long, and he would call him out each and every time. He was done with all of the fuckery. One way or another, it would end today.

“Watch your mouth, boy, or I will end you right here. Right now,” Jax warned.

“You can try, but I’m not the same scared child that I was when you jumped me before. I’ve grown up since then.” Mason held firm in his stance. He wasn’t going anywhere. Jax and his father would not run him out of town and away from the pack he built. He was no longer the kid who Jax towered over. Mason was easily a foot and a half taller than his former alpha. Not to mention the fact that he had about eighty pounds of pure muscle on the scraggly man.

But Mason was no fool. He knew that Jax was sketchy when it came to fighting. He was small and fast and could stun an opponent with his speed alone. That didn’t mean Mason didn’t have a chance in a fair fight. Not at all. Mason knew he could take him with the tricks he had up his sleeve. Hell, he might even revel in giving his former alpha a beat down.

“You’ve grown bold and arrogant in the years you’ve been gone,” Jax growled at him.

“Not at all. In fact, it’s quite the opposite. I see clearly now. I see through the bullshit. The fact that you would punish me for a gift so clearly given to me by my father.”

“I didn’t give you shit, boy. Other than your life,” his dad shouted in disgust. Spittle flew from his mouth with each word he spoke.

“Liar! Everyone can hear the lie you continue to spew. You know it. I know it. The packs know it. Gifts of this caliber are handed down from one generation to the next on the male side. I’ve done my homework over the years. Have you? The answer is simple, and it lies in the genetics of our species. So you seek to punish me for something you are guilty of yourself. Hypocrite much?”

Mason had had enough of his father's lies and his former pack's bullshit. He was done with the lot of them. At some point in his life, he had hoped there could be peace between him and his people.

He no longer wished for that. Not when he saw the type of people who stood in front of him. They were not honorable wolves or honorable men. There was nothing good about them. They were simply the worst of the worst. They are the reason why shifters so often get a bad rap. People like his father, his former alpha, and their entire damn pack were to blame for the biases humans held against shifters.

"Is this true?" Jax asked, turning to his father.

"N ... no. He's lying," his father stuttered.

Once again, Mason heard the lies spewing from his father's mouth. It appeared that Jax could as well.

"Does your pack know?" Jax asked Mason.

"Most of them, but not all. Not the ones you have tied up here. By the way, what was your plan for them? Were you going to kill them?" Mason asked.

"I hadn't decided yet." Jax shrugged. "I'm still not a hundred percent certain. They look a little uppity to me, to be honest. I doubt many of them would be good for much of anything when it comes to serving beside me in my pack."

"You're wrong. They don't deserve to die. They are good men. Good fathers. Good husbands. It's a shame you look for all the wrong things in the people you want by your side."

"That makes them weak and pathetic. A pack should be strong and ruthless in order to do the things that need to be done in our world," Jax said.

"Yes, our world can be fucked up. Especially when there are people like you and my father in it. If it weren't for shifters like you, we would be a much more peaceful people. My pack has never been at war with any rivals. Can you say the same?" Mason paused to give Jax a chance to answer.

When no answer came, he continued on. “Yeah, I didn’t think so. Instead, you trot your men into certain death, and for what? To what ends? To say that you beat another pack? Big fucking deal when you lose half your men doing it. There’s a different way of living life.”

“The pussy way,” Jax laughed.

“You know, the best thing that ever happened to me was getting kicked out of your pack. Now, I’m only going to say this once. Release my mate and my men, or you’re going to regret it.”

“Fuck you. I’ll do whatever the hell I want. I think I’ll take your pretty little mate and show her what being with a real man is like. I’ll fuck her good, then slit her throat and fuck her some more. Maybe I’ll make you watch. Maybe I’ll let your dear old dad have a shot at her too.”

“You are a sick fuck. I don’t know why anyone with any worth would ever follow the likes of you,” Mason said.

“Me? Ha! That’s rich coming from someone who jumps into people’s dreams and twists them into what he wants them to do.”

“I was a kid! What don’t you understand about that? Maybe if my father would have manned up and shown me how to use my gift instead of denying it, things could have been different.”

“Do you ever stop whining? Jesus, fuck!” Jax rolled his eyes dramatically.

“Let them go,” Mason said again.

“Come get them if you want them so badly.”

Mason knew what Jax was doing. He was taunting him, trying to get him to make the first move, assuming Mason was there alone. Big mistake. He felt the full power of his pack running through his veins. Everyone had gathered outside. They were waiting for his orders.

He glanced around at those that had been captured and his mate before giving a single nod and letting out a loud whistle,

calling the others into the abandoned warehouse.

One by one, members of his pack flanked him. The look on Jax's face told him that he now held the upper hand when it came to strength in numbers. There were easily seventy-five wolves standing behind Mason, supporting him compared to Jax's measly fifteen.

Jax was outnumbered and outmatched. Mason's pack was healthy and made up of men in their prime. His former pack, well, to put it nicely, they were well past the age of midlife crisis. Jax's men began to back away, including Mason's father. They'd all had the look of having bitten off far more than they could chew, and they looked pissed for having been sent on a fool's errand that was sure to lead them to their deaths should they continue to proceed with this foolishness.

“Let my mate and my people go, and I'll let you leave with your life.” Mason didn't mince words. He was done with all of them.

TWENTY-FIVE



Jane had never seen a more glorious man than Mason. He had stood up to his father and his former alpha with ease. She could see the other men shaking in their boots when Mason's pack filed into the warehouse.

"You think you can beat me because you have a hoard of weaklings behind you?" Jax taunted him.

"You're already beaten, and you know it," Mason countered.

"Maybe, but I'll take down as many as I can before you take me out, and I think I'll start with your pretty little mate." Jax grabbed Jane by her hair and lifted her off the ground.

Jane let out a shout as Jax's fingers dug deep into her scalp. She was sure she would have a giant bald spot when all was said and done.

"Can you get to me before I mark her? Or snap her neck?" Jax asked.

"What!" she shouted as a fresh wave of panic flooded Jane's senses. This guy was insane. Who lived like this? What did he mean by mark her? Mark her with what? She had no idea, but it sounded much less lethal than the whole snap-her-neck thing. That would definitely *un-alive* her.

"Let her go," Mason shouted. His eyes glowed with an intensity she had never seen. Even with the current predicament that she found herself in, she still allowed herself to appreciate Mason's beauty. He was her beast.

It was the first time she had thought of him as hers. The irony hadn't been lost on her. Just when she was about to lose her life, she was finally ready to accept him as her man. Talk about timing.

“Easy,” Jax said to Mason. “One more step, and you’ll regret it or not. I mean, if you really cared about her, you would have marked and claimed her immediately as your own. Human or not. She would have at least been protected against this.”

Before Jane even knew what was happening, she felt a sharp pain in the side of her neck.

She screamed as the pain turned into a blistering heat that she couldn't escape. She felt like she was going to pass the fuck out from the pain shooting through her entire body.

“No!” Mason screamed as Jax let go of Jane and pushed her to the ground. She bounced off the hard concrete.

The tiny hairs on the back of her neck stood on end as Mason shifted from his human form to his wolf form in seconds. Jane did the only thing she could think of to help her man. She kicked out her leg, connecting with the back of Jax's knee, and sent him crumbling to the ground.

Mason was on him instantly. Jane turned away, not wanting to see what was sure to be Jax's bloody and gruesome death. It wasn't that she felt bad for the man. She didn't. Not at all. He deserved everything he was getting and more, but that didn't mean she wanted the sight of it haunting her dreams for the rest of her life.

The members of Jax's pack took off, running out the nearest exits. Mason's men were hot on their heels, not letting them run from their punishment.

“Mason! Watch out!” Jane screamed as Mason's dad shifted into a scraggly wolf and descended on him with a fury she had never seen. His eyes turned blood red, foam dripping from his mouth. He looked more like a rabid animal than a noble wolf.

How could a father attack his own son so viciously? It made her sick to think their relationship had come to that point. That Mason's dad would rather see him dead than anything else.

Mason spun around and landed a blow with his back leg to his dad's abdomen. His dad's wolf flew backward and bounced off a cement pillar. Mason didn't hesitate. He was on the wolf in one single leap, tearing into his back leg.

Howls of pain quickly turned to a man's screams.

"Let me go, you piece of shit!"

Mason shifted back to his human form. "I will let you leave with your life this one time, old man. But if you come at me, my mate, or my pack again, I will end you. Do you understand me?" Mason growled down at this father.

His father kept his mouth shut and nodded up at his son. Mason turned to Jane. A look of worry and sadness passed over his face. She grabbed her neck. The pain reminded her that she had been bitten by Jax.

"Let's get you out of here," he said, bending to help her up.

Her view was blocked by his enormous body. She had no idea what was happening when he quickly spun around. That was when she saw his dad in wolf form, jumping toward Mason's neck with his crooked teeth bared.

"No!" she screamed. Her heart dropped. She could not, and would not, allow anything to happen to Mason. He was too important to her. Her future with him flashed before her eyes. She saw what life with him could be like. And damn it to hell, she wanted it.

She wanted to wake up every morning beside him. She wanted to kiss him good night and tell him that she loved him every day. She wanted the laughs they would share, the late-night lovemaking.

She wanted it all, and she would not allow his dad, who seemed to be hell-bent on destroying his son, to take it all away. But what could she do with her hands tied behind her

back? Not to mention the fact that she was probably bleeding out from the wound on her neck.

Thankfully, she didn't have to do anything. As quickly as Mason's dad had sprung at him, he dropped to the floor. She watched as he shifted from wolf to human, his lifeless eyes staring back at her.

Mason unbound her hands and then scooped her off of the floor and cradled her in his arms. "Let's get you out of here." He kissed the top of her forehead.

"What do you want us to do with these guys?" one of his men asked.

Mason glanced around at the remnants of Jax's pack. "Am I going to have to kill the lot of you?" he asked.

"No," a few men said as the others shook their heads.

"Leave and don't come back," Mason ordered.

Several of the men dropped to their knees.

"What are they doing?" Jane asked. If Mason had just told her to leave after the devastating violence she had just witnessed, she would have hightailed it the fuck out of there. Instantly.

"They are submitting to me," he replied.

"Why? What do they want?"

"To join my pack. They want me to be their alpha."

"What!" Jane gasped, unable to wrap her head around the whole damn thing. "Why would they want that?"

"Probably because they see the pack here, and they know that someone as bad as or worse than Jax will become their new alpha if they go back. They don't want that. Do you?" he asked the men.

"No," one of the men replied. "I don't know about these guys, but I want a better life for my kids and wife. You seem like an honest man with a good pack. What more could a wolf want in life than to be a part of that?"

Jane could practically see the wheels churning in Mason's head as he debated what to do.

"Rise," he said, and all the men stood. Their eyes were downward, never once meeting Mason's hard stare.

What he said next shocked her to her core.

"You are more than welcome to bring your families here and join the pack. But I will not put up with any of the shit your former pack is known for. You will each be assigned one of my men to get you situated and show you the ropes of our pack. If you have a problem with this, leave now, and don't look back."

Each of the men stood firm. Not a single one chose to walk away.

"Very well. Rick, see to our new pack members. You know what needs to be done."

"Yes, sir," Rick said and set off on his task.

TWENTY-SIX



Mason carried Jane out of the warehouse and away from the gore. He had to get her back to his place, but she would never be able to walk that far. Not in her current condition. Then he had to figure out what the fuck to do about the bite on her neck. He wished he could go back and kill Jax all over again for marking his mate.

A sigh of relief passed through him when Giles pulled up in one of his blacked-out SUVs.

“Sir,” Giles said as he jumped out of the driver’s seat and popped open the back door.

Mason carefully set Jane on the back seat before he climbed in and pulled her back into his lap.

“The hospital, sir?” Giles asked.

“No. I’m afraid not. What we need are a witch and a healer.”

“A what?” Jane blinked up at him. “I’m sure if you take me to the emergency room, they can stitch me up, and I’ll be fine in no time. But I might need a rabies shot. Or several,” she tried to joke through the pain.

“Sorry, baby. What you’ve got, no doctor or nurse can help with. When he bit you as he did, he basically mystically marked you to be his mate,” Mason explained, unsure if she realized how serious the consequences of Jax’s bite really were.

“That doesn’t sound good,” Jane whispered.

“It’s not, but I swear to you, we will get you fixed. I will not lose you,” Mason said, trying to keep the tremble out of his voice. His heart had never hurt so bad as it had when he watched Jax sink his fangs into his mate. If he had only been a few seconds quicker, he could have saved her from the pain she was in and the pain that was to come.

“I know you will. I’m sorry,” she said.

“For what?” he asked.

“For not listening to you and staying put. I should have never thought that I could take on a shifter or three. I’m just a weak human compared to everyone in your world.”

Mason wiped away the tears running down her cheek. “You are not weak. You are the bravest human I know. To lash out and kick Jax as you did, it was the only reason I was able to take him down so quickly. Otherwise, I would have been in for a hell of a fight. Plus, you saved me. If you hadn’t yelled my name when you did, my dad would have ripped my throat out that time.”

Mason could only imagine the thoughts running through that pretty head of hers. It had to be hard as a human to see so much violence in such a short amount of time. To feel helpless compared to the deadly force of his wolves. He didn’t want her to feel like that. He wanted her to feel just as powerful as she was in her own right. He wanted her to know just how much he truly needed her.

“You’re just saying that to make me feel better,” she said with a sigh.

“Is it working?” he smiled down at her.

“A bit,” she laughed. “Ouch. Don’t make me laugh. It hurts too much.”

“Sorry, baby.”

They pulled into the driveway a few seconds later. Gerri ran over to the SUV and popped open the back door.

“What happened?” she shouted.

“Jax fucking bit her!” Mason shouted.

“He what?” Gerri asked, astonished.

“You heard me.” Mason slid out of the SUV, careful not to bounce Jane around too much.

“I really hope you killed that fucker.” Gerri was shaking, she was so angry.

“He’s dead. So is my father.”

“I’m so sorry, Mason. You didn’t deserve any of this.”

“It’s done now,” he replied.

Gerri walked with him as he carried Jane into the house. He quickly made his way to the bedroom.

“I’ll bring the healer and witch as soon as they arrive, sir.”

“Thank you, Giles.”

Gerri held open the bedroom door.

“Thanks,” Mason said as he gently laid Jane on the mattress. Under any other circumstances, he would love seeing her in his bed. But at the moment, it was all he could do to keep his cool. She was still in much more danger than she knew. The bite could kill her if it wasn’t dealt with soon.

“Do you need a drink or anything?” Mason asked Jane.

“Water would be amazing.”

“I’ll grab it,” Gerri said.

“That’s okay. You stay with Jane. I’ll go get it.”

Mason had to get out of there. Even if it was just for a moment to get his mate a drink. He had to calm himself and get it together before he lost it in front of her. The last thing he wanted was to scare her more than she already was.

“Sir, how bad is it?” Giles asked as Mason entered the kitchen.

“Bad. Did you get ahold of Krista?” Mason asked.

“Yes. She’s bringing Caleb with her. He’s the best healer around.”

“Did she say how long it would take them to get here?” Mason worried they were running out of time.

“They should be here any second,” Giles confirmed with a glance at his phone.

“Did you need anything else, sir?”

“Water. She wants some water.”

GERRI SAT on the bed next to Jane and clasped her hand in her own. “Are you okay, honey?” she asked.

“To be honest, I’ve had better days. How are you?”

“Me?” Gerri looked puzzled. “I’m fine. I’m not the human who decided to go up against a few shifters on her own, silly girl.”

“Yeah. Not my best moment. I really should have listened to Mason when he told me to stay here, but I just had it in my head that I wasn’t about to blindly follow another man’s orders,” she huffed. “But what I’ve figured out is I don’t have to follow bullshit orders or commands.

“I realize now that Mason was only looking out for me and trying to keep me safe. There’s a big difference between that and how Craig used to treat me.” Jane was glad that she had finally made that revelation on her own. She felt like such an idiot for thinking the two were the same. “I don’t know how I could have been so damn dumb,” she winced as the pain in her neck flared up again.

“You’re not dumb, honey. You were taken advantage of by Craig. He was ... is an ass, and he always will be. He’s nothing like Mason. I hope you know that.”

“I do. There’s a night and day difference between them. You know what I thought when I knew I was going to die?” A chill passed over her as she remembered the terrorizing moment.

“What’s that?” Gerri asked.

“The future that I was going to miss out on if I died. I’ve been so damn stubborn since my divorce. I never once allowed myself to think of what it could be like with the right guy. Probably because I never knew the right guy until now. Anyway, I saw a life with Mason. An incredible life, or at least what life with him could be like.

“Maybe I’m full of it. Who knows? Either way, for the first time in a long, long time, I wanted the life that I saw. I wanted all of it. No questions. No hesitations. I was more afraid of losing Mason than I was to give up what I’ve always thought of as my freedom.”

Jane couldn’t believe it. None of it. Since her divorce, she had always been all about remaining alone for the rest of her life. How stupid she had been. No, not stupid. She had been hurt and betrayed long ago. Because of that trauma, she had pushed away any thought, want, or need of a life with someone else. It had taken her nearly dying to figure that out.

“I knew you’d get there eventually, honey.” Gerri squeezed her hand lightly.

“Is that why you were so damn persistent?” Jane laughed.

“Well, that and I thought you’d like to ... I don’t know ... maybe get laid.” Gerri laughed.

“Yeah, there’s that. And wow.”

“I bet!”

“What’s going to happen to me?” Jane asked, her voice suddenly serious. Her body had a constant chill, and the pain in her head was about to eat her brain. Every bone in her body hurt like hell, in addition to the bite mark on her neck, which wouldn’t stop bleeding.

“You’re going to be healed, and a witch is going to do a spell to break whatever link was created between you and Jax,” Gerri explained.

“Will it hurt?” Jane asked.

“Probably, and I know Mason feels bad about that. So do I. Neither of us wants to see you in pain.”

“I feel like I’m dying. Like my entire body is shutting down. I feel so tired,” Jane’s voice turned to a soft whisper.

“Hang in there, honey. They’ll be here soon.”

TWENTY-SEVEN



“Here’s your water,” Mason said as he entered the room.

“Thanks,” Jane said with a whisper.

“Let’s sit you up a little bit,” Gerri said, lifting Jane into an upright position.

“Thank you. I feel so damn weak. Like I can barely hold my head up on my own.”

Mason held the bottle of water to her lips, allowing her to take slow sips of the ice water. He hated seeing her in so much pain. For the umpteenth time, he wanted to kill Jax all over again, maybe harder this time around.

“Sir, Krista and Caleb are here,” Giles announced.

“Finally,” he sighed, knowing how short they were on time.

“What do we have here?” Caleb asked.

“My mate has been bitten and marked by my former alpha,” Mason explained.

“Oh, that’s not good,” Krista said. “May I?” she asked as she approached Jane slowly.

“Of course,” Mason said with a nod, knowing that he needed to stay the fuck out of the way and not interfere with what needed to be done. No matter how much he wanted to help his mate, helping her was out of his hands.

“I’m Krista. I’m going to be the one who gets this venom out of your system and breaks whatever connection that sick fucker made to you. I wish I could say this is going to be easy and painless, but it won’t be. Mason, Gerri, I need you to hold her down. We need to get started. She doesn’t have much time left.”

Mason hopped across the bed and scooted behind Jane. “I’ve got her arms. You hold her feet,” he said to Gerri.

“On it,” Gerri said, climbing onto the bed and covering Jane’s legs with her body.

“Ready?” Krista asked.

When both he and Gerri nodded, Krista started to chant in a language Mason did not understand. The hair on his arms stood on end. His wolf surged forward, suddenly aware of the magic surrounding them.

Easy, boy, Mason said to his wolf. This is the only way to save our mate. The last thing we need is for you to pop out right now and bite the head off of the witch.

I don’t trust her, his wolf growled, continuing to press against his mind. His animal wanted control of the situation. He wanted to be the one to save their mate, but that was impossible, and Mason knew it.

The only hope that Jane had was the witch who was currently chanting her spell to draw out the venom from the werewolf bite. To bite a human and not complete the mating ritual was certain death for any human, not just Jane.

Stop fighting this. You have to trust me when I tell you that only the witch can save her. You know it. She was bitten by an alpha who had no intention of being her mate. His bite will kill her if we don’t allow the witch to do her job. I know you don’t like it. Hell, I don’t like it. But it is what it is, and there’s nothing we can do about it, Mason reasoned with his animal.

His wolf calmed and accepted the explanation Mason provided, which allowed him to focus on his mate.

Jane screamed as the witch started to slowly draw the venom out of her neck and into a bottle she held in her hand.

Mason would give anything, even his life, if he could shield Jane from the pain she was in. Sadly, that was impossible. She began to thrash in his arms, trying to get away from Krista. Her fight or flight response was kicking in, telling her to run or fight. They couldn't allow that to happen. He tightened his hold on her arms at the same time Gerri tightened her hold on Jane's legs.

Krista's chants became louder and louder with each passing second. Mason watched as the venom continued to pour out of Jane's neck and into the bottle. The process seemed to go on forever until the witch finally stepped back.

"I think I got it all," Krista said after a few moments. Her breaths were shallow, and she wobbled on her feet. Caleb caught her before she fell to the ground.

"Krista! Are you okay?" Caleb asked.

"Yeah, I just need a minute. That took a lot more energy than I thought it would. At least the venom is out of her now. That will buy us some time to break the mating link from the former alpha. She's out of immediate danger for the moment, but I need to find a way to replenish my power before I can break the connection," she explained.

"Use me. Channel my power. Take what you need of me to save my mate," Mason said.

"Are you certain?" Krista asked.

"Yes. Just do it," he snapped, holding out one arm to her.

"Very well," she wrapped one of her hands around his forearm and began to whisper a different chant.

Mason could feel the witch sucking his strength and energy from his body like a mystical mosquito that just wouldn't stop. He wanted to swat her away like he would have with a pesky insect, but he fought the urge, knowing that this had to happen if he wanted to save his mate.

Mason could barely keep his eyes open as his energy waned. He needed to focus and stay awake until Jane was safe and fully out of the woods, but it was becoming harder and harder with each minute that ticked by.

“There. I should have enough power now to finish the job and break the link,” Krista said. “Are you okay?” she asked Mason.

“I’ll be fine. Don’t worry about me. Just worry about breaking the connection to that sick fucker.” Mason could hear the tiredness he felt in his voice. He felt lethargic, like he wouldn’t be able to stand if he tried right now. He needed a nap to replenish the energy he’d given to the witch to save his mate.

Krista began chanting once again. Her voice started off low, then became louder and louder as time went on. Mason felt a cold gust of wind whoosh through the room. His wolf tried to surge forward once again, despising the magic around them.

Calm down. We’re almost done. I promise. The witch has already sucked the venom out of Jane. Now, she just needs to break the mating connection, then we’re done, and the witch will leave, Mason said, trying to calm his wolf once again.

The animal pushed harder against his mind this time, not wanting to heed the advice Mason had given him. He wanted to be assured that nothing would go wrong, that their mate would be fine, and that the witch didn’t have any tricks up her sleeve.

“My wolf is trying to take control of my body. He doesn’t like all the magic in the room, and I fear I don’t have the strength to hold him off much longer.” Mason needed to warn the others before it was too late. The last thing he wanted was to hurt the witch and fuck up the spell that was meant to save his mate. That couldn’t be allowed to happen.

“Sleep,” the witch said, waving her hand in front of his face.

That word was the last thing he heard before darkness consumed him.

TWENTY-EIGHT



Jane thrashed back and forth on the bed as the woman they referred to as the witch shouted unintelligible phrases over and over, driving Jane out of her mind. Though Mason had been holding her tightly through the whole process and through the worst of the pain, his grip had suddenly loosened when the witch had told him to sleep.

Fear washed over her, burying her in a sea of anxiety. Would Mason be all right?

“Calm yourself, Jane. She needs to break the mating connection you have to the former alpha, or you will be lost forever,” the man they called Caleb said.

“What happened to Mason?” Jane asked frantically.

“Krista had to place him in a deep slumber to keep his wolf from taking over. Trust me when I say it would not be good for his wolf to make an appearance right now. With as close as you are to him right now, the wolf would tear you to pieces. That wouldn’t be a lot of fun. He would also likely kill the only person who can break the connection between you and that former alpha,” Caleb explained.

“He’s right, Jane,” Gerri said. “Mason’s wolf wants to protect you, but he would do more harm than good right now. It’s best that Mason sleeps for a little bit until this is all said and done. I’m here with you, and I won’t leave your side. I promise.”

“Okay,” Jane said with a weak nod. Her friend was right, but it didn’t matter. She was still worried about Mason. She

hated the very thought of her big, strong shifter being rendered unconscious by a witch. That just didn't sit right with her.

Krista's words became louder and louder until they started to ring in Jane's ears. Suddenly, she felt like her head was going to explode from the pressure inside. She grabbed her head and let out a loud, blood-curdling scream. The pain intensified to the point where she felt like she might literally die from whatever it was the witch was doing to her.

"Hang in there, Jane," Gerri shouted, holding on to her tighter than ever. "She's almost done. Just a little longer. You can do this for Mason."

Jane wanted to believe Gerri. That she would be all right, but with the pain shooting through her head, her friend's words went in one ear and out the other.

The pain intensified once again. This time to a whole new level of ridiculousness. It was almost as if she could feel her skull splitting in half, and it did not feel good. Not at all.

"Please!" She begged for the pain to stop, but Krista's shouts kept getting louder and louder until nothing but a deafening silence swept over the room. The ringing in Jane's ears finally stopped. The pain of her skull cracking suddenly vanished. The aches and pains she had been feeling, the fever, the headache, all of it was suddenly gone.

"It's done," Krista said and backed away from Jane.

Caleb cautiously approached her with a jar in his hand. "I promise what I'm about to do won't hurt nearly as bad as what you've already been through. But I will warn you that this is going to sting a bit. It's a salve, an ancient recipe used in treating wounds like yours. This will make it as though you had never been bitten to begin with. Is it okay for me to put it on your neck?" he asked.

"Sure," Jane said weakly, "why not?"

The cold salve felt good at first as he spread it across her wound. That feeling only lasted for a few seconds before the sweet relief was replaced with a burning heat she hadn't been expecting. A sting, yes. The feeling that she was being

branded with a hot iron? No. That she hadn't expected. Jane sucked in a deep breath, followed by another, and another as a fresh wave of pain tore through her neck until it suddenly disappeared.

"See? All better. That wasn't so bad, was it?" Caleb asked.

"Hah, trust me when I say it wasn't fun," Jane snarked at him. She took a calming breath, trying to slow her racing heart. "Are we done now?" she asked, hoping like fuck the answer was yes.

"Not quite. I need you to drink this." Caleb handed her a small vial with a bright orange substance inside.

"What is this?" she asked, eyeing up the goo.

"An elixir to help you regain your strength. You've been through a lot in the last few hours, and unless you want to sleep for the next week or so, you'd best just go ahead and chug it and be done with it." He gave her that *mother knows best* look that her own mother had given her so often as a child.

"Fine," she pouted and chugged the orange goo down her throat. "Holy shit!" she shouted. "That was godawful. Try adding some sort of decent flavor to it next time," she suggested.

"I'll have to keep that in mind for the next batch I mix up," Caleb chuckled. "I'm going to set the second bottle of this on the table. When Mason wakes, make sure he drinks this. Krista depleted his energy sources in order to save you. He's going to need this as much as you did, if not more." Caleb set a larger jar on the table next to the bed. "Giles knows how to get a hold of us if you need anything else," Caleb said.

"Wake in your human form when you are ready," Krista said, touching Mason's arm.

"Thank you," Jane said to both Caleb and Krista.

"You're welcome. A suggestion. Stay away from those big bad wolf types. They can be deadly." Krista winked at her and left.

Gerri scooted off the bed.

“You’re not leaving, too, are you?” Jane asked.

“No, I’m sticking around until I know you and your hunk are back on your feet. But both of you need to get some rest and get your strength built back up. I’m going to hang out with the pack. I saw a couple of people who look like they might need my help to find their mates.”

“Ahh, ever the meddler.” Jane giggled.

“Always. Now, get some rest, and I’ll see you in a bit. I’ll see if Giles can fix up your favorite dinner for later,” Gerri said.

“Oh, I don’t want to bug him with that,” Jane said.

“Please. He lives for requests. That’s literally what he does. It’s in his nature,” Gerri said.

“What do you mean by that?” Jane asked.

“It means that he was literally born to serve. He derives pleasure from helping others,” Gerri explained.

“Is he human?” Jane asked.

“Nope. Not even one percent. Though, he does look it. Doesn’t he?”

“Weird. You have so much explaining to do. I’m so confused,” Jane admitted. She knew very little about the paranormal world.

“Later. Now, you and Mason rest.” Gerri kissed Jane’s forehead and left, pulling the bedroom door closed behind her.

TWENTY-NINE



Jane stretched her arms above her head and let out a loud yawn. She felt Mason's hard body pressing against hers.

A few days had passed since all the shit went down with Mason's dad and his former pack. Even with the orange goo that Caleb had left them, both Jane and Mason had managed to sleep for the better part of two days.

Not wanting to involve Yulia or Amelia in the paranormal world, she had told them she had the stomach flu and she would be back when she was better. They all but begged her to stay home, not wanting to catch the fake stomach flu, with Yulia proclaiming a bug like that to be worse than death itself. Not that she could blame Yulia. After all, who wanted to spend the better part of a week puking your guts out, then passing it on to your family?

"Are you finally awake, for good this time?" Mason asked, planting a flurry of tiny kisses on her neck and shoulder.

"I think so. What about you?" she asked.

"Oh, I'm definitely up." Mason pressed his hard cock up against her backside and wiggled his hips.

"Mmm. That feels nice," she said with a sigh.

"I can make it feel a lot nicer." Mason nibbled gently on the back of her neck. "That is if you want me to make it feel a lot nicer."

"I thought you'd never ask," she said with a breathy moan as he slid his cock in between her already moist folds.

“I need you, Jane.” He lined up the tip of his cock to her entrance and then gently surged forward.

“Oh,” she cried out as he slid balls deep with a single flick of his hips. She loved how wide he was and how he filled her every time he buried himself inside her. Though it took a few seconds to adjust to his size, she quickly found herself pushing back against him, wanting more.

Mason wrapped one arm around her waist, his fingers sliding between her thighs to rub her clit. He kissed and licked her shoulder and her neck as he slowly pumped in and out of her.

And there was nothing better than the feel of Mason’s cock as he made love to her sweet and slow, taking the time to make sure she felt every vein and every ridge of his cock each time he surged into her heat.

“You feel so good, baby. I swear I could spend my entire life buried in your pussy, and you would never hear a single complaint from me.”

She giggled at his confession, knowing he meant every word because she felt the same. It was moments with him like this that she lived for. After depriving herself for years of the simple pleasures a man could give her, she swore there was nothing better than being with him now.

“I want you to be mine forever, Jane. I want you to be my wife and my mate,” he whispered in her ear.

Her heart skipped a beat as the words left his mouth. She knew she was his mate. They talked about it several times over the course of the last few days, but what she hadn’t known was that he would ask her so soon. It didn’t matter to her, though. She already knew the answer she would give him. That surprised her more than anything.

Mason slowed his thrusts to a full and complete stop, leaving his hard length deep inside. “There’s something under the pillow I want you to grab. I would, but my hands are kinda’ full.” He circled her clit again with his fingers to prove his point.

Jane giggled. "I'm sure whatever it is can wait for later."

"Nope. It's something we need right now." He nibbled on her ear. "Just grab it, woman. Humor me, or I'm going to have to stop what I'm doing and pull my cock out of you. Is that what you want?" he teased her by pulling his cock back and leaving only the head in.

"No! Don't you dare!" she shouted and reached up under the pillow, where she found a small box. Her heart fully stopped this time.

"Open it." He kept up the nibbling on her ear.

"Only if you slide back into me all the way," she said, trying to push back against him.

"Oh, I suppose I could." Mason slammed deep inside of her, making her body shake. "Is that what you wanted?" he asked with a playful smile.

"More!" Jane demanded, dropping the box beside her on the bed, needing more of his hard cock, deeper and faster, in her pussy.

"Not until you open the box and answer my question."

"What question?" Whatever they had been talking about had been long forgotten the second he slammed into her.

"Focus, baby. Focus. Or I'm going to have to do this the other way."

"Fine. Fine." Jane wrapped her fingers around the box once again. This time she pulled it open. "Oh, my God!" she exclaimed.

"Jane Williams, will you be my wife and mate?" Mason asked, slowly pulling his cock back out to the tip and slowly sliding it back in until he was full hilt in her.

"Yes! Oh, Yes!" she cried out.

"Is that a yes for an answer or a yes for my cock?" He repeated his motion.

"Both!" she shouted.

“Mmm. Good. Now put the ring on so I can fuck you properly.” He nipped at her shoulder.

Jane slid the ring onto her left ring finger and paused to stare at it. She was momentarily mesmerized by the giant diamond surrounded by a volley of dark blue sapphires.

“It’s beautiful!” She choked back the tears. “Now, what was that you said about fucking me properly?”

“Your wish is my command. But Jane, I’m going to make you my mate as well.”

“Yes, please.” Jane knew exactly what that entailed as Mason had explained to her that he would bite her the moment they were both cresting toward their climaxes. After having been bitten by Jax, she worried at first that Mason’s bite would also be lethal to her, but he had explained that his bite would not harm her in any way. That his bite would join them forever.

Once Jane had understood the differences between Mason biting her and Jax biting her, she felt a little bit better about the situation. She trusted Mason and the fact that he would never hurt her. She actually looked forward to his bite after hearing from Gerri that a mate’s bit was the most erotic thing one would ever experience. Several of the female pack members also confirmed it to be true. The tiny bit of hesitation that Jane had felt at first disappeared and had never returned.

“Your wish is my command.” Mason flipped Jane over onto her stomach. He crawled between her legs, kissing a path up her thighs and over her ass. He paused to lift her hips a little higher before running his tongue from her clit to her ass and back down.

“Oh, God!” Jane cried out as his tongue landed on her sensitive bud.

“You like that, baby?” he asked.

“I love it. So damn much,” she cried out again as he repeated the motion.

“Good, because I love doing it. I love the taste of your pussy on my tongue.” He slid his tongue into her heat, making

her legs shake.

“Yes!” she cried out as he tongued her with wild abandon.

“Fucking perfect! I can’t wait any longer to be inside you.” Mason positioned his cock at her entrance and held perfectly still. “Are you ready to become my mate,” he asked.

“Yes. Please!” she begged.

“You will be mine forever. I will be yours forever. Do you understand what you are getting yourself into, Jane?”

There was no doubting her decision. No second thoughts. Not a single one. Jane knew what and who she wanted and how she wanted to spend the rest of her life. She was done thinking. As far as Jane was concerned, it was time for action.

THIRTY



“I know what I’m getting myself into, and I know, in my heart, that it’s exactly what I want. You are exactly who I want. I can’t imagine ever wanting anyone as much as I want you.”

“That’s exactly what I needed to hear,” Mason said as he slammed fully into her. Grabbing onto her hips, probably harder than necessary, he pounded her pussy. She was so hot, tight, and wet that he had to bite the side of his cheek to keep from coming.

“Make me yours, Mason!” Jane begged.

“Soon, baby. Soon. I promise. Right now, all I want you to worry about is the pleasure. I want it to consume you until you feel like you can’t take it anymore. Then I want you to take more.”

“Oh, God!” she cried out at not only what he had said but the demanding pace in which he pounded in and out of her. Every nerve ending seemed to fire off at the same time, and they begged for more of everything that he was doing. Her entire body shook from the force of each thrust. It took every ounce of strength Jane had to keep her ass up in the air for this position.

Mason stretched his hard body over hers and slowed his pace, giving Jane a moment to catch her breath and collect the myriad of thoughts running through her mind. Her primary thought was how much she liked having sex with him and how damn good every move that he made had felt.

He slid his cock from her pussy and pressed it against her tight ass. “Remember when I told you I couldn’t wait to fuck you here?” he growled into her ear.

“Yes,” she whispered, goosebumps breaking out across her body at the thought of what they were about to do.

“Do you want me to?” he asked.

“Yes,” she said, anticipation tearing through her body.

“Mmm. Good.” Mason pressed his cock slowly into her ass.

Jane let out a loud gasp as the pressure in her body began to build with each inch Mason slid into her. He kissed and licked and nibbled on her back, shoulders, and neck. Taking his time not to hurt her, he continued to ease into her as gently as possible.

Once he wrapped his arms around her body and held her tight, she loved his full weight pressing against her and holding her down.

“Mason,” she moaned when he was fully seated in her ass.

“Oh, God, baby. I want to fuck you so damn hard,” he groaned.

“Do it,” she said, bracing for exactly what she wanted.

“Are you sure?” he asked.

“Please,” she begged. “I want to come like this ... with you in my ass. Please.”

“Yes!” Mason didn’t wait for her to ask again. He pulled back and rammed his cock into her ass, over and over, making the headboard bang against the wall. Each thrust came faster and harder than the last until Jane’s body shook, and her cries of pleasure got louder and louder.

“Mason, I’m going to come,” she shouted.

“That’s it, baby. I’ve got you. Come for me, so I can fuck your pussy again and make you mine forever.”

“Yes!”

White lights danced in Jane's vision as her climax slammed into her. She felt a gush of heat between her legs. The pressure inside of her cresting to an all-time high as he continued to pound her ass.

"Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God!" she chanted as wave after wave of pleasure rushed through her body. Just when she thought she couldn't take more, Mason's arm snaked between her legs. His fingers landed on her clit and began a slow circling motion.

"Fuck!" she shouted. Her chest heaved from the shallow breaths she tried to suck in. She felt like she was going to pass out any second from the sheer amount of pleasure bombarding her.

"You are so fucking hot when you come," Mason said as he slowed his pace and pulled out. "I'll be right back. Don't you dare go anywhere," he said with a wink.

"I couldn't move if I tried," she said with a laugh. Her arms and legs felt like Jell-O. There was no way she could even think about standing, let alone actually do it. She'd try to take one step and face plant.

She was going to pass on that. Besides, they were nowhere near done. More pleasure was on its way, and there wasn't a snowball's chance in hell that she was about to run from that. Though what they had just done was hot as hell, there was more to come, and she couldn't fucking wait.

THIRTY-ONE



“All cleaned up and ready for more fun?” Jane asked as she watched Mason stroll back to the bedroom from the adjoining master bath.

“Hell, yeah. I am. Are you ready for the next round?” he asked with that sexy grin that she loved.

“Absolutely. Now, get that sexy ass of yours over here and make me scream your name.” She motioned him forward with her index finger and plastered her best come-hither look to her face that she could muster.

“So demanding. I love it. You can demand sex from me any time you want, baby,” he said, crawling up onto the bed between her legs. He nipped at her ankles which earned him a few giggles from Jane. He grabbed her thighs and hitched her legs over his shoulders, and then lined his cock up with her pussy.

“You know, this is my favorite place in the world to be,” he said.

“I’m glad. Because this is my favorite place in the world to be. Right here. Under you.” Jane bucked her hips in an upward motion, trying to get him to slide his cock into her.

“Easy, baby. I’ll be in you soon enough. I just want to tease you for a few minutes. Is that so wrong of me?” he asked with a sheepish grin.

“Yes. Yes, it is. I don’t like to be teased,” she said, giving him her best pouty look.

“Not even if it’s like this?” He parted her folds with the tip of his finger. With a slow up-and-down motion, he rubbed her clit, teasing her lightly.

“I guess that isn’t too terribly bad,” Jane moaned, and she wiggled her hips, still trying to get him deep inside of her.

“Oh, the hardships you face, baby. Whatever will you do? How will you handle it?” Mason laughed.

“I know. Right? Woe is me and all that shit,” Jane sighed. It wasn’t that she didn’t love a good teasing, but that wasn’t what she needed right now. She needed Mason to stretch her out and make her come all over his cock.

Though she had already had multiple orgasms, she needed more. And she would take them any way she could get them. All she had to do was make Mason understand that.

“Do you want my cock in you, now?” He pressed the tip against her entrance and pushed just slightly in.

“Yes, please. I’m begging you. I just need to come again. I feel like I’m going insane. Like my body will spontaneously combust. I can’t take it anymore. Please fuck me, Mason. I need you so badly. Please,” she begged.

“Oh, goodness, baby. It sounds like we have a true emergency on our hands,” he said with a grin. “I definitely wouldn’t want you to spontaneously combust, so I better be the good mate and give you what you need.” With that, he slammed home in one smooth move.

“God! Yes! Just like that!” she shouted, loving the way she felt every vein against her inner walls and the way he stretched her feminine muscles. It was the best damn feeling on the freaking planet, and Jane couldn’t imagine anything feeling any better than having her mate inside her, making love to her.

“Mmm. I love how tight you are around my cock. How wet you are for me. How you squeeze me each time I pull out and slide back in,” he said, pulling out to the tip and easing back in.

She moaned, clenching her muscles around him. “Like that?” she asked with a giggle.

“Oh, God, baby. Yes! Just like that. Do it again,” he requested as he pulled out to the tip and slid right back in.

Jane repeated the same muscle movements, driving Mason up a wall.

“Now, that is fucking talent, and I’m glad a talent like that is reserved for me and me only.”

“Only for you, always for you.” Jane wrapped her arms around Mason’s neck and pulled his mouth down to meet hers. She nibbled at his lips, wanting his kisses ... needing them almost as much as she needed her heartbeat.

Mason picked up his pace, his thrusts coming harder and faster, just the way Jane wanted them. A wicked heat tore through her body, leaving her panting for oxygen to fill her lungs.

The more she moaned, the harder he slammed in and out of her, driving her closer and closer to her next climax. His hands seem to be everywhere at once, rubbing her clit, massaging her breasts, her hips, letting every inch of her body feel his love and worship. It was like nothing she had ever experienced in her entire life.

Every leg, every nipple, every move he made, every touch, every kiss sent her flying higher and higher until she was afraid her body would shatter and soar away in hundreds of broken pieces.

“Mason! Oh God!” were the only words Jane could squeak out. Her thoughts were jumbled, and her mind was a mess. Passion and pleasure consumed her every thought. Just when she assumed it couldn’t get better, Mason stretched his muscles over her body. She wrapped her legs around his waist and locked her ankles together.

His chest pressed against hers, every part of their bodies melding together. Her senses were overloaded with the raw pleasure burning through her body. She tossed her head back and forth, inching closer and closer to her climax. Just a little more pressure, and she would be there, flying to the heavens.

But he wasn't about to let her come. Not just yet. She could tell by the way he kept changing his thrust patterns to keep her just on the edge. To send her out of her mind with need.

"Are you ready, baby?" he asked.

"Yes! Please! Oh, Mason, please. I can't take it any longer," she hollered.

His eyes glowed with a ferocity she had never seen. It was so fucking hot and sexy to see him looking at her that way ... like she was the only thing on the planet that mattered to him. No one, not a single person, had ever looked at Jane like that until Mason.

"Make me yours!"

"Mmm. Fuck!" he growled just before his fangs pierced her neck.

Jane had expected the same pain she had when Jax had bitten her, but that wasn't the case. She felt a tiny sting, followed by a surge of raw energy and pleasure shooting through her. She felt her body come apart at the seams and fly away, past the moon and the stars and into the heavens. She'd had plenty of orgasms over the years but never an orgasm like this. She could swear her soul left her body. It was like she was watching everything from above. Her climax was so damn intense that her entire frame shook from the force of her explosion.

Jane watched from above as Mason made sweet love to her, saw each twist of his hips as he pistoned in and out of her. She saw her nails as they scored his back and left red marks crisscrossing on his skin. She felt each drop of blood that left her body and flowed into Mason's mouth.

Mason pulled his fangs from her neck and licked the spot where he had bitten, sealing the wound instantly. Jane didn't know why, but she had the sudden urge to bite him. He turned his neck to the side, giving her better access. She followed her instinct and bit down on his neck. Her teeth sank into his skin far easier than she would have ever thought possible.

Tiny drops of Mason's blood coated her tongue and mouth. If she hadn't known better, she would have sworn she'd just been hit by lightning. A burst of energy surged through every inch of her body, pulling together the pieces that had broken apart with her orgasm.

At that moment, something in her snapped into place. The broken part of her that always thought she would be alone disappeared. It was replaced by a powerful feeling of love, telling her Mason would always be by her side, no matter what. She could feel the connection to him just as she could physically feel anything else. It was now a part of her. He was now a part of her.

Jane pulled back from Mason's neck and licked the spot where she had bitten as he had done to her. Everything she did, she did on instinct, and where those instincts had come from, she had no idea. But it felt right, so she went with it, hoping that was what she was supposed to have done.

Mason picked up his pace once again, thrusting into her at a speed she'd never known was possible and sending her racing for yet another climax.

"You're mine, Jane. Always."

"And you are mine. I'll never let go." It was a promise Jane didn't give lightly. She knew what it meant to love someone with all her heart. What she couldn't surmise was how her feelings for Mason had devoured her so quickly. She had read about all-consuming romances in the books that she had loved to read, but she had never expected to feel that way about anyone, not after her first marriage.

Gerri had tried to tell her, and she didn't want to hear a word her friend had said. It was a lesson she had to learn on her own.

Though Jane had sworn she would remain single forever, that vow she had made to herself had come to an end, but Jane didn't mind. As the weeks with Mason turned into months, she couldn't imagine ever being without him. He had always said she was made for him, but he had that wrong.

He had been made for *her*.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

New York Times and USA Today Bestselling Author

Hi! I'm Milly Taiden. I love to write sexy stories featuring fun, sassy heroines with curves and growly alpha males with fur. My books are a great way to satisfy your craving for paranormal romance with action, humor, suspense and happily ever afters.

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