

A close-up photograph of a woman's face, focusing on her right eye. She has vibrant green eyes, and her eye makeup consists of a shimmering green eyeshadow on the lid and a lighter, shimmering shade on the inner corner. Her lips are painted with a soft, pinkish-red lipstick. The background is dark and out of focus. In the top right corner, there is a decorative, white, swirling graphic element. The title 'Prince of Wolves' is written in a stylized, teal-colored font with a slight shadow effect, positioned across the middle of the image. The author's name 'Quinn Loftis' is written in a white, serif font at the bottom right.

Prince of
Wolves

Quinn Loftis

Chapter 1

Jacque Pierce sat in the window seat in her bedroom, watching her neighbors' house across the street. *I'm not really being nosy*, she thought to herself. *Just curious.*

"Yeah," she snorted. Only if you call curious having your eyes glued to your neighbors' house like a hound on the hunt. Oh, well. I can call a spade 'a spade' tomorrow morning, she told her conscience.

The Henrys were having a foreign exchange student stay with them this year. They didn't have any children of their own and Jacque didn't know if that was by choice or because they weren't able to have children. Either way, Jacque was here to get the nitty-gritty on the situation and report to her best friends afterward.

So here she sat, scoping out the neighbors house with her lights turned off and blinds cracked just enough to see. To top off her *James Bond* experience, she even had binoculars! Now if she only had the nifty background music to go along her shenanigans.

She'd been sitting in her window for an hour and was just about to give up when a black stretch limo pulled to the curb. *Now isn't this strange?* she thought. *A foreign exchange student arriving in a limo?* She put the binoculars to her face and adjusted them to get a better look, settling them over the passenger door to see who would emerge. She knew this was a little much, but honestly, in a town of 700 there just wasn't a whole lot of excitement and Jacque would take it where she could get it.

The driver got out of the limo to open the back door, but it was already opening, and the boy who stepped out of that limo had to be the most beautiful guy she'd ever seen. And that was only his profile. *Wow, I mean wow*, was all Jacque could think. Jacque couldn't even imagine what his entire face must have looked like. He was tall, probably six foot one or so, and his hair was jet black. It was longer on top and she could tell that he had bangs that fell across his face. They swept to the left,

partially covering that eye. He had broad shoulders and, from what she could see of his profile, high cheek bones, a straight nose, and full lips. She realized her mouth had dropped open and she was all but drooling over this guy. She shut it and watched as he and his driver conversed. It all seemed very formal until the driver hugged the boy with obvious deep affection. *He must be more than just his driver*, Jacque thought.

Suddenly, the boy turned as if he had heard what she was thinking and looked straight at her window, straight at her. Jacque froze, unable to look away from the mesmerizing blue eyes that held her. All her thoughts seemed to fade into the distance and she thought she heard the words: *“At last, my Jacquelyn.”*

Jacque shook her head, trying to clear the haze that had filled it. After she came to her senses from the intense stare, she recapped in her mind what his face had looked like. She was right about the cheekbones, nose, and lips. What she wasn't prepared for was that his crystal blue eyes now seemed to glow in the moon light; the hair that fell across his forehead and over his eye only added to his mysteriousness. Overall he had a very masculine, very beautiful face.

The shirt he was wearing was black and, thanks to her handy dandy binoculars, she was able to see that it fit tightly and showed off a muscular chest and flat stomach. He had a black leather biker jacket on, but past that she couldn't see because the car was in the way. She imagined his legs were every bit as nice as the rest of him.

When she looked back at the street, the mysterious guy was walking into the Henrys' house. As she saw the door close she heard the voice again.

“Soon.”

Jacque sat there for a few minutes, trying to get her brain to work again. Everything seemed so hazy. After blinking what felt like a thousand times, she pulled herself together, picked up the phone, and dialed Jen's number.

Three rings later Jen answered. “What’s the word?”

Jacque took a slow breath and said “I think you better come over.”

“I’m there, chick. See ya in 5,” Jen answered and hung up.

Jacque grinned to herself. It was great to have a friend you could always depend on to be there when you needed her.

Jacque picked up the phone again and called Sally, who answered after only one ring. She had obviously been diligently manning the phone, waiting for Jacque to call with details on the latest small town drama.

“Jen is on her way over,” Jacque said. “I need you to come too. We need to talk.”

“Okay,” Sally simply said and hung up.

Fifteen minutes later, the three friends were gathered on Jacque’s bedroom floor, hot chocolate in hand, because how can you have a girl powwow without hot chocolate?

“So fill it and spill it,” Jen said.

“Okay,” Jacque said, taking a deep breath. “So I’m sitting in my window seat, shades cracked, lights off, binoculars in hand...”

“Binoculars? Really, you honestly were using binoculars?” Sally interrupted.

“Well, you said you wanted details, so I was giving you details,” Jacque defended.

“Oooh, did you have the *Mission Impossible* sound track playing in the background? Cuz that would have been spytastic,” Jen said enthusiastically.

“Actually,” Jacque said distractedly, “I was thinking more *James Bond*-ish. You know, with the whole stakeout thing...”

“No, huh-uh. That would be more like *Dog the Bounty Hunter* type stuff. But you couldn’t be Beth, ‘cause you’re not

stacked enough on top. You would have to be baby Lisa...” Jen rattled on.

“You are so, so not comparing me to Dog the Bounty Hunter’s daughter right now. And why are we talking about this anyway, because it is sooooo NOT the point!” Jacque growled in frustration.

“Spy analogies aside, I was sitting there about an hour and then a black stretch limo pulled up in front of the Henrys’ house.”

“A limo? What foreign exchange student shows up in a limo?” Jen asked.

“I know, right? That’s what I was thinking,” Jacque stated. “I assure you the limo was of no consequence once the person inside stepped out. Ladies, I saw the most gorgeous guy to ever grace my line of sight.”

“When you say gorgeous,” Jen started, “are we talking Brad Pitt boyish good looks, or Johnny Depp make ya want to slap somebody?”

“No, we’re talking Brad and Johnny need to bow down and recognize,” Jacque answered. “But, aside from him being dropped off in a limo and aside from the fact that he was a walking Calvin Klein ad, it began to get strange at this point in our story, boys and girls,” Jacque said in a spooky voice.

“Like it wasn’t strange already?” Sally asked.

“Well...okay, strange-er. Just as he was about to walk up the path, he suddenly turned and looked straight at me, as if he could sense I was watching him! Like, he looked right in my eyes. I literally couldn’t move. It was like I was mesmerized by him or something. And then we entered the world of ‘what the hell.’ As he was staring at me, I heard a voice in my head and it said ‘at last, my Jacquelyn.’ Then, as he turned to go in the house, I heard the voice again. It said, ‘soon’.”

Jacque stared expectantly at her two best friends, waiting for them to tell her she’d finally jumped off the deep end. But they just sat there, staring back at her.

“Well?” Jacque asked.

Finally, Jen stirred. Taking a deep breath in, she looked down at her empty hot chocolate mug and said, “We’re gonna need more hot chocolate.”

“Agreed,” Sally and Jacque replied at the same time.

Once Jen had returned with three fresh mugs of hot chocolate and Oreo cookies, she said, “So, let me see if I’m catching what you’re throwing. Hottie exchange student drives up in a limo, steps out, rocks your world, looks into your eyes, and speaks to you in your head? Am I getting the gist of it here?”

Jacque nodded her head, sheepishly looking at the floor. “I mean, I guess it was his voice in my head. It could’ve been a long lost dead relative who decided to speak to me the moment that hottie looked into my eyes.”

Jen and Sally both gave Jacque their “get a larger spoon if your going to shovel it in that big” look.

“What?” Jacque asked. “I’m just saying,” she said, throwing her hands up in the air in frustration. Flopping back onto the floor, she groaned loudly and covered her eyes with the back of her hand. “Am I going crazy, ya’ll?”

“No, sweetie. You’ve been gone a long time now, we just didn’t want you to know that we knew,” Sally said with humor.

“Seriously, I know it sounds crazy. But I promise I heard a voice – a beautiful, deep, masculine voice in my head, and it knew my name! That is crazy, jacked up, ‘put her in a straight jacket’, totally insane!” Jacque looked at them both with fear in her eyes. She truly did wonder if she had finally cracked.

There was after all, people in her family of questionable sanity, her mother being one of them. Jacque loved her mom and they had a good relationship, but she wasn’t always in touch with reality. Jacque’s father wasn’t in the picture and never had been. He had bailed as soon as he found out her mom was pregnant. Thankfully, she had two best friends who

kept her feet firmly on the ground, which was why she was so fervently seeking their thoughts on this matter.

Sally finally spoke up. “I don’t think you’re crazy, Jac. Really, you’re not. There has to be some sort of explanation. We’ll figure it out, we always do.”

“Yeah,” Jen added. “It’s two weeks ‘til school starts. From now until then we are on scout detail.”

Sally nodded her agreement.

The three were quiet for a few minutes, each pondering ways to “run into” the new exchange student without seeming too obvious. Jen was lying on the floor, looking up at the ceiling fan when she said, “We need to find a way to introduce ourselves to him so that we can each get a good look and see if Sally or I hear a voice in our head.”

“My mom was planning on taking over a good ol’ Southern meal for him since he isn’t from here. We could ask if we could go over with her. Or would that be too lame?” Jacque asked.

“No, I think that’s perfect,” Jen stated.

By midnight they had come up with a somewhat weak game plan, the whole of it revolving around going with Jacque’s mom to give the new exchange student some fried chicken, taters, and corn on the cob. *Seriously, how lame can you get?* Jacque thought as she lay on her bedroom floor. Jen and Sally had fallen asleep on the other side of her room each with a blanket wrapped around them.

Jacque sat up and looked around her room. This was a place she felt safe and comfortable: the twin-size bed with the new green bed spread her mom had bought her for her birthday, the stained-glass lamp with absolutely no theme whatsoever that sat on her small wood desk. She, Sally, and Jen had carved various things on the desk’s surface. She looked at her dresser mirror, which had pictures lining both sides, mostly of Jen, Sally and her in various places and poses.

A few hours ago I was just another seventeen year old getting ready to start her senior year. I was so normal, she thought.

She had three homecoming mums hanging on the wall next to her bed, and on the other side was the window seat she had occupied tonight, where her life had changed in a way she wasn't sure of yet. Jacque lay back down on her back and watched her ceiling fan go around in a circle, the motor lulling her to sleep. Her last thought as she drifted off was of a full moon, whatever that meant.

Chapter 2

As his limo pulled up to the house where Fane would stay, he couldn't shake the feeling that something was off. Not necessarily in a bad way, he just felt unsettled, restless, and tense.

Well, it could've been because he was more than a thousand miles away from home. He knew absolutely no one, it was his senior year in high school, and he was going to be spending it in a country he had never been to before.

"Yes I imagine that might make a person tense," Fane said to himself. He looked at the house and noticed it was quite large – two stories with a wrap-around porch. It actually looked like a house you might see out in the country, not in a suburb. The yard was nicely manicured with short green grass. There was a tall, full tree to the right of the walkway with a quaint bench underneath. On the porch there were two rocking chairs and a porch swing, and between the chairs was a little table with a potted plant. Overall, it was a charming home. A home in which a person would feel comfortable – a normal home.

Fane hoped this was the case because 'normal' was not usually a part of his vocabulary. He was, after all, from a family of werewolves. Specifically Grey wolves (*Canis lupus*). Not only that, he just happened to be the son of the Pack's current Alpha. His name, Fane Lupei, literally meant "Crown Wolf." How fitting for the Prince of the Romanian Greys.

What could possibly be normal about your family being able to change into wolves, or being a prince of those wolves yourself? Nothing in that scenario could ever be normal.

You made this choice, Fane told himself. Now you have to live with it. So get out of the car.

Fane wasn't really sure why he had even decided to apply to the foreign exchange program. He just knew he'd felt a pull, like a moth to a flame, to come to the United States. And not to just any city in the United States, but to Coldspring, Texas.

Why he'd thought it was a good idea to leave his home in Romania, which had the largest number of Greys in the world, he didn't know.

There were other places that *Canis lupus* held as territories, like Ireland, the Balkans, and Poland – even Italy and Spain had some Grey wolves. One would think that a Grey would go to another territory where other Greys were. The problem was that wolves were extremely territorial, especially among males, and unless a wolf wanted a fight, you didn't wander into another's territory. Fortunately, there weren't any *Canis lupus* in the small town of Coldspring, so Fane was free to come and claim his own territory, which was completely in his nature to do.

Okay, no more stalling, Fane thought. He looked up at Sorin, his driver and friend, and said, "I guess this is it. Mulțumesc (thank you), my friend, for coming all this way to drop me off. I appreciate it."

"Think nothing of it, my Prince. It is always an honor to serve you."

"Oh, come now. Don't go getting all formal on me. Here in Coldspring, I'm just a high school student, not a prince," Fane said.

Fane knew this was hard for his friend, though Sorin's title was actually "Guard to the Prince" and had been since Fane was a child. Sorin had actually wanted to stay in the U.S. with Fane, but Fane had insisted Sorin go home and let him be on his own for a while. Because there were no other Greys in this area, it wasn't likely that he was going to get into a battle.

Sorin got out of the car to open Fane's door, but Fane was unfolding his tall form before Sorin could even get around the front of the car. Fane stood six foot two inches tall, which was a good five inches taller than Sorin, so once out of the car he had to look just a little lower to meet his long-time friend in the eye. Sorin bowed only slightly, a show of respect and love for the Prince, and then broke formality and hugged him. Wolves took great comfort in touch; it was as much in their

nature as breathing and even in human form they tended to touch more than humans. Fane patted Sorin on the back and stepped away.

Out of nowhere, Fane caught a passing thought in his mind that caused his wolf to perk up.

“He must be more than just his driver.”

Fane turned his head to look toward the thought’s origin, and locked eyes with a girl in a window of the two-story house across the street.

The belief by humans that men “changed” into werewolves was false. Fane was able to do what the *Canis lupus* called “phasing”. The wolf and the man were one, there was no changing from one to the other. A change would mean that once a man was in wolf form he was no longer a man, but fully wolf, and when in human form that he was fully human. This was not the case. A *Canis lupus* was always aware of his wolf, as was the wolf always aware of the man. They usually existed together harmoniously. When Fane was in his wolf form, he could still think and reason as if he were in his human form. When he was in his human form, he could call on his wolf to phase only the parts he needed to use instead of phasing his entire being.

He phased just enough to let his wolf eyes do the looking. Although the Grey wolf’s eyesight wasn’t as good as its hearing, its night vision was the best of all the breeds of wolves. He found himself looking into eyes the color of emeralds.

It registered in Fane’s brain at that moment that he had “heard” her thoughts. There was only one person in the world that a Grey could hear thoughts from – his mate. His wolf growled possessively, and he took several deep breaths to keep from phasing. He discovered for the first time what it was like to not be in harmony with his wolf. The wolf wanted out, he wanted to go to his mate, his other half. Fane knew it was a better idea not to phase into his wolf and go pining at her window like a lovesick pup. He couldn’t get her scent, so her

window must have been closed. A wolf's mate also carried a certain scent that only he would recognize.

Reflexively, he sent her a thought as he picked her name out of her mind. "*At last, my Jacquelyn.*" It was so natural to claim what was his, and she was without a doubt his, whether she knew it yet or not.

Judging from the look on her face, she had heard him, and for a minute he thought she just might pass out from shock. Further confirming that she was his mate, he could feel her distress and confusion. But he knew she would be fine, she was strong. She had to be because she was the mate of an Alpha and she was to be his Luna. She was so named because she, like the moon, had a pull over many things – she had power that other female Greys did not.

Fane turned and, ignoring his wolf's instincts to go to her, walked up to the house, so breaking the gaze that had locked them together. As he knocked on the door, he couldn't help himself and sent her another thought, one to assure her this encounter wasn't their last.

"*Soon,*" he thought, and once again felt her confusion.

The Henrys were the family he would be living with for the next year – the "host" family was what they were called in the exchange program. This was the first time he had ever seen them and he was surprised at how young they were. They both looked to be in their early thirties. Mr. Henry was a little shorter than Fane and had sandy brown hair and brown eyes. He was thin, like a runner, and had a friendly face. Mrs. Henry was much shorter, with dark brown hair and pale brown eyes. She was average in size, neither heavy nor thin, and had a short, cute nose and rose-colored cheeks.

"Welcome to our home, Fane," Mrs. Henry said, reaching out to hug him.

Fane was a little surprised, as he knew Americans to be stand-offish when it came to touching. But he found comfort in the touch and sank into that feeling.

Mr. Henry held out his hand and Fane responded by shaking it. “We are very glad to have you here with us,” Mr. Henry said.

“Thank you for allowing me to stay in your home. I appreciate your generosity greatly,” Fane said sincerely.

“You must be tired from your long trip. Why don’t we show you your room and let you get settled for the night. If you’re hungry, I can show you the kitchen and you’re welcome to help yourself to anything you find. We can visit more tomorrow and get better acquainted once you have rested,” said Mrs. Henry kindly.

Fane followed them both upstairs and they went down a long hall, passing several doors. “We’ll give you the full tour tomorrow,” Mr. Henry told Fane.

That was fine with Fane. He was very tired, but his brain was going ninety to nothing thinking about what he had just discovered. The wolf inside was restless knowing that his mate, who he possibly could’ve had to wait an eternity for, was just across the street.

Finally at the end of the hall, at the last door on the left, Mrs. Henry stepped aside and said, “Here is your room. We took the liberty of decorating it a bit, but you are welcome to change it anyway you like. So we’ll leave you to it. Sleep tight.”

“Mulțumesc,” he stated formally. The Henrys looked at him quizzically. “Oh, that means ‘thank you’ in Romanian. Sometimes I forget and start speaking my native language, forgive me.”

“Oh, no. That’s great, Fane,” Mrs. Henry said. “I would love to learn your language and culture. Please feel free to use it anytime you want.”

“Well then, mulțumesc and noapte bună – which means good night,” Fane told them.

With that, the Henrys turned and walked away, leaving Fane to explore his new territory.

He walked into his room and immediately felt at home. They had inadvertently decorated his room in winter tones with wolves as the dominate theme. *How fitting*, Fane thought. The walls were painted a white that glistened like snow and one had a mural of a winter forest; in the distance there was a wolf on a snowy hill, his head tilted to the sky in a lonely howl. The bed was a full-size with a thick blue comforter and lots of pillows.

To the left of the bedroom door was another door. Fane opened it, and walked into a huge closet with built-in drawers all along one wall. The back wall had a clothing bar across the top. Along the right side of the closet were various sizes of shelves from floor to ceiling. All in all, it was quite a sight – there was even a built-in shoe rack along the bottom of the closet all the way around the perimeter.

Fane stepped out of the closet and turned right to go into the other door and walked into a spacious bathroom with a glassed-in shower and separate bathtub. There was a long marble counter top with a deep bowl sink. The mirror that hung above the sink was antique-looking with a large curved pewter frame. The floor was stone tiled, and the light fixtures on the wall were old-world style lanterns. The hanging light fixture featured electric candles in a metal circular frame. It was becoming more and more obvious that the Henrys were quite wealthy.

After checking out all of his new territory – even in his human form Fane couldn't help seeing things as his territory or not – he decided to take a shower and wash off the smell of crowded airports and unfamiliar people. He took his time enjoying the hot water and finally decided he was ready to go to bed.

His final thought of the night was of Jacque's emerald eyes. He couldn't see the color of her hair because he had never gotten past her eyes. The shock of who and what she was had distracted him. Still, those emerald eyes led him to sleep.

Chapter 3

The morning sunlight shone into Jacque's room as she yawned noisily and stretched her limbs. She glanced over to where Sally and Jen had fallen asleep and saw they were snoozing soundly. *I'll let them sleep while I get a shower*, she thought. She still had things she needed to process from her encounter with hottie from across the street.

"Thanks, Jen," she muttered under her breath. Now she couldn't think of him as the foreign exchange student because Jen had so eloquently named him the "hottie."

Jacque would have to watch herself and make sure not to introduce herself by saying, "Hi, it's nice to meet you, hottie." Yeah, that wouldn't be embarrassing at all.

She gathered up some clean clothes, and as she stared in her closet she realized it was taking quite a long time to pick an outfit to wear to meet the hottie – grrr...the exchange student. *Jac*, she thought, *say it to yourself. Ex-ch-an-ge student.*

Finally she chose a pair of jeans that had holes in various places along the legs. Of course, they weren't there through any fault of hers; they were \$125 jeans made to be ripped up... go figure. She picked a baby doll tee that said "I'm not stubborn, my way is just better." *Better to let him know up front that I'm sarcastic*, Jacque thought.

She headed to the bathroom to take a hot shower, hoping it would help settle her nerves. She didn't really understand why she was so nervous about meeting the exchange student – *way to go, Jac, you didn't call him the hottie* – but she was very nervous. *It could be*, she thought, *because he might have spoken to me in my head.*

"I'm mean, what the heck," she muttered.

Jacque took her time in the shower, finally getting out when the water started to get cold. She dried off with a towel and got dressed, then took her time fixing her hair. She couldn't decide if she should wear it up or down. "Good

grief,” she told herself, “you never have this much trouble getting ready.” She just couldn’t shake the feeling that something major had happened last night when she’d locked eyes with that handsome stranger.

Settling on wearing her hair up – it was summer in south Texas, after all, which basically meant frying eggs-on-the-side-walk hot – she headed back to her room to see if Sally and Jen had decided to join the living.

Sure enough, they were both sitting in the floor. Each had bed-head and looked a little dazed.

“You’re up bright and early...and dressed,” said Jen, sounding surprised.

“Well, I woke up with just a few things on my mind and knew it would be impossible to go back to sleep. Also, I need to go talk to my mom about us going over with her to greet the hot...I mean exchange student. Thanks to you, Jen, I will probably introduce myself to him by calling him hottie.”

“Well if you do, I will be sure to do you the honor of laughing my ass off.” Jen said graciously.

“Oh, thanks sooo much,” Jacque retorted.

“Okay, kids. Let’s play nice. We have plans to make, so let’s not waste time competing over who can be the snottiest sista,” Sally said in her best motherly voice.

“Okay, okay. Why don’t ya’ll take turns getting a shower. I will go talk to my mom about when she plans to head over to the Henrys’.”

“Sounds good,” Sally answered.

“Go team,” Jen said with fake enthusiasm.

Jen could often be just as sarcastic as Jacque, which at times caused them to be the best of friends and the worst.

Jacque headed downstairs to find her mom already in the kitchen, cooking up a storm. Lilly Pierce was not your average woman. She had a sketchy background growing up in a foster

home, not knowing who her real parents were. She often had these “feelings” about things that were going to happen, and the scary thing was she was usually right. Jacque and her mom never really talked about it, though Jacque was beginning to show signs of a similar nature. Only Jacque didn’t know things, she could feel things – like others’ emotions. It was very subtle at times. She might be in a room with her mom and, without Lilly ever saying anything, Jacque would know without a doubt her mother was sad or worried or confused. She didn’t know how she knew it, she just did. It wasn’t reliable, though, because she could go days without feeling another’s emotions. Jacque didn’t want to know things, or feel things; she just wanted to be normal.

As Jacque looked around the kitchen, she saw there was a pan of fried chicken on the stove and corn in a pot of boiling water. Her mom was steadily mixing a bowl of mashed potatoes, adding milk and butter as she saw fit.

“Hey, mom. How goes the southern meal making?” Jacque asked.

“I’m almost done, I just need to put some rolls in the oven. Would you mind getting them and putting them on a pan? They aren’t homemade, just those Hawaiian rolls, but they’re really good.”

“Yeah, I can do that.” Jacque bent down to grab a pan. “So, Sally, Jen and I were wondering if you needed help carrying all this over to the Henrys’,” she said, trying to sound casual. Her mom looked at her questioningly and Jacque figured she hadn’t even come close to casual.

“Are you really wanting to help or is this just a perfect opportunity to meet the new exchange student? It is a guy, right?” Lily asked.

“Yes, he is a guy, and maybe we would like to see who he is. But we do also really want to help you. I don’t think you can carry all this over on your own,” Jacque answered.

“Well, I was going to ask you to help me anyway. And I thought you girls would be interested in meeting the new young man, especially since you and Trent split up.”

“Do not go there, Mom! This has nothing to do with him. It’s only natural to want to meet someone new, and especially since he’s not from our country,” Jacque stated firmly.

“Okay, okay, you don’t have to be defensive. I will be ready just as soon as those rolls are done warming. I’m going to call the Henrys now to make sure they’re okay with us coming over in ten minutes.”

Jacque put the rolls on the pan in straight rows. As her mom was stepping out of the room to call the Henrys, she caught the briefest hint of worry coming off of her. It had been a while since she had picked anything up from her mom so it kind of made her take a step back. *I wonder what she’s worried about?*

She headed back upstairs to see if the girls were done getting ready and to let them know the plan was in motion. Man, she felt ridiculous as she thought about how it sounded to have a “plan” to meet a guy, and not meet him like “hey, what’s up,” but meet him like, “hey, are you a weirdo or something?” What was her world coming to? Oh, well. Could be worse. She could be hearing voices...oh wait, she was. Well, crap.

Sally was done with her shower and doing her hair when she got upstairs. Sally could be very efficient when she needed to be, and she wasn’t one to be overly fussy about her looks. Of course, that could’ve been because she would be pretty even with a paper bag over her head. Her long coffee-colored hair was striking against her mocha-colored skin. She honestly didn’t look like a Sally. *Whatever*, Jacque thought. *I didn’t pick her name.*

Jen was still in the shower and Jacque could hear her singing Martina McBride’s “Independence Day.” She was belting it out proudly and tunelessly.

Jacque banged on the door and hollered, “Yeah, yeah, you’re strong, free and independent, we get it. Hurry up! We’re rolling out ten minutes ago!” Jen just sang louder. Jacque rolled her eyes and went back to her room.

“If she’s planning on blow drying that blond mess on her head then we’re leaving her here,” Jacque told Sally, looking over to see her shoving her feet into shoes.

“Well, I’m ready when you are, Sherlock. Let’s go check hottie out,” Sally said with a wink.

“How lucky I am to have you, my dear Watson,” Jacque said, smiling.

Jen stepped into Jacque’s room fully clothed, hair up in a French twist.

“What’s taking you guys so long? I’ve been ready for two minutes,” Jen said with fake exasperation.

“Oh, a whole two minutes? How dare us make you wait. Please don’t have us flogged, your majesty,” Jacque retorted.

“It’s about time you realized who the queen is in this outfit,” Jen said, grinning.

“Girls, I’m ready if you all are!” they heard Jacque’s mom yell.

Well, here we go, Jacque thought. She felt in that moment that she was walking into the lion’s den. Just what had she gotten herself into?

“I think I am officially going to be sick,” Jacque said with a slight moan.

“Take slow deep breaths. If you pass out while we’re over there, I once again tell you I will laugh my ass off,” Jen said.

“Man, you’re just a ball of warm fuzzies, aren’t you?” Jacque said, glaring at Jen.

“I’m just saying,” Jen laughed.

Turning in a circle with arms out and palms turned up, Jacque said “How do I look? Is this shirt a little much?”

“No, I think it’s perfect. It makes a statement like, ‘hey, I’m not scared of your little mind gibberish’,” Sally encouraged.

“But I am scared of his mind gibberish. If it is really his mind gibberish and not something else entirely,” Jacque said, sounding forlorn.

“Oh, come on. Pull yourself together, man. He’s just a guy, okay? Nothing more and nothing less,” Jen stated with utter confidence.

The only thing was that Jacque didn’t believe mystery guy was just a guy. No, he was more, much more. She just didn’t know what yet. As they began to descend the stairs, a thought touched her mind, one that was not her own.

“*Good morning, my Luna,*” Jacque heard.

She stumbled a few steps on the stairs. Jen reached out to steady her. “Are you okay?” she whispered.

“I just heard the voice again,” Jacque said shakily.

“What did it say?” Sally asked.

“‘Good morning, my loona’,” Jacque answered. “What the stink does that mean?” *I can’t believe I thought it was a good idea to go over there,* she thought.

Jacque’s mom was standing at the bottom of the stairs, watching them closely. She had that look that Jacque knew all too well – her mom knew something was up. She could feel her emotions strongly and, according to them, Lily Pierce was very concerned.

“Are you girls coming?” her mom asked.

“Lead the way, Ms. Pierce,” Jen said.

Each of the girls carried a dish of food; Jacque’s mom had even made sweet tea. After all, what’s a southern meal without sweet tea?

As they stepped out of the house and onto the walkway, the sun shone brightly down on them. It was ten am and it was already blistering hot.

Although the grass on some of the lawns was still healthy and green, Jacque's lawn was brown and dead. Of course, that could've been because her mom mowed it way too short last time in hopes she could go longer than a week between mowing. She'd inadvertently killed the grass in the process. *Oh well*, Jacque thought, *it's not like we're going for first place in the prettiest lawn competition*. Goodness knows both she and her mother would rather pull their toenails out than work in the yard in that ridiculous southern Texas heat.

As they crossed the street, Jacque saw the curtains of the right second story window part. Briefly, she saw the handsome face looking back at her. She looked away to get the attention of Sally and Jen, but when she looked back to point him out the curtains had closed.

"He was standing in the window, ya'll. I promise I did not imagine it." Jacque sounded a little desperate.

"We believe you, Jac. Stop doubting that," Sally said with conviction.

She's right, Jacque thought. They were her best friends and they would stick by her no matter what.

Chapter 4

Fane woke up and, without thinking, sought out Jacquelyn's mind. It felt like second nature to him even though he'd just met her. Well, more like found her.

He spoke into her mind effortlessly, "*Good morning, my Luna,*" and instantly felt her panic and confusion.

He listened to Jacque tell her friends that she had heard his voice, or rather a voice she wasn't completely convinced was his. And she wanted to know what 'Luna' meant. He also caught the passing thought that she was on her way over here...now.

Fane looked at himself in the mirror and quickly decided a shower was in order – and something more presentable than pajama pants with no shirt.

He quickly jumped in the shower and was out in a record five minutes. He was standing in front of the bathroom mirror, brushing his teeth, when he noticed something different on his chest and shoulder.

Fane, like every male *Canis lupus*, had markings that looked like tattoos. They appeared of their own accord once puberty hit. These markings revealed where in the pack order a wolf belonged, and the more elaborate the marking, the higher the rank. The tattoos varied in size, shape, and on what side of the body they were on. The marks were dark black, with curves and points at the ends of the lines. Fane's were on his right side, which indicated he was a dominant. It started on his right shoulder blade and came over the top of his shoulder, going down onto his bicep and across the right side of his chest. The fact that it came around to the front of his body indicated he was an Alpha. Only Alphas had markings on the front and back of their bodies. That way, no matter what direction he was facing, all could see his markings and know the identity of the pack's leader.

Sometime between the night before and that morning, the markings had climbed up the right side of his neck – they

looked like black flames.

Fane honestly didn't know what it meant. He had never heard of the markings spreading. He decided he would have to call his father later today to find out what it meant. Meanwhile, he hoped the Henrys didn't notice that the markings weren't there last night, which might've been a little difficult to explain.

Deciding there was nothing to be done about it at the moment, he moved on and quickly ran a razor across his face and threw on some aftershave.

Fane walked over to his suitcase to pick out some clothes. He hadn't bothered to unpack anything last night because he'd been so tired. There weren't a whole lot of variations to his wardrobe: black, grey, and dark blue shirts mostly. He had a lot of long sleeved shirts because of the cold in Romania. He'd had to buy short sleeved shirts to prepare to come to the U.S.

He decided on a dark grey short sleeve t-shirt and his Lucky brand jeans. He pulled on his biker boots and grabbed his wallet, which had a chain attached to it.

Although motorcycles weren't very popular in Romania – because of the temperature – Fane loved them and owned a Honda. He tried to ride as much as he could and, of course, was completely covered in leather when he did ride to stay warm.

He'd wanted to bring his motorcycle with him, but his parents had offered to buy him a used bike once he got here. He was planning on talking to Mr. Henry about that later today, to see if he would be willing to take Fane to a motorcycle dealership to pick one out. His parents had given him a credit card with a decent limit on it. It should get him a pretty nice bike.

Just when he was ready to go downstairs, his wolf perked up at the sound of footsteps in the street. He walked over to the window and parted the curtains. *What luck*, he thought to

himself. His window was directly in front of Jacquelyn's house.

He looked down at the street and saw three teenage girls walking with who must've been Jacquelyn's mother.

His gaze shifted to the only one who mattered and she looked straight up into his face.

She is beautiful, Fane thought. Now that he could get a good look at her, he saw that she had wild, unruly, auburn curls. Freckles dusted her fair skin. She was on the short side, thin, but not skinny. She was wearing faded, holey jeans and a green shirt that said, "I'm not stubborn, my way is just better."

So his Luna had attitude. Well, of course she would. It wasn't like a meek woman could be Alpha to female Greys – they would tear a timid Alpha apart. Jacque turned to talk to her friends. While she was turned, he stepped away from the window to head downstairs.

Fane had to admit he was a little nervous about meeting her. He had never been nervous with girls. Then again, he hadn't really dated much. No one ever seemed to catch his eye so he'd figured, why waste his time? The few girls he had dated never produced even a quarter of the attraction he felt for Jacquelyn.

He wished now that he'd gotten up earlier and called his father to talk to him about this whole mate thing. He had learned a little growing up, but he still felt very unprepared to handle it. Especially since she was human and knew nothing of his world.

As Fane came to the bottom of the stairs, the doorbell rang. He heard Mrs. Henry coming from the right side of the house. As she came around the corner, she saw that he was there and smiled at him warmly.

"Good morning, Fane. Did you sleep well?"

"Bună dimineața," Fane said gracefully. "I slept very well, thank you."

“I take it that ‘bună dimineața’ means good morning?” Mrs. Henry asked.

“That was a very good pronunciation. And yes, it means good morning,” Fane explained.

“Oh, I guess I better get the door,” she said just as the doorbell rang again.

As Mrs. Henry opened the door, Fane felt his stomach tighten in anticipation. *What am I going to say to her?* he wondered. Well, naturally he couldn’t very well declare her his mate in front of all these humans – they would think he was mad.

So he settled with a simple, “Hello my name is Fane.” *Yes*, he thought. *That’s a very normal thing to say.* And normalcy was what he wanted, after all.

The four ladies were standing at the threshold of the door.

“Lilly, how sweet it is of you to come over to meet our guest!” Mrs. Henry announced kindly.

“We come bearing a homemade southern meal for the newcomer,” Lilly responded.

“Come in! Let me introduce you to Fane. He’s from...well, here. I’ll let him tell you. He can speak for himself, after all,” Mrs. Henry said as they all filed into the entryway.

“Sara, why don’t we set this food in the kitchen? Then we can sit in the living room to make our introductions. That suit you okay?” Lilly asked.

“Oh, of course, of course. You all can’t stand here in the front door holding all that food. You would think I’ve never had company before. Come on, girls, and let’s set it on the counter in the kitchen,” Mrs. Henry said, sounding a little flustered with herself.

Sara, Fane thought. *So that’s Mrs. Henry’s first name.* He hadn’t even thought to ask when he’d met them last night.

Once the food was left in the kitchen, they all met in the living room. Lilly sat on the rocking chair by the fireplace, while the three girls sat on the couch next to the rocking chair. Mrs. Henry and Fane both sat on the love seat across from the couch. There was a wooden coffee table in between the couch and love seat that had various magazines and some coasters sitting on it.

Fane realized that while he'd been cataloging the room, the five ladies had all been looking at him expectantly. He noticed Jacquelyn's gaze linger on the markings on his neck. His wolf liked that she noticed even though she didn't know what they meant.

He cleared his throat and started speaking. "Good morning, doamnelor (ladies). My name is Fane Lupei and I am from Romania. I am seventeen and I will be a senior this year." Fane looked at each of the ladies, pausing briefly on Jacquelyn. "Should I say more?" he asked.

Lilly looked at him quizzically. "What does dome-na-ler mean exactly?"

Fane tried not to grin too much at her poor pronunciation. Romanian, after all, was a very difficult language to speak.

"It means 'ladies'. I was saying good morning. I have a bad habit of mixing my native language with my English, I beg your pardon," Fane said to Lilly.

"I don't mind. It's actually pretty neat to hear you speak Romanian. It's not a language one hears very often, if ever," Lilly assured him.

There was an awkward pause for a moment, and then the blond-haired friend of Jacquelyn's looked at him poignantly and asked "So why Coldspring, Texas?"

Fane cocked his head to the side, just like he would do in his wolf form. "Scuzați-mă (excuse me)?" he asked. "I do not understand the question."

"Why did you choose to come to our little blink-of-an-eye town?" Jen asked, speaking slowly, as if to a child.

Jacquelyn elbowed her, which made Fane smile.

“Oh, I see. Well, honestly, I’m not sure. When I applied for the exchange program they sent me several candidates for my host family. I read about them and something about the Henrys felt right. I don’t know if I explained it right, but that is only how I know to say it,” Fane answered.

“Your English is very good,” Jacquelyn’s other friend, the brunette, stated.

“Da (yes), my parents have always spoken both Romanian and English to me. They thought it would be foolish to think I would only need to know Romanian language and culture,” Fane explained to her.

“So you have studied American culture as well?” Mrs. Henry asked.

“Da. American culture is quite different from mine. What I have been taught by teachers has not always stood true in real life.”

“Okay,” Lilly said firmly. “Enough of the Spanish inquisition. Girls, let’s briefly introduce ourselves and be on our way so Fane can get settled in.”

Lilly simply introduced herself from where she sat. “Fane, my name is Lilly Pierce and I’m Jacque’s mom. I own a bookstore on the square downtown to which you are most welcome anytime to study or chat. Please call me Lilly, as I am not my mother. She was Ms. Pierce. I am so glad to know you.”

“Meu doamnă, acesta este un onoruri,” Fane said, bowing ever so slightly.

“In your language I said, ‘my lady, it is an honor’,” Fane translated.

Jen stood up and held out her hand. “I’m Jennifer Adams, a.k.a. Jen. I am also seventeen and a senior. Glad to know ya,” she said as he took her hand.

To her surprise, he did not shake it. He simply brought her hand to his lips, just barely laying them on the top of it.

Fane looked up at Jen after lightly kissing her hand and said, “Sa o placere sa te cunosc.”

Jen looked slightly dazed and confused.

“It is a pleasure to meet you,” Fane translated.

Sally stood up, gently pushing the hazy-looking Jen back down to the couch and then held out her hand.

“I’m Sally Morgan, seventeen, senior, and it’s nice to meet you,” she said with natural cheer.

Again, Fane took her hand and lifted it to his lips, placing a feather soft kiss on the top of it. Then he repeated what he’d said to Jen. “Sa o placere sa te cunosc.”

Sally sat down next to Jen and, when Jacquelyn made no move to stand up, Jen reached over and pinched the back of her arm.

“Oww!” Jacque yelped.

She glared at her friend but finally caught on to what Sally was silently telling her.

Standing up to introduce herself, Jacque began to speak, and for a moment her mouth wouldn’t spit out what her brain was telling her to say. “Oh, um, I, um...” *Good grief*, Jacque thought to herself, *spit it out already*. “I’m Jacque, seventeen, and a senior as well. Lilly is my mom.” She made no move to give Fane her hand.

The surprise on her face was obvious when he reached out and took her hand anyway. Fane bowed over as he brought it to his lips, and this time they lingered there.

As he held her hand to his mouth he took in her scent and found to his pleasure she smelled of cotton candy and fresh snow, an odd, but strangely familiar combination. He tried not to growl possessively, but couldn’t quite suppress the urge

completely. Fane knew Jacquelyn had heard him because she tensed even more.

He lifted his eyes to hers and just as he had said to Sally and Jen, he told her, “Sa o placere sa te cunosc.

The only difference was as he spoke to her with his mouth he also sent her a message with his thoughts.

“I am so honored to finally meet you, my Luna,” he told her. *“We have much to learn about each other.”*

Chapter 5

From the moment she had stepped into the Henrys' house, Jacque's nerves had been rattled over being around the strange exchange student. Not to mention, as soon as she locked eyes with Fane she felt a weird tingling sensation across the top of her shoulders and behind her neck. She reached up and placed her hand on her neck, tilting it a bit as if it were stiff. *That was weird*, she'd thought.

Mystery guy was standing at the bottom of the stairs. He was wearing a dark grey t-shirt, jeans, motorcycle boots, and the wallet in his back pocket was attached with a metal chain. The guy could make a plastic bag look sexy.

The look on his face was one of curiosity and what she thought might be nervousness. That surprised her because at first glance he did not appear to be the nervous type.

Mrs. Henry told them all to bring the food into the kitchen and then everyone was to go to the living room to be introduced to their guest.

Once seated in the Henrys' living room, they all listened to Fane introduce himself. *Finally, something to call him other than mystery guy and hottie*, Jacque thought.

Jen asked why he had chosen this little town and when he didn't understand the question the first time, she asked him again and spoke down like he was a child. This earned Jen an elbow in the ribs, courtesy of Jacque. After all, was it really any of their business why he came? But Jen just shrugged her off and waited for Fane to answer. He appeared confused and cocked his head in an odd way, kind of like she had seen dogs do. *Oh, that's so gracious of me, comparing the Romanian to a dog*. Jacque wished someone would just put her out of her misery.

Sally mentioned that Fane's English was very good and he explained that he'd been taught English right along with Romanian all his life.

Lilly finally stepped in and suggested each girl introduce herself, so they could get going and let Fane and the Henrys get settled.

Lilly's mom was the first one to speak. She told Fane her name and occupation, and instructed him that he was to call her Lilly.

Then her friends were next. *He's gonna think we are absolutely crazy*, Jacque thought.

When Jen stepped forward to introduce herself, she held out her hand to shake Fane's. To everyone's surprise, instead of shaking it, he kissed it.

Jacque was completely dumbfounded when she felt herself having an extremely irrational wave of jealousy flow through her. In that moment she wanted to wrench Jen's hand from Fane's and growl at her. *Growl! Are you freaking kidding me?* Jacque thought.

She noticed that Sally had to push Jen down to the couch because she was slightly dazed from the encounter. This did nothing to calm Jacques raging emotions.

Jacque had to brace herself, as Fane was now lifting Sally's hand to his lips. She couldn't understand why she was feeling like this. It was totally obvious that his greeting was completely non-romantic – which, by the way, shouldn't matter to her anyway – and yet she did not want him to touch another female. *Okay*, Jacque thought, *it's official. I have dived headfirst off the deep end.*

Out of nowhere, she felt a sharp pain. Yelping, she turned to look at Jen – who had just pinched her. She realized then that Fane was looking at her expectantly and she had just been sitting there like an idiot in her own little bubble.

Jacque stood up but made no move to give him her hand. She introduced herself, sounding so eloquent when she couldn't spit out what she was trying to say. She was getting ready to sit down when Fane reached out and grabbed her hand. She was a little startled, but that quickly faded into

something else entirely when he bowed over her hand and pressed his lips firmly against it. Jacque could swear she heard him take a deep breath through his nose and growl low in his throat. *That was really weird*, she thought. But once again, for her things couldn't simply be weird, they had to be downright insane.

As Fane repeated what he had told Jen and Sally, Jacque also heard the voice in her mind.

"I am so honored to finally meet you, my Luna. We have much to learn about each other."

Jacque blinked a few times, trying to clear her thoughts. *What on earth could it possibly mean by "finally meet"?* she thought. *Did this voice know it was waiting for me?* It was time to go home, Jacque decided. She needed to talk to Sally and Jen about Fane, she needed to decide whether or not to confide in her mother, and she needed to have a good, cleansing panic attack. Not necessarily in that order.

Jacque pulled her hand from Fane's grasp and he didn't try to keep her from doing so. She turned to look at her mom, raised her eyebrows and asked, "Are you ready? I'm good to go. Sally, Jen, ya'll ready to go?"

Jen and Sally both nodded at the same time, quickly catching Jacque's mood.

Lilly looked at her daughter suspiciously, but merely nodded and turned to Mrs. Henry. "Thank you, Sara, for having us over. It was really nice to see you. Fane, it was great to meet you. Don't make yourself a stranger. You're welcome over at our house anytime."

Fane bowed slightly, placing his hand over his heart. "As we say in my country when parting, *pînă la următor timp Mai art.hot. Moon lumină al tău patetic*. It means: until next time, may the moon light your path."

Jen looked at Fane and in her outspoken way asked, "Is that kinda like an Irish proverb? Only, ya know, like a Romanian proverb instead?"

Sally giggled, Jacque looked mortified, and Fane simply smiled. “Yes, something like that.”

Jacque pushed Jen and Sally towards the door, trying very hard not to look and see if Fane was watching her. She knew somehow that he was. *So, what the heck? Might as well watch him back*, she told herself. She tentatively looked over her shoulder and, sure enough, Fane was staring at her. He had a slight smile on his face and his eyes were squinted together ever so slightly, giving her the impression that he knew something she did not. That thought made her shudder and push Jen and Sally harder out the door.

“We’re going, Jacque. Good grief,” she heard Jen grunt.

“Well, go a little quicker please!” Jacque whispered through tight lips.

The girls walked briskly down the walkway and across the street, not even bothering to see if Jacque’s mom was behind them. All Jacque could think was that she needed to put some space between her and that hottie. Okay, so she still couldn’t stop calling him hottie. *Well, it’s true, so go jump in a lake already*, she told herself.

Once inside the house the three girls double timed it up the stairs and into Jacque’s bedroom. Sally shut the door firmly and turned to pin Jacque with her best “you better spill it now” stare. Jen had pulled up some carpet and was staring just as sternly.

Jacque took some slow, deep breaths. *I seem to be doing this a lot lately*, she thought.

“First impressions?” Jacque finally prompted.

“Oh, I don’t know, maybe something like, OH MY, stutter, drool, FREAKING, pant, deep breathing, GOSH!” Jen spat.

Sally nodded fervently. “Yeah, what she said, but more panting and deep breathing on my end.”

“What about you?” Jen asked. “You didn’t seem as mesmerized as us. Why is that?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Maybe because I was, ya know, a little distracted by THE VOICE IN MY HEAD!” Jacque realized she was yelling. “I’m sorry, ya’ll. I shouldn’t take my stress out on you. I’m just – just – I don’t know. Freaking out, I guess.”

“Have you tried talking back to the voice? You know, like answering it through your thoughts?” Sally asked tentatively.

Jacque shook her head. “I feel like if I do, then I am just solidifying the fact that I’m losing it.”

“You’re NOT losing it. Something is definitely up with this Fane guy. No one, and I mean no one, can look that good and make you want to curl up and purr when he talks to you. Something’s fishy and it’s not your mom’s fried chicken,” Jen told her.

Jacque turned to her window and opened the blinds. She looked across the street at the Henrys’ house and wondered what to do about Fane Lu-whatever his last name was.

She heard her two best friends walk up beside her. With all three gazing out the window, they put their arms around her.

“I know I’ve said it before, and I will keep saying it until it sinks into that unruly, curly head of yours, but it will be alright. You are not alone in this, okay?” Sally said with love.

“Yeah, chick. You got us, no matter what,” Jen agreed. “Besides, we’re too nosy to not stick around.”

Sally pulled a strand of Jen’s hair as a scolding. “Ow! Crap, I’m just saying!” Jen scowled.

Jacque turned away from the window and wiped away the tears she hadn’t even realized were there. Then she hugged her friends.

“Okay, I know you guys need to go home and assure your parents that you’re still alive and haven’t been abducted or anything. But do ya’ll think you can come back later?”

Both girls nodded.

“I will have to do some laundry and pick up my room to pacify my mom, you know how it is, but then I can come back over and stay the night again if your mom is cool with it,” Jen said.

Sally spoke up as well. “Yeah, I can be back around seven tonight. I just need to take care of some chores as well.”

“Okay, that sounds good. I’ll let my mom know that ya’ll will be back. I know she won’t care.”

Jacque walked them downstairs to the front door and watched as they each walked to their cars. She stood in the doorway, watching them drive off until she couldn’t see their cars any longer. She slowly turned and went back into the house, shutting the door behind her.

She stood in the entryway, looking at nothing. Her mind was running amok again and Jacque was trying to decipher the thoughts. It was no use. She was tired, emotional, and beginning to realize that ever since she had walked out of the Henrys’ house and away from Fane, it was taking all she had not to turn around and run – not walk, but run like a cat with a fire cracker tied to its tail – back to him. What the hell was up with that?

Jacque’s head snapped up when she heard her mom hollering from upstairs. “Jacque? I need to go to the store for a little while. I’ve got some new inventory I need to take care of, and since I was able to hire some other staff I can finally get caught up.” Her mom came to the top of the stairs and looked down at her. Tilting her head, she asked, “Are you okay, sweetie? You look a little frayed around the edges.”

“Naw, I’m good. Just a little tired. I didn’t sleep too well last night,” Jacque fibbed. Then she thought of how she had been feeling her mom’s emotions so strongly and decided to say something. “What about you mom? You okay?”

“I’m fine. Just got a lot on my mind, that’s all. Nothing to worry about. Why don’t you lie down for a little bit? Are you

gonna be okay while I'm gone? Need me to get you anything while I'm out?" her mom asked.

"No. I'll be fine, mom. Thanks though. Oh yeah, I did want to check and see if you were okay with Sally and Jen spending the night again tonight?"

"No, I don't have a problem with that if their parents are okay with it. Ya'll can order pizza if I'm not home by dinner," she answered.

Jacque hugged her mom and told her goodbye before heading up to her room. She shut the door, turned off the lights, and put her Evanescence CD on. The music was oddly calming to her. Then she laid down on her bed and closed her eyes.

Chapter 6

Fane watched as Jacquelyn hurried back to her house. He wanted to growl at her eagerness to get away from him, but he reminded himself it was only because she was scared, not because she didn't want to accept him as her mate. After all, she didn't even know him, let alone know what a mate was.

Mrs. Henry called him from in the kitchen and he went to see what she wanted.

"Lilly made you a traditional Southern meal. Are you ready for lunch yet? It's only 11:30, but I thought you might be hungry since you didn't get a chance to have breakfast."

"Actually, I am hungry and it all smells really good." Fane's wolf perked up at the smell of the chicken and his stomach growled. He hadn't realized that he was so hungry.

"The plates are in the cabinet to the left of the stove, and the silverware is in the drawer to the right of the sink," Mrs. Henry pointed out. "Eat all you want. Oh and she made sweet tea as well. It's in the fridge. The glasses are in the cabinet next to the plates."

"Thank you," Fane said simply.

"I'm off to the grocery store; I didn't get a chance to go yesterday. Is there anything in particular that you like?" she asked.

"I'm not picky and I like to try new things, so whatever you usually buy will be fine with me. I can give you some money as well, since you will be feeding another mouth," Fane answered.

"There is no way I'm taking any of your money, Fane, so you can just get that notion out of your head. You are our guest, and we are more than pleased to feed you," she said firmly but not unkindly.

"Mulțumesc, Mrs. Henry. I am most grateful," Fane responded.

“You’re welcome. Oh, I keep meaning to tell you, no more Mrs. Henry. Call me Sara and you can call Mr. Henry Brian. Okay, well, I’ll see you later. My cell phone number is on the front of the fridge, so put it in your phone in case you need me. See you later,” she said with a wave.

Fane walked over to the fridge and there on the front was a pink sticky note with both Sara and Brian’s cell phone numbers. He took his phone out of his pocket and put both numbers in his contacts.

He found himself thinking it was kind of odd that he would never need Jacquelyn’s cell phone number, because he would always have a direct line to her designated just for him, and she to him as well. He wasn’t sure if that was a little unsettling because it meant if and when Jacquelyn realized it, she had access to his thoughts...all his thoughts. There was a way to put up what you might call a wall in your mind if you needed a break from your mate, but it was difficult for mates to be cut off from each other for any length of time. Not that he knew from experience, that was just what his father had told him about the mate bond.

Even though Jacquelyn had yet to respond to him when he spoke through her thoughts, he wasn’t feeling any ill effects from her lack of reciprocation. Once again, he was going to need to talk to his father about this.

He prepared himself a plate and a glass of sweet tea (and really, it should have been called sugar with some tea in it), and decided to eat up in his room since Sara was gone and he hadn’t seen Brian this morning.

He sat at the desk right next to the window that faced Jacquelyn’s house and pulled the blinds up so he could look out. Taking a bite of chicken, he thought about her for the millionth time since he’d set eyes on her. He thought about her unruly hair, her green eyes, her – what he now knew to be soft – skin dusted with freckles, and most of all her scent. Cotton candy and fresh snow, what an odd thing to smell like, but he supposed it had something to do with who she was, sweet and

pure – and he had a feeling she could be as cold as the Romanian snow if the situation called for it.

Fane continued to eat his lunch, his wolf thoroughly enjoying the protein even though it was cooked. He of course preferred it raw and enjoyed it even more after a hunt. Still, it was excellent.

He took his plate back downstairs and washed out his glass, refilling it with water this time. With no sign of Brian, he headed back up to his room. He wanted to see Jacquelyn, and if he couldn't, he would settle for talking to her.

Once in his room, he shut the door and lay down on his bed, hands behind his head, eyes focused on nothing in particular, and reached out to her.

“Have I scared you, my Luna? I promise that has not been my intention.”

He found it interesting that he didn't really even know how it worked, he simply would just think of her and he was instantly able to “speak” to her.

Fane realized it had been several minutes and she had not responded. She was either asleep or ignoring him. He was just about to speak again when she answered.

Cautiously she asked, *“Who are you? Are you real, or am I just imagining you?”*

Fane frowned slightly. He didn't like the way his mate sounded – strained and a little desperate. He hated that she had to go through this, that she knew nothing of his world. He was going to have to explain it somehow without her thinking he was some *nebun* stalker.

“I am very real,” he answered. *“And you know who I am. Your human mind just does not want to accept it.”*

Fane was going to push her gently in the direction she needed to go and let her come up with the conclusion. If he told her he was the voice in her head, if he didn't let her decide for herself, then she might not be able to believe it.

He listened as she wrestled with what he told her. Her mind was so interesting and comical at times.

“What on earth did it mean by “human mind”? Was the voice implying that it was not human? Oh, wouldn’t that be the icing on the cake. I’m not just hearing a voice, nope, that would still be in the realm of crazy. I passed crazy a few exits back. No, I’m now entering crackpot ville.”

Fane couldn’t help himself when he let out a small laugh. Where did she come up with phrases like “crackpot ville”? He just had to ask. He wanted to know her, to understand her. He found himself using a term of endearment – “my heart” – without even thinking. It just came naturally, even though he never considered himself to be the type for pet names.

“Meu inimă, you are not crazy. And where do you get your odd way of speaking? Crackpot ville? What does that mean exactly?” Fane asked her.

Without realizing it, in using his native language he had not just given her a little push in the right direction, he’d pretty much shoved her off a cliff. So much for subtle. It never was his strong suit anyway, according to his mother.

He felt her distress rise, could feel her need for disbelief, and yet there was a small spark of...relief? *Didn’t see that one coming*, Fane thought as he closed his eyes and focused on her, listening to her mind come to terms with this revelation.

Well, there’s the clincher, Jacque thought. *I mean, really. If you’re going to hear a voice, what are the chances it would have a Romanian accent?* To Fane’s and evidently her surprise, she started to laugh, not just a giggle but a full-out, body shaking laugh. For some reason unbeknownst to Fane, it just suddenly struck her as funny. Of course she now knew it wasn’t just a voice, it was Fane. After all she didn’t know any other Romanians, and just to put the nail in the proverbial coffin, she asked in a soft, almost shy voice, *“Fane?”*

His heart stuttered at the sound of his name. Even though it wasn’t from her lips, she’d said it and it sounded so good

coming from her. A small amount of triumph settled over him and his wolf growled in contentment knowing his mate was thinking of him. He answered her honestly, wanting her to believe him without a doubt.

“Da, meu inimă. It is I.”

Fane held his breath, waiting for her response, scared that she would continue to try and pass this off as her lack of sanity. What would he do if she refused to take her place at his side? He hadn't even considered the idea of her not accepting him. He growled in response at the thought. Mates were bound to each other; there would never be another for either one of them. To Fane's knowledge there had never been one who had rejected their mate. It would be a devastating action for both and neither would ever be whole again.

That just wasn't acceptable, he decided. He would drag her back to Romania with him where she belonged, if it came to that.

Right, Fane, he told himself. That would really earn her trust. You can't just hit her over the head and drag her around by her hair, even though that would actually be the easier road. No, he was going to have to do this the honorable way and court her. Jacque deserved that, after all. She was his Luna, and would be Queen of the Canis lupus one day – she deserved his unwavering love and devotion. And she would get nothing less.

He continued to wait for her response. He thought about reaching out to her to find out what she was thinking, but up til now he had been giving her privacy, only intruding into her thoughts when he spoke to her. It would be a violation to listen to her when she didn't know that he could do so any time – he could also “see” the things she thought in her head. And as a gentleman he would not violate his Luna's privacy, mate or not.

Fane decided to let her be for now. She needed time to process the fact that the guy she met only briefly was somehow able to talk to her through her thoughts. That was a

lot to absorb. He would wait to see if she would seek him out. He only hoped that he and his wolf would be patient. The mate bond called to him and demanded an answer.

Chapter 7

Jacque's eyes snapped open at the revelation that was causing her to hyperventilate. Fane! The voice was Fane! Once he had answered her, she believed without a doubt that she wasn't just hearing a voice made up by her subconscious. It was someone real, tangible, and...well, hot! *Not that him being hot is important*, Jacque thought to herself. But it seriously didn't hurt.

No longer able to lie still, Jacque got up and went over to her window. She opened the blinds and looked across the street at the Henrys' house, wondering what Fane was doing. Wondering if he was wondering about her. *Oh, good grief*, she told herself. *You just met him, you don't even know him, and you're wondering if he's thinking about you? Do yourself a favor - get a Kit Kat and give yourself a break.*

She closed the blinds and leaned back against the wall, shutting her eyes. After taking a deep breath, she decided she needed to do something to keep herself occupied until Sally and Jen came back over. There was a pile of dirty clothes on the floor next to her closet, she grabbed the empty laundry basket, filled it, and carried it downstairs to the laundry room. Still not operating on all four cylinders, she didn't even bother to sort them out, she just threw her whites and colors together and tossed some detergent on top of them. She shut the washer lid and headed back into the living room.

"Okay," she said out loud. "What next?" She turned in a complete circle, letting her eyes roam over the room. The only thing she could see was that the living room needed to be dusted. She went into the kitchen and got supplies from under the kitchen sink and headed back to the living room. Trying to drag things out, she sprayed each item and carefully wiped them with the dusting cloth. By the time she was done, Jacque was sure the living room had never been so clean.

She put the dust cloth and spray away and then her clothes were ready to go into the dryer.

When she finally looked at the clock, she moaned as she realized it had only been an hour since she'd come downstairs. What was she going to do now? *I could go over to the Henrys' and see if they were done with mom's dishes*, she told herself. *Yeah, Sherlock, that wouldn't be obvious at all.*

Jacque headed back up to her room, wracking her brain for things she could do to keep her mind off you-know-who, at least until Sally and Jen were back. When she shut her bedroom door, her hand brushed up against the bathing suit she had hanging on the doorknob. "Okay, sun tanning it is," she said to herself.

Jacque grabbed the bathing suit and went to the bathroom to change. She ran a hand down her legs and decided they were smooth enough for just laying on a towel in the backyard. She looked in the mirror at herself, pleased enough, she supposed. She was a little on the short side at five foot one and a half inches, slender and muscular from playing on the girls' tennis team. She wasn't Beth from *Dog the Bounty Hunter* in the chest department, as Jen had so nicely pointed out, but she wasn't Grace of *Will and Grace* either. She figured a C cup wasn't anything to complain about. Her hair was her favorite thing about herself: auburn, curly, and wild. Most of the time she didn't attempt to tame it, but for sun bathing she decided to put it up in a ponytail.

The bathing suit was a bikini that she'd let Sally and Jen talk her into. Though, she did get her two cents in by buying a mismatched bottom and top. She figured if she liked two different bathing suits, why not buy half of each? *With that reasoning it's no wonder I'm hearing voices*, she told herself.

Overall, Jacque thought, *I don't look too shabby*. She slipped on her pink flip flops, grabbed her cell, iPod, towel, and sunglasses, and was out the back door.

Her backyard was very simple, just a square, and it didn't even have a fence around it. They didn't really need a fence. They didn't have a dog, or little kids to corral in, so when her mom had bought the house she'd never bothered to have one

built. There was a single tree growing smack dab in the middle of the backyard, so depending on the time of day Jacque either had to lie on the left or right side of the backyard.

The right side it is.

Jacque took her towel and laid it on the grass. She'd already put her ear phones in and set her iPod to shuffle – Pearl Jam was the band playing at the moment. She slid her sunglasses on and turned to sit down on her towel. It was then that she realized in choosing the right side of the backyard, she was directly in front of the Henrys' house. *Wait folks, it gets even better. It's the side of the house where Fane's bedroom window is.*

Bad, Jacque thought. This is very, very bad. I can get up and go lay on the left side of the back yard...in the shade... which makes no sense. Or I can lay here and look like I totally planned to put a bikini on and plaster myself in front of Fane's window like a centerfold. For the love of pigtails, could someone throw me a bone? Jacque's mind screamed.

She sat there debating for a minute or two, then threw her hands up and said, "To hell with it, I'm already down here. He can get an eyeful if he wants, and if he wants to know if I did it for his benefit he can just ask me." With a decided humph, Jacque laid back on the towel, arms by her side, feet flat on the ground, and knees slightly bent.

As she closed her eyes, she began to feel the warmth of the sun seep into her skin and calm her. She took some deep breaths and focused on the lyrics to the song now playing in her ears. It was "Untouchable" by Taylor Swift. She'd heard it a couple times before but had never really listened to it. Now as she heard the words, something inside her awoke.

Untouchable like a distant diamond sky

I'm reaching out and I just can't tell you why

I'm caught up in you, I'm caught up in you

*Untouchable, burning brighter than the sun
And when you're close, I feel like coming undone*

*In the middle of the night when I'm in this dream
It's like a million little stars spelling out your name
You gotta come on, come on, say that we'll be together
Come on, come on, little taste of heaven*

*It's half full and I won't wait here all day
I know you're saying that you'd be here anyway
But you're untouchable, burning brighter than the sun
Now that you're close, I feel like coming undone*

Jacque didn't really understand how she knew it, but she believed without a doubt that her future was with Fane. She wasn't sure how or why, or when, and at that moment he seemed very untouchable – she sure as hell was coming undone.

The song stopped and her phone started vibrating. For a moment she was a little disoriented, then she realized she was getting a phone call. She looked at the screen on her phone and it was Jen.

“Hello?”

“Got good news, got bad news. Won't charge you for either so which do you want first?” Jen answered.

“Slap me first, pat me on the back last,” Jacque told her.

“Bad news it is. I won't be back over to your house until nine at the earliest. My mom and dad are in one of their ‘we're a family, we need to eat at the table together, blah blah blah’ moods. So naturally, being the sweet little thing that I am, I didn't argue with them for twenty minutes or slam my door

and tell them how 1950s they were being. Nope, not me. I smiled sweetly.”

“Jen, you don’t do anything sweetly. How did you manage a smile?” Jacque retorted.

“Oh, shut up. That was the slap. The pat is I get to come over, even after the little fit that I didn’t throw,” she said with smug satisfaction.

“Try to keep your mouth shut between now and then so that you don’t have to call me later with something worse than a slap, okay?” Jacque told her.

“Okay, okay. Geez, who spit in your pizza?”

“I’ll give you the full details tonight, but suffice to say at least one piece has made its way into the puzzle.” Jacque thought about her words for a moment, then remembered a question Fane had asked her when he was “talking” to her. He had asked where she got her odd way of speaking. Did she speak oddly?

“Jen, do you think I speak oddly?” Jacque asked.

There was silence for a moment at the other end of the line. Jacque assumed either Jen was thinking or she had found something more interesting to pay attention to. Jacque was just about to ask again when Jen answered, “You do realize who you’re asking, right? ‘Cause I just asked you who spit in your pizza and you knew exactly what I meant. So, I’m just saying I might not be the best judge of any oddities you may possess.”

“True dat,” Jacque responded.

“I’ll see you tonight. Try not to do anything too crazy without me. You know how I like to watch,” Jen said, cackling as she hung up.

Jacque shook her head, laughing to herself about her friend’s sick, twisted sense of humor. She didn’t bother to turn her music back on, she just listened to the sounds around her. For the most part the only noises were the occasional bird or dog bark. Other than that it was a quiet summer day. As beads

of sweat ran down her collar bones she thought, *Let's qualify that. It's a quiet, hot, summer day.*

Jacque rolled over onto her stomach and closed her eyes, letting the heat and the sounds run over her. Before she realized it she had fallen asleep.

Chapter 8

Fane looked at his watch. It was half past noon. Sara had been gone an hour and he still hadn't heard Brian at all. There was an eight hour time difference between Coldspring and Romania, so it was eight thirty in the evening where his family was. He decided to call his dad while Brian and Sara were out. He had some questions that he thought should be answered before he had to start explaining things to Jacquelyn.

He dialed his father's cell phone number and listened to it ring.

"Da?" his father answered. This was the way he always answered, with a simple "yes." No "hello" or "this is", just yes. Something so small, but it made him homesick.

"Tată," Fane answered.

"Fane? Cum te simți?" his father asked him.

"English please, father, I'm trying to get in a better habit of not switching back and forth in conversation. I am good. How is mamă? How is the Pack?" Fane asked.

"Your mother is good, other than missing her pup. The Pack is good," his father responded.

Fane asked about the Pack for two reasons. The first was that he was to be Alpha one day and his father had been teaching him for as long as he could remember that the other wolves in the Pack were like his children. He was to love them, protect them, and care for them. Sometimes that meant feeding them, other times it meant disciplining them. So as Prince and future Alpha he knew it was his duty to make sure the Pack was well.

The second reason was because there were a lot of un-mated males in the Pack, and un-mated males were restless, aggressive, and for lack of a better term, stupid. It really was true that behind every great man was an even greater woman – it stood true for wolves as well. Until a male wolf was mated, his emotions were volatile; he tended to be restless, and prone

to wandering. All could lead to territorial battles and, needless to say, it could get messy. Once a male wolf bonded with his mate, all of those aggressive tendencies were balanced out by the gentle nature of his mate. It was not really known how it worked, but from what some males had said, it was like the better half of their soul was given back to them and they felt whole.

Fane had make sure his father didn't need him home if things were getting out of hand with the Pack.

"I need to ask you some questions about the mate bond," Fane told his father. "Does the mate have to be a *Canis lupus* or can she be human? What does it mean when you suddenly have more markings on you than before? What if your mate doesn't know anything about your world and won't accept you?" Fane was sounding a little frantic by the time he stopped talking.

"You're seventeen, you've been in America for less than twenty four hours, and you think you've found your mate?" his father asked him.

Fane heard his mother gasp in the background and begin speaking quickly in their native tongue. "Calm down, love. Let me find out," he heard his father tell her.

"I know how it sounds, Tatã," Fane told his father. "But I don't know what else it could be."

"Why don't you start from the beginning and then we will try to figure out if this is indeed your mate," his father suggested.

So Fane told him about how he had heard her thoughts the night he'd arrived. He told him about being able to "feel" how she felt and that her scent had nearly caused him to curl up at her feet and pant like a stupid pup. He told him that she'd spoken to his mind as well and figured out that Fane was indeed who she was hearing.

After Fane finished there was silence from the other end of the phone. For a second he thought they might have been

disconnected, but then his father broke the silence.

“A mate cannot be fully human; there has to be Canis lupus blood somewhere in her line. It can be generations back, but it has to be there in order for her life to be bound to yours. You know how long we live, and when you bind her to you she will take on your longevity as long as she has Lupi in her blood.” His father paused, then continued. “As for the markings, I hadn’t discussed this with you yet because I didn’t think you would find your mate before you graduated from high school. It’s very, very rare. I was over a century old before I found your mother. The markings of a male Canis lupus only change when he finds a mate – it is a way to tell all Canis lupus you have a mate.”

“Don’t you have to do the blood rites before you can be mate bonded? I mean, the markings changed after seeing her through a window!” Fane stated incredulously.

“Aranjare (settle),” Fane’s father told him. “This is something to rejoice over, not fret. We will figure out the details later. You have a year to woo her and help her understand our world before you come back to Romania.”

Fane was breathing a little easier. It was true that there was no rush for him to bond with her. Especially since she was right across the street where he could see her and know she was safe. His wolf wasn’t totally pleased with the idea of leaving his mate un-bonded, but he would wait and watch. Wolves were very patient hunters.

Fane was brought out of his thoughts when his father asked, “Did you happen to notice any marks on her anywhere?”

“Marks on her like the marks I have?” Fane asked.

“Well, you might not have because the female Canis lupus marks are more of a private thing. I don’t mean they are anywhere that couldn’t be seen if she had on a bathing suit, I mean private as in they are for her mate. The markings will match yours like a puzzle piece, but might not be in the same

location and usually cannot be seen by others if she has regular clothes on,” his father continued.

Fane felt a low growl in his throat as he realized his dislike at the idea of another male seeing Jacquelyn’s markings. Even if they were on her arm or leg, they were meant for him only.

“Fane? Fane, are you alright?” he heard his father ask him.

“I’m just a little...I don’t know what, I mean I’m seventeen, and the thought of another wolf seeing markings on a girl I barely know infuriates me. I’m not even out of high school,” Fane said with frustration and confusion.

“I know you are only seventeen, fiu (son), but you have to remember that when your wolf finds its mate he is no longer a juvenile – he becomes a full-fledged adult overnight. Your wolf expects you to step up and be ready to be the Alpha. You are meant to be because you are to protect her at all costs. Yes, you are only seventeen, but you are not a mere human, you are *Canis lupus*, you are Prince to your Pack, and you are Alpha,” Fane’s father told him.

Fane took some deep breaths to calm and compose himself. It wasn’t like him to get so upset over something he couldn’t change. His emotions seemed a little on edge today and he could only imagine it had everything to do with the sassy red head across the street.

“One more thing. I know that mates cannot usually go long periods without sharing their thoughts or being near one another without feeling discomfort from the separation. I haven’t had that since I discovered Jacquelyn. Why would that be?” Fane asked his father.

“You won’t begin to feel some effects of being mated until after the bond is completed through the blood rites. Until then neither one of you should have any problem being apart.”

“I wouldn’t say that,” Fane mumbled.

Fane’s dad continued, saying, “There is a reason this has happened to you so young. She is part human, which means she can’t phase and she is weaker for that. Maybe she will

need your protection in some way. Keep your eyes and ears open. Nothing happens by chance, there is purpose in everything.”

“But there are no Canis lupus in this area. What could possibly be a threat to her in this little, insignificant town?” Fane asked.

“Lesser words have preceded many a war, Fane,” his fathered answered ominously. “All will be well, fiu. Get to know her, be her friend. Keep your wolf in check and call me and keep me updated. Te iubesc (I love you), Fiul meu (my son).” And with that Fane’s father and Alpha hung up.

Fane sat there for awhile longer, going over in his head the things his father had told him. Jacquelyn had to have Canis lupus in her bloodline somewhere, and it was either very distant or a relative she did not know.

He heard the door open downstairs and caught Brian’s scent. He decided he needed to get some fresh air, preferably behind the handlebars of a motorcycle, and went downstairs in search of Brian. Maybe he would take him to a dealership to look at some used motorcycles.

Fane found Brian whistling an unknown tune in the kitchen while pouring himself some of the sweet tea.

“Hope you like sugar better than tea, because that’s about all you’re going to drink when you take a sip of that,” Fane told him with a smile.

Brian chuckled. “Yeah that’s how we do it in the south. It’s not really sweet tea, its tea flavored sugar.”

Fane laughed with him.

“I have a favor to ask, if you have time,” Fane started.

“Shoot.”

“My parents have given me money to buy a motorcycle but I need a ride to a dealership to look at some. Would you mind taking me to look at some bikes?” Fane asked.

Already nodding his head yes as he took a drink, Brian said, “Yeah, that’s not a problem. If you’re ready, I don’t have anything pressing. We can go now.”

“Ok, let me grab my phone. Give me just a sec,” Fane said as he headed toward the stairs.

When Fane got to his room, he picked up his phone and checked to make sure his wallet was in his back pocket. Then, just out of curiosity, he opened the curtains to glance out at Jacquelyn’s house.

Fane had to blink several times to get his brain to understand what it was seeing, and then he had to take slow, deep breaths to keep his wolf from growling possessively. For there, across the street to the right side of her yard, which, if she had a fence would be the backyard, was his Luna laying out in a skimpy bathing suit. That wasn’t the half of it. She was laying on her stomach and there at the top of her back, stretching out from shoulder to shoulder and up her neck to just below her hairline, were the markings that would fit his perfectly. Her markings were there on display for any male to see, not to mention her mom, if she came out. Without thinking, his mind reached for hers.

“You do realize that they only sold you ¼ of that bathing suit don’t you?” Fane said, trying to sound casual and not like the jealous monster he felt to be.

At first he didn’t get a response. As he was looking at her, he realized she must have fallen asleep, which was not a good thing because in this heat she’d burn terribly.

Fane focused on her and using an Alpha push, spoke, *“Jacquelyn, wake up!”*

Still, she did not move or respond. Fane was deciding whether or not to walk across the street and disturb her when she finally spoke to him.

Chapter 9

Jacquelyn heard Fane ask her if she had inadvertently bought only a ¼ of a bathing suit. *So he's a funny guy*, she thought. *Two can play at that game*. She'd been asleep up until that point, but as soon as he spoke to her she had woken up. For now, she continued to lie perfectly still, knowing he must be watching her. She didn't want him to know she had heard him. The second time he spoke to her she felt a push that made her want to obey him. *He soooooo did not just give me command*, she thought indignantly. She was surprised when he didn't respond to that thought. What Jacque didn't know was that she was blocking him because she didn't want him to be able to hear her.

It was a minute before she finally answered.

"I know it, right? And it still covers too much to give me a good tan with as few lines as possible," she retorted with a smirk.

Jacque heard him growl at her. Was he actually jealous? If so, jealous of what exactly? He didn't know her from Adam.

"I have told you before, you are my Luna," she heard him answer her thought. She realized then that she hadn't been trying to block her mind from his.

"And I'm telling you now I don't know what that means, and I'm not your anything!" she growled back.

"If nothing else could you at least be mindful of the fact that you are going to burn if you lay out in practically nothing and fall asleep." Fane sounded very annoyed.

What did he mean if nothing else? Was he implying that she was trying to lie out and show off her body to just any passerby? Jacque sat up and glared up at Fane's window, and sure enough, he was standing there staring at her. Frustrated with herself for allowing his disapproval to actually bother her, she stood up and with as much sarcasm as possible, curtsied to him, then picked up her things and marched back into the house.

“Meu inimă, did you just curtsy to me?” Fane asked in astonishment and amusement.

“Well, seeing as how you seem to think you deserve something from me, I thought I would indulge you just a little, but I assure you my intentions were completely rude!” Jacque responded.

Jacque heard him chuckle at her sass.

As Jacque walked into the house, she set her things on the couch and went to the kitchen to get a drink. She hadn't realized just how hot she had gotten while lying out in the sun, which didn't make her happy because it only confirmed what Fane had said. “I mean seriously, who is he, the bathing suit police?”

“No, micul incendiu (little fire). I am simply trying to look out for you. Who knows what wolves lie in wait to pounce on unsuspecting sun-bathing beauties?” Fane said knowingly.

“And just what is that suppose to mean? Do you always talk so vaguely?” she asked in exasperation.

Just then she realized that their whole conversation had been thoughts back and forth to one another. Man, had her life gotten weird...no, actually it wasn't just weird, it was bordering on bizarre.

“Don't you have something you need to be doing?” she asked him as she went upstairs to take a shower. She realized that even though all she had done was lay outside, she smelled like the outdoors and sweat.

“Actually, yes. I am going with Brian to look at motorcycles. My parents have given me the money to purchase one so I will be able to get around on my own,” Fane told her.

“Why not a car? And what if it rains, won't you get soaked?” Jacque asked.

“It's cold most of the time in Romania. Why would I want to be cooped up in a car when I could be on a motorcycle with

the sun on my face? And they make rain gear,” Fane explained.

“Oh. Well, I guess if you lived somewhere cold all the time, it would be nice to ride out in the sunshine,” she answered.

Jacque began gathering clothes to take to the bathroom. As she walked into the bathroom and closed the door she discovered she was reluctant to undress while they were talking through their thoughts. Somehow that felt way too intimate. As if sensing her discomfort, Fane asked her, *“Is something wrong? Did I do something to upset you...besides imply your bathing suit was a bit skimpy?”* Fane asked with little remorse.

“No, no, I’m fine. Just, um, got things to do is all. People and places, you know how it is,” she said awkwardly.

“Jacquelyn, why are you acting so strangely?” Fane asked.

Jacque rolled her eyes. Could he just leave it alone? If she had to spell it out for him she was going to be mortified. She could just hear herself explaining how she was sweaty from the sun and needed a shower and the thought of talking to him through their thoughts while she was butt freaking naked was just a tad beyond her comfort zone.

Fane must have caught her passing thoughts. Man, she really needed to learn how to block him out somehow.

“I will leave you alone since you have things to take care of. Just so you know, I may be a teenage guy, with teenage hormones, but I assure you I am not dishonorable, nor would I abuse our thought connection,” he said with firm conviction.

“I know you can hear my thoughts, but can you like, ‘see’ through my eyes?” she asked apprehensively.

“No, but I can see the things you think. Just as you can see what I think if you want. When your emotions are strong I feel you and hear your thoughts very loudly, even when you aren’t trying to communicate with me. You might want to bear that in mind,” Fane told her.

“How do I keep you out of my mind?” Jacque asked.

“All you have to do is imagine a wall in your mind between mine and yours. I will not be able to get past it. The same goes for me if I don’t want you to hear my thoughts.”

Jacque was surprised to find herself a little hurt at the idea of him not wanting her to hear his thoughts, but then she thought how absurd that was because everyone needed privacy.

“Okay, I’ll keep all that in mind. And since we are in mind reading 101, could you answer me this? Who else can you do this with?” Jacque asked, not realizing how jealous she sounded.

“No one, meu inimă, only you. You will not be able to do this with anyone else as well,” Fane stated possessively.

“Talk to you later, be safe,” Fane told her.

And just like that she “felt” him leave her, and fell instantly bereft. She undressed and, without looking into the mirror, got into the steamy hot shower, letting it wash the feeling away. It was silly to feel so empty without him in her mind, she knew that, and yet she couldn’t shake it off. It just seemed so natural to talk to him, like she had done it all her life. She found it so odd that she was jealous at idea of him talking to another girl through her thoughts. She had only known him a day, after all, but the thought irked her to no measure. *Ok, Jacque,* she told herself, *move on to another topic.* She hadn’t heard from Sally and figured she’d better call her to make sure she was still going to be able to come over.

She got out of the shower and toweled dry, flipping her hair over and drying it first, then standing upright to dry her body. Turning to look into the mirror, she froze. Then, without realizing she had done it, she reached for Fane’s mind. *“Fane, what the hell is on my back!”*

No answer.

Slowly calming down, she began to examine the design that looked like a tattoo. The thing ran from shoulder to

shoulder and up her neck. It was scrolled lines arching and curving, coming to a point at the nape of her neck, with definite places that appeared would fit into a puzzle. It was very beautiful and feminine – it was also very not there before she tanned. Had Fane done some Romanian voodoo on her? ‘Cause she would so do some voodoo up on his ass if he had.

He still hadn’t responded to her after a few minutes, so Jacque got dressed and combed out her wet hair and put mousse in it. She went back to her room, still trying to think about how the marks could have appeared on her back when her phone rang. For a fleeting moment she hoped it was Fane, but that would be ridiculous when he could just talk through his thoughts. Shaking her head in frustration, she answered the phone.

“So I’m thinking bikini, towel, tunes, and catching rays. You in?” Sally’s cheerful voice came through the phone.

“You’re a little late, Charlie Brown. I’ve already cooked, rotated, and cooked some more. I just got out of the shower. So I assume you are going to be able to come over soon?” Jacque asked, relief in her voice.

“That’s the rumor. You free?” Sally asked.

“Free, crazy, completely deranged...take your pick.” Jacque answered.

“I’m on my way over now, be there in five.” Sally hung up.

Jacque looked around her room and decided to pick up from the impromptu sleepover. She folded the blankets and laid them on the bed. No sense in putting them away since the girls were staying the night again. She picked up the dirty clothes on the floor and threw them in the laundry basket. Her mind was restless and she decided to write her thoughts out. Sometimes writing down what was floating around upstairs helped her put things in perspective.

She got out a notepad from school and opened to a blank page, grabbed a pen off her desk, and sat down on her bed and began to write.

I've met a guy. Not just any guy but a really unusual one. He's from Romania. He is beautiful, and he can talk to me through my thoughts, and I can talk back. It's so unreal. To top it all off, I have these strange markings on my back that came out of nowhere. I don't know what to even begin to think about the whole thing. But I know for the sake of my waning sanity I need to talk to him face to face and see if he will answer any of my questions. My other problem is I seem to be...

Jacque's phone beeped. She had a text message:

Sally: @ star bcks, frap moca?

Jacque: def.

Grateful that her friend could recognize a much needed caffeine binge when it was called for, Jacque turned back to her writing.

...jealous over a guy I barely know. I feel like we are somehow connected, like we've known one another our whole lives. I also feel like my mom knows something. She's been acting a little weird, or maybe I should say she's been feeling weird since I can feel her emotions. Funny, I haven't felt Fane's emotions when I've been around him – which has only been one time – and I haven't felt them when we've been "talking" either. I don't know if it can possibly get any stranger, but I'm thinking that it likely will....

Chapter 10

Fane and Brian were getting into the car when he felt Jacquelyn's alarm and heard her scream at him, "*Fane, what the hell is on my back!*"

For a brief moment he got a picture in her mind of her back, but he quickly shut her out, not wanting to intrude on her privacy. He decided then not to answer her, even though it broke his heart to leave her in a state of confusion and fear, but he felt like some things were better said face to face. Especially if you're going to be telling someone that they have Canis lupus markings on their body because they've found their werewolf mate they didn't know even existed. You know, the standard 'hey, let's get to know each other bit.'

He flinched a bit when she screamed and Brian asked if he was okay.

"Yeah, I'm good. Just had some ringing in my ears for a minute," Fane lied.

"So do you know where you want to go?" Brian asked.

"Just stop at the first dealership you see that has motorcycles. I'm not picky and I'm good at fixing them up, so it's okay if it needs a little work," Fane explained.

As they drove past Jacquelyn's house, he found himself looking at it, fighting the urge to slip into her mind and see how she was. It felt weird when she had called out to him; it was the first time she had done so without him prompting her first. It pleased his wolf that she was turning to him for help, he was her protector after all. He quickly reminded the preening animal inside that she didn't exactly have anywhere else to go. That got a growl out of him that he quickly disguised as a cough.

Brian, as requested, pulled into the first dealership he saw that had motorcycles out front. As Fane got out of the car, his eyes fell instantly on a solid black Honda shadow with chrome pipes and wide wheels. It was used but still looked to be in good shape.

Fane liked his bikes to be simple. Nothing flashy or fancy. He just wanted to ride, not show off.

A salesman came walking out into the heat and went immediately to Brian, the adult, and Brian pointed him in Fane's direction.

"Can I help you?" the salesman asked and in that same instant took a breath. Fane was positive he heard a low growl as the salesman abruptly stepped back, turning his head ever so slightly so that his neck was exposed to Fane.

Fane looked at him, briefly confused, and then it hit him. The thought nearly sent him to the ground: *Canis lupus*.

Brian, thankfully, had begun to wander around the car lot and was not paying attention, so Fane stepped toward the salesman, "Steve," his name tag said, and sniffed. Sure enough, he was a Grey.

Instinctively, Fane growled as his wolf perked up at the presence of another male Grey in an area Fane had deemed his territory. After all, he was not aware of any Greys in Coldspring.

The Grey named Steve asked, "Who are you? Why are you in the Alpha's territory?"

Alpha, Fane thought. *What Alpha is he talking about?* Fane didn't want to divulge too much to this Grey, in case he and his Alpha were a threat.

"I wasn't aware there were any Greys in this area," Fane stated vaguely.

"Who are you that you think you deserve to know what Greys are where? You're just a pup, and with a human at that," he spat at Fane.

Fane's wolf pushed to come out and he let him just a little. Power poured over him and the Grey felt it instantly, nearly bowing involuntarily as his wolf realized he was not more dominate than the "pup" he had so hastily named.

“I don’t have to dignify you with an answer, but just so you know what you have provoked, I will oblige you. I am the Prince of the Romanian Canis lupus. I am next in line to be Alpha and I submit to no one but *my* Alpha.” Putting as much push in his words as he dared without unleashing the full power of his line, he asked, “Who is your Alpha and how long has there been a pack of Greys in Coldspring?”

The Grey whined just a little but answered, “I have heard of your father. It is said he makes all Alphas bow just by his presence.”

“Answer my question, Steve. Now.” Fane glared.

“My Alpha is Lucas Steele. I have been a member of this pack for three years. I don’t know how long it has been active. Why are you here? You’re a teenager from another country. What could you possibly be doing in Coldspring, Texas?” Steve asked, bewildered.

“My business is not yours. Setting aside this interesting turn of events for a moment, please, I would like to purchase that black Honda Shadow. How much?” Fane asked.

“Don’t you want to test drive it?” Steve asked.

“No. How much?” Fane asked again.

“\$2,500. There is no warranty left on it. It has five thousand miles, the tires are new, never been in an accident,” Steve rattled off like a recording.

Fane pulled out his credit card and handed it to him. As Steve walked off with his parents’ credit card Fane realized he had just made a big mistake. Steve now had his father’s full name. He imagined this might be a moment when his fiery little Luna would say something along the lines of, “Go directly to jail, do not pass go and do not collect \$200.” Yes, she would definitely say something like that.

Brian wandered back over to Fane but Fane didn’t realize it until Brian said something. “So you find something to buy?”

“Yeah, actually. I’m going to purchase that black Honda Shadow. It looks to be in pretty good shape. Do you think you could take me to wherever it is that I get the license and whatever else I need in order to finalize the sale?” Fane asked.

“That’s not a problem. Let me know when you are ready,” Brian responded.

“Ok. Mulțumesc, Brian. I really appreciate your help,” Fane told him.

“You’re welcome,” Brian said with a smile.

Fane turned to see Steve coming across the lot toward him. He had some paperwork in one hand and Fane’s credit card in the other. He handed Fane the credit card first once he reached them.

“Could you step inside for a moment to sign these papers?” Steve asked Fane.

Fane simply nodded and started to follow Steve in the direction of the building. They stepped inside and just a few steps to the right was a table. Steve sat down, Fane did not. He simply leaned down and signed the places Steve had marked. Once everything was signed, Steve stood back up and handed Fane the keys. Before Fane turned to leave, Steve said, “I have a message from my Alpha.”

Fane turned back and looked Steve in the eyes. The less dominate Grey instantly dropped his gaze but continued. “He says don’t unpack.” With that Steve turned and walked away.

Fane pushed the door open and walked back out to where Brian stood.

“Okay, Brian, I’m ready if you are.” Fane was trying very hard to contain his anger. His wolf was not happy. There were other wolves in a territory he had claimed based on the information that there were no other Greys here. On top of that, his mate was in the same area, un-bonded. He would say things couldn’t get worse, but that would be a huge mistake when it came to talking about *Canis lupus*.

As Fane pulled into the driveway to the Henrys' house, he was pleased at how well the motorcycle ran. Brian had insisted they go straight to a motorcycle shop and buy a helmet since they didn't have one at the dealership. He opted for a full face helmet with a dark visor and bought a clear visor to change out for when he was riding at night. *It feels so good to be on a bike again*, Fane thought to himself. He parked behind Brian's car and locked his helmet and the helmet he had impulsively bought Jacquelyn on the side of his bike.

As he was walking to the front door, he saw Lilly pulling into her driveway across the street. He hadn't realized she left.

As she was getting out of her Volkswagen convertible, she turned and saw Fane and waved.

"Fane! Hey, I wanted to invite you over for dinner tonight," she hollered across the lawn. "The girls are having pizza. You are welcome to come if you don't mind hanging out with a group of teenage girls," she said with a wink.

Fane was a little surprised at the invitation but he was not about to miss an opportunity to spend time with Jacquelyn.

"I would be honored. Mulțumesc," Fane responded.

"Great. We'll order the pizza around five. Oh, and tell Brian and Sara they are invited as well. We'll make a night of it and play some games," Lilly said enthusiastically.

Fane couldn't really put his finger on it, but Lilly seemed a bit edgy. Maybe he was imagining it, but something was definitely off with her. She waved and turned to go into her house as he did the same.

Sara was sitting on the couch reading a book when he entered and he told her they were invited to Lilly's for pizza and games.

"Oh, that sounds great," Sara said excitedly. "I'll make some brownies to take. Do you like brownies?"

"Yes, I do actually. I'm going to excuse myself and go call my parents to say hello, if that's okay," Fane told her.

“Of course that’s fine. You don’t have to ask us, you are practically a grown man. As long as you aren’t selling drugs or going to all night raves and orgies, you do what you want. We trust you until you give us reason not to,” Sara said casually.

“Mulțumesc,” was all he said in response and then he turned to go upstairs to call his father and tell him what he had discovered today. He was also going to have to explain how he lost his temper and revealed his title, and gave the Grey his credit card with his Alpha’s name on it. Honestly, he’d been in Coldspring one day and he’d found his mate, met another Grey, found out about a pack that wasn’t supposed to even be here, and been threatened. Needless to say, it hadn’t been boring.

He dialed his father’s number for the second time that day. His father answered on the first ring,

“Colega ta este in pericol, (your mate is in danger),” were the first words Fane heard his father say.

Chapter 11

You did what?” Jacque interrupted as Lilly Pierce was telling her and Sally that she had invited Fane and the Henrys over for pizza.

“Hi, Sally,” Jacque’s mother said, ignoring her outburst, “You’re staying for dinner, right?”

“If that’s okay with you.” Sally answered sweetly.

“The more the merrier. We’re going to play games, too. It’ll be fun! Jen is coming too, isn’t she?” Lilly asked.

“Yes, mother. Now could you please tell me why you are so interested in Fane?” Jacque asked.

“Could you tell me what you have against him? Why do you have such an aversion to getting to know him?” her mom responded.

Jacque just didn’t get it. Maybe her mom thought that because she and Trent had split up, pushing another guy on her would help her move on. Yes, it had been kind of hard on Jacque, they did date for almost two years. But hadn’t her mom noticed that she pretty much had moved on? It’d been like two months since she’d even seen Trent and she barely thought about him. In fact, in the past twenty four hours she hadn’t thought about him at all. She decided to let it slide for now, she knew a losing battle when she saw one.

Jacque looked at Sally and motioned for her to go upstairs, “We’ll be upstairs, mom. Jen probably won’t be here until later. She said she would have to eat with her parents, but hopefully she’ll make it for the game portion of the evening,” Jacque said in mock excitement.

“Keep up the attitude, Jacquelyn, and see where it gets you,” Lilly said sternly.

Lilly very rarely got cross with Jacque so that was when she knew it was best to double-time it up the stairs before her big mouth got her working in the bookstore every Friday and Saturday night for her entire senior year.

Once in Jacque's room, Sally sat cross-legged on the floor looking through Jacque's CD collection. She picked out Jacque's favorite Evanescence CD and put it in the stereo. Once the music was playing loud enough to keep prying ears away, she looked at Jacque and said, "So, let's hear it. What happened when Jen and I left today?"

Jacque thought about the moment that she'd realized the voice she was hearing was Fane. When he had spoken to her in Romanian she had no more doubt that it was indeed his beautiful voice in her mind.

"Well, after you guys left I laid down on my bed to just chill, ya know, catch my bearings. As I was laying there the voice in my head came back. He asked me if I was scared and told me that hadn't been his intention," Jacque explained.

"He?" Sally asked. "So it's Fane? The voice is Fane?"

Jacque nodded and added, "I finally confirmed it when he spoke to me in Romanian, and honestly, Sal, if you're going to hear voices why on earth would you hear one that speaks in Romanian?"

"Well, duh, because you have a secret fantasy about running away with a gorgeous Romanian noble to his beautiful ice castle." Sally said, a hint of wistfulness in her voice.

"Oh, of course. I completely overlooked that very plausible answer," Jacque said, rolling her eyes.

"So how long did you guys 'talk'?" Sally asked and when she said "talk" she put her hands up, making the sign for quotations.

"After he spoke to me in Romanian I asked if it was Fane, ya know, just for clarification purposes."

"Definitely good to be clear on these matters," Sally interrupted.

"Well, when he confirmed it I just kind of shut down. I didn't want to 'talk' to him. I needed to do something, so I got

up and picked up my room and dusted the living room,” Jacque explained.

“So all your mom needs to do to get you to clean is find some Romanian foreign exchange student to go all mystic mind-reading on your butt. Huh, who knew?” Sally said in amusement.

“Yeah, yeah, whatever. Then I decided to get some sun. So I lay out in the backyard. I don’t know how long I was out there before I heard his voice again. This time he was not mad, but sort of frustrated or something.” Jacque said, remembering how his voice had sounded in her mind.

“He had the nerve to point out how skimpy my bikini was by asking me if I knew they only sold me one quarter of my bathing suit!” Jacque told Sally in disbelief.

“Oh, Jen is going to love this – a Romanian hottie with a sense of humor. Brilliant and hot to boot!” Sally said, grinning to herself. Then she paused a minute in thought.

“Wait, so he was looking out his window at you?” she asked.

“Yep, so you know what I did?” Jacque asked.

“Please tell me you didn’t flip him off or moon him, or some other terribly twisted suggestion that Jen would have offered,” Sally said worriedly.

“No. Although, those all sound like great ideas. I simply stood up gave him a good ol’, southern curtsey and marched myself to the house. *After* I graciously explained that I would have preferred the bathing suit to not cover so much,” Jacque said, laughing.

Sally rolled her eyes at her. “Remind me never to be in a lion’s den now that I know you like to taunt them.”

“Oh come now, my dear Watson. Are you to tell me you are afraid of lions and tigers and bears,” Jacque started.

“Oh my,” Sally finished, putting her hands on either side of her face, pretending to look fretful.

Both girls laughed at the silly antics that seemed to keep them sane. Jacque pulled her hair up into a ponytail, not thinking about the shirt she was wearing, and as she turned to grab a hair band she heard Sally gasp. She looked at her friend and realized her eyes were on her neck and back. Jacque had forgotten that she had purposefully worn a shirt with a low back so she could show Jen and Sally the markings.

“Oh, did I forget to mention those?” she said nonchalantly.

“What the hell, Jac! When did you get that?” Sally asked in disbelief.

“Well, let’s see. If I remember correctly, after ya’ll left I downed a bottle of Crown, ran to the nearest tattoo parlor, and had some dude with piercings in every visible body part named Snake give me this awesome ink. I just totally forgot to mention it,” Jacque said sarcastically and then added, suddenly sounding tired, “I don’t know where it came from. When I came up to take a shower after lying out in the hot sun it was just there. I kind of had a mini melt down. I screamed at Fane, but he never answered me, which tells me he is the guilty party involved.”

“So now he’s not only doing his mind voodoo, but body voodoo too,” Sally said, and then giggled as she realized how it sounded.

“You know what Jen would say,” Jacque started just as her bedroom door flew open and Jen walked in.

“Depends on what is called for, my dear. But do tell, what exactly smart-ass comment am I supposed to be making?” Jen said dramatically.

“Fane has done body voodoo on Jacque,” Sally said in a tattle tale voice.

“Ooooh, was it good?” Jen asked huskily.

“Good freaking grief. She doesn’t mean like, physical voodoo, pervert.”

Jacque turned around to show her the markings on her back.

“I guess he decided to forgo the whole ‘hey, will you wear my class ring’ and straight into ‘let’s get body art together,’” Jen said, studying the markings.

“What, you think maybe he has some...” Jacque trailed off. Then she remembered when they were at the Henrys’ she had noticed a tattoo that ran up the side of Fane’s neck. She had totally forgotten it because it just sort of went with the whole biker thing he had going on.

“Stink ya’ll. He did have a tattoo on his neck. I saw it when we were at the Henrys’, but that doesn’t mean it matches this one,” Jacque told them, looking for reassurance.

“No, it most definitely does not mean they match,” Sally agreed, albeit not very convincingly.

Just then Jacque turned her head and cocked it to the side at Jen. “What are you doing here? I thought you said nine at the earliest.” Jacque asked her.

“Well, I just happened to mention that you were a little depressed about the whole Trent thing and really needed some girl support and yada yada yada. My mom totally swallowed it whole,” Jen confessed.

“That’s just great, Jen. Now your mom thinks I’m all torn up like a kicked pup about Trent and I’m not! I’m totally over him...aren’t I?” Jacque asked.

She started thinking back over the two years she and Trent had dated. Even though they had only been sophomores and juniors in high school, their relationship had been pretty intense. Then out of nowhere Trent had come over and told her they needed a “break.” Jacque politely told him not to treat her like an idiot and just call it what it was – it was over. It literally was out of nowhere. The day before they’d been hanging out on the couch and he had actually told her he thought he might be in love with her. When he left her house he told her he would call her that night and he never did. The

next time she heard from him, he came over to call it off. Jacque hadn't seen or heard from him since.

Thinking about him was really making her start to miss him. He really was a great guy and they had had a lot of fun together. He was tall, muscular from lifting weights, had messy wavy hair that he wore just long enough to be wild, and had unusual grey eyes. He liked to goof off, but he was always a gentleman and could be pretty intense sometimes. They dated for quite awhile before their relationship got physical and when she told him that sex wasn't on the agenda he was completely okay with it.

"I don't like where your thoughts are at the moment, Luna," Jacque suddenly heard.

She had forgotten that Fane told her – when her emotions were strong he felt them even if she wasn't broadcasting them to him.

"Well then, I guess you should knock before entering," Jacque told him harshly.

"Who is this Trent? What does he mean to you? When and why was he kissing you?" Fane asked in quick succession.

"Ok, you listen up and you listen good, you little Romanian, voodoo-casting, mind reading, nosy -" Jacque stumbled for a minute, looking for a word and when she didn't find one she lamely finished with, *"person. I am NOT your loona or whatever you call me. You have no right knowing my business and I don't owe you an explanation. So, so just... grrrrr!"* She was so frustrated because she wanted to tell him to take a hike but a huge part of her rebelled against it because she wanted him with her. She was absolutely nuts.

Acting like he hadn't heard a word she said, Fane asked again, *"So who did you say Trent was?"*

Jacque huffed in exasperation.

"Are you talking to the Romanian hottie?" Jen asked.

Jacque nodded. "He heard me thinking about Trent and wants to know who he is."

"Why does he care...oooh," Sally said with a thoughtful look. "He's got the hots for you."

"Aww, man. Why does Red always get the hotties?" Jen whined.

"Hold on girls, give me a sec," Jacque said.

"Oh, by all means. Don't mind us, the non-vooodoo freaks. We'll just hang out while ya'll make out mentally," Jen smarted off, and Sally burst out laughing.

"That's a good one," Sally told her as they bumped fists.

Jacque just rolled her eyes at them.

Turning her attention back to Fane, she had a feeling he wasn't going to drop it so she just decided to tell him.

"Trent is the guy I dated for the past two years. We broke up two months ago."

Fane was quiet for a moment, then he said, *"I'm sorry for your pain because of that, but I will not deny my pleasure in knowing I will not have to convince him it was in his best interest to take his intentions elsewhere."*

Jacque was a little taken aback by his honest comment.

"And why exactly would you do that?"

"Because I intend to court you myself, and that would be most difficult if you had affections for another, don't you think?" Fane asked her.

Jacque looked at the clock on the wall and realized it was five fifteen. The Henrys and Fane were supposed to be coming over in fifteen minutes.

"So, I guess you are going to be over in a few minutes," she said more as a statement than a question.

"Yes, I am looking forward to seeing you again. Is that okay with you, Jacquelyn?" Fane asked.

Jacque thought about it for a minute and couldn't deny the butterflies in her stomach at the anticipation of getting to see him again. She really needed to get some medication, she decided.

She heard Fane laugh and assumed he must be listening since she kept forgetting to try and put the wall up he had explained to her earlier.

"I actually have some questions I need to ask you, so yeah, it's okay," Jacque told him honestly.

"I'll see you in a few minutes then, Meu inimă." he told her.

Chapter 12

Fane had taken a shower after getting home from his motorcycle ride. He didn't want to smell like the outdoors when he went to Jacque's house. He found it amusing that he was so suddenly conscious of himself now that he'd met his mate. He so wanted her approval, as did his wolf.

He actually made an attempt to comb his hair out of his face, but it just fell right back in front of his left eye.

He had chosen a deep red, polo style shirt. It contrasted nicely with the markings on his neck, which at the moment he thought looked pretty cool. He grabbed his phone and wallet and put them in his back pockets and headed downstairs.

Sara and Brian were waiting in the living room. Sara had the brownie pan in her hands and Brian was carrying some games, one of which Fane recognized as Dominoes. This he was familiar with because his family liked to play.

He went over to Sara and took the brownie pan from her, simply saying, "I will take these for you."

Sara smiled at him in appreciation.

"Ready?" Brian asked them.

Both Sara and Fane nodded yes.

Sara knocked on Lilly and Jacquelyn's door, and he felt his neck markings sting just a little as he turned and saw a car driving slowly by. Fane let his wolf out just enough to see who was driving abnormally slow past his mate's house. Fane was on edge. He now knew there were other Greys in the area and his father had informed him that Jacquelyn was in danger. He'd also received an anonymous phone call from a wolf claiming to be Alpha of the Coldspring pack, stating that Jacque had already been claimed by another wolf and that Fane was to leave immediately.

Jacque was the one who answered the door and Fane couldn't help the smile that came across his face. She was, after all, his fiery miracle. He could have had to wait centuries

before he found her and all it had taken was a mere seventeen years. How he was blessed.

“Come in, ya’ll,” she said politely.

Obediently, they all filed into the entry way. She pointed them in the direction of the kitchen and Fane could smell the aroma of the already delivered pizza.

“Hi, you guys,” Lilly greeted them. “I’m so glad you could come over!” Lilly and Sara hugged. Jen and Sally were already filling their plates when Lilly looked at them, “What, ya’ll couldn’t wait on the guests?”

“Hey, we were doing you guys a favor,” Jen said.

“Oh, really,” Lilly said. “And just exactly what favor is that?”

“Ya know, testing out the product, making sure it’s safe. Would hate to unknowingly poison our Romanian guest, although it would make for a great headline,” Jen answered.

“Jen, do you always have to say what you are thinking? Have you ever thought to yourself, ‘Hey self, maybe I should keep my trap shut. Yeah, good idea self?’” Jacquelyn glared at her best friend.

“You’re just cranky because you’ve been thinking about Trent,” Jen stated, snotty-like.

Fane couldn’t help the low rumble in his chest that escaped at the name of Jacquelyn’s all too recent old flame.

Lilly’s head snapped around to look at him. Fane cocked his head to the side as his wolf perked up at her perceptive gaze. *Interesting*, Fane thought to himself, *she knows something*.

Jacquelyn caught that last thought. “*She knows something about what?*”

Fane looked away from Lilly and turned to look at his Luna’s confused face. He was going to have to tell her. If not tonight, then soon, and he was going to have to talk to Lilly.

Something told him that she was not unaware of who and what he was.

“Fane, what are you thinking about?” Jacque asked again.

“We will need to talk later, Jacquelyn, and your mom needs to be present as well,” Fane told her.

“There are paper plates there on the counter,” Lilly pointed out. “And cups with ice in them. The drink choices are lined up for you. Dig in!”

Everyone formed a line and began to fill their plates. No one talked for a few minutes as they gathered their food and drinks. Finally they were all seated at the dining room table.

Fane noticed that Jen and Sally had managed to maneuver it so that Jacquelyn and he had to sit next to each other. He found this amusing.

“So, are you kids looking forward to starting your senior year? Do you know what classes you will take?” Brian asked.

Mouths full of pizza they all nodded simultaneously. Jen was the first to be able to talk and naturally had something interesting to add. She didn’t disappoint. “Naturally, I’m taking Anatomy and Physiology.”

“Really, is that because you like...” Brian started to ask.

But Sally and Jacque managed to interrupt quickly. “Don’t go there,” they both spit out.

“Because I like science?” Jen finished for him. “Nope, ‘cause I like boys, silly.”

Lilly rolled her eyes and Fane coughed on his pizza. He was surprised by her candidness. Jacque looked over at Fane and he noticed her face was red as the fire he named her.

He winked at her, and that only caused her face to redden more.

“Just what is your favorite subject, savuroase mea fata (my spicy girl)?” he asked her.

She was just taking a drink when he asked her this and she nearly spewed it out of her mouth.

“Are you okay, Jacquelyn?” Fane asked her innocently.

She glared at him as she answered, “Fine, thank you.”

“I will have you know that I prefer contact sports to classes. I find that a little physical violence is good for the soul,” Jacque thought with a smirk.

“Like I said you’re savuroase mea fata,” Fane told her.

She looked at him questioningly but said no more.

“So Lilly, how is the bookstore doing?” Sara asked her.

“Great! Since I’ve hired more staff I’ve been able to catch up on my inventory and start putting together some other ideas that I have been brain-storming, like maybe putting in a coffee shop and a gift section. You know, just more things to help bring in a variety of customers,” Lilly told her.

“Mom, I didn’t realize you were planning all this,” Jacque said.

“Well, you’ve kind of been preoccupied this summer and I’ve been at the store a lot. I was going to tell you about it, but time just seems to get away from me.”

Fane caught the implication that when Lilly said she had been preoccupied, she was referring to the whole break-up thing. *So apparently this whole Trent thing was been a bigger deal than Jacque let on,* he thought to himself.

“Does it really matter to you that much?” Jacque asked him.

Man, he really needed to work on blocking his thoughts, or he was going to get himself into trouble.

“Be patient with me, Jacquelyn. I will explain things soon and then you might be able to understand why I react the way I do to some things pertaining to you,” Fane told her.

After everyone finished eating they cleared the table and picked out a game Fane had never heard of called, *What's yours like?*

Jen pulled out the directions and began to read them,

“In this game, all players except the one in the hot seat look at a guess word and then creatively describe what theirs is like. They might be telling about their swimsuit, neighbor, closet, hair, or any of the other 300-plus words in the game. The player in the hot seat then tries to link all the clues together to figure out what is being described. The best part about this game is that the hilarious clues come from the people who play the game. The player who guesses his or her word with the fewest number of clues wins.

What do you think players are describing with these clues?

Mine keeps getting bigger.

I compare mine with others.

My wife likes mine.

I never see mine.

I receive mine once a month.

You wouldn't believe what I do for mine.

Mine disappears too fast.

The answer is: Pay check.”

Fane realized right away this was going to be a game that Jen enjoyed. It obviously pleased her to cause Jacquelyn as much embarrassment as possible. He was actually looking forward to seeing her squirm.

“Okay, who's going to be in the hot seat first?” Brian asked.

“I'll be in the hot seat first,” Lilly answered.

“Jacque, you pull out the answer and say your first clue, then pass your card to the next person,” Brian told her.

Jacquelyn pulled out the card and, sure enough, her face turned red. *Oh yes*, Fane thought, *this was going to be fun*.

“Mine is,” Jacquelyn paused, “curly.” She still couldn’t keep from turning red.

Fane saw the answer in her head and winked at her.

Sally was next. “Mine is long.”

Sally handed the card to Sara, who said hers was like chocolate – smooth and dark and Brian said his was the color of sand.

Finally it was Jen’s turn, and Fane could tell everyone was a little nervous about what she would come up with.

“Mine is silky to the touch,” Jen said with a wink at Fane.

Fane felt Jacquelyn’s wave of jealousy like a tidal wave. He cocked his head to the side and studied her. *Interesting*, he thought, *she doesn’t like Jen flirting with me*. Her head snapped around to glare at him and he realized she had heard what he was thinking.

“*Relax, my Luna. I assure you I am all yours*,” Fane told her.

“*Oh, this coming from the Romanian who is jealous of a boy I’m no longer dating. Not to mention you and I are not together, so it’s really of no consequence*,” Jacquelyn told him in a huff. “*It’s your turn by the way*,” she added.

Fane looked over at Jen and realized she was holding the card out to him. She looked at him knowingly. Apparently she had picked up on the fact that Jacquelyn and he were conversing.

Fane looked at the answer on the card and debated what to say that wouldn’t embarrass him too badly, but the choices were not good. He could go with straight, short, or black. All those options pretty much could be taken, as Jen would no doubt do, to have very un-innocent connotations.

“Mine is,” *Well*, Fane thought, *if you gotta go down, do it with a bang*, “short.” And with that, everyone, including Jacquelyn, lost their composure. It was obvious that Jen knew all his choices were pretty poor and had been waiting for him to choose to run with it.

“Nice,” Jen said, putting her hand up for a fist bump with Sally.

In all the commotion, Fane just couldn't help himself and looked up at Jacquelyn, who was giggling wildly. He raised one eyebrow at her, “*Did I amuse you, savuroase mea fata (my spicy girl)?*” Fane asked her.

All Jacquelyn did was wink at him and it about did him in. She was a joy to his heart and she was all his. Now he just had to convince her of that...and quite possibly her mom as well. Fane had thought about whether to talk to Lilly and Jacquelyn tonight, but as the evening carried on he decided to talk to his father again and perhaps he'd found more out that would help him make the safest decision for his mate.

The evening turned out to be a lot of fun and laughs. Sometimes the girls laughed so hard they had tears streaming down their faces. At one point Sally had fallen out of her chair, laughing so hard because the answer to the question had been “tires on your car,” and naturally, Jen had not been disappointed when she said hers were round. When it was Fane's turn, he realized a little too late that his vehicle only had two wheels, so his response was, “Mine has two.” Which resulted in Jen laying her head on the table and laughing so hard her whole body shook, and Sally laughed so hard she fell out of her chair, which brought the laughing to an all time high. *It's wonderful*, Fane thought. *Even if we're enjoying making our answers sound like they're about certain parts of our anatomy. What can you expect from teenagers with a game called “Mine is like”?* The whole evening made Fane feel at home because his family was close like this. They often got together and ate and played games, or just gathered around the fire to talk.

As the evening came to a close, they began to say their goodbyes. All the girls hugged. Fane walked past Jacquelyn to the front door. Then he turned to her and asked, “Could I talk with you a moment? I won’t keep you from your friends long.”

Jacquelyn turned to her mom and girlfriends and said, “I’ll be outside for just a minute, okay?”

“Okay,” Lilly said.

“Don’t hurry on our account. You hate to rush these kinds of things the first time around,” Jen commented.

Sally hit her on the arm and told her to keep her trap shut.

Fane put his hand on Jacquelyn’s lower back to gently guide her to the porch. He felt a shudder go through her as he touched her. “*Mine,*” his wolf told him.

Once outside Jacquelyn turned to him, looking up into his face with curiosity and asked, “So what do you need to talk to me about?”

It feels so good to be this close to her, Fane thought. *She completes me and fills this void I didn’t even realize was there.* All he really wanted to do in that moment was wrap her in his arms and hold her, take in her scent, mark her as his.

Fane shook off the thoughts so he could answer her question.

“There is much I need to talk with you about, but I don’t think tonight is a good time. I’m not trying to be cryptic, but I need to talk to my father about some things. I would, however, like to take you out if you would do me the honor.”

Jacquelyn looked at him blankly and blinked a few times.

“So what I’m hearing you say is that you have information that I need to know, but you’re not going to tell me just yet. And with all this bizarre stuff...well bizarre to me, you want to go out on a date, like everything is just rosy?” she asked him, sounding astonished.

“Pretty much,” Fane responded.

“Well, I can’t very well hold a gun to your head and make you tell me. Although, Jen would think that a perfectly acceptable response. Then again, Jen also thinks going to football practice and lying out in her bikini is amusing so, ya know, gotta keep it all in perspective,” Jacquelyn explained.

“Okay, I’ll go out with you. When is our little adventure and how should I dress?” she asked.

“Tomorrow, wear something comfortable to ride on the motorcycle and don’t worry, I bought you a helmet.”

“You did what?” she asked in disbelief. “You were that sure I would say yes?”

Fane stepped closer to her, lowering his face towards hers. He whispered, “I felt my chances were pretty good. I can be very persuasive when I need to be.”

Fane stayed there a minute longer, but decided it best that he back away from her a little because he was very tempted to kiss her. She shook her head as if to clear it when he stepped back, and looked at him with what he thought might be longing in her eyes.

Time to go, Fane told himself. He took her hand and lifted it to his lips, never breaking eye contact with her.

“Thank you for a wonderful evening. I truly enjoyed your company, my Luna,” Fane said quietly.

Jacquelyn was having trouble getting her brain to tell her mouth what to say but she finally spit out, “Me too.”

Fane didn’t want to leave her. It was against his instincts and his wolf growled at the thought. She was supposed to be with him, where he could take care of her and keep her safe. But it wasn’t time yet, so he would have to take advantage of the time they did spend together and soak up her presence. He leaned in quickly and took a deep breath. Then he blew gently next to her ear. She shivered. What Jacquelyn didn’t know was that he wasn’t trying to be sensual by blowing next to her ear –

he was putting his scent on her so other Greys would know she was his.

The scent wouldn't last long, only a day or so. The only permanent way to put his scent on her was to complete the bond. Unfortunately, they weren't quite there yet.

With that, Fane turned away from his mate and walked back to the Henrys'. At the door, he turned one last time and found her still standing there, watching him. He lifted his hand to his mouth and blew her a kiss, sending her a thought. *"Sweet dreams, meu inimă. Dream of me. I will be dreaming of you."*

Chapter 13

Jacque stood on her front porch, staring as Fane retreated to the Henrys'. She wanted to call him back, didn't want to spend a second without him. *Get a grip, woman.* She took a few deep breaths, trying to clear her mind, and when she did she noticed the subtle scent of woods and spice. Strange, but the scent called to her, comforted her, like she could wrap herself in a blanket of it.

She took one last look at the Henrys' house and turned to go in.

"Mom," she hollered. "I'm back in."

"Okay, the girls took some brownies upstairs. Are you okay? Need to talk about anything?" her mom asked.

"No, I'm good," Jacque told her. "Oh, there is one thing. Fane asked me out on a date for tomorrow night. That okay?"

Lilly looked at her daughter, trying to decide if she thought it a good idea for her daughter be with him. After all, she did know who and what Fane was, not that anyone else knew that. Although, she was beginning to think that Fane might suspect something.

"Yeah, that's fine. You two know what you're going to do?"

"Not yet," Jacque answered, then went upstairs to give the latest news to her two partners in crime.

Jacque opened her bedroom door to find Jen and Sally lying on her bedroom floor, happily munching on the brownies Sara had brought over.

"Soooo, did he confess his undying love for you and ask you to run away to his Romanian castle?" Sally asked in a wistful voice.

"Oh my gosh," Jacque said sarcastically. "How did you know?"

“I’m just good like that. Ya know, with the knowing the future and what not,” Sally answered.

“Yeah, yeah. You’re a real gypsy,” Jen told her.

“So, do we have to beat it out of you or are you going to confess willingly? ‘Cause you know I’m into the whole torture thing, it’s how I roll,” Jen said, sounding absolutely sure of herself.

“Well, he told me that we had things to talk about but that tonight wasn’t the night to do it. He wanted to talk to his father first, whatever that means. Then he asked me out on a date, and then he leaned in close to me...” Jacque started to explain, but Jen interrupted.

“He kissed you?! Was it good? Were his lips soft? Were his lips closed or were they slightly parted like he might want to wrestle with...” Jen asked rapidly, not even taking a breath.

“Step back, Don Juan. Don’t even finish that sentence, let me,” Jacque scolded.

“Well, if he didn’t kiss you then lie to me so I can live vicariously through your pretend love life,” Jen told her with a pout.

Jacque ignored that comment and continued with her story. “So he leaned in close and at first I thought he was going to kiss me, but then his head went slightly to the right and his mouth was right next to my ear. He blew on my neck.”

“Why?” Sally asked confusedly.

“I know, right? I don’t know. I do know I nearly grabbed him by the shirt and kissed him myself. He must have been blocking his mind from mine because I didn’t pick up anything.”

“Wicked,” Jen said, looking thoughtful.

“Did you say ‘yes’ to going out on a date with him?” Sally asked Jacque.

“All I got to say is if she said no, she might not want to go to sleep tonight, ‘cause I’m going to dye her hair blonde to compliment her on being a dumb ass,” Jen told them.

“Uh, Jen. You’re a blonde,” Jacque pointed out.

“No, not really. God just got it wrong and it was too late to change once He noticed.”

Sally shook her head and said, “Sometimes, Jen, I really worry about you.”

Jen didn’t say anything more.

“Well, put away your hair dye you overreacting freak. I said yes. I asked him what I should wear and he said just something to be comfortable riding a motorcycle. Just when I was going to tell him I didn’t have a helmet, he said not to worry – he had already bought me one!” Jacque told them.

“Yummy,” Jen said. “Confidence is so sexy.”

“You think anything is sexy,” Sally retorted.

“Not true. Guys driving those hybrid cars are so not sexy,” Jen told her.

“Is she serious?” Sally asked Jacque. “I mean, who thinks of stuff like that?”

“I’ve found that if you just nod your head while she’s talking, she eventually wears herself out,” Jacque said with a smile.

“Oh, and then when he was walking to the Henrys’ he turned and blew me a kiss and told me to have sweet dreams, that he would be dreaming of me!” Jacque finished.

“Oh, that is so freaking romantic!” Sally exclaimed as she rolled over onto her back, kicking her legs in the air and squealing.

Jacque couldn’t disagree, but it also felt surreal. She had to admit he’d successfully gotten her to stop thinking about Trent. How could she when this gorgeous Romanian hunk was claiming she was his – whatever it was he called her.

“Yeah, it’s romantic,” Jacque said. “But there’s definitely the proverbial other shoe that’s going to drop sooner or later.”

“Oh, don’t be so pessimistic,” Jen told her. “Maybe he’s the one, you know, like in those romantic movies where a person has one true soul mate. I mean, he can talk to you telepathically, so it could happen.”

Jacque couldn’t argue with Jen’s assessment of the situation. *Anything is possible at this point*, she told herself.

Jacque found herself stretching and yawning. She looked at the clock on her phone and saw that it was eleven thirty. Man, she didn’t realize how late it had gotten. They’d been having such a good time playing games that time had flown.

“I’m gonna crash, ya’ll. Here are your blankets,” Jacque told them as she handed them out.

“Yeah, you’d better go to sleep. You need to look your best. Bags under your eyes just doesn’t say, ‘Hey, throw me on the floor and take me’,” Jen said.

“Yes and that is so the look I was going for. How ‘bout I just wear fishnet stockings with thigh-high boots and a sheer bra? Do you think that would look too desperate?” Jacque asked innocently.

“I’m just sayin’.” Jen shrugged her shoulders.

Jacque walked out of her bedroom shaking her head. She headed to the bathroom to brush her teeth and put on the tank top and boxer shorts she had left there the night before. When she took off her shirt, she turned around and held out a hand mirror to look at the marks on her back and neck.

She realized as she studied it that the markings on her neck looked like they would actually fit into Fane’s like a puzzle piece. As Jen would say, “Wicked,” Jacque muttered.

She felt a shiver go down her spine and quickly shoved on her tank top before realizing it wouldn’t cover the markings on her shoulders. The last thing she needed was her mom to see them and start asking questions, especially since Jacque didn’t

have any answers. She brushed her teeth and washed her face and darted across the hall to her bedroom. Going to her closet, Jacque took off the tank and Jen saw the marks for the second time. Almost if talking to herself, she said, “This is really happening, isn’t it?”

“I’m afraid so, sweet girl. There’s nothing to do but go with the flow or sink fighting the current,” Sally said, using her best Mary Poppins voice.

Jen looked at her and narrowed her eyes, “If you bust out in ‘Just a Spoonful of Sugar’ I’m going to duct tape your mouth closed.”

“You really should seek help for that temper of yours. You know, they have medicine that would help,” Jacque told her, trying to sound gentle as if talking to an unruly child.

Jen simply flipped them both the bird and changed into her sleep clothes.

Jacque turned off the lights as they all lay down to sleep. They were quiet for awhile, but just as Jacque was drifting off, she could feel the waves of worry coming off of Sally.

“Sally,” Jacque said. “It’s all going to work out, remember? We’re all too stubborn to accept any other outcome.”

Sally didn’t respond so it was quiet again. Then Jacque spoke up once more, “Jen, seriously. You didn’t have some smart ass comment right when we needed it?”

Jen was quiet. Jacque and Sally seemed to be holding their breath, waiting for their outspoken friend to work her magic.

Jen finally answered, “I was thinking about the game we were playing tonight and about the one where the answer was tires on your vehicle. When Fane said he had two, I so wanted to ask him if they were big.”

And just like that the atmosphere lightened and the three girls laughed until they had tears. Of course, Jen could never stop at just one perverted or smart ass comment, so when they

had all caught their breath she added, “Jacque, you could always throw your friends a bone or, heck, even just a kibble and find out for us.”

“Is that all you ever think about, Jen?” Sally asked in exasperation.

“What, how big Fane’s are? Good grief, no. I think about other things,” Jen defended.

“Anything not pertaining to the opposite sex, or for that matter sex itself?” Jacque asked sarcastically.

Jen started to open her mouth then abruptly shut it. Looking at nothing in particular, thinking, she finally answered, “Nope, huh-uh. Don’t think so.”

They all broke out in laughter again until they finally drifted off to sleep.

Chapter 14

Fane woke up early and decided to go for a run. Running always helped him clear his mind. He got up, resisted the urge to reach out to his Luna, figuring she was probably still asleep, and changed into some workout shorts. He decided against a shirt, knowing he wouldn't leave it on long anyway. He brushed his teeth and went downstairs to the kitchen. Brian and Sara were still asleep so he tried to make as little noise as possible, which was easy for him to do, being a werewolf and all.

He peeled a banana and nearly ate it whole, then poured himself a glass of orange juice. He rinsed the glass and put it in the dishwasher and picked up his phone from the counter. After putting it in his pocket, he headed out the front door.

Because he was *Canis lupus*, Fane could run for very long distances even in human form. He didn't have to work out to keep his muscular physique, it was just the way all *Canis lupus* were built. Some were leaner than others, but all were very muscular. He glanced up at Jacquelyn's window and, giving into his desire, reached out to her mind briefly. He decided if she was thinking about something he thought she wouldn't want him to know, he would retreat quickly. As it was, she was still asleep and her thoughts were scattered. He kept seeing his own face and then another, unknown male's face. He assumed this was the Trent she'd been dating previously. She didn't seem to be interested in him anymore, but it was obvious he had hurt her. Fane and his wolf did not like that.

He pulled back from her thoughts and started up the street. He had to restrain himself from running full speed because he was much, much faster than a human. The wolf wanted to run, wanted to hunt. Fane pushed down the urge and kept it at a nice fast jog.

He found his mind going over the previous night, when the car had driven by Jacquelyn's house. He'd seen two males, one of which was the salesman from the dealership he had gone to earlier, so he knew it had something to do with the Greys. He still didn't know what they wanted from Jacquelyn,

but from what his father could tell him, they wanted Fane out of their territory.

So far his Alpha had not given the command to leave, so Fane wasn't going anywhere. The problem was that once his Alpha did give him the command to leave he was going to have to convince Jacquelyn and her mother to come with him. There was no way he was going to leave her here unprotected.

As he continued to run, Fane's thoughts would switch back and forth between thinking about Jacquelyn and their date tonight, to thinking about the local pack he had not known existed. When he finally made it back to the Henrys' house, he had been running for over two hours.

He went through the front door and as he walked in he saw Sara coming down the stairs in workout shorts and shirt, her hair up in a ponytail.

"We're going out to run some trails at the park across town. You're welcome to come but it looks like you've already been out and about," Sara told him.

"Thank you for the invitation, but I did just finish running so I will pass for today. I wanted to check with you and make sure this was okay. I asked Jacquelyn out on a date for this evening so I will be out. Will that be a problem?" Fane asked.

"No problem at all. Jacque is a one-of-a kind girl and we all love her. I don't think I have to tell you to treat her good, you seem to have impeccable manners. Do you have a helmet for her or did you want to borrow our car?" Sara offered.

"That is most generous, but I did buy two helmets when I bought my bike."

Once the Henrys left and Fane took a shower, he sat down to call his father again and see if they could come up with some sort of plan.

The phone rang one time and his father's voice was on the other end.

"Da."

“It’s me,” Fane told him. “I need to know what you want me to do. Do I need to request a meeting with this Alpha and find out what his interest in my mate is?”

“I have been thinking about it a lot and have decided to send Sorin back to you. I think his experience as a werewolf will be of some help, not to mention it will show them you are not on your own,” his father told him.

“As my Alpha, what are you telling me to do?” Fane asked him.

“I want you to protect your mate and her mother, but do not act on anything unless provoked. If it gets out of hand, I don’t care how you get your mate and her mother on a plane, but you do it fast,” his father said firmly.

“Okay, so when will Sorin arrive? And where is he going to stay?” Fane asked him.

“He should be there sometime around eight pm. You might find this interesting, but he is staying with Lilly Pierce.”

“That’s my mate’s mother,” Fane said, confused.

“I am aware of that. I guess it’s time for me to tell you, but you must wait to talk to Jacquelyn until after her mother tells her. She musn’t feel betrayed,” Fane’s father explained. “I did a little searching and found out that your mate is indeed part wolf. In fact, she is half Grey. Jacquelyn’s father was a Grey. He and Lilly were together for quite awhile, although they never married. At some point in their relationship he decided to tell her about his origins because she had a special gift and knew there was something different about him. She actually received the news very well. After that, things were good, but one day Jacquelyn’s father came home, packed his things and left Lilly a note. All it said was ‘I have to go, I have no choice. I’m sorry.’ Jacquelyn’s father did not know Lilly was pregnant with his child when he left. I have since located him and found that he is with his mate, which is why he had to leave Lilly. You see, Lilly was not his true mate and even though he had

feelings for her, they weren't a pindrop compared to what he feels for his mate."

"So Lilly has known this Jacquelyn's whole life and never told her?" Fane asked him.

"She didn't think she would ever have to. For all she knew, the rules did not apply to Jacquelyn because she is not full-blood. She knows who you are, Fane, and what you are. I called and spoke with her about what is going on and she took it really well. She agreed to let Sorin stay with them as he would be added protection," his father explained.

"I know I can trust Sorin, but you know how hard it is for a male wolf to allow another to be so close to his mate, especially when the bond ritual has not been performed," Fane told his father.

"I know it is going to be hard on you but you are going to have to set your wolf nature aside and recognize what will keep her safe. Still, I don't know if Sorin will be enough of a deterrent to keep the other pack from attempting to take Jacquelyn."

Fane growled at the idea of his mate in the hands of a pack to which she did not belong.

"How can they possibly want her when she is not a true mate to any of them?" Fane asked.

"I know it is hard for you to understand because you are so young, and you've found your mate so quickly, which is rare. Most go decades if not centuries before they find their mate. Female Greys are not abundant and after such a long time some Greys get desperate enough to settle for less and hope that over time their wolves will bond. What they don't know, because they don't remember what our ancestors have taught, is there is only one mate for each. Only one," his father emphasized.

"Is Sorin going to need me to pick him up?" Fane asked.

"No, he is going to rent a car for the duration of his stay," his father answered. "I will keep you updated as I learn things."

You lay low, Fane. I don't want my only son and the future Alpha of this Pack killed." His father used his Alpha voice. It demanded obedience and could not be defied.

"Yes, Alpha," Fane replied, recognizing that in that moment he was not speaking as son to father, but Pack to Alpha.

Fane hung up the phone and lay back on his bed, staring up at the ceiling. He decided to wait a couple more days before he confronted Lilly and Jacquelyn, but he was going to have to convince Lilly to tell her daughter. He would obey his father and not tell Jacquelyn before then.

Because he needed her touch, even if only mind to mind, Fane reached out to his Luna. "*Are you awake, meu inimă?*" He patiently waited for her response.

"*Well, I am now. Is it customary in Romania to wake people at the crack of dawn?*" she replied grumpily.

"*It is not the crack of dawn, Luna. It is already ten thirty,*" Fane told her.

"*Oh, my bad. It's moved up to still-too-freaking early,*" Jacquelyn responded.

Fane chuckled at her grumpiness and found it rather endearing.

"*So I take it you are not a morning person?*" he asked her.

"*I'm not a person until after noon, so make a note to yourself to keep your thoughts out of mine til then.*"

"*Duly noted. I will not seek you out until one minute after twelve,*" Fane said jokingly.

"*Aren't you just so clever?*" she retorted.

Fane wondered what she looked like in the morning, hair all a mess, rumped clothes. He imagined she was adorable.

"*I would rather you not see me first thing out of bed, nor imagine what I look like. I assure you, 'adorable' would not be the description you choose,*" Jacquelyn told him.

“I believe how I see you is not really up to you, my Luna,” Fane said gently.

“What exactly does loona mean?” she asked him.

“I will tell you soon but not today. Rest assured it is a high honor to be called that,” Fane said. *“I was planning on picking you up at five thirty. Is that too early?”* he asked her. He hoped not because Fane would actually go pick her up now if he could. He so desperately wanted to spend time with her and get to know her. He wanted her to know him and he hoped that she liked what she learned. He wanted to be worthy of her because she brought him balance and control and love. Fane was careful not to let those thoughts be open to her.

“Five thirty is good. Are you going to tell me what we are doing?” she asked him.

“I was thinking that golf game Americans play that has the all the different obstacles,” Fane answered.

Jacquelyn giggled at his description and Fane grinned, glad he could make her laugh, even if it was at his expense.

“You mean putt-putt. That sounds like fun. Are you going to be in my head anymore today?” she asked him.

Fane’s voice was very soft and intimate when he answered, *“Do you want me to be in your head, Luna?”*

Fane felt Jacquelyn respond to his voice. When she answered, even her thoughts sounded breathless. *“I um, I don’t know.”*

“I will take that as a yes and you can tell me to leave at anytime. Talk to you later, meu inimă,” Fane said to her sweetly.

“Bye,” was all Jacquelyn could manage to get out.

Chapter 15

Hello, earth to Jacque,” Sally said as she snapped her fingers in front of her friend’s face.

Finally Jacque turned her head to Sally, looking quite spacey and out of it and said, “I’m in trouble.”

“What is that supposed to mean?” Jen asked her as she sat in the floor painting her toenails. She’d apparently found Jacques nail polish and, as always, helped herself.

“I was just talking to Fane and his voice got all sensual on me and it was like...”

Jacque didn’t know how to finish so Jen offered up, “Phone sex, virtual mind sex, I would say sex on a stick put that really only applies to Dove ice cream bars.”

“Jen, paint your toenails,” Sally ordered.

Jen stuck her tongue out , but obeyed.

“I could so fall hard for this tasty Romanian,” Jacque told them.

“There’s nothing wrong with that. Just make sure it’s not a rebound from the whole Trent thing,” Sally told her honestly.

“I hear what you’re saying, Tonto,” Jacque told her with a smile.

“So what’s the plan for the whole date thing?” Jen asked.

Jacque thought about Fane’s cute description of putt-putt. She was actually looking forward to it, she hadn’t been in a long time.

“He’s picking me up at five thirty and taking me to putt-putt. I think it will be interesting to see a Romanian hottie play something he didn’t even know the name for,” Jacque told them.

“He didn’t know what putt-putt was called,” Jen laughed, “that’s awesome.”

“It’s the little things, Jen, the little things,” Sally told her.

Jacque spent the day discussing various scenarios for her evening with Fane. Naturally, all of Jen's included vivid make out scenes and somehow always ended with their clothes off. She truly was a piece of work. *You can't help but love her*, Jacque thought.

At three thirty, Sally and Jen sat Jacque down on the edge of her bed and began pulling various options of outfits to wear. She decided right away that a skirt or sun dress was out because of riding the motorcycle. Finally she was down between a pair of jeans with holes in various places and "Daisy Duke" shorts that looked worn out, only they weren't because that was how she bought them. She had already decided on a hunter green, spaghetti strap shirt with various sparkly designs on it.

"Just go with the jeans," Jen said. "They're sexy in a bad ass kind of way and they'll help keep your skin intact if you're in a motorcycle wreck." Sally glared at Jen. "What? I'm just saying," Jen defended.

"Yeah, I think I will go with the jeans. They leave something to the imagination," Jacque decided.

"Okay, hair up or down?" Sally asked.

"I'm thinking down for the motorcycle ride because of the helmet. It's putt-putt, Sal, no need for a French twist," Jacque told her. "I'm just gonna wear my green flip flops." Jacque hated wearing shoes and if they weren't required she avoided them, just another of her weird quirks.

She took a shower while her two best friends picked out eye shadow for her to wear. When she got back to her room they had Jen's phone hooked up to her computer speakers and were jamming to *Lynard Skynard*. Jacque just shook her head at them. She got dressed and then Sally pushed her down into her desk chair and went to work on her unruly hair while Jen started on her eyes. "Man, I've got good friends," Jacque thought to herself, not for the first time.

By the time they were finished with it was five. Sally and Jen looked spun her in a circle to see their finished product. Then they looked at each other, bumped fists, and said at the same time, “Damn, we’re good.”

“I would have to agree, ladies. Ya’ll are fantastic. Thank you both so much,” Jacque told them.

“Oh, hell no. Don’t go getting all sentimental on us. If you mess up the work I did on your eyes I will not hesitate to kick your butt between your shoulders,” Jen said sternly.

“I love you too, Jen,” Jacque said sarcastically.

“Are you nervous?” Sally asked her.

“If I said I wasn’t I’d be lying. But I would also be lying if I didn’t say I was absolutely beyond excited,” Jacque told them.

“Why do you say that?” Jen asked in a rare moment of seriousness.

“I wish I could tell you guys this without ya’ll thinking I’m a total nut, but no matter how I put it, it’s still going to sound crazy,” Jacque admitted.

“Um, Jac, hate to point this out, but two days ago you told us you were hearing a voice in your head,” Sally told her.

Jacque looked thoughtful for a moment. “Point taken,” she agreed.

“Okay, well I don’t know quite how to explain it, but I feel like I belong with him, like I have always belonged with him. Now that I’ve been close to him it’s like a part of my soul was missing and now I have it back,” Jacque explained.

“That is so romantic,” Sally said dreamily.

“Well, there’s only one way to find out,” Jen said. “Spend time with him, get to know him, and see if he feels the same way.”

Jacque and Sally looked at each other in shock. “Jen, did you just suggest something that didn’t involve wild making

out, clothes coming off, and is comparable to the car scene in Titanic?” Sally asked incredulously.

“You didn’t let me finish. Then after you get to know one another, seal the deal with a steamy make out scene on the motorcycle, like in *Top Gun*. Ahhh, see? There is always a time and place for lip locking, hand roaming, and good ol’ fashion clean, or if you’re lucky, not so clean fun,” Jen said with a wink.

“As always, Jen, you did not disappoint,” Jacque told her.

“I aim to please, my dear,” Jen replied, completely undaunted.

Jacque looked at her watch and realized it was twenty after. *Okay*, she told herself, *have fun, don’t worry about all the other crap going on*. Jacque took one more look in the mirror and caught a glimpse of her neck and shoulders.

“Oh shite, the markings are showing!” Jacque exclaimed.

“We know,” Sally said.

“Why didn’t you remind me?”

“Because they look as cool as Hades, that’s why,” Jen piped in.

“That statement doesn’t even make sense, Jen. Hell is not cool, geez...”

“Oh, my bad. They look as hot as Hades, that’s why,” Jen interrupted.

Jacque continued, “And what should I say to my mom? ‘Hey mom, going on my date, oh don’t worry about these handy dandy marks, ya know how it is with random, mysterious markings and what not, just popping up when you least expect it’.”

“No, we were going to tell her they were the stick-on ones and that Jen insisted you wear them,” Sally said.

“The idea that I be the one to blame was completely involuntary, I will have you know.” Jen frowned.

“Seeing how thick that one is I doubt she will swallow it, but he is gonna be here...” before Jacque could finish the doorbell rang.

“So I don’t have time to change,” she finished.

“Look, you’re going to be great. Just be yourself,” Sally told her in a motherly voice.

“For goodness sakes, if you wind up not liking him, kiss him anyway for us, okay? Throw us a bone, Jac,” Jen told her.

“And if I like him but I’m not ready to kiss him, what then my little nympho?” Jacque asked her.

“If you like that gorgeous piece of meat out there and you don’t kiss him, I will personally take every bra you own and hang them on all the antennas of the cars on your street. Oh, and I’ll write your name on them in black magic marker and hang two on hottie’s motorcycle! How you like them apples?” Jen told her.

“Where on earth do you come up with these ideas? Is there like a website called vindictive.com, or cruel-mean-ideas.org?” Sally asked her sarcastically.

“Nope, I think of them all by my little self,” Jen answered.

The girls all turned when they heard a soft knock on Jacque’s bedroom door.

“Come in.” They all three said. Jacque looked at the other two as if to say hello, my room, but they just shrugged.

Jacque’s mom came in the room looking at the girls like they were guilty, and in truth they usually were.

“Fane’s here. He brought a helmet. Did you forget to mention you would be riding a motorcycle?” Lilly asked her.

“No, I just assumed that you knew,” Jacque said.

“Well, I did see him on one but I assumed that he would be borrowing one of the Henrys’ cars.”

“Well, you know what they say about assuming,” Jen added.

Both Lilly and Jacque turned their heads to look at Jen, who simply shrugged and said, “I’m...”

“Just saying. Yeah, we know,” Sally finished for her.

Jacque decided to just go ahead and let her mom see the marks so she wouldn’t freak out in front of Fane.

“Mom, what do you think about these fake tattoos that Jen put on me?” Jacque asked, turning around so her mom could get a look at her shoulders and neck.

Jacque heard her mother take in a sharp breath. She turned to look at her and saw her mom had her hand over her mouth and there was fear, major fear in her eyes. Once again she knew her mom knew something that she wasn’t sharing.

“Are you ok, Lilly?” Sally asked Jacque’s mom.

It took a minute for Lilly to get her composure back, but as soon as she did her face went blank.

“Of course. I’m fine, it was just a bit of a shock. They look so real,” her mom told them.

Jacque turned to look at her two best friends. “What are ya’lls’ plans? Staying here or going home?” she asked them.

“We’re going back to Jen’s to hang out. If you want to come over after your date and Lilly’s ok with it, that’s fine,” Sally answered.

“That’s fine with me, if you want to,” Lilly told Jacque.

Jacque couldn’t decide what she wanted. Part of her wanted to be with her friends, the other part wanted to be alone so she could talk to Fane. She would see how the night went and decide then.

“I’ll call you guys and let you know if I’m coming. I don’t know what time we are going to be home so I wouldn’t want to come over if it was really late and ya’ll were already in bed,” Jacque told them.

Sally and Jen gave her a ‘yeah, what a load of crap super sized with fries’ look. Jacque just tried to look as oblivious as possible under their scrutiny.

Jacque looked at her mom, expecting her to say something about a curfew but she never did, she just turned to go back downstairs. “I’ll be downstairs with Fane telling him embarrassing stories from your childhood, so you might want to expedite your final preparations,” Lilly told her daughter.

Jacque turned back to her friends. “Look, I’m not going to lie. Part of me wants to stay home tonight so I can talk to Fane, but the other part of me wants to be with my girls,” Jacque told them.

“We’re totally cool with you staying home to get to know him more. There is only one stipulation and that is we get everything in living color detail. No condensing, no paraphrasing, no inconclusions, and no summaries. Every single detail!” Jen told her adamantly.

Jacque laughed at her two friends and gave them both hugs. “Thanks, chicas. You two are the best.”

“Ok, I’m ready. I’ll see you guys later,” Jacque told them.

“Have fun!” Sally and Jen said together.

“Oh look, Sal. Our little girl is growing up. Where did the time go? From teaching her to cut her Barbie doll’s hair, to cutting her own hair, and now sending her off with a hot piece of Romanian meat. I’m getting all choked up.” Jen faked tears.

Sally looked at Jen and shook her head. “You done?”

“Yeah, I’m done. Why you always gotta cramp my style, yo?” Jen asked in her best slang voice.

“Cause that’s how I roll,” Sally answered.

“Are you two sure you can be left unattended and to your own devices?” Jacque asked them, smiling.

“Go already,” Jen said.

Jacque opened her bedroom door and walked to the top of the stairs. She took a deep breath and let it out through her mouth.

“Luna, I’ve been waiting to see you all day. Are you rethinking going out with me? Because that’s okay, I’ll just go back to the Henrys’ and let you be with your friends,” Fane told her through his thoughts.

“NO!” Jacque responded, realizing a little too late that she had just incriminated herself letting him know how much she wanted to see him as well. *“I’m on my way down now. Quit being so impatient, it’s not becoming,”* Jacque told him.

She felt his confusion when he asked, *“Becoming what?”*

Jacque couldn’t stop the giggle that came out of her but she regained her composure by the time she was at the last of the stairs.

“Never mind,” she answered as she came around the corner into the living room. Her mom was sitting on the couch and Fane was sitting across from her on the antique, high winged back chair that her mom had inherited from some distant relative. It was a horrible shade of peach but Lilly loved it so the ugly lump stayed in their living room. Somehow, with Fane sitting in it he managed to make it look good. *Man, I have it bad,* Jacque thought to herself.

Fane must’ve caught that last thought because he grinned at her knowingly.

He stood up when she entered the room and, without shame, looked her up and down from her toes to her head and back again. Jacque was a tad surprised that he would do this in front of her mother and supposed because of her nerves she could be excused for having a Jen moment.

“Did you get your fill or would you like me to turn around for you too?” Jacque asked.

“Jacque, is that anyway to speak to your date?” Lilly asked, clearly not shocked that Jacque had acted with such attitude.

“Actually,” Fane started, “I would love for you to turn around so that I may admire the new addition to your already beautiful skin.”

Jacque couldn't help but blush for two reasons: one, he had called her skin beautiful. *I mean, come on. Who wouldn't blush at that, right?* And two, the way he commented about the markings seemed very possessive, like they tied her to him in some way and for some weird, messed up reason Jacque liked that. *Yeah, she thought, they have a padded cell in the insane asylum just waiting for ya, babe.*

Jacque didn't miss the way her mom responded to Fane noticing the markings – she was glaring daggers at him, as if daring him to make any further comment. Jacque knew that look. It was one of the looks in her mom's repertoire that meant if you wanted to keep your ass then you better cover it now.

So Jacque did a quick turn around and grabbed Fane by the hand. Oh, he had great hands. *I mean, seriously,* she thought. *Does he have to have great everything?* She nearly burst out laughing because she could just imagine the comeback Jen would have for that.

“Alright. We're going, mom. Love you. Don't wait up, I'll wake you up when I get home. Yes, I will wear my helmet; no, I won't be cold; no, I don't need any money; yes, I have my house key, and yada yada yada,” Jacque answered before her mom could even ask.

They were out the front door before Lilly could get in a word.

“Was that really necessary?” Fane asked her.

“Did you not see the look my mother was giving you when you asked about these marks on my skin? Which, by the way, I know you know something about and you will be happily divulging said information tonight,” Jacque told him.

Fane acted as if he simply had not heard her and since he had not let go of her hand once they made it outside, simply

pulled her along to his motorcycle. He handed her a black and dark pink helmet which, upon closer inspection, had different designs on it. It was actually pretty awesome. She put it on her head, trying not to feel too ridiculous, and waited for his instructions.

Fane looked at her and grinned a breathtaking smile, dimples and all, “You ready, Luna?” he asked her. It felt like he wasn’t just asking her about the motorcycle ride, more like he was giving her a choice, one that she had no plausible outcome for.

“Probably not, but what the hell. What’s life without a little excitement or craziness, ya know? Take your pick,” Jacque answered.

Chapter 16

As Fane drove across town with his mate behind him, her arms wrapped tightly around his waist, he thought about how it had taken every ounce of self control for him not to reach out and run a finger across the markings on Jacquelyn's shoulders and neck – his markings. It was bad enough that Lilly had noticed the possessiveness in his voice when he asked about them, but his wolf just wouldn't ease up until he asked Jacqueline about them. Thankfully, he hadn't made a total fool of himself by touching them or growling in contentment. But the night was still young, and he had ample time to make a fool of himself, so better not count your pups.

Before they got on the motorcycle, Fane asked her if she was ready, and although he meant for the date, he also was pleading with his eyes to understand he needed her to be ready for more. He knew that she was strong mentally and physically, the Moon would not give him a weak mate as he was Alpha, and she would be over the females. But Fane was not so naive to believe that it wouldn't be a shock to learn werewolves were real, and quite possibly other things that went bump in the night.

“How are you, Jacquelyn? Are you cold?” Fane sent her the question.

“I'm great! This is awesome. I've never ridden on a motorcycle before. I can honestly see why you wouldn't want to drive a car after you've been on one of these! Oh, and no I'm not cold,” Jacquelyn answered him, sounding excited.

It pleased him to know he was able to do something to bring her happiness. He could feel her joy pouring off in waves and it was so soothing to his wolf. His mate was happy and that was very important to him.

They reached the restaurant that Fane had decided on. Brian had told him about it when he mentioned he was taking Jacquelyn out. It was a mom and pop diner with a little bit of everything.

“This ok with you?” Fane asked her.

“Yeah, this is great,” Jacquelyn answered.

Fane looked at her for a moment. He couldn't help it when his eyes lingered on the markings on her shoulders and neck. Those marks told all Canis lupus she was his, his to make happy, his to protect, his to...and to his astonishment he realized she was his to love as well. Even though he didn't know her very well yet, he knew without a doubt he would love her.

“Fane, is everything alright?” she asked him.

“Yes, Luna. Everything is fine, better than fine, actually,” Fane told her with a smile.

To Fane's satisfaction, dinner was pleasant, easy. There was no time when he felt the conversation forced or awkward. He smiled over the fact that she didn't refuse dessert like most girls on a first date, and she had absolutely no qualms about taking food off his plate without even asking.

After they ate, Fane took Jacquelyn to a nearby park. He had no plan of telling her anything yet. He'd told his Alpha he would keep quiet until her mom talked to her and he planned to keep his word. But he knew she would ask questions and it was better here where their conversation would not be easily overheard.

“I know you've only been here a few days, but how do you like Coldspring?” Jacquelyn asked.

“Thus far, it seems like a pleasant place to live, not as formal as the life I am used to, or as cold,” Fane told her with a wink.

“No offense, but based on what you wear, your life doesn't seem all that formal.”

Fane hadn't thought about how his appearance might look to her. She probably thought he lived in a little hovel of a house with junk out front. She would be surprised to find that his home was actually 7,000 square feet, although it was partly

because his father often had members of the Pack stay with them.

“I guess the clothes would lead you to a different conclusion,” Fane responded.

Suddenly he had this intense desire to know her, know anything or everything. “What’s your favorite color? What is your favorite song, book, and movie? What do you like best about being an only child and least?” Fane fired question after question, not really giving her a chance to answer. He was so eager to learn all about his mate, his Luna.

“Step back, take a deep breath, ‘cause any minute now you are going to pass out from lack of oxygen,” she told him. “Well, seeing as I’m super shy this will be hard for me to share, so bear with me.”

Fane rolled his eyes at her sarcasm. Jacquelyn was anything but shy.

“My favorite color depends on the day and today it is green,” she explained.

“Is that why you are wearing green?” Fane asked.

“Yes. I have to admit that I dress very much in accordance with my mood, and the colors I choose reflect that. I know, I’m a conundrum. What can I say? I like to keep things interesting.”

“Favorite song? That changes frequently as well. Right now I would have to say its ‘Accompany Me,’ by Bob Seager. Ask me again next week and it’ll be different. Favorite book? Well, you’re probably going to laugh if you know what this book is, but it’s one I have always loved. It’s called ‘Where the Sidewalk Ends’ by Shell Silverstein. It’s a children’s book of outlandish poetry. Ever heard of it?” she asked him.

“No, actually. I have not. Perhaps you will share it with me sometime,” Fane told her.

“I don’t have a copy of it anymore. I lost it along time ago, although, I think Jen took it and just never ‘fessed up,” she

explained.

Fane made a note of this in his head. That was something he could get her, something to show her he cared about what she liked.

“Okay, where were we...oh, my favorite movie. Well, it’s not just one, it’s a series. The ‘Harry Potter’ movies. You’ve heard of them, right?” she asked.

“Yes, I have actually seen them as well. They were good,” he told her.

“As far as being an only child, I don’t know that I’ve ever really thought about what it would be like to have a sibling. I’ve always been so close to Jen and Sally it’s like I have sisters.” She shrugged. “What about you? Same questions.”

Without repeating the questions, Fane simply answered them in the order he had asked them. “Any shade of black or grey, ‘Lord of the Rings’, ‘300’, and I don’t like the responsibility that comes with being the only heir in my family.”

He realized that she wouldn’t understand the whole heir reference, but in an effort to be as honest as possible where he could, he told her.

“So, um, I was wondering if you,” Jacquelyn stumbled around her words. It was obvious she was uncomfortable with what she wanted to know. Catching the thought in her mind, he understood she wanted to know if he had a girlfriend in Romania. He was actually a little shocked that she thought he would pursue her if he did have a girlfriend, but he had to remember she did not know him yet.

“No, Luna. I do not have a girlfriend, nor am I recently out of a relationship.” Fane knew the jab about her ex wasn’t necessary, but he couldn’t help it. He loved to see her get riled up and, sure enough, if she had had hackles they would be at attention.

“Why does it bother you so much that I had a boyfriend? I mean, it’s not like I even knew you existed a week ago, not to

mention Trent and I aren't together anymore," she said firmly.

"I know, Jacquelyn, I'm sorry. I'm not really bothered by it anymore. Well, mostly not bothered by it. I have to admit I don't like the idea of another male touching you, but as long as I know he won't be again, I think Trent is safe," Fane told her honestly.

"So you're saying that if I dated another guy they wouldn't be safe?" she asked him in disbelief.

"Do you want to date another guy?" Fane countered.

Fane felt the wall in her mind go up and knew the answer was no, she didn't want to date anyone else, and he smiled at that, which was not a smart thing to do at that moment.

Jacquelyn stepped forward and put a finger against his chest, poking him with every word. "Don't dodge my question with a question of your own, you pushy, bossy, Romanian butt head!" She was fuming. Fane imagined that if it were possible there would be smoke rising off that hot tempered red head of hers, and she wasn't done yet either.

"I can damn well date who I want, when I want. There is nothing you can do or say to change that, so if you want to continue with this...this...thing between us," she said, flinging her hand back and forth to indicate them both, "then you'd better just back the hell up, buddy!" By the time she was done, she was panting from her little rant.

"I didn't say you couldn't date another person, I asked you if you wanted to," Fane told her. "Is that so hard to answer?"

Jacquelyn glared at him, obviously wanting to hit him with something. He decided to back up just a little. He continued to stare back at her into those deep green eyes, waiting to see if she would admit to him what he already knew.

Jacquelyn looked down as if something could possibly be of interest to her on the ground. In a voice so soft, he would have missed it if not for his wolf hearing, she said, "No, I don't want anyone else."

When she looked up at him there were tears in her eyes and his heart broke.

“Meu inimă, why the tears? I did not mean to hurt you. Please tell me what I can do, you are breaking my heart,” Fane told her with agony.

He wrapped his arms around her and pulled her close. He stroked her hair gently and whispered to her in his native language words of comfort and reassurance. Finally, after several moments she began to speak. She didn't pull away from him, which was good because he wasn't ready to let her go. He had hurt her. His wolf was not happy and needed the touch of his mate.

“I'm sorry. I'm not usually a blubbering idiot, it's just that I'm so confused. My emotions for you are so freaking intense and I've known you all of three days. I mean, this isn't a movie where we meet and fall madly in a matter of days, Fane. This is my life!”

“I know, I'm sorry I wasn't more considerate. Please, love, forgive me. I won't let my jealousy or pride get in the way of taking your feelings into consideration again,” Fane told her in all sincerity.

Before she could pull away, Fane kissed her lightly on the forehead and took a deep breath, enjoying the way she smelled.

She looked at him oddly and said, “I'm not even going to ask why you just sniffed me.”

“Because you smell wonderful.” Fane was completely unashamed that he had been caught.

They were quiet for a few moments before the questions he had been waiting for her to ask finally came.

“So, are you going to fill me in on why we can share thoughts or why I suddenly have markings on my skin that would fit yours like a puzzle?” Jacquelyn asked him.

“So you noticed that the markings matched?” Fane was surprised.

He had to tell his wolf to chill out because he desperately wanted to preen in front of her, proud that she’d noticed his markings. *Good grief*, Fane thought to himself. *This is ridiculous, wanting to prance in front of my mate and show her I’m worthy of her. Act normal, you hairy baboon, or she’s going to run from you screaming.*

“They are unusual markings, climbing up your neck like that, so naturally I noticed them.” She tried to sound nonchalant about it.

“Look, Jacquelyn, I want to tell you. You have no idea how badly I want you to know everything. Your mom needs to talk with you first. She needs to tell you what she knows and then when I explain how I fit into it, it will make more sense to you,” Fane explained, imploring her to accept this.

Fane knew, however, that she would never let it go that easily.

“What does my mom have to do with any of this?” she asked him incredulously.

Just as Fane was about to answer her, a car pulled in next to his motorcycle, which was quite a distance away from where they were sitting on a bench. Fane let his wolf out enough to use his eyes, and saw to his displeasure that it was the wolves that had driven past Jacquelyn’s house the night before.

The four Greys began walking toward them and Fane tried to figure out what his best strategy would be. He and his wolf were in agreement that they did not like their mate in danger, but what could he do? If he attempted to fight them, she would be left unprotected. If they tried to make a run for it, the Greys would easily overtake them because she couldn’t run faster than the wilves. He could carry her, but Fane had a feeling that would not go over too well with his Luna.

He would just have to wait and see what they wanted.

“Who are these guys? Do you know them?” Her thoughts were clouded with worry.

“I know very little about them. This is another thing we need to talk about, but we must talk to your mother first,” Fane answered.

Fane never took his gaze off the wolves coming towards him and his mate, but out of the corner of his eye he saw Jacquelyn give him a displeased look, obviously not happy with his answer.

As the wolves approached, Fane couldn't suppress the low warning growl that escaped from his throat. If he had been in wolf form his hackles would have been standing, tail down, stance wide and low, ready for any sudden movement they might try.

The wolf from the dealership, Steve, spoke first. “My Alpha wants to know why you are still here.”

Fane took a step forward, which caused the wolves to back up a step. None of them could help lowering their heads just a little because Fane was more dominant than them all.

“I hate to break it to you, Beta, but your Alpha has no authority to order me out of a town that he has not made known as his territory. There is no record of this pack existing.”

The Grey looked a little confused by this, which meant either his Alpha didn't know this, or his Alpha didn't share this information with his pack.

“Regardless, there is only one of you compared to an entire pack. What do you really think you can do against those odds?” he asked Fane.

Fane glared menacingly at the four Greys; they backed up even more. “You tell your Alpha to back off. There are only so many disregards for Pack Laws that I will concede.” Fane looked each wolf in the eyes and they dropped them instantly. Then, in the same voice his father used to make his wolves obey, Fane told them, “Leave, now.”

When a dominant issued a command like that the submissive could only obey, whether they wanted to or not.

Steve fought the order as he walked away. Before he got in his car, he turned to Fane and said, “Just so you know, pup, she has already been claimed. If you don’t stay away, her true mate is going to challenge you, and rest assured he will tear you apart.”

At that Fane snarled furiously. His eyes began to glow and he felt his canines elongate. The Grey whined and scrambled into his car, his tires squealing as he peeled out.

Fane closed his eyes and took slow deep breaths. *Calm yourself*, Fane thought. *No one is going to take her from you.* He sort of chanted this to himself over and over until he and his wolf were somewhat in control. Fane turned to face Jacquelyn and saw confusion, but to his relief there was no fear.

“Ok, you can forget trying to get away with not explaining that little episode of the Twilight Zone. I’m not an idiot, so don’t think I didn’t pick up on the whole animal kingdom reference, the way you just nearly went postal on their hides, or the fact that the ‘she’ they were talking about was me,” Jacquelyn said, arms crossed, brow furrowed in determination.

Fane walked up to her, towering over her short frame. To her credit, after seeing him act like the animal he was, she didn’t take a single step back.

“You’re right, Luna. It’s time to talk, but your mom will start. Let’s go.”

With that, they were on his motorcycle headed back to Jacquelyn’s house.

Chapter 17

Jacque held on tight to Fane's waist, laying her cheek against his back, taking in his warmth. She was nervous, but glad she was finally going to get some answers. That whole little scene at the park had freaked her out. She could not make sense of anything those guys had said to Fane, or vice versa.

The only reference she had of the term 'Alpha' had to do with dogs or wolves. And who were they to tell Fane he had to leave and what did they mean she already had a mate? The questions swirled around in her brain over and over again, yet she could find no explanation.

"Luna, are you ok?" Fane asked her, sounding worried.

She smiled, not able to help liking the fact that he worried about her. It felt good to be cared for, not that she wasn't cared for by others, but it felt good coming from him.

"I guess I'm as good as can be expected. Don't be alarmed if I freak out or have a melt down, it will pass," she told him with only a small amount of teasing in her voice.

The truth was she was already on the verge of a panic attack. When those guys told Fane he had to leave, the mere idea of him gone actually caused her pain. *How messed up is that?*

Jacque closed her eyes and concentrated on her breathing. *In and out, in and out. Whatever it is, whatever he tells you, you will not cower in a corner and shake like a frightened puppy,* she told herself firmly. *No, but I make no promises that I won't pass out from shock. There is no shame in passing out, it's simply the brain's way of saying 'hold the stink up, I need to process this mess'.* Jacque smiled at her monologue, wondering if other people talked to themselves like that. Probably not, but everyone's got something, right?

Fane pulled into her driveway and turned off the engine. It seemed eerily quiet. Jacque climbed off his bike, taking the helmet off, and shook her hair out. She looked up to find Fane watching her.

“What?” she asked him.

To Jacque’s surprise, Fane actually blushed! He turned his head away from her and she saw the small smile that had appeared.

“Sorry, it’s just, um, well, you looked attractive shaking your hair out,” Fane stammered.

Jacque tried really hard not to laugh but was completely unsuccessful. She looked up at him and saw embarrassment in his eyes.

“Fane, you can’t possibly be embarrassed by thinking I’m hot. I practically drool all over you every time I see you. I should be the one embarrassed,” she confessed to him.

“Are you?” Fane asked.

“I guess maybe I should be, but throw me a bone, you are freaking hot. I can’t change that so I’m embracing it.”

Fane chuckled and told her, “You amaze me, Luna. Truly you do.”

It was Jacque’s turn to blush. “Thanks,” was all she could think to say.

Fane took Jacque’s hand as they were walking to the front door. She felt warmth spread up her arm and throughout her body just from holding it. When Jacque opened the door, she saw the man that had been the driver of the limo Fane arrived in just three nights ago, standing in her living room. Jacque froze, not really sure what to do.

Fane stepped around her and went to the man and embraced him just like they had done on the night he arrived. *Okay, Jacque thought, I’m fixing to have a two-year-old moment.*

“MOM!” Jacque yelled, “WHO IN KING ARTHUR’S NAME IS THIS MAN IN OUR HOUSE, WHAT THE CRAP DO YOU KNOW THAT YOU AREN’T TELLING ME, AND FOR THE LOVE OF ALL THINGS THAT KEEP US SANE WHAT HELL IS GOING ON!”

In the kitchen Lilly Pierce closed her eyes and took a deep breath. *It's time*, she thought to herself. She'd hoped this day would never come, that Jacque would grow up and have a normal life, never affected by her father's blood. Apparently that had been too much to hope for.

Lilly stepped into the living room. "I guess it's time for me to tell you the truth about your father," she told her daughter.

"Why have you waited this long to say something? Were you ever going to tell me?" Jacque asked, the hurt evident in her voice.

Lilly sat down on the couch, hands folded in her lap, eyes focused on the floor. "Actually, no. I wasn't planning on telling you as long as it never affected you. I figured there was no reason to add confusion to the pain of your father leaving."

"Did you ever think that it wasn't your choice to make?!" Jacque was yelling now, she was so upset and yet knew that her anger was disproportionate to the situation.

"Jacquelyn, calm yourself. She was just trying to protect you, not hide things from you," Jacque heard Fane's soft, comforting voice tell her. Unfortunately, it just fueled her fire.

Jacque turned on him. "Do not tell me to calm down! Everyone in this room seems to know something about my life that I don't and frankly that just ticks me off a teeny, tiny bit, so back off!"

Fane held his hands up in surrender and took a seat across from Lilly on the loveseat. Sorin sat in the ugly winged back chair, leaving Jacque the only one standing.

She wasn't ready to sit down so she started pacing around the room.

"I understand why you're angry and that you're hurt, but I need you to hear me out before judging me," Lilly told her.

Jacque stopped and tried to wipe away the tears that were running freely down her cheeks. She turned to look at her mom and simply nodded her head. Her mom patted the couch

for her to sit on, but Jacque took one look at Fane and knew she needed to sit by him.

“I’m sorry, love, it’s just that I see you hurting and all I want to do is comfort you. It’s MY job to comfort you. Please bear with me a little longer. Sit by me, calm the animal inside please.” Fane’s thought was so emotional that Jacque found herself walking over to the love seat and sitting next to him.

Jacque’s mom looked a little shocked, but as quick as it appeared it was gone.

“Jacque,” her mom began, “there is no easy way to explain this. There is no way that I can say it that sounds sane, so I’m just going to lay it out there, okay?”

“If you knew what my life has been like the past few days you wouldn’t even have to lead off with that. So as Jen and I like to say, slap me with it,” Jacque told her.

Lilly took a deep breath. “Your father is a *Canis lupus*, a werewolf.”

When Jacque didn’t respond Lilly just continued. “I knew there was something different about him when I met him. The longer we dated, the more sure I was that he wasn’t normal. So one night I just asked him, ‘What are you?’ And he told me. At first, naturally, I didn’t believe him, but then he showed me his wolf and he was beautiful. Over time, he told me more and more about his culture and species. I knew one day he would leave because he would find his true mate. He was honest with me about it and I chose to stay with him anyway because I felt that whatever time I could have with him was better than none at all.”

Lilly paused for a moment and looked at Jacque, who was just sitting there staring at the table in front of her. Fane took one of her hands and looked like he was waiting for her to go into hysterics at any moment. Still, she said nothing.

Lilly continued. “Three days before he left I found out I was pregnant with you. I was going to tell him that very night, but when I got home there was a note waiting for me instead

of him.” Jacque looked up at her mother when her voice wavered and saw she had tears in her eyes.

She realized then that her mom still loved her father. *Even though he’s a Canis Lup-whatever*, she thought to herself.

“*Canis lupus, meu inimă*,” Fane told her.

“I wasn’t thinking to you, was I? No, I was not. I was thinking to myself. So if you don’t mind, keep your nosy Romanian brain out of mine,” Jacque growled.

Fane just squeezed her hand and this angered Jacque even more because she didn’t want anyone’s comfort or understanding, she just wanted to be pissed off.

Lily pulled herself together and when Jacque still did not say anything she said, “I had no idea what would happen to you as half *Canis lupus*. I didn’t know if I would come in your room one day and find a wolf puppy in your crib. As time went on and you seemed to be completely normal, I decided to just let it go. When you hit puberty I was worried maybe that would trigger some change in you, but it didn’t and I thought we were home free. And then,” Lilly looked at Fane, there was no condemnation when she said, “you came along, and I knew all my hope was in vain.”

Fane looked Lilly in the eye and told her, “I am sorry to have brought your fears to pass, but I am not sorry to have found Jacquelyn. She is my mate and I will claim her, as is my right. You know she will not be complete without me, nor I without her.”

Lilly nodded. “I know this, Fane. At first I was angry and scared. However, now that I have spent some time with you, albeit not enough, I can tell you are a good man. I say ‘man’ because you can no longer be a boy, you have to protect my little girl.” Her voice sounded almost desperate now.

Jacque’s head snapped up when she heard her mom’s tone and saw the fear in her eyes.

“Okay,” Jacque started, taking a deep breath, “give me just a moment, ok? Let me process this...out loud.” She turned her

head to look at Fane. “You, Casanova, give me some space, you’re freaking me out right now.”

Fane let go of her hand and moved away from her, though only a tiny bit. Jacque rolled her eyes.

“So my father turns all hairy once a month, is that what I hear you telling me?”

Fane and Sorin both let out a snort of laughter but pulled it together when Lilly glared at them.

“No, all the things you think you know about werewolves are false. *Canis lupus* can phase – they don’t call it changing – whenever they want to. They can phase their whole body into wolf form, or just their eyes, or teeth, or whatever. It has nothing to do with the moon.”

Jacque knew her mom loved interesting things, and she definitely found the whole werewolves-being-real bit interesting. She was past the whole trek down memory lane and moving right along onto the highway of the unbelievable.

“I can’t phase though, right?” Jacque asked apprehensively.

“No,” Lilly, Fane, and Sorin all said at the same time.

“Surround sound, nice,” Jacque said sarcastically.

What can I say? she thought to herself. *I get sarcastic when I’m freaked out.*

“Well, that’s a crappy deal. Here you have a dad who can turn into this cool wolf thingy and you can’t even get a sexy, bushy tail,” Jen said as she and Sally walked into the living room.

Jacque stood up, the relief very obvious on her face.

“What are you two doing here?” she asked them.

“I asked them to stay and listen in. I knew you would tell them anyway and figured you would need some support from people you didn’t feel like were hiding things from you,” Lilly told her.

“So you guys heard everything?” Jacque asked tentatively.

“Every page-turning word. I wanted to pop some popcorn. I figured there might be some tense moments and you know I eat when I’m tense, but goody two shoes here wouldn’t let me,” Jen said irritably.

Sally patted Jen’s hand in mock sympathy. “We know, sweetie. But see, since it was Jacque finding out it was her dad who gets hairy, not yours, I didn’t really care if you were tense.”

Jen took Sally’s hand off hers and bit into it hard enough to leave teeth marks.

“Hey! What the hell, chick?” Sally exclaimed.

“See, don’t you wish you’d given me the popcorn?” Jen retorted.

Jacque started laughing, she just couldn’t help herself. She was so grateful to have Sally and Jen giving her something normal to grasp onto.

Jacque turned and looked at her mom. “So my father left because he found his true mate, or whatever?”

“Yes, and I want you to know I don’t blame him. I knew that it would eventually happen,” Lilly answered.

“Did he ever know about me?” Jacque asked, not really sure if she wanted to know the answer because if he did, and he had never bothered to come meet her, it was really going to hurt.

“No honey, he didn’t know. After he left I had no way to contact him. If he’d known he would have wanted to be a part of your life. He is a good man, Jacque. Only problem was he wasn’t really a man. Just my luck, huh?” Lilly said with a sad smile.

Jacque thought for a moment and something Fane had said earlier came to mind – he had called her his mate!

She slowly turned to look at him and saw that his head was down, shoulders slumped as if he were deflated. It broke her heart to see him look so broken. Jacque walked over to him and got down on her knees in front of him. He still did not move. Jacque took her finger and placed it under his chin and raised his head so she could see his face. The look she saw brought tears to her eyes. She didn't talk out loud, she felt like this was private, just between them, and for the next few moments there was no one in Jacque's world but Fane.

"What's wrong, Fane?" she asked him.

"You know what you are to me, yes?"

Jacque whispered her answer out loud. "Mate."

Fane nodded his head. *"Yes, meu inimă. You are my mate, the other half of my soul, and the thought of you not wanting me is more than I can bear,"* Fane told her honestly.

"No pressure, huh?" Jacque said, trying to lighten the mood.

"I would never ask you to do something you do not want to, Luna, but I will not lie and say that I won't follow you around like a sick puppy," Fane said with a smile, though the tears were not quite gone yet.

"I just need time to sort through all this. I'm not saying I don't want you, I mean, now that I've met you the idea of life without you makes it hard to breathe," Jacque revealed.

Fane took her hands in his and said, "Time is the one thing I can't give you, love."

Chapter 18

Fane held the hands of his mate and hated to have to tell her that he couldn't give her the one thing she wanted, but there was no time. He needed to complete the bond through the blood rites, especially since there was another Canis lupus attempting to claim her. Once the bond was complete, no other male could dispute whose mate she was.

Fane pulled Jacquelyn up off the floor and returned her to the seat next to him. He continued to hold one of her hands, taking comfort from the touch.

"I'm not trying to rush you, Jacquelyn. Under different circumstances I would give you all the time you need, but you are not safe un-bonded," Fane explained to her.

"Ok, that was just clear as mud. Would you mind elaborating why I am not safe?" Jacquelyn asked.

"When I came here my father...wait, let me back up for a moment and tell you a little about who I really am so that everything fits together, okay?" Fane asked.

"Whatever gets us to the place we need to be. I'll try not to ask 'are we there yet'," Jacque answered impatiently.

"I am Canis lupus like your father. My lineage is Romanian. There are many types of werewolves. But we are known as Grey wolves, as is your father," Fane explained.

"How can you know my father is a Grey?"

"My father told me," he answered.

"Who is your father?" Jen asked, enthralled in the conversation.

Everyone in the room turned to look at her. She just lifted her shoulders and said, "My bad. That was Jacque's line, wasn't it?"

Sally shook her head and hit Jen in the shoulder. Jen scowled at her.

“My turn,” Jacque piped in. “So, who is your father?” she repeated.

“I’m getting to that. You two jumped the bullet,” Fane told them.

The three girls laughed. Sorin coughed, trying to disguise his laughter.

“Jumped the gun, handsome, not bullet,” Jen corrected him with a grin.

“Oh. Well, as you would say, my bad,” he told Jen.

“Let me continue. As I said I am a Grey and my Pack is in Romania. Every pack has an Alpha, just like our animal cousins. The Alpha is sort of like the king, he rules the pack. He keeps order so that dominant wolves don’t tear each other apart, and so that everyone, especially the non-dominants, also called submissives, are protected.” Fane was trying to make sure he made all this as clear as he could so that Jacquelyn would understand where she fell in all this – and what her new life would be like.

“My father is the Alpha of the Romanian Canis lupus. I am next in line to be Alpha and our Pack calls me Prince. I am a dominant, which means it is in my nature to want to protect those weaker than me. It is also in a dominant’s nature to be aggressive and very territorial. An Alpha has to be a dominant or else he can not maintain order in the pack. Are you with me so far?” Fane asked her.

“You’re a Romanian werewolf prince, your dad is the werewolf king, you are bossy, possessive, and territorial by nature. Which, if you were just a wolf would mean you’d pee on whatever you wanted to mark as yours.”

Jen was nearly rolling on the floor at Jacquelyn’s description.

“And why exactly did you bring your royal butt to Texas?” Jacquelyn finished.

Fane was smiling, thankful that her sense of humor was still intact. He took that to mean she was handling this news rather well.

“Every male Canis lupus has one mate, only one. Sometimes they are drawn to a certain area. I think it’s nature’s way of helping us wolves out, because it can take years and even centuries to find your mate.” Fane let that sink in a minute, knowing the inevitable was coming. But Jen beat Jacquelyn to the punch...again.

“Hold on, put on the brakes, throw it in park, and set the emergency brake while you’re at it. Did you just say centuries?” Jen asked dubiously.

This time, nobody paid attention to the fact it wasn’t Jacquelyn who had asked. They were all too busy looking at Fane, waiting for an answer. Sorin, however, was just sitting in the ugly peach chair looking bored. *He could throw his two cents in at any moment*, Fane thought to himself. But Sorin just sat there.

“Yes, I said centuries. Canis lupus live much, much longer than humans,” Fane answered.

This time it was Jacquelyn who asked, “How much longer? ‘Cause you know I’m only good for like seventy five years, maybe eighty. If I sit any longer on the shelf, I expire.”

“Once we complete the blood rites your life is tied to mine and you will live as long as I do, just as I will live as long as you. You see, Jacquelyn, once mates are bonded one cannot live without the other. It is the way of our species that when one mate dies the other follows,” Fane told her.

“Oh my gosh!” Sally exclaimed. “That is so freaking romantic! Or depressing. It’s all in how you look at it. Do you have any cousins?” she asked him hopefully.

“I’m sorry, Sally, but you must have Canis lupus somewhere in your lineage to bond with a Canis lupus.”

“I can check. You know, like do some research, ‘cause there is no telling what’s in my blood. I could go back

generations..." Sally was interrupted when Jen covered Sally's mouth with her hand.

"Don't mind her. She's missing that part in her brain that tells her when to shut up," Jen said.

"You're one to talk," Jacquelyn said, smiling.

"Okay, keep going. I need to get this all out tonight so I can have tomorrow to freak out," Jacquelyn told Fane.

"I came to Texas because my wolf somehow knew you were here, and that his mate, our mate, was in danger. Before you ask, I will try to explain this quickly. My wolf and I are one, but also separate. When I am not in wolf form, he is still there. I can still call on him for help and use his attributes. When I am in wolf form he uses my human attributes – I can still think and reason like a man. That is why we don't call it changing, because that implies that when we are in our wolf forms we no longer retain any human attributes, and vice versa, which is not the case. We always coexist together. Does that make sense?" Fane asked.

"Yeah, I get that. Not that it's easy to believe, but I understand the logistics of it," Jacquelyn answered.

Fane let go of her hand and brushed her hair away from her face. *She looks so tired*, he thought to himself. He was so grateful that she hadn't thrown him out or told him he was crazy. *But there is still more, so she might throw me out yet.*

"I realize what you're saying is that I'm your mate. You've mentioned this bond thing, and blood...what did you say?" Jacquelyn asked.

"Blood rites. Even though we are mates, we have to perform a ceremony to bond us to each other," Fane began.

"Oh, Sally, get some popcorn now. It's fixing to get rich," Jen interrupted.

Jacquelyn rolled her eyes and Fane just ignored the comment. He didn't want to be distracted, his Luna needed to

know what was coming and know it had to happen very, very soon.

“Ok, back up. When you say perform a ceremony, are you talking behind closed doors type stuff?” Jacquelyn asked him, sounding embarrassed and nervous at the same time.

“If you are asking me if we must consummate our relationship to complete the bond, then the answer is no, Luna.”

He saw her take a deep breath and let it out in obvious relief.

“Put up the popcorn, Sally, things are staying stale,” Jacquelyn announced.

“Can’t you ever just drizzle on my parade or do you always have to have a full monsoon?” Jen asked her with obvious irritation.

“Is the idea really that bad to you, Luna?” Fane asked, honestly wondering.

“We are so so so NOT having this conversation right now. I may be your mate or whatever, but I’ve only known you three stinking days. What kind of girl do you think I am?” Jacquelyn thought back to him.

“Well in truth, love, it does please me to know that is something you do not take lightly,” Fane told her. Then, sounding a little unsure, he asked, *“You haven’t taken it lightly, so to speak, with anyone else, have you?”*

Jacquelyn closed her eyes and shook her head. She took a breath and Fane could tell she was trying to reign in her fiery little temper.

“If you absolutely must know, there hasn’t been anyone I’ve wanted to take lightly...ever. And since you are being so stinking nosy, what about you? Is there a double standard in the Canis lupus world? Is it okay for a guy to take any and everyone lightly without repercussions?” Jacque threw back at him.

“Thank you. To answer your question, it is very uncommon for a male Canis lupus to take anyone but his mate lightly.” Fane grinned at the euphemism they were using to keep from having to actually say ‘making love’. Jacquelyn caught that thought. *“Nope, it’s called not taking it lightly, deal with it.”*

Fane laughed out loud at her embarrassment, which caused everyone in the room to look at him. He couldn’t help himself, she was such a joy to his heart. He didn’t care if she never called it what it was, just so long as she would be his.

“Are you two ready to share the conversation with the rest of us, or would you like to take this to another room?” Jen asked sarcastically.

“Nope, no need to leave. We’re just all one big happy family, sharing, talking, and getting all the gory details of life as a werewolf. Just another typical Wednesday night,” Jacquelyn rambled on nervously.

“Are you ready for me to continue, my Luna?” Fane asked her.

“Bring it on.”

“The blood rites ceremony is performed by the Alpha of the pack you are joining, so it will be performed by my father. In some ways it is much like a human wedding. There are usually only a few witnesses – family and close friends. We will exchange vows...” Fane took a breath because he knew what he was going to say next she would not like. “...and then we do the blood rites,” he finished vaguely. He knew she wouldn’t let him off that easy, but he thought it wouldn’t hurt to try.

“Fane, darling, what exactly are the blood rites?” Jacquelyn asked him with sweetness that he knew better than to believe.

“Understand, Jacquelyn, we are not human. There are some things that our wolf nature demands, one of those things is a blood rite. A male Canis lupus wants the world to know his mate is his. There are several ways this happens. For

example, his mate takes on the markings that he has on his body. The markings on Canis lupus reveal their place in the pack. For instance, I am a dominate so my markings are on the right side of my body. They are also very elaborate and go to the front of my chest, indicating that I am an Alpha. My father explained to me that when an Alpha finds his mate he develops new markings that are visible even with clothes on, like on the neck, in order to tell all Canis lupus that he is mated. A mated Alpha is a much stronger Alpha.”

Fane paused to give her a chance to ask any questions, and then just to humor her he turned and looked at Jen, who responded with, “Oh, I’m good. Carry on, this is great stuff.”

Fane winked at her and grinned.

To his and Jen’s surprise Jacquelyn reached over and slapped his arm. “Quit winking at my friends. Jen’s gonna hyperventilate and Sally’s gonna pass out. Get on with this whole blood rites thing,” she growled at him.

“You’re a violent little thing, aren’t you?” Fane teased.

She gave him a look as if to say “I’m waiting.”

So he continued. “That is one way the male’s mate is marked.”

Sally raised her hand like she was in school.

Jen rolled her eyes and said, “Put your hand down, you dork, and just ask.”

“How do the markings identify her to other werewolves if no one can see them unless she wears a low shirt like Jacque did tonight?” Sally asked.

Fane growled and that earned him another slap on the arm from Jacquelyn.

“Don’t growl at my friends, either.”

“I wasn’t growling at them, love. I was growling at the idea of another seeing your markings. The markings on the female are meant only for her mate to see, they are precious to

him because it is the first thing that indicates she is his. Male *Canis lupus* do not like other males to see their mates' markings. It was very difficult for me tonight with yours showing, it helps that your hair covers up most of them," he told her.

"So it's kind of like some guy looking in her lingerie drawer and seeing all her hot little outfits, huh?" Jen stated with a grin.

"Only you would come up with that analogy. You know that, right?" Sally asked her.

"I'm just clarifying things. You know, breaking it down, making it chewable," Jen responded.

"Jen, Sally, I love you guys but zip it, okay?" Jacquelyn asked them in exasperation.

Both girls ran their fingers across their lips as if to close a zipper and gave her the thumbs up sign. Jacquelyn nodded her thanks.

"Another way a male *Canis lupus* shows that he has found his mate is the ability to speak to her by thought. I cannot speak to anyone else, nor hear anyone else's thoughts but yours. It is the same for you," Fane continued to explain. He noticed the look Jacquelyn was giving him was less than pleased and asked her, "Does that bother you, Luna?"

"Well, there are some things I don't want you to know," Jacquelyn told him shyly.

"Oooh, like that time we snuck out and went skin-" Jen started but was quickly interrupted by Sally.

"JEN!" Sally hollered. "Let's get that popcorn. I think you need something to keep your mouth occupied or we are going to shove your foot in it, okay?" she finished sweetly.

"Once again my parade is saturated in the downpour of hurricane Sally," Jen retorted.

Jacquelyn watched as her two best friends walked to the kitchen, and then she turned to Fane.

“So what’s the third way a male marks his mate?” she asked him.

Fane simply sent her the thought, *I think you would be more comfortable if we talk about it privately.*

Jacquelyn’s eyebrows rose in apprehension. “That bad, huh?” she asked him.

In response, Fane simply took her hand and pulled her up from the couch. He turned to Lilly and Sorin and told them, “I think the rest of this conversation needs to be between me and my mate.”

“I can understand that,” Lilly responded.

Sorin simply nodded his understanding.

Fane looked at Jacquelyn and said, “Lead the way, Luna.”

Chapter 19

Jacque continued to hold Fane's hand as she led him up the stairs to her bedroom. Before they reached the top of the stairs she heard her mom yell, "Jacque, leave your door open, please. Mated or not, you are still living under my rules."

Jacque laughed, so thankful for something that made her feel like she was just a girl with a boy, hanging out. Not a Canis lupus, not a mate, just teenagers.

"You got it, mom," Jacque hollered back.

Fane could feel her relief and it made him sad that he was causing her life to change so drastically from what she had ever known. He wanted her to be happy, he wanted her to feel safe, cared for, and loved by him.

As they entered her room, Jacque let go of Fane's hand and stepped away, putting some distance between them. She needed space, she was beginning to feel just a tad claustrophobic.

"You can sit in that chair or the window seat," she said, indicating both places.

Jacque suddenly felt very nervous, being in her room alone with him felt so intimate, yet she couldn't deny that she was very relieved that whatever he had to tell her was not going to be broadcasted to everyone downstairs.

"So, what is this other thing that marks the female as a mate? I'm assuming it has to do with the blood rites?" she asked him.

"You are correct, it is about the blood rites. The reason I wanted to speak with you alone is because it is the only part of the ceremony that is private," Fane explained.

"Whoa whoa whoa, back up. I thought you said there was no taking it lightly stuff happening in this ceremony," Jacque said a little frantically.

"Luna, I'm going to lay this out plainly for you. There will be no lies, half-truths, or bush beating," Fane told her firmly.

Jacque tried, she really did, but she couldn't contain the laughter.

“Meu inimă, would you please share with me what you find so funny?” Fane asked her patiently.

“It's called beating around the bush, oh prince of wolves, not bush beating,” she informed him, still giggling despite her efforts not to.

“Oh, well, my mistake. There will be no *beating around the bush* any longer. We are going to call it what it is, so if you turn a lovely shade of red I will try hard not to find it adorable.”

“Fine, spit it out already,” Jacque answered, irritated by his little sermon

She planted herself on her bed, legs Indian-style, back straight, her hands folded in her lap. She was trying desperately to not be anxious but she was quite unsuccessful. Finally, Fane began to explain the blood rites, and he was right, what he told her made her blush so badly that she felt its heat.

“What I told you is true about the bonding ceremony. We do not have to consummate or make love, whichever you prefer to call it, in order to be fully mated. We do, however, have to exchange blood.”

Jacque cringed at that. “That's really gross. You do realize that, don't you? I mean, surely that can't be good for a person.”

Fane gave her an “I'm not finished” look, and she abruptly stopped talking.

“There is no eloquent way to put this, it just is what it is. I will mark you and take your blood by biting you,” Fane paused, waiting for her reaction. She did not disappoint.

“YOU ARE GOING TO WHAT ME?” Jacque yelled, completely caught off guard by his revelation. *I mean*, she thought to herself, *when he said exchange blood I was thinking*

finger prick, a little embarrassment because I'd have to suck on his finger and vice versa, but biting me? That's in a whole 'nother category of embarrassment.

Fane walked over to her bed and knelt down in front of her. He placed his hands over hers and she instantly felt reassurance flow through her. She closed her eyes and let herself soak it up, embracing the comfort he was providing.

When she opened her eyes she was staring into glowing, crystal blue eyes. "How did you do that?" she asked him.

"For wolves, touch is a very powerful thing. It provides comfort and reassurance for them, and like other things, it is even more potent between mates. You needed my comfort and I could do nothing else than provide for you. When you need something, it calls to me. I can feel it, my wolf can feel it, and we are obligated to do what we can."

Jacque tried not to think about that, but call her crazy – which at this point she was bound to be – she could just picture herself craving a Snickers ice cream bar in the middle of the night while a raging thunderstorm wreaked havoc. Here came Fane knocking on her window, soaking wet, with a Snickers in hand. *That could be kinda handy.*

Fane caught all of her little daydream and chuckled at her. "You really think the oddest things. You know that, right?"

"Let's stay on track, wolf-boy. Bite me where exactly? Since this has to be done in private, I'm a little leery of the answer," she told him.

"Relax, Luna. I'm not going to bite you anywhere that you might one day like," Fane said.

Jacque knew he was just trying to get a reaction out of her and, much to her chagrin, it worked like a charm.

"You just stop that thought right there. There will be no discussing of the future likes and dislikes of our maybe one day physical relationship, got it?" Jacque told him with finality.

“I will humor you for now,” Fane told her with a grin. “Moving along, love, I will bite you on your neck. Rest assured, Luna, I am a werewolf but at least I’m not a vampire. My bite will not last so long as to drain you of your blood, only long enough to take enough blood to swallow and leave my mark on you.”

Jacque was quiet for a moment. She took a deep breath, then said, “I’m not even going to ask about the vampire comment. I’m just gonna let that one slide by without so much as a wave or glance. What I will give my attention to is this whole leaving a mark on me bit. I get that when you bite me you’ll get blood in your mouth and yada yada, but how are you going to leave a mark on me?” Jacque asked him with surprising composure.

“I’m not really sure how I leave a mark on you. I think it’s just a part of the whole supernatural part of bonding. The mark I will leave is the visual symbol that you are mated,” he explained. “The final warning to other males that you have been bonded is smell.”

“I’m going to smell? Please tell me I’m not going to stink, ‘cause I don’t do stinky, okay?” Jacque implored him.

“No, Luna, you are not going to stink. To other *Canis lupus* you will smell like me because you have taken my blood, and I will smell like you when I have taken your blood. Once we have consummated our mating, the smells will intensify greatly,” Fane explained.

“You just had to throw that last curve ball in there, didn’t you? Well, don’t get your hopes up ‘cause I’m not going to swing at it,” Jacque told him haughtily.

“So this whole biting thing is done in private. Why?” she asked.

“Would you like me to bite you on the neck in front of your mom?”

“Point to you. You’re right, there is no way that mouth of yours is coming near my neck in front of anyone, not my mom

and especially not your parents,” Jacque said.

Oh crap, she thought, *I have to meet his parents*. She felt panicky at that thought yet she didn’t know why. She hadn’t been nervous when she’d met Trent’s parents. She heard Fane growl as he caught the thought of Trent in her mind.

“Oh shut up already, you over possessive, royal, Romanian pain in the backside. It’s not like I’m thinking about him biting my neck,” Jacque said sarcastically.

Fane stood up and sat next to her on the bed. He leaned closer and swept her hair away from her neck, revealing the markings on her shoulders and neck. Fane traced the marks and let out a low growl. Jacque shivered at his touch and found that she couldn’t quite keep her breathing even. Actually, she felt like she might pass out at any moment. What came next almost sealed her fate.

Fane leaned even closer and whispered in her ear, “I would hope you were not thinking of him biting your neck. I assure you that once I do you will never have need to think of another again.” And then he gently placed his lips on her neck. Jacque didn’t even try to suppress the small moan that came out of her tightly closed lips. But naturally, Fane could not leave well enough alone. After he kissed her neck, he pulled his lips away playfully and gently nipped her.

Jacque jumped and turned to look at him breathlessly, putting her hands up as if to ward him off. “I, um...” She shook her head and rubbed her face with both hands as she struggled to get her thoughts and words to cooperate with her mouth. “Now I understand why that part is done in private. Thank you for demonstrating.”

Fane grinned at her wickedly. “I could demonstrate again. It is proven that people are most likely to remember things when done three times.”

“Nice try, Don Juan, but people remember things they are *told* three times, not things they do,” she countered.

“We could test out the theory to see if it applies to actions as well. I’m all for scientific study,” Fane teased.

“Well, you’re out of luck because I suck at science and therefore do not enjoy it,” she said matter of factly.

Fane leaned forward again and this time Jacque leaned back, but this didn’t deter him, he just grinned and leaned closer.

“So you mean to tell me, my micul incendiū (little fire), you did not enjoy my demonstration? If you did not, then I did not do it correctly and I would feel obligated to try again.”

Closing her eyes, Jacque immediately thought of a wall shielding her mind and then she came up with plan. *Evasion is not working, time to move on to plan B. If you can’t beat ’em, join ’em. Let me just see if I can give him a taste his own medicine and just maybe it will throw him off his game and then I can retreat. You know what Jen would call you right?* she asked herself. *Yeah, yeah. I’m a chicken s__t, so be it.*

Her plan of attack decided, Jacque stopped leaning back and instead leaned forward. This did indeed confuse him and make him back up a tad. Encouraged by the little victory, she got a little bolder and scooted her body closer to his. Fane’s brow furrowed and she could tell he was wondering what was going on, but he did not move, just sat very still. Jacque decided the angle she was currently in was all wrong for her scheme so she got up on her knees and scooted around until she was directly behind him. She was sitting on her legs with her feet behind her. She placed her hands on his shoulders and leaned close until her mouth was right beside his ear.

Fane shuddered and that made her grin. *Take that you little seducing hound*, she thought to herself. She let her breath flow over his ear as she told him. “How do you like them apples, wolf-boy?”

Fane scooted forward to get away from her mouth and she could see the rise and fall of his back – he was breathing quickly. She found herself rather intrigued by his behavior.

She could not think of a time that Trent had responded to her like that...*Oops*. She'd let her wall down during that thought.

Fane stood up so abruptly that Jacque fell forward and had to catch herself to keep from falling on her face. She looked up and saw Fane pacing her room quickly, in obvious agitation.

"Fane, I'm sorry. I didn't mean for you to hear that. I wasn't trying to think about the physical part of my relationship with Trent, I was merely comparing your reactions..." Jacque tried to explain, hoping to calm the wolf currently wearing a hole in her carpet.

"Jacquelyn, you are not helping," he told her with a growl. "I realize you do not understand the intensity of my feelings for you, but I cannot change my nature. In the wild, wolves mate for life, and a male wolf will kill any who tries to take his mate. It is the same with my species. I realize this Trent," Fane said his name in obvious repugnance, "was a part of your life and you can't change that. It's not that I dislike him as a person, it's just that I am jealous of the obvious affection you felt and still feel for him. I don't like the fact that you were intimate with him, when that is my right alone." Fane closed his eyes and took slow, deep breaths, pressing his fingers on the bridge of his nose.

When he looked up at Jacque, she could see the struggle going on inside him. He wanted to honor her and give her the space she needed because she had not grown up with his kind, he could not expect her to just accept his ways without compromise. But his wolf did not see things in such muted colors. He thought in absolutes. Jacque was his mate, she belongs with him and no other, her thoughts should be for him alone, and she should give herself to him completely just as he was giving himself to her completely.

Jacque got up off the bed and walked to him. This time she was not trying to beat him at his own game, she was not trying to seduce him, she only wanted to reassure him. In that moment, she realized she wanted to be his and she desperately wanted him to be hers and no other's.

She put her arms around his waist and laid her head on his chest. Fane answered her unspoken thought. “I am only yours, my Luna. I was yours from my first breath and will be until my last.”

Jacque closed her eyes as tears ran slowly down her cheeks. She pulled him closer to her as his hands rubbed her back and he kissed the top of her head. When she pulled back to look up at him, he gently held her face. Then he did the sweetest thing Jacque had ever experienced.

Fane kissed her forehead, her eyes, her cheeks, and her nose; he kissed her chin and when she thought she couldn't wait any longer, he kissed her lips. It was soft and slow and sweet. Jacque let out a soft moan and that made Fane growl. He increased the pressure of his lips on hers and the kiss became much more passionate.

Finally, Fane pulled away and leaned his forehead against hers. To Jacque's relief he was just as breathless as she, and it took him a moment to compose himself.

“I think it's time for me to say good night, love, or my good intentions of keeping your virtue pure until we are bonded might take a backseat to my hormones,” he said honestly, completely unashamed at his obvious desire for her.

Jacque smiled at him. She didn't want him to go. She didn't want to be separated from him for even a minute, but she knew her mom would never let Fane spend the night, no matter if he was her mate or not.

“Sorin is staying here to protect you and your mom. If at any point you feel unsafe, call to me. I realize your mom is not completely comfortable about you and I being mated, but I need you to understand, your safety comes first and I will not leave you unprotected just to appease your mom. Do you understand this?” Fane asked her earnestly.

Jacque knew her mom would want her safe even if that meant Fane being at their house everyday, and that idea suited her just fine.

“Are you always this bossy?” Jacque asked him, ignoring his question.

“When it comes to your safety, yes, I retain the right to be bossy,” Fane told her. He hugged her close one more time, then let her go. Jacque immediately felt lonely without his touch. It shocked her because she felt close to tears. *Good grief, Jacque*, she thought to herself. *Get a grip, he’s just going across the street.*

“That is part of the bond, love. It is hard for mates to be apart for very long and not share their thoughts. A mate’s soul is not complete without the other and mates need that closeness, they crave it,” he explained to her.

“So what am I supposed to do while we are apart? I mean good grief, Fane, you haven’t left yet and I’m sad over the mere idea of you gone,” she told him desperately.

Fane placed his hand on her neck, on the very spot his lips had been earlier. “I will come to you the instant you ask for me. If I have to sleep on the floor right outside your door, I will do it if that’s what you need.” Then Fane said the one thing Jacque did not expect to hear.

“I love you, my Luna. I was made to love, protect, and provide for you. Never hesitate to tell me or ask me for what you need.”

Jacque stood up on her toes and kissed Fane firmly on the lips. She pulled away quickly and said, “You better go now, before I beg you to stay.” She turned him toward her bedroom door and pushed him out.

She didn’t want to watch him walk away from her, as silly as that might be. Instead of using words, she sent him a picture from her mind. It was of him holding her close. She was tilting her head to the side like wolves do to show submission, like a female would do for her mate to fulfill the blood rites. She had absolutely no idea where the thought came from, maybe it was her subconscious letting him know she would submit to the blood rites ceremony. *That’s news to me*, she told herself.

In her mind she heard Fane growl in response and all he said was, *“Soon, my love. Very, very soon.”*

Jacque shivered at his words. *“Oh goody,”* she responded sarcastically.

Hey, what else would he expect from her? Sarcasm was her specialty.

Jacque went to her window and sat in the seat, staring out at the street. She was waiting for Fane to leave her house, so she could watch him walk across the street. Yep, she had it bad. She saw Sorin step out and then Fane. Sorin hugged Fane again. *Man, they really are a touchy bunch, aren't they,* she thought. They talked for a few minutes. When they finally parted, Sorin positioned himself directly in front of Fane, put his hand over his heart, bowed slightly, and turned his head to expose his neck. The only response from Fane to acknowledge Sorin's obvious submission was a curt nod. Then Sorin turned and walked back into Jacque's house.

Before Fane turned away to walk back to the Henrys' house, he looked up at her window. At first Jacque wanted to duck away, embarrassed at being caught watching him...again. Then she figured, *What the hey, how often do I get to hanker after hot Romanians?*

“I would hope you don't hanker after any other. Romanian, hot, or otherwise.... Luna, what does that even mean?” Fane sent her his thoughts.

“You're really going to have to invest in a good dictionary and thesaurus. You know that, right?” Jacque responded.

She watched as he blew her a kiss and couldn't help thinking how much she would rather have her lips on the receiving end of that kiss instead of his hand. She felt her neck tingle at the thought of his lips, and was telling herself to get a grip when she realized Fane hadn't told her something. Jacque jerked her window up and leaned out.

“Fane, you conveniently forgot to tell me how I take your blood,” Jacque told him.

“I didn’t forget, I thought that would be obvious, love,” Fane told her. “You get to bite me back.” Fane winked at her, grinned, then turned to walk back to the Henrys’.

“If you don’t want to bite him, I will.”

Jacque turned to see Sally and Jen standing in her doorway. Sally lifted her right hand, which held a coffee mug. “Hot chocolate?” she asked.

“You better believe it,” was all Jacque said.

Chapter 20

Fane was smiling to himself as he walked across the street toward the Henrys' house. He hadn't forgotten to tell Jacquelyn that she would have to bite him, he had just been waiting for the right moment. He was quickly learning that his Luna was unpredictable. He didn't know if she would be happy about getting revenge over him biting her, or if the idea of having to bite him hard enough to draw blood would be the shove that pushed her over the edge. To his relief, she didn't freak out...yet. She simply looked confused. He figured it would sink in in a little while and she would contact him later tonight.

Fane made it into the kitchen and then halfway up the stairs before he ran into Brian. "How was the date?" Brian asked, wiggling his eyebrows.

"It was good. Jacquelyn is a wonderful girl," Fane answered.

"So you gonna take her out again?"

"I hope so. I didn't ask her tonight. I didn't want to come across as obsessive or anything," Fane told him and chuckled to himself. He knew he was beyond obsessed but, then again, she wasn't just a girl he liked, she wasn't just a crush, so honestly he was being pretty reasonable about the whole situation. *Yeah, keep telling yourself that*, Fane thought.

"Oh, you had a phone call while you were out," Brian told him.

"A phone call? Was it from my parents?" Fane asked.

"No, it was from Steven, the salesman from the dealership. He asked that you call him back tonight, that it was very important. I wrote his number down and taped it do your door."

"Ok, thank you," Fane replied absentmindedly as he continued on up the stairs.

"I'll see you in the morning," Brian called to him.

“Yeah, see you,” was all Fane said.

When Fane made it to his bedroom, he saw the note Brian had taped to the door. He pulled it off and pushed the door open, closing it behind him.

For a moment he just stared at the piece of paper, not really sure if he should call his Alpha first. He decided he should call Steve first – then he could tell his father about everything.

He picked up the phone and dialed the number Brian had written on the paper. He listened to it ring four times before someone finally answered.

“Hello,” the voice said.

“I’m calling to speak with Steve, please,” Fane said politely.

“Hold please,” Fane was told. Fane waited for several minutes before another voice came on the line. He was trying hard not to think about all the scenarios that could play out under the circumstances, and unfortunately each was no better than the other.

“Is this the pup from Romania?” a deep voice asked.

“If by pup you mean the Romanian Prince of the Canis lupus, then you are correct,” Fane responded already wanting to growl. “To whom do I have the pleasure of speaking?” Fane asked.

“My name is Lucas Steele. I am the Alpha of the Coldspring pack. I’m calling to find out why you’re still in my territory, as you have not been sanctioned to be here. Not only that, but why are staying across the street from the female I have claimed as my own?” Lucas asked, his voice becoming a growl.

Fane’s eyes began to glow; he felt his canines lengthen and had to close his eyes to gain composure. This mutt had dared to claim Jacquelyn as his. If he came near his mate he would rip his throat out. Once he was calm and able to speak he responded. “There is no record of your pack. Therefore, I do

not have to seek permission to be here. As for the female you are referring to, unless you can prove that she is indeed your mate, you have no claim on her.”

Fane heard a low growl on the other end of the phone. He waited for Lucas to respond and for a moment thought that the other wolf was no longer there. Then he heard him speak. “Are you trying to say that you can prove she is your mate?” Lucas asked.

“Da (yes),” was all Fane said in response.

Then he heard Lucas say the very thing Fane had been hoping to avoid.

“Then I challenge you for the bonding ceremony. You know how this works, correct? Even if you do, let me refresh your memory. Whether or not she does carry your marks, she is not bonded to you, and I have the right to challenge you for the bonding ceremony. If I win, this of course means you die, and I will take the female as mate. If you win, well, the outcome is obvious,” Lucas explained.

Fane took a deep breath. His Alpha was going to be livid. Jacquelyn was going to be even angrier when she found out she had to go to Romania. This really was not how Fane had expected to start his senior year in high school. Fane had to buy himself some time in order to get Jacquelyn and her mother out of the country, which meant she would have to go without him. He didn’t like that idea, but he would do whatever he could to keep her safe.

“I can do nothing else but accept. However, I have the right to request my Alpha be present at the challenge to ensure a fair fight, and because he is in Romania, it will take two days for him to get here.”

“I know the rules. You may call your Alpha to come and witness. However, during those two days Jacquelyn,” Lucas paused when he heard Fane snap his teeth together and growl, “will be under house arrest, just in case you were planning on trying to smuggle her out while we’re waiting for your Alpha.

I will have two guards at her house and you will not be permitted to see her during this time.”

Fane was quickly losing control of his composure, and Lucas Steele finally pushed him over the edge when he told Fane he would be stopping by Jacquelyn’s house the next day to tell her his intentions. Fane’s nails began to sharpen and grow, his face was beginning to lose its human shape as the wolf tried to push himself out. His mate was in danger, another male was attempting to take her from him, and he wanted blood.

“Fane, are you alright? What’s wrong? Something’s wrong so don’t try to tell me it’s not ‘cause I will kick your butt if you lie to me after that whole ‘there will be no half truths and lies and blah blah blah,’ so spit it out.” Fane heard Jacquelyn in his thoughts and it calmed the wolf immediately. Fane realized in that moment how precious having a mate was, for only she could tame his wolf.

“I will not tell you that nothing is wrong, Luna, but I cannot tell you what it is at this moment. Please trust me. Give me a few minutes and I will explain,” Fane told her honestly. He knew he was going to have to tell her, especially since this Lucas Steele was going to be coming to her house. At least Sorin was there and would protect her with his life – she was to be his queen one day, she was to be valued above his life.

“Fine, five minutes. Then I want you at my front door to talk to me face to face,” Jacquelyn demanded.

“I will be there,” Fane answered.

Fane hadn’t realized that Lucas was asking him a question since he’d been distracted by his mate’s thoughts.

“Do you understand the terms that I have laid out for you regarding the challenge?”

“I do,” was all Fane said.

“Then I expect to receive a phone call the minute your Alpha is here. My wolves will be at her house in one hour. You have until then to see her. I would advise you to not let

my wolves catch you touching her. As you know, while the challenge stands you cannot attempt to bond with her or you forfeit.” The line went dead.

Fane paced around his room, pulling the wolf back. His nails returned to their normal length, his canines receded, and when he looked in the mirror he saw that, although his face had gone back to normal, his eyes still glowed ice-blue. *Well*, he thought to himself, *I think that’s the best I can do*. He felt his wolf stir as if to tell him he was lucky that was all that was left of the phase.

Fane had never felt his wolf that angry before. He and his wolf were in agreement that the idea of this other Alpha anywhere near their mate was infuriating. He wasn’t sure how he was going to manage not going over there and tearing Lucas Steele in two. He looked at the clock and realized it had been four minutes since he had heard from Jacquelyn and because he wouldn’t put it beyond her to march across the street if he didn’t show up, he decided he’d better get over there.

For the sake of expediency and to keep from bothering Brian and Sara, Fane decided to take the window. Two stories might have been a challenge for a human but for a Grey, jumping was second nature. He leaped to the ground, then set off at a jog across the street to Jacquelyn’s.

When he got there, she was already standing on the porch with a robe wrapped around her, foot tapping, and a look that would make even an Alpha Grey stop in his tracks. She was adorable.

“What the hell was that? Do you make it a habit to jump out of two story structures? Were you thinking, ‘hey the front door is such a typical way to leave a place why not mix it up a bit and fall out of the window instead?’” Jacquelyn fumed.

“Relax, Luna. I didn’t fall, I jumped. Jumping is second nature to me and I chose to do it because I didn’t want to bother Brian or Sara. How are you?”

“How do you think I am?” she asked sarcastically. “Here I am sitting, drinking my hot chocolate, explaining to my two best friends that I have to bite some guy, you know the usual, and BAM.” Jacquelyn clapped her hands together to emphasize her words. “I’m nearly knocked over by a wave of emotion or something,” she finished, sounding less aggressive and wearier than she had when she started.

Fane took her hand in his, brought it to his lips, and kissed it gently. He felt her shudder in response. He hated that he was causing her distress and hated knowing it was about to get worse. He looked at his watch and realized he only had forty five minutes before Lucas’ wolves arrived.

“I need you to get your mom, love. I will get Sorin,” Fane told her.

“Why? What’s wrong, Fane?” Jacquelyn asked, obvious concern all over her face.

“Let’s get inside and get everyone gathered and I will explain. Bring Jen and Sally also, please,” Fane said as he led her in the house.

“Sorin is in the room down the hall from the kitchen,” Jacquelyn told him.

Fane liked that there was distance between the other wolf and his mate, but the logical part of his brain worried that it was too far for him to be able to protect her effectively.

Fane headed toward Sorin’s room as Jacquelyn headed toward the stairs to get her friends and mother.

Before Fane could even turn the corner to go down the hall toward Sorin’s room, his guard was already there. Sorin exposed his neck in submission to his Prince and asked, “Have you called your father yet?”

“Not yet. I want to talk to Jacquelyn and her mother first and let them know what is going on. The wolf claiming to be Alpha of this territory is sending Greys over here to watch Jacquelyn’s house. I don’t think he is aware that you are here, and we need to keep it that way,” Fane told him.

Fane and Sorin made their way back to the living room and saw that all four ladies were seated on the couch together. Fane wanted to have Jacquelyn sit by him but relinquished the idea, knowing she needed to be close to the people she trusted most.

“I trust you, Fane.” Fane heard Jacquelyn’s thought in his mind. She stood up and came to him. He took her hand and led her to the loveseat where they sat down together. That small act made Fane’s heart swell with love for his mate.

Lilly looked a little sad when she saw her daughter sitting next to Fane, but she quickly shook it off. “Fane, tell us please,” was all Lilly said.

“There is a pack of Greys here in Coldspring and the Alpha, Lucas Steele, has contacted me. He is claiming Jacquelyn as his mate.” Fane couldn’t help the growl that came out as he said this last part.

“The hell I am!” Jacquelyn yelled, abruptly standing. “I don’t even know this crack pot...” She looked at her mom. “Do I?” she asked, sounding less confident.

“No, Jacque,” Lilly answered. “I don’t know him either. Fane, have you seen him?”

“No, I have not met him in person.” Fane turned to Jacquelyn. “You will know him soon enough, meu inimă. He is planning on coming here tomorrow to tell you himself.”

“Just who the hell does this guy think he is? He can’t just march his furry butt up to Jacque’s house and if he thinks he can, he has obviously underestimated my ability to go all kung fu on his hide,” Jen ranted.

Fane smiled at her, appreciating her loyalty to his mate.

“Will you be with me?” Jacquelyn asked him, sounding like she already knew the answer.

“No, love, I will not be able to. Lucas has challenged me for bonding ceremony, so I cannot be with you until after the fight. He is allowed to see you one time to let you know of his

intentions, and then he is not allowed to see you either,” Fane explained to his mate.

“What do you mean he challenged you for bonding ceremony? What fight?” Jacquelyn asked incredulously.

Fane took her hand and pulled her down next to him. “Because we are not bonded, any male has the right to challenge me to be your mate, even if he is not your true mate. I have no choice but to accept the challenge. What that means, Jacquelyn, is that Lucas and I will fight in our wolf forms. The one left standing will be your mate.”

“When you say, ‘the one left standing,’ you’re saying the one left alive, aren’t you?” she asked him.

“Yes, love. The fight is to the death,” he answered.

Jacquelyn sat quietly for a few moments. Her head was down so he couldn’t see her eyes.

“*Are you alright?*” Fane asked as he placed a hand under her chin and pulled her face up to look at him.

“No, Fane. I am most definitely not alright. I’m freaking out at the moment, if you must know. The idea of bonding or whatever with you was crazy. The idea of bonding with a total stranger, a stranger that happens to be a werewolf, mind you, is beyond my ability to be reasonable about,” Jacquelyn told him.

“I second that motion,” Sally said.

“I third it,” Jen put in.

“You can’t third something you dork, you just say ‘aye’ to show you are in agreement,” Sally informed her.

Jen just stuck her tongue out at Sally and ignored her comment.

“You aren’t going to be bonding with anyone but me!” he growled.

“Yeah, yeah, beat your chest if you need to while you’re at it, Tarzan,” Jacquelyn said sarcastically.

“I’ve requested my Alpha be present at the fight. It will take two days for him to arrive. I was going to try and have Sorin smuggle you and your mom out of the country, but Lucas suspected as much and is putting your house under watch by his wolves. However, he is not aware that Sorin is staying here, so that is to our benefit. Should I lose...”

“You will NOT lose!” Jacquelyn said firmly.

Fane continued as if she had not spoken. “Sorin will get you and your mom to safety. You must promise me, Luna, that you will go with him and let my Pack keep you safe.”

“I will make no such promise because nothing, and I mean absolutely nothing, is going to happen to you. If you get as much as a scratch on your handsome face I’m going to kick your werewolf a-” before Jacquelyn could finish Fane had his mouth on hers, kissing her firmly.

“Finally, I get some action!” Jen exclaimed.

When Fane finally pulled back from Jacquelyn, she looked a little dazed. She quickly recovered, however. “You just kissed me,” she said, her words full of confusion.

“I did, love,” Fane responded with a sly grin.

“In front of my mom!” Jacquelyn said, clearly embarrassed.

“And Sorin and your friends as well,” Fane pointed out, sounding smug.

“Don’t be a smart ass,” Jacquelyn told him.

Fane stood up and, looking at his watch, realized he only had ten minutes left with his mate. It infuriated him that he had to obey the rules of the challenge, but if he didn’t he could wind up having to forfeit and lose her. The thought made his heart hurt. He pulled her up off the loveseat to him, and again not caring of their audience, kissed her like it might be their last. He held her face tenderly in his hands and tried to memorize her features, how soft her skin was. He pulled back abruptly and turned away, overwhelmed with such strong

emotions he didn't know what to do. He wanted to crush something; he wanted blood, the blood of the one who dared to take his mate. He was breathing hard and his eyes were glowing when Jacquelyn spoke.

“You kissed me again!” she said, stomping her foot like a child. “Is PDA a big thing with your pack, ‘cause that could be a problem,” she continued, but stopped as soon as Fane turned to face her.

Chapter 21

Jacque's breath caught when Fane turned towards her and she saw his eyes glowing, like when you see an animal at night and light hits their eyes. They looked just like that. *Freaky*, she thought.

Jacque realized, once she got over the shock of his eyes, that Fane was on the verge of losing control. She wasn't sure what might happen if he didn't regain control, and she could tell he was fighting for it as hard as he could. She didn't know what to do or how could she help him.

Jacque was too busy staring at Fane to realize that Jen had walked beside her. "He needs you to tame the beast that is roaring inside him. Go to him," Jen whispered and pushed Jacque towards Fane.

Jacque looked at Jen and then at Sally. She couldn't believe something so profound had come out of Jen's mouth.

Sally shrugged. "Who knew?" she said, answering Jacque's unspoken question.

Jacque turned her attention back to Fane as she walked to him. She was close enough that she could feel his breath on her face. She reached up and laid her hand on his cheek. His eyes closed and he leaned into her hand like a dog begging to be petted. Jacque found herself smiling, but then felt his anger, fear, and jealousy flow through her. Fane's eyes snapped open and he stared unblinkingly into her eyes.

"I have not meant to scare you. I would say that my wolf is the one out of control, but that would be a lie. The man is just as out of control as the wolf right now and that makes me very dangerous," Fane shared his thoughts with her.

"You would never hurt me," Jacque told him in complete confidence.

"No, it is impossible for a Grey to harm his mate. Others, however, innocent or not, cannot have that promise. I have to go, Jacquelyn. Lucas' wolves will be here any minute, and in

the state I am in I cannot guarantee I will be civilized with them,” Fane told her.

Jacque was shaking her head before he even finished speaking. “I don’t want you to go,” she whispered.

Fane pulled her to the side and turned so that his back was facing the others and she was shielded from their sight. He moved her hair away from her neck and kissed her in the same spot he had before, the spot where he would leave his mark. *It better be his mark,* Jacque thought.

“I love you, Luna.”

“What does Luna mean?” she asked him.

“I will tell you soon, but now is not the time. I must go before the other wolves get here.” He held her a moment more, then stepped away.

Jacque snatched his hand before he could get much further and pulled him to her. She looked him in the eyes, still seeing the wolf glowing there.

“I love you, but if you let this Alpha take me as his mate, I will die just so I can come kick your royal Romanian butt. Got it?”

“Say it again,” Fane told her.

“Say that I’ll kick your royal Romanian butt?” Jacque started.

“No, love. Say the first part,” Fane said adoringly.

It dawned on Jacque what he was talking about and it made her smile. She leaned in close to him and whispered, “I love you.”

“Thank you,” Fane said so softly she almost missed it. He kissed her on the forehead and turned back to the others. He looked at Sorin, who stepped forward and bared his neck again.

“You will protect her with your life or you will forfeit it,” Fane told him in a voice Jacque had never heard him use.

Sorin sank down to his knees. It didn't look like he had meant to, it was like someone forced him there. She heard a whine come from Sorin and then Fane walked to him and laid his hand on his head. He said something in Romanian and walked to the front door.

Jacque rushed to follow him as he opened it and walked out. Just as she stepped out, a car stopped in front of her house and two men got out. Jacque grabbed Fane's arm, not in fear for herself but fear for him. Fane instinctively took her hand without thinking about the fact that Lucas had said he didn't want his wolves to see Fane touching her.

As soon as he touched her the other wolves growled, baring their teeth, their eyes glowing. Jacque's breathing increased and her hand tightened on Fane's.

Fane turned to her. "You have to let go, love. They are growling because I'm touching you."

"I don't give a flying sack of crap that they don't like you touching me. I will touch who I want, I will bond with who I want, and I will not have mangy mutts growling at me in my own yard!" Jacque was yelling, had let go of Fane's hand, and was stomping toward the other wolves.

Fane was so surprised by her that he'd barely reached her as she got in the face of one of the wolves. She had her finger in his face and was yelling every expletive known to man and some not known, for that matter. Jacque had never felt so angry. How dare this Lucas whoever try to tell her what to do, dictate who could touch her, or challenge her mate.

The wolf she was yelling at was leaning back as far as he could to keep from touching her. She was no longer aware of her surroundings, she had tunnel vision, and the only thing she could see was this wolf in front of her who'd dared come in her territory. She didn't pause to think about the fact that she had just called her yard her territory, she filed that away for later.

Jacque felt something touch her arm. She saw the angry face of the werewolf in front of her and heard him growl ferociously. She turned to see who had touched her. It was Fane. He was saying her name and trying to pull her back from the other wolf. Jacque realized they had an audience since everyone in her house had now come outside.

Jen was marching down the walkway and right into the other wolf's face. She put her hands on her hips and glared at him. "You think I'm scared of you?" she asked sarcastically. "I'm your worst nightmare. Just remember, we all gotta sleep sometime. Hope you can sleep with one eye open," she winked at him and turned to walk back to the house.

Jacque finally let Fane pull her back to the house, then he stepped away from her, and though she tried not to let it hurt her, she couldn't stop the stab of rejection she felt.

"I'm not rejecting you, meu inimă. Please believe that. I'm trying to protect you," Fane told her through his thoughts.

She looked at him and nodded her head in acknowledgment as she watched him turn toward the other wolves. He walked past them and when he made it to the street he turned and told them, "If either of you touches her I will kill you and use your pelt as a rug." And he left.

Jacque watched him the entire way until the door to the Henrys' was closed. One of the wolves standing in her yard walked up and bared his neck to her.

"Do you think it wise to bare your throat to the one who would see it torn out?" Jacque asked, surprised by sounding so confident and in control despite the emptiness she felt without Fane by her side.

"I bare my throat in acknowledgment of my Alpha's mate," the wolf told her.

"Then you bare it in vain because I am NOT your Alpha's mate. If he kills every wolf on this earth I will still not be his mate," Jacque growled.

“Go inside, my Luna. I can feel how tired you are,” she heard Fane tell her.

“I am just fine, thank you very much. I will go inside, but not because you told me to. I’m just tired of standing out here with these butt heads,” Jacque responded.

She heard Fane laugh. She felt his joy and that made her smile, which made the wolf in front of her cock his head to the side like a dog. Jacque blew a breath out in exasperation and turned to go in the house. Before she could make it in the front door one of the wolves spoke. “Lucas said to tell you he will be here at nine am.” And that was it.

When Jacque walked in the living room, everyone was seated with a mug of what she presumed was hot chocolate. Jen grinned and winked. She saw Sorin sitting in the ugly chair and realized he had not been outside. *What’s up with that?* she thought.

“Why did you not come out to defend your prince?” she asked him, sounding a little more accusatory than she meant to.

“The wolves do not know there is a Grey in the house. If I had gone out they would have scented me immediately. We do not want to provoke them any more than we need to until we are a little more matched in numbers,” Sorin explained to her patiently.

“Oh, right. Got it,” Jacque said with a nod.

Despite what Jacque told Fane, she was very tired. She didn’t know what time it was, and frankly didn’t care. She just wanted to lie down and sleep. Sally and Jen must’ve picked up on that because they got up and took their mugs to the kitchen and came back to lead Jacque upstairs. Jacque hardly noticed them help her lie down and cover her with a blanket. She had scarcely laid her head down before she was asleep.

Jen and Sally sat on Jacque’s floor. They were worried about her.

“I know she’s tough, but I think this is really wearing her out,” Sally said.

“Well, duh!” Jen responded. “Wouldn’t it wear you out if you’d just met the man of your dreams? Then it turns out he’s a werewolf, then it turns out you’re his mate or whatever, then it turns out there’s this other pack of wolves with a psycho, werewolf leader who wants you as his mate, and then it turns out...” Jen paused. “You get the picture.”

“When you put it like that, it is a lot to take in,” Sally agreed.

Jacque woke up to the sound of Fane’s voice, and for a moment she thought he was in her room, but quickly realized he was talking to her in thought.

“Luna, wake up please,” Fane said.

“Haven’t we talked about this whole ‘waking me up way too early could be hazardous to your health’ thing?” Jacque teased him.

“I’m sorry to wake you, love, but I wanted to talk with you before Lucas arrives.”

“Uggggh! I was really hoping this was all a bad dream,” she moaned. *“Well, not you. I mean the part about this Lucas dude and the challenge.”*

“I’m sorry, Jacquelyn,” Fane told her sadly.

“Ah well, that’s how it goes. I’m too irresistible for my own good.” Jacque tried to lighten the mood.

“That you are, Luna,” Fane replied.

Jacque picked her phone up to look at the time and saw that it was eight thirty. *Crap.* She needed to get up and get dressed. *What do you wear to talk to a crazy, Alpha werewolf?* she thought to herself.

“As much clothing as possible,” Fane answered her thought.

“I was thinking maybe I should wear that bikini you like so much,” she teased him.

“That would be a very poor choice, Luna. I want your marks covered completely,” Fane replied.

“I think a please is in order,” Jacque told him.

Fane growled but then relinquished. *“Please, love.”*

“Oh, all right, since you’re not being all jealous or possessive,” Jacque smarted off.

Jacque got up and tiptoed around her two best friends. She wondered if their parents knew they were at her house. She figured they must know or else the National Guard would be out looking for them. She stepped into her closet and flipped through the shirts she had hanging. She honestly hadn’t realized how many t-shirts she had with smart ass sayings on them. *Go figure,* she told herself.

The one she finally settled on made her smile. It was a black baby tee that had a picture of Edward from *Twilight* on the front and on the back the words, “Team Edward.” That made her laugh out loud. *“Take that, you mangy werewolf.”*

“You’re just too pleased with yourself, aren’t you?” she heard Fane say.

“Hey, get out of my head, you perv. I’m trying to get dressed.” Jacque feigned outrage.

“Sorry, love. I was just curious to see what you would pic. Your sense of humor is one of the things I love most about you. Please be safe, don’t provoke Lucas – oh, and maybe it would be wise to keep Jen away from him,” Fane told her.

“Good idea. I feel like I should say bye, or talk to you later, but that’s just weird,” Jacque told him.

“How about I just tell you I love you?” Fane asked her.

Jacque smiled. *“I love you, wolf-man.”*

The last thing Jacque heard was Fane’s deep chuckle. She could feel him pull away from her thoughts and she felt bereft.

She took a deep breath and started going through her jeans and picked out a low-rise pair of cargo pants.

She walked out to the bathroom to dress and throw her hair up in a pony tail. She realized once her hair was up that the marks on her neck came above the collar of her shirt.

“Hells bells,” she huffed as she pulled her hair back down. She pulled her bangs out of her face and secured it back with bobby pins. “That’s as good as it’s gonna get,” she told her reflection in the mirror.

When she walked back into her room, Sally and Jen were both up, stretching and yawning. They both took one look at her shirt and cracked up laughing.

“You’re my hero,” Jen told her.

“Kill ‘em with sarcasm. I always knew that was your motto.” Sally still laughed.

“I’m sorry I crashed on ya’ll like that last night. I was just so tired. I don’t think I’ve ever been that tired,” Jacque apologized.

“Well, it’s not like you’re under any stress or anything,” Jen said sarcastically.

Jacque grabbed a pair of flip flops from under her bed and slipped them on. As she reached for her phone she heard Jen’s phone start playing the *Jaws* theme song. Sally and Jacque looked at her.

“It’s my mom’s ring tone.”

“Nice,” Sally and Jacque said at the same time.

Jen answered her phone and then stepped out in the hall to talk to her mom.

“Do your parents know you’re still here?” Jacque asked Sally.

“Yeah, I called them last night. Your mom talked to my parents and Jen’s,” Sally answered.

“She did? What did she tell them?” Jacque asked.

“She asked them if they minded if we stayed the rest of the week for a final vacation before school starts. Just the girls, doing girl things like facials and pedicures and whatnot. They totally bought it and thought it was so nice of your mom. You know, to let us all get one final week of relaxation before our stressful senior year starts.” Sally put the back of her hand on her forehead and swooned.

“My mom totally rocks,” Jacque said.

“I totally do, don’t I?” Lilly said, standing in Jacque’s doorway.

“Hey, mom. What’s up?” Jacque asked her.

Lilly looked at her daughter’s shirt and gave her thumbs up. “Nice job on the shirt.”

Jen scooted in past Lilly and plopped back down in the floor. “My mom just wanted to know if she could bring anything over for us – brownies, nail polish. Ya know, girly stuff. I told her we had it covered. She told me to tell you thank you again, Lilly.”

“Your mom wouldn’t thank me if she knew the big bad wolf was coming over to play,” Lilly said. “Speaking of, Lucas Steele is here.”

Jacque’s mouth dropped open. “*Here here?* As in, in this house here?”

“Yes, Jacque, he is *here here*.” Lilly answered. “He’s asking to speak with you in private.”

Without even thinking, Jacque reached for Fane’s mind. “*He’s here.*”

“*I know, love. I saw his car drive up. Are you ok?*” Fane asked her.

“*I’m ok. I’m fixing to go talk to him. Be with me.*”

“*Always,*” Fane responded.

Jacque asked Sally and Jen to wait in her room; she didn't want them brought to Lucas' attention.

As she walked into the living room, she saw him sitting on the couch, arms spread over the back, looking quite relaxed. *Smug little fur ball*, she thought to herself and was pleasantly surprised to hear Fane's chuckle in her mind.

"Are you comfortable?" Jacque asked Lucas as she walked into the living room.

When he turned to look at her, Jacque was caught off guard by his eyes. They were two different colors. His right eye was crystal blue and his left green as ivy. He had brown, wavy hair that he wore messy, but she could tell it was a carefully placed messiness. He had a five o'clock shadow across a strong jaw line and when he smiled at her a dimple appeared on both cheeks.

"I am, actually. Thanks for asking," he responded.

He had a deep voice, but not quite as deep as Fane's. She had to admit he was an attractive guy. She heard Fane growl. "*Chillax, wolf-man. I only have eyes for you,*" she told Fane.

"Jacque." The sound of her name got her attention. She realized Lucas was now standing in front of her and she had to look up to see his face. He was at least 6 feet, maybe a little taller. "My name is Lucas Steele. I'm sure Fane has told you that I am the Alpha of the Coldspring pack."

"Yeah, he told me. He also told me that you are under some sort of delusion that I am going to be your mate," Jacque retorted.

"*I distinctly remember advising you not to provoke him, Luna. Do you remember that?*" Jacque heard Fane's voice in her mind.

"*I don't know. Some things seem kind of hazy at the moment,*" she responded vaguely. Fane growled again. *I have a feeling he's going to be doing a lot of that being mated to me*, she thought to herself.

“I claimed you before he even knew you existed. You should be mine,” Lucas told her calmly.

Jacque was staring at him intently, trying to get a lock on how old he was. She could tell he was definitely older than her but she couldn't tell how much older.

“How old are you?” she finally asked.

He looked a little surprised by her question. *That's good, keep him on his toes.*

“I'm twenty two,” he answered.

“You do realize that I am not eighteen yet? That makes me jail bait.” Jacque pointed out.

“Human laws do not matter to Greys. Besides, I'm not saying we have to consummate our relationship, just that you will bond with me,” Lucas told her.

“You so did not just say that. I mean, good freaking grief man, is that all you wolves talk about?” Jacque asked, obviously annoyed.

Lucas looked a little confused and then caught on. “Are all human females this silly?” he asked her.

“I am not silly,” Jacque said indignantly. Then his eyes wandered down to the front of her shirt and she realized he'd noticed the vampire depicted there. She smiled and turned around to show him the back. Without thinking about it, she pulled her hair up so he could read the words.

At first she simply heard him smirk, but then she heard a deep, feral growl.

Jacque dropped her hair back down and turned around slowly. Lucas' eyes were glowing and his teeth had grown quite long. His breathing was fast and she could tell he was struggling to keep his wolf under control.

“He wasn't lying when he said he could prove you were his mate,” Lucas said, his words a little difficult to understand because of the length of his teeth.

Jacque's eyes got big as she realized he had seen her marks. Just then she heard a ferocious snarl and realized that Fane had caught that last thought.

"I'm sorry, Fane. I was just showing him the back of my shirt and I forgot my marks," Jacque told him quickly.

"Pay attention to Lucas, Jacquelyn. Look at him and let me see his face," Fane instructed her.

Jacque pictured Lucas in her mind just as she was seeing him.

"Jacque, you must be careful. He is not in control of his wolf."

"Yeah, ya think?" Jacque accidentally said aloud.

Lucas snarled and his eyes narrowed. "Are you able to speak through each other's thoughts? Are you speaking to him now?" he asked her.

"Umm, maybe and not your business," she answered.

Lucas lunged at her, grabbing her by the arms. Jacque slammed the wall down in her mind so Fane could not see what Lucas was doing. She knew he would come to her house and raise all kinds of hell, and quite possibly try to kill Lucas.

"Do not play games with me. I am Alpha and you will answer me truthfully, mate," he growled in her face.

Jacque jerked her arms free and stepped back from him.

"Listen carefully, Lucas Steele, because I will only say this once. I am NOT your mate, I will never be your mate, and if you ever put your hands on me again I will cut them off along with other body parts you might want to use one day. Got it?" Jacque told him with as much force as she could put behind her words.

"That's a shame, too, because you're kind of cute. But it happens to the best of them," Jen said as she sauntered into the living room with Sally right behind her.

"And the worst of them," Sally finished for her.

Both girls stood on either side of Jacque with their arms crossed, an obvious wall of solidarity against Lucas.

Lilly walked into the living room and took in the scene. She looked at Jacque and saw the red marks that were now appearing on her arms from where Lucas had grabbed her. Lilly's mouth tightened in anger.

"I think it's time for you to go now, Mr. Steele," Lilly told him with forced politeness.

Lucas turned his gaze on Lilly, who took an involuntary step back. He drew in a deep breath, obviously trying to compose himself. Then he looked at Jacque. "I have challenged Fane for the bonding ceremony. If I win, you will be mine. Nothing and no one will keep you from me." And with that he turned to walk out the front door.

All four of them followed him out to watch him go, and when they got out the door they saw Fane jump from his second story window and take two bounding steps and land right in front of Lucas.

"Oh S@#T! Jen hollered

"I second that," Sally said

"I third it," Jacque said, eyes so wide they threatened to pop out of her head.

Chapter 22

Fane saw Lucas lunge for Jacquelyn before she could put the wall up between their minds, and the rage he felt called his wolf out. He was nearly completely phased when he heard Sara downstairs. That was enough to pull him back and keep from becoming a huge, black, snarling wolf in his bedroom. It wasn't enough, however, to keep him from growling like a dog with rabies. The anger he was feeling was tangible; it was making it hard for him to breath.

Lucas had touched his mate, he had put his hands on her in a threatening way, and by doing so had violated the challenge rules. That meant that Fane would be allowed to see Jacquelyn for the duration of the two days they had to wait until his father arrived. Because he was Jacquelyn's true mate, challenge rules said he could protect her if the challenger caused physical harm to the female.

Before that thought was even complete in his mind, and without any thought to who might see him, he leaped out his window into the front yard and jumped right in front of Lucas Steele. Sometimes life just threw you a bone when you needed one.

Lucas crouched low, immediately growling. "If you touch me you forfeit the challenge."

"Sa patesti ce este al meu (you harmed what is mine)," Fane growled.

"Oh crap, he's talking in Romanian. That means he's pissed doesn't it? They always talk in their native tongue in the movies when they're fixing to kick somebody's a-" Jen tried to finish, but Jacquelyn slapped her hand over Jen's mouth and shook her head from side to side.

"Let me translate for her," Sally said. "Shut the #@\$\$% up, Jen!"

"My bad," Jen whispered once Jacque had uncovered her mouth.

Fane could not remember a time when he had been so angry. He could feel his wolf pushing to come out, to defend their mate.

“Ai violat regulile provocare (you violated challenge rules),” Fane growled.

He knew he needed to calm down but when he glanced over and saw the red marks on Jacquelyn’s arms, his wolf won. He phased in the blink of an eye and had Sorin not lunged in front of him, he would have torn Lucas Steele’s throat out.

He felt a hard object throw him back and let out a grunt as he hit the ground. In an instant, he was back on all four feet, head low, eyes narrowed, and teeth bared. He was taking slow, calculated steps to place himself in between Lucas and his mate. He saw Jacquelyn step back when he got near her, and it hurt to know she was afraid of him in his wolf form.

He continued to move forward, pushing Lucas farther away, and was preparing to lunge again when he heard Sorin yell, “Fa ne nu ating de el! (do not touch him).”

Fane stopped in his tracks, he didn’t move closer but he continued to growl and glare at Lucas.

“As Fane has said, you have violated the challenge rules by causing harm to Fane’s mate, therefore it is Fane’s right to stay with her while we await the arrival of his Alpha,” Sorin informed the wolf.

“I did not harm the female!” Lucas snarled.

“Hey, flea bag, the female has a name!” Jen spat at him.

“Jen, now is not the time, hon. Keep your trap closed,” Sally said through pursed lips.

“Oh right, sorry. I just get so carried away. I’m good, carry on.”

Sally and Jacquelyn rolled their eyes.

Lucas must have decided during that little interlude that he needed to be more diplomatic, because when he spoke the second time it was quite a bit nicer.

“I did not mean to cause Jacquelyn harm. I do not think red marks on her arm constitute a so-called violated challenge,” he told Sorin.

“What you think does not play into what simply is. It is time for you to take your pack and leave. You will be notified immediately when our Alpha arrives,” Sorin said in finality, and just to punctuate that he was done with the conversation, he called Fane to him. “In privinta, mea print, va rog sa veniti. (With respect, my Prince, please come).”

Fane gave Lucas one more snarl for good measure and trotted over to where Jacquelyn stood. He put his head against her thigh and nudged her backwards.

“You gotta be kidding me. You’re bossy even when you’re in wolf form,” Jacquelyn told him, rolling her eyes. He nudged her a little harder. Finally relenting, she turned to go back toward the house.

“Come on, girls. Show’s over...for now anyways.”

Sorin waited outside until Lucas and his wolves had driven off.

Once in the house, everyone filed into the living room, which had quickly become the “meeting” room. Jacquelyn knelt down in front of Fane and ran a finger down the center of his muzzle. Fane closed his eyes and a low hum came out of his throat.

“You were great out there, you know?” she whispered to him.

Fane opened his eyes and they just stared at each other for a minute. Then Fane licked Jacquelyn smack on the face. “EWWW! You have GOT to stop kissing me in public. Really, it’s getting out of hand,” Jacquelyn told him, wiping her face. Fane simply looked at her with his tongue hanging out the side of his mouth in a goofy grin.

“Fane, I think we need you back in your human form, please,” Sorin told him respectfully.

Fane turned and trotted up the stairs to Jacquelyn’s room. “I don’t know what he thinks he is going to find up there unless he likes his pants super tight and ten inches too short,” Jacquelyn told Sorin.

“I will get him something from my bag,” Sorin offered.

He returned with a pair of jeans and a shirt and handed them to Jacquelyn.

“Uh, what am I supposed to do with these?” she asked Sorin.

“Wait, hold on,” Jen said, holding her hands up. “This is obviously a job for a woman who appreciates a fine looking specimen like wolf-man up there.”

Jen tried to take the clothes from Jacque, who stepped back, holding the clothing out of Jen’s reach.

“Like I’m going to let you, the nymphomaniac of our posse, take these clothes up to Fane. Seriously, how delusional do you think I am?” Jacquelyn asked her.

“I could really use some clothes, Luna. You keep your room kind of cold,” Fane told her through their connection.

“I’m bringing them, but you better have a towel or something wrapped around you,” Jacquelyn said sternly.

“I make no promises, love. You will just have to risk it.”

Jacquelyn huffed out a breath and headed up the stairs. All the while, Jen and Sally were letting out cat calls. Fane could hear the girls from Jacquelyn’s room and could only imagine how red his Luna’s face was.

He heard her knock very gently on her bedroom door. Fane grabbed a blanket from the floor and wrapped it around his waist.

“I’m decent, Luna. Come in,” Fane told her.

Jacquelyn walked in and her head was down with her hair falling in her face so she could not see anything in front of her. She reached out and tried to hand Fane the clothes, but he grabbed her wrist and pulled her all the way into the room. She let out a shriek as she collided with Fane.

“Sorry, love. Didn’t mean to pull you quite that hard,” he said with a sly grin.

“Uh huh, sure you didn’t,” Jacquelyn said as she twisted her wrist to get free of his grasp. Fane let go easily, but did not step away from her, so Jacquelyn took the initiative and stepped back.

“What are you doing? Don’t you think you need...” Jacquelyn began, but stopped mid-sentence when she let her eyes wander over Fane’s torso. Fane realized she was looking at his markings and it made his wolf happy that she noticed them.

“What do you think?” he asked her.

She began to walk around him, circling him like a predator seeking out its prey. Her eyes narrowed as she followed the lines of the marks. A couple of times her hand reached out like she wanted to trace the marks. It took all of Fane’s control not to lean into her hand. Like the wolf, he craved her touch.

“It’s beautiful. I didn’t realize the marks would cover so much of you, but you said that they come across your chest because you’re Alpha, right?” Jacquelyn asked, still completely mesmerized by the marks.

“That is correct. I have more marks than others and my marks match my mate’s.” Fane reached out and ran a finger across Jacquelyn’s neck as he said this. Jacquelyn slapped his hand away. “No touching while you’re standing in nothing but a blanket,” she told him, trying to sound firm but not able to wipe the grin off her face.

When she finally stopped and just stared at him he couldn’t help but tease her. “Have you gotten your fill or do you need a

few more minutes? I'll be happy to let you study them if you'd like," Fane told her with a wink.

"Yeah, I bet you'd like that, wouldn't you?"

"Well, if you are not going to take advantage of me while I am so vulnerable, I suppose I should get dressed." Fane grinned.

When she didn't respond or turn to leave Fane decided to shock her into action. He acted like he was going to unwrap his blanket. "Of course, if you want to watch me dress you are welcome to. Seeing as how you are my mate, you could even help if you'd like."

Jacquelyn turned bright red and abruptly turned around to face the door. Fane dressed quickly and tried to keep his mind out of hers, although he was very curious as to what she was thinking about.

"Ok, love, you can turn around." He was slipping his shirt over his head as she did.

"You know you're beautiful, don't you?" Jacquelyn asked him.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean you, all of you. Your skin is beautiful, you're all buff and built, your eyes are incredible. You're just beautiful," she explained.

"Well nobody has ever told me that, so no, I did not know I was beautiful. Thank you," he said, placing his hand over his heart and bowing his head.

"You are exquisite. Did you know that?" he asked her.

"I wouldn't say exquisite. I mean, I don't think I'm Sandra Bullock or Julia Roberts, but I suppose I don't break the mirror," she responded.

"No female I have ever seen holds a candle to you, Luna."

They were quiet for a moment. Fane was looking at her face, her beautiful green eyes and endearing freckles. He let

his eyes wander down her neck to her shoulders and then arms, where the red marks that were quickly becoming bruises caught his eyes. He growled low.

“Come here please, Jacquelyn,” Fane told her.

Jacquelyn had stepped back a step at the sound of the growl.

“I am not growling at you, meu inimă. I merely want to look at the marks that mongrel left on you,” he explained.

“It’s nothing. They don’t even really hurt anymore,” Jacquelyn fibbed.

“Jacquelyn, love, don’t tell me un-truths. I know when you aren’t being honest with me.”

“Who are you, Santa Claus?” Jacquelyn retorted.

“Just come here, please. Or do I need to come over there?” Fane asked with a wicked gleam in his eyes.

“Pipe down, I’ll come to you.”

Jacquelyn walked over to him and he gently touched each arm where the bruises were. Jacquelyn flinched, unable to hide the fact that his touch hurt. Fane leaned down and kissed her arms gently over the bruises, wishing that he could heal them. He had failed to protect her, his mate. She’d needed him and he had not been there.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered. “I’m sorry I was not there to protect you. I should have been.”

“Fane,” Jacquelyn reached up and ran her hand down his cheek, “this was not your fault. You were not allowed to be there, and how was anyone to know that psycho fur ball would hurt his so-called mate? You have nothing to apologize for so just knock it off. Got it?”

Fane looked into her eyes and could see the sincerity there, no condemnation or anger, and he was so thankful. She was truly amazing, and she was his. Thank the moon that she

wanted him because he would have hated to have to spend the rest of their lives pining after her.

“I am grateful that you do not condemn me. Nonetheless, you are my mate and I should always be there to protect you, which is why you will not be out of my sight until the challenge. I will trust no one to protect you but me,” Fane told her.

Jacquelyn began to remind him that her mother would not approve of this but he stopped her with a finger to her lips.

“I will talk to your mother. As I said before I will not put your safety second to her approval.”

When he removed his finger from her lips, she stepped forward and kissed him. When she stepped back Fane looked at her quizzically. “What was that for?”

“Just because I can, and I wanted to,” Jacquelyn told him simply.

“Oh. Well, in that case...” Fane grabbed her around the waist and tossed her on the bed, covering her body with his. Jacquelyn let out a squeak. He held his weight off of her by supporting himself on one forearm. Then he leaned down and nuzzled her neck with his nose. Jacquelyn began to giggle and push at his chest.

“Stop that, that tickles,” she told him, laughing. “I’m not kidding, Fido, you’re going to make me pee on you.”

Fane pulled his head back to look at her. Her eyes were crinkled with laugh lines.

“I’m a wolf, not a dog, love. And if I don’t get to pee on you, then you most certainly do not get to pee on me,” Fane teased her.

He leaned forward and kissed her gently, then a little harder. By the time he pulled away they were both trying to catch their breath.

“I think we better go downstairs now,” Fane told her, still trying to get his breathing under control.

Jacquelyn reached up and stroked his face and gently pulled him closer. “Or not,” she said just before she began to kiss him again.

Fane let it go on a moment more before he finally pulled away and stood up, pulling her up at the same time.

“As much as I would love to stay right here with you, love, Jen might come looking for us soon and finally get that show she’s been waiting for,” Fane told her as he winked again.

“Ugh, fine, have it your way. But you’re the first guy I’ve ever heard of that has walked away from a willing female,” Jacquelyn told him.

Fane pulled her back as she tried to walk past him. “We have plenty of time, meu inimă, and I don’t want a just a willing female, I want my mate bonded to me, wearing my mark.”

“Good grief, and here I thought I was picky,” she teased. “Ok, wolf-man, if we’re going down let’s go. Oh, and I’m not going to be there when you decide to tell my mom you’re staying. I’m going to be conveniently occupied with something that would normally be unimportant but for some reason at that exact moment needs my undivided attention.”

Fane ran a finger across the marks on her neck and Jacquelyn shuddered. “What ever makes you happy, love.”

Jacquelyn rolled her eyes and took his hand as they went to join the others downstairs.

Chapter 23

Seriously, Sorin, how old are you?” Jacque heard Jen asking him as she and Fane walked into the living room.

“Jen, are you being rude?” Jacque asked her nosy friend.

“Jen rude? Never,” Sally said in mock astonishment.

Sorin was just grinning good-naturedly. “No, I don’t mind her asking. I do, however, ask that you not act too shocked when I do reveal that I am 135 years old.”

Everyone was silent for a few heartbeats, shocked, even though Fane had told them that Canis lupus could live for centuries, hearing it from the mouth of one who had was a little different.

“Shut. Up.” Jen gasped. “What have you been doing for 135 years? Don’t you get bored?”

“Jen, it is not essential to your livelihood to know everything about everyone. You know that, don’t you?” Sally asked her.

“Maybe not, but it does make life more interesting,” Jen told her

Sorin sat listening to the girls banter and when they were finally quiet, he leaned forward and put his elbows on his knees. “I can’t say that I have. Humans are too interesting to ever get bored. I have enjoyed my long life and see it as a gift. However, I do envy the males of my species who have found their mates. I have been looking for mine all these years. My wolf grows restless, and if I wasn’t so close to Fane and my Alpha, I fear I might have a little pent up aggression.”

“What do you mean if you weren’t close to them?” Sally asked him.

Jacque sat down at one end of the couch and Fane sat on the floor in front of her with his back leaned up against her legs. Sorin looked at Fane as if asking for permission to speak.

Fane spoke instead. "When a wolf lives so many years without his mate, he can become volatile and aggressive. The reason the female *Canis lupus* are so precious is because they balance the male's violent nature. They bring peace to the battle that is constantly raging inside the wolf, especially the dominant ones. An Alpha helps keep the wolves under control. He is able to command the wolves in ways others, even dominants, cannot." Fane looked up at Jacque and the look on his face made her heart ache. She didn't understand what she did for Fane, but she was grateful it was her and not some other girl.

"So am I, meu inimă," Fane told her through his thoughts.

Jacque winked at him, loving the way he listened to her, not even minding that he was being nosy.

"Not nosy, just attentive," he told her.

She slapped his arm. "Yeah, keep telling yourself that if it makes your conscious feel better," she teased him aloud.

The whole room turned to look at them, obviously confused by the comment from Jacque that made no sense.

"My bad," she said, looking sheepish.

"Must be nice to be able to talk to each other without anyone else listening to your conversation, which, by the way, would so come in handy in class," Jen mused.

"Anyway," Fane continued, "that is what Sorin means when he says it helps when he is around me or my father. I am not the Alpha yet, but his wolf recognizes that I am next in line to be Alpha, so I am able to control his wolf."

"I'm sorry that you haven't found your mate, Sorin. It seems so unfair that Fane has found his when he is so young," Jacque told him as she absentmindedly traced the marks on Fane's neck.

Finally, when nobody had said anything for several minutes, Lilly stood up and suggested everyone pile into the kitchen and help make breakfast.

“Might as well. Don’t want the wolves to get hungry,” Jen said, laughing.

“You crack yourself up, don’t you?” Jacque asked.

“Quite often, actually,” Jen responded.

After everyone had eaten breakfast, Fane asked Lilly if he could speak with her. Before her mom could drag her into it, Jacque grabbed her two friends and headed up to her room.

“What was all that about?” Sally was confused.

“Fane is going to tell, not ask, my mother that he is staying in our home.”

“Does he know your mom will chew him up and spit him out, werewolf or not?” Jen asked.

“I told him I would take no part in it, but he said my safety came before him trying to appease her, and that he wouldn’t trust anyone else to keep me safe,” Jacque explained.

“Well, maybe he’s itching for a good fight after not being able to beat the crap out of that psycho wolf today,” Sally said.

“Yeah, that or he’s just delusional that being a prince or Alpha or whatever is going to have some bearing on what Lilly will allow. HA! Yeah right,” Jen said with a smirk.

Jacque felt a little nervous and was beginning to wonder if she should have stayed with Fane to at least help smooth things over. *Naw*, she thought, *he’s a big boy, he can take care of himself.*

“*I heard that, Luna,*” she heard Fane tell her.

Jacque couldn’t suppress a giggle. She was always caught off guard when he responded to one of her thoughts, especially when she wasn’t thinking it to him. She didn’t like to think about the fact that she had access to his thoughts, it just felt weird to think about intruding.

“*Intrude away, love. I have nothing to hide from you.*”

“Yeah, wolf-man, that’s what worries me.” She sent him the thought and heard him chuckle in response.

Sally and Jen were lying on Jacque’s floor, going through her CDs when she heard her mother yell her name.

“The stuff is going to hit the proverbial fan,” Sally said.

“If I’m not back in ten minutes, come looking for my body please.” Jacque was only half joking. Lilly could have a pretty hot temper when she got upset or was pushed in a direction she was not really ready to go.

Jacque made her way to the dining room where she found Fane and her mom seated at the table.

“So what’s up?” Jacque asked her mom innocently.

“Fane has just informed me that he plans to stay here until after the challenge. I wanted to know what you thought about that,” Lilly told her.

Jacque was a little surprised by her mom’s words and it took her a moment to formulate an answer.

“You...what...I...” Jacque tried to spit it out, but it just wasn’t happening.

“Jacque, are you okay?” her mom asked her.

“I’m just a little confused. I thought you would be mad that he wanted to stay here,” Jacque explained.

“I want you safe. I may be a stubborn woman, but I’m not a stupid one. Are you okay with him staying here?”

Jacque glanced at Fane and had to look away when he winked at her. She wanted to say, ‘of course I’m okay with it, duh! Who wouldn’t be ok with a major hottie with a Romanian accent staying at their house?’, but she didn’t.

“I’m ok with it if you are,” she answered nonchalantly.

“Alright, then. I guess that’s settled,” Lilly said, then turned to Fane, “Lay a paw on my little girl and you will be a three legged Lassie, got it?”

Fane winced and asked, “You both do realize I’m a wolf not a dog, right?”

Lilly shrugged and stood up to give Jacque a hug.

“I’ve got to go to the bookstore and do some work. I’m not sure when I will be home so you’ll have to fend for yourselves when it comes to dinner.”

“Lilly, please allow Sorin to accompany you. I do not like the idea of you out alone,” Fane told her

“I’ll be fine. No one is going to mess with me in such a public place,” Lilly answered

“Maybe, maybe not. All the same, I want Sorin to go with you.” Fane’s tone said the discussion was over. It was really weird to hear a seventeen year old guy talk with such authority, yet it seemed so natural coming from Fane.

Sorin appeared in the entryway to the dining room. He turned his head slightly away from Fane, exposing his neck, and waited for Fane to tell him what he wanted.

“Sorin, please accompany Lilly while she works. I don’t want her out alone with everything that is going on. I wouldn’t put it past Lucas to do something stupid like snatch Lilly in order to get Jacquelyn to cooperate,” Fane told him.

Jacque hadn’t even considered something like that. Man, her life had turned into a movie, she could probably sell it to HBO and make a fortune. She would have to consider that once all this was done.

“HBO? What is that?” Fane asked her.

“You really are just as nosy as Jen, aren’t you?” Jacque asked him back

Fane turned to look at her and shrugged his shoulders, continuing to wait for her answer. Jacque let out a breath and rolled her eyes.

“Oh, good grief. It’s a television station. I’m thinking I could make a killing selling my story to them for a mini-series

or something.”

Lilly just laughed and shook her head as she walked out of the dining room with Sorin on her heels.

Jacque and Fane were left in the dining room staring at each other. After a few moments, Jacque began to feel self-conscious and turned to go back up to her room.

“Hey, where are you going?” Fane asked as he reached for her arm.

“I was going to go back up to my room to see what the girls are doing. Why? Where are you going?”

“I guess I need to come up with something to tell the Henrys as to why I am going to be staying over here all the time,” Fane told her.

“You could tell them the truth. You never know, they may take it really well.”

“I’m not sure what else I can tell them. Nothing else makes sense,” Fane explained.

“Do you want me to come with you?” Jacque asked him.

Fane looked surprised by the question. “You would do that for me?”

“Well, I do have some conditions, of course,” Jacque teased.

“Really, and what might those be?” Fane asked her flirtatiously.

“I want Jen and Sally at the bonding ceremony thingy,” Jacque blurted out.

“Is that all?” Fane asked, surprised.

“Give me time. I’ll think of more, but for now that will do.”

“Done,” Fane answered.

“Let me run up and tell Jen and Sally that we’re going over there.”

Thirty minutes later, Fane and Jacque were sitting in the Henrys' living room across from Sara and Brian. Both looked a little shell-shocked by what Fane had just told them. Fane wasn't talking now, he was just letting it sink in.

“Sara, Brian,” Jacque spoke gently, “are you okay?”

Sara looked at Jacque as if she just realized she was in the room.

“Are you okay?” Sara turned the question on Jacque. “I mean, you're his mate, right? Are you okay with that?”

“I'm great with it. I mean, I'm still a little shocked and it does seem very surreal but other than that, I'm rosy,” Jacque told her.

Brian still hadn't said anything and Jacque was beginning to wonder if he was going to be able to process this without freaking out. Then he surprised her by saying, “I knew there was something different, something special about you, Fane. I'm not saying I understand all of this, but I trust you, and I want Jacque and Lilly safe from whatever's going on. We believe you and support you.”

“I truly appreciate your trust. I am going to try to limit my time here because I don't want to give Lucas a reason to use you against us. Please stay alert for anything odd or out of place,” Fane told them.

“We can take care of ourselves, you just worry about what it is you need to take care of. You said your father is coming to help?” Brian asked.

“Yes, my father is coming and so is my mother, but they will only be here to keep the challenge fair. My father is a very, very strong Alpha and there are few who would dare to challenge or defy him.”

Jacque stood up, went over to Sara and hugged her, then Brian. “Thank you guys for being so awesome,” she told them.

“Yes, I have to agree with Jacquelyn. You both are very awesome,” Fane said, shaking Brian's hand and hugging Sara

as well.

The rest of the morning and afternoon was spent with Fane, Jacque, Jen, and Sally all hanging out in Jacque's room. Occasionally they would talk about the whole challenge thing, but mostly they just quizzed Fane on all things Romanian. They asked him what different words were in Romanian. Jen wanted to know how to curse in Romanian, go figure. He told them about the folklore of werewolves and vampires. Jacque steered the conversation quickly away from that because she didn't really want to know if vampires were real. She was just coming to terms with werewolves, and there was no need to overwhelm her already wavering sanity.

Fane was a good sport, even when Jen tried to ask about Fane's personal dating experiences and the like. He just winked at her and politely said, "A prince doesn't kiss and tell, love."

Of course, the wink nearly made Jen hyperventilate, so it was only fair for Jacque to slap Fane on the arm for nearly making her friend pass out because he was so freaking hot.

"I don't understand why you're hitting me, Luna. She is the one who asked about my previous experience with girls," Fane defended.

"I'm hitting you because you flirted with her and nearly killed her. Do you even realize how drool-worthy you are?" Jacque asked him.

Fane cocked his head to the side and narrowed his eyes. "Drool-worthy? What does this mean?"

"What it means, Romeo, is that when you walk into a room every chick there forgets she is with the guy standing right next to her and wishes she was with you," Sally piped in.

"Exactly. Well put, Watson," Jacque told Sally.

"That's what I'm here for, Sherlock," she responded.

Jacquie looked over at Jen to see if she had recovered from her swooning. Jen was lying on her stomach, propped up on

her elbows, staring dreamily at Fane. Sally followed Jacquelyn's line of sight, then slapped Jen on the butt.

"OW!" Jen yelped. "What the hell, chicka?" She glared at Sally.

"I was thinking maybe we should go see what we can round up for dinner," Sally said, looking at her phone to check the time. "It's already five fifteen, and you know how you get if you go too long without eating, Jen."

"Yeah, yeah. Just call it what it is. You want to give Simba and Nala here a little privacy. It's all good," Jen said as she followed Sally out of earshot.

Jacque shouted, "He's a wolf, you nymphomaniac freak, not a lion."

She heard Sally and Jen laugh as they descended the stairs.

Chapter 24

Fane looked over at Jacquelyn, who was on her bed, still grinning over the *Lion King* reference Jen had made. Fane was so thankful that she had friends with such great sense of humor. Laughing could get you through a lot.

“How are you doing, Luna?” Fane asked her.

Jacque looked at him and smiled sweetly. “I’m doing. How are you?”

“I’d be better if you were closer to me,” Fane told her with unabashed honesty.

“Where did all this boldness come from?” she asked him with a grin.

“When I realized I could lose you at any moment, I decided I wouldn’t waste any time I have with you. And seeing as how I love being close to you, touching you, I feel it’s a major waste when you aren’t next to me,” he explained, making it sound like such a logical answer.

“Oh. Well in that case,” Jacquelyn paused as if to think about it, “naw. I’m too comfortable to move.”

Fane laughed, caught off guard once again. He stood up and walked over to her, sitting down next to her. He placed his hand on her back and rubbed in circles, just enjoying her nearness.

“Keep that up and I’m gonna be sound asleep,” Jacquelyn told him with a sigh.

“I will rub your back for you every night if you like, my Luna.”

“What does Luna mean?” Jacquelyn asked, not for the first time.

“It means ‘moon’ in Romanian,” Fane answered.

“And why exactly do you have a pet name for me that refers to a big, round space crater?” Jacquelyn asked skeptically.

“It is an honor to be called Luna, and only an Alpha female earns that title.”

“There’s just a small problem with that, you know. Just a minor little thing, really...” Jacquelyn paused. “I’m not an Alpha female, Fane.”

“Aw, love. But you will be once we are bonded,” Fane pointed out.

Fane didn’t get a response from her after that. He continued to rub her back and listen to the hum of the fan motor. He was trying very hard not to intrude on her thoughts; he wanted her to share with him without him having to fish it out of her brain.

“So, why is it an honor to be called Luna?” she finally asked.

“Because the moon influences many things on this earth. For instance, the moon controls when the tide rises and falls, and you, as the Alpha female, will have great influence on your mate and the Pack. No other female has the influence you will have. So when I call you Luna, I am telling you I recognize how important you are.”

Jacquelyn just stared at Fane for a few breaths. “Wow, I was thinking you were gonna say something about how like the moon I light up the darkness in your life, yada yada. You know, something sappy.”

“I could say something sappy if you want,” Fane told her, knowing she would really rather him not.

“No, no. I’m good with what you gave me. I don’t see how I could possibly be all that influential, but we’ll cross that bridge when we get there.”

“You will see. One day, probably sooner than you think, you will understand how the Alpha female is like the moon,” Fane said as he continued to rub her back.

After a while, Fane decided sitting up was no longer comfortable and laid down next to Jacquelyn on her bed. His

position was such that he was looking right at Jacquelyn's face. She'd fallen asleep during their silence and Fane was just content to watch her sleep. He hadn't realized how tired he was from worrying about Jacquelyn all night, and found himself drifting off as well.

Fane woke with a start, blinking rapidly to clear his sleepy eyes. He realized the room was dark. He pulled his phone out of his pocket to see what time it was – eight pm. He looked over at Jacquelyn and realized that she was no longer there. He put his hand on the spot where she'd been and felt that it was still a little warm. She'd not been up long. He drew on his wolf hearing to listen to the house and realized it was silent. There was no need to panic, he knew that, but he still didn't like that fact that there were three teenage girls who were supposed to be in the house, yet it was quiet. His mind reflexively sought her out.

“You do have a good reason as to why you are not in this house, right Luna?”

Fane could feel her blocking him from her thoughts, which meant she was up to no good. Why was he not surprised?

“Why on earth would you think I was up to no good?”

Fane grinned at her false innocence.

“Where are you, love, and what mischief have you and your sidekicks gotten into?” Fane asked.

Fane could tell by her silence that he wasn't going to like what they were up to.

“We were bored so we climbed up on the roof to look at the stars. See, it's not that bad,” Jacquelyn responded.

Fane let out a slow breath, trying to control the strong protective instincts that were a part of his genetic makeup. He knew that she was fine, but all he could think about was if she slipped and fell. What would he do if something happened to her? *Get a grip, Fane,* he told himself. *You can't put her in a bubble.*

“No, you can’t put me in a bubble, but because I know it will make you feel better I’ll come in from the roof. See? I can be reasonable...but don’t always count on it,” Jacquelyn teased him.

“Thank you, Jacquelyn, you are right. It will make me feel much better if you would come back in.” Fane was so thankful that his mate cared about his feelings and concerns. He knew that she didn’t know it yet, but those qualities would be a treasure to an Alpha who would often feel as if he were bearing the weight of the world on his shoulders.

Fane got up from the bed and headed downstairs to see if he could find something to eat – he was hungry and his wolf was hungrier. He managed to find some bread and lunch meat and put together a decent sandwich. He was in the kitchen eating when he heard an ear-splitting scream.

Fane dropped his sandwich and took off toward the front door. He threw it open and was instantly hit with the unmistakable smell of *Canis lupus*. His lips pulled back in a snarl as a low growl began to build in his throat. Fane’s wolf pushed to be let out, his mate was in danger and he wanted blood.

“Jacquelyn, where are you? Are you alright?” Fane sent her the thought.

For a moment there was no response and it was enough to cause Fane’s hold on his wolf to waiver. His eyes phased, he could feel the rest of his body shaking with the need to.

“I’m ok, just in shock. We’re in the backyard. Please come,” Jacquelyn told him.

Even though she said she was okay, he could tell she was scared. Fane ran around the side of the house and came to an abrupt stop. Fane now understood why they’d screamed. About ten feet from Jacquelyn’s back door were four dead animals. Fane walked to where the three girls stood. He stepped in front of Jacquelyn and placed his hands on either side of her face and made her look at him.

“Are you alright? Was there anyone out here when you screamed?” he asked her.

“There was no one out here. We had climbed down from the roof and were fixing to go in the house when we noticed a shadow on the ground. We came over to investigate and we saw those,” she said, pointing at the bodies on the ground.

Fane looked over at Sally and Jen and saw that they were both just staring at the animals. “Are you two okay?” he asked them.

Jen slowly turned her head to look at him. “Is it just me,” she asked, “or are there really four dead animals in Jacque’s backyard?”

Fane stepped away from Jacquelyn and walked over to inspect the animals. He noticed right away that there were no bullet wounds or arrow piercings. There were, however, tears in the animals’ jugulars. These four had been killed by wolves, and they were all clean kills, there was no damage to the rest of their bodies. He noted that they were laid out in order of size, smallest to largest. The first was a rabbit, next a fox, then a small doe, and last a large buck deer. Fane let out another low growl. Jacquelyn walked up to him and placed her hand on his arm and it was enough to calm him.

“This is no threat. It is an offering, and a demonstration,” he answered.

“Offering for what? And to demonstrate what, exactly?” Sally asked.

“Lucas is offering Jacquelyn kills from his hunt, a peace offering of sorts. He is also demonstrating his ability to provide for her and the pack. He wants her to know that he is able to take care of her should she become his mate. It is a wolf thing, so to speak,” Fane explained.

“Okay, first of all, EWW!” Jacquelyn started. “Second, why in Sam Hill would I want four carcasses laying in my backyard, and three, what the hell am I supposed to do with them?”

“I’m thinking bonfire,” Jen said.

“Huh-uh, nope. That would stink,” Sally responded.

Fane pulled out his phone and dialed Sorin’s number. Sorin picked up on the first ring.

“Da,” Sorin answered.

“Am si eu ceva am nevoie de tine sa faca (I have something I need you to do),” Fane told him.

A few moments later he put his phone away having explained to Sorin that he wanted him to take the four animals over to the car dealership where he had purchased his motorcycle and put them out front. After a brief silence, he pulled his phone out again and dialed another number.

“Da?” Fane heard, as his Alpha answered the phone.

“Unde ești tu (where are you),” Fane asked him.

“Your mother and I have just landed in Newark and are boarding the plane to come to Houston. It’s a little less than four hours from here to there. How far is Coldspring from Houston?” his father asked.

“It’s fifty five miles, so a little less than hour,” Fane answered.

“We should arrive at Jacquelyn’s between one thirty and two am, then. What has happened?” Fane’s father asked, concern lacing his tone.

“The Alpha Lucas Steele broke the challenge rules by harming Jacquelyn. Sorin stopped me from killing him and now he has left four dead animals in Jacquelyn’s yard.”

Fane heard his father growl. “How did he harm your mate?”

“I wasn’t there to protect her,” Fane told him with obvious shame in his voice. “He saw the markings on Jacquelyn’s back and neck. He got angry and grabbed her arms and gripped her hard enough to leave bruises on both arms. Imi pare rau am ratat ai, tatalui (I am sorry I failed you, father).

“Tacerea (silence). You have not failed me, son. You had no choice but to honor the rules of the challenge. You don’t have time to sulk over what has happened, do you hear me?”

Fane took a deep breath. He knew this is what he needed to hear and was thankful that he’d decided to call his father.

“I hear you, Alpha,” Fane answered.

“You have a fight to prepare for and a mate to protect. What has happened is past. Take whatever anger you have over this and use it to fuel you during the challenge, but do not dwell on it.”

“Thank you, Tata (father). I will see you soon.” Fane ended the call.

Fane took Jacquelyn’s hand to lead her back into the house. “Ladies, I don’t think our furry friends need an audience any longer,” he said as he held the back door open for them.

Without saying anything to each other and without any conscious choice, they all went and sat in the living room. Jen and Sally each took an end of the couch while Jacquelyn and Fane sat on the loveseat. Fane was absently tracing the markings on Jacquelyn’s neck.

Sally finally broke the silence. “So what now?” She directed the question to Fane.

Fane was staring at Jacquelyn and had to pull his gaze away to look at Sally.

“My father and mother will be here around one thirty or two. Tomorrow he will call Lucas to make him aware of his arrival, and then they will set the time and place for the challenge,” Fane explained.

“Are you nervous?” Jen asked him.

Fane felt Jacquelyn tense at the question, the anxiety came off her in waves.

“*Inima mea, va rog sa nu faceti griji. (My heart, please do not worry),*” Fane thought to her.

“I have no idea what you just said, but I have a feeling you are telling me to chill out. Am I right?” she asked him.

“I didn’t exactly put it like that. What I said was, ‘my heart, please do not worry’.”

Turning to look at Fane, Jacquelyn said, “How can you tell me that? You’re going to fight another wolf to the death and you tell me not to worry. Yeah, I’ll get right on that.”

“Jacquelyn, I am not without defenses. I am from a strong bloodline, I am a dominant and I stand to be Alpha to the largest pack of Greys in the world. All of these things make me stronger and I have found my mate. Please, love. I don’t want you to be upset,” Fane implored her.

Jacquelyn didn’t say anything, just stood with her back to Fane, head down, looking utterly defeated. It broke Fane’s heart.

“I think a hot bath is in order. What do you think, Sal? Hot bath for the wolf princess?” Jen posed to Sally with a look that said ‘get up off your butt.’

Sally was a quick study. “Yep, most definitely. Hot bath is just what the doctor ordered...or something like that.”

Fane watched helplessly as the two girls took his defeated and worried mate upstairs, away from him. His wolf was protesting, and so was the man. *We should be the one comforting her; she is ours to protect and love.* Fane began to step toward them, but stopped when Jen pierced him with a stare and gave a shake of her head that was most definitely a command for him to back off. He couldn’t help the growl he let out.

“Don’t you growl at me, White Fang, I’ll have you neutered and de-clawed so fast you won’t know what hit you,” Jen retorted.

Fang cocked his head to the side and then shrugged his shoulders. “At least you got the species right.”

Fane let the girls go without further protest and sat back down on the loveseat. He let out a deep breath and laid his head back. He was tired, and to his chagrin he was worried. Not worried about winning the challenge, he felt confident he could beat Lucas. No, he wasn't worried about that. He was worried about Jacquelyn wanting to watch. He was sure that she had no idea just how messy it would get and he knew it would scare and anger her. He was learning that when his Luna was angry she tended to be impulsive. His only consolation was that his mother would be there to keep Jacquelyn from doing anything that would put her in harm's way. The thought of something happening to her caused him to be short of breath, like maybe he was having a panic attack. *Okay, Fane, get a grip,* he told himself.

After several more deep breaths he was beginning to calm down. He closed his eyes and tried very hard not to slip into Jacquelyn's mind to see if she was okay. It took all of the manners his mother had beat into him not to listen to her thoughts. Instead he laid there, humming the tune of one of his favorite artists. Believe it or not Fane, a Romanian, was a Willie Nelson fan. Who knew? It was a song that he wanted to share with Jacquelyn because it described so well how he felt. *Soon,* he thought. *Not tonight.* Tonight she didn't want to be with him, but soon.

Chapter 25

Jacque lay in the tub her two best friends had filled with hot water and bubble bath. She felt bad for walking out on Fane like she did, but she was hurt, scared, and worried. No amount of telling her she shouldn't worry was going to make it better. Tears ran down her cheeks as she imagined all the horrific possibilities of what could happen at the challenge. *He expects me not to worry. As if*, she thought.

She stayed in the tub until the water became cool. As she dressed and combed through her curls, she was trying to decide if she should go to Fane or just go to bed. If she were honest with herself, she would do what every bit of her was craving to do. To crawl up in his lap and let him hold her, to spend as much time with him as possible. It really truly was a no brainer, as much as she loved Jen and Sally, a hot Romanian prince and, as fate would have it, her soul mate was waiting for her. She knew what Jen would say, something along the lines of, "If you don't go to him, you better believe I will." *Yep, mm-hmm, that's what she would say. Okay, decision made.* She winked at herself in the mirror as she turned to leave the bathroom.

Before she went down to Fane, Jacque stuck her head in the door of her bedroom to tell Sally and Jen thank you and let them know she would be downstairs. But before she could even open her mouth to speak, they were already answering her unspoken thoughts.

"You're welcome, we love you, you love us, we're the best friends ever, and all that sap," Jen said without looking up from the magazine she was flipping through.

"Yes, we're okay if you go down to Fane. No, it won't hurt our feelings, and we all know if you don't, Jen will," Sally said with a wink.

"True dat," Jen threw in there for good measure.

"Ok, you two are the best friends ever. I mean that. I'll be back in a little while," Jacque started.

“Don’t hurry on our account. You know we’ll want details, and if you come back up here with nothing juicy, I might just throw you out the window. Any questions?” Jen said, again without looking up.

“You haven’t looked into that medicine we’ve talked about, have you?” Sally asked her sarcastically.

“Details, ok. Got it,” Jacque said as she turned to go.

As she got to the top of the stairs and began to descend, she heard Jen yell, “Don’t think I won’t know if you’re lying. I know how many bases you’ve been on, you red-headed puritan. I will be able to tell fact from fiction.”

“Oh, shut up already,” Sally scolded.

Jacque laughed and shook her head. She knew that what Jen was really trying to do was lighten the mood. Jen knew how hot-headed Jacque could be, and if she went to Fane already upset it would be hard for her to calm down and be reasonable. Being reasonable just wasn’t one of her stronger attributes, much to Jacque’s frustration.

As she walked into the living room, she saw that Fane was still sitting on the loveseat. His arms were stretched out on the back of the seat, and his head was resting back. His eyes were closed and because his breathing was so slow and even, it was hard to tell if he was awake.

“I like the smell of your shampoo,” Fane said suddenly.

Startled by his unexpected words, Jacque tried, without success, to suppress the squeak that emerged from her. Fane had not moved, nor had he opened his eyes. He just continued to sit there all calm and collected. Jacque rolled her eyes and went around to the couch to sit down.

Fane slowly raised his head and pinned Jacque with those piercing blue eyes. Her heartbeat sped up and her breathing got a tad bit more shallow. She had to look away from him before she made a fool of herself by drooling. *Yeah, that would be so cute*, Jacque snorted to herself.

“Does being near me repulse you, Luna?” Fane asked her

Jacque knew she must look confused, because, frankly, she was. How could he possibly think he repulsed her? If anything he should be the one repulsed.

“Why would you ask me that?” she asked him.

“I know no other reason why my mate would choose to sit away from me instead of by my side,” Fane told her, sounding so formal and old fashioned.

“Oh throw me a bone, Fane,” Jacque said in exasperation. “Did it occur to you that maybe I just needed some space because it’s hard for me to think when I get close to you?”

Fane grinned, obviously pleased with her comment. He stood up slowly, rising to his full height so that Jacque had to tilt her head back to look up at him. He walked around the coffee table that separated the two couches and sat down close – *revision*, Jacque thought – he sat down very close to her.

“So are you having a hard time thinking now?” he asked her softly.

With a shuddering breath, all Jacque could do was nod her head.

“Why did you come back down here, meu inimă? I didn’t think you wanted to be around me,” Fane told her.

Jacque tried to scoot away from him, but it was in vain because he just scooted with her. *Dang stubborn werewolf.*

“At first I didn’t want to be around you.” Jacque noticed his head lower at her words and quickly explained, “I didn’t want to be around you because I didn’t want to hear you tell me not to worry or that it was going to be ok. Then I realized none of that really matters, what matters is being with you, spending time you. I hate when we are apart. I’m sorry if that sound desperate, but it’s the truth.”

Fane wrapped his arms around her and pulled her close to him.

“Thank you, Jacquelyn. You have no idea how hard it was to sit here on this couch and not come to you, and even harder not to seek out your thoughts. I love you. I’m sorry if my words upset you. I’m here if you want to worry, not worry, or anything else. I’m here,” Fane told her in all sincerity.

Jacque closed her eyes, soaking up the feel of him against her, the safety she felt with his arms around her, and the warmth pouring through her from his words. She didn’t know how she had gotten to be blessed to be Fane’s mate, but she was thankful beyond words.

“As am I,” she heard Fane’s thoughts in response to her own. It made Jacque grin.

They sat there in silence for quite awhile. Every now and then Jacque would hear Fane humming a tune she couldn’t place. Eventually, Jacque curled her feet up on the couch and leaned her head onto Fane’s chest. Fane grabbed the blanket that was thrown across the back of the couch and covered her.

“This is how I want to spend my nights for the rest of my life,” Jacque told Fane.

“I guess that’s a good thing since I intend to keep you for the rest of your life,” Fane said, only half-teasing.

“It’s late, love. Why don’t you go to bed? I don’t want you to be tired tomorrow.”

Jacque looked up at him and kissed him gently on the lips.

“I don’t want to sleep in my bed tonight,” she told him.

“Just where were you planning on sleeping, Luna?” he asked her.

“Well, this is a big couch. I imagine two people of reasonable size could sleep on it together,” she said, trying to suppress a grin.

“What do you think the mom of one of the reasonably-sized persons would say when she found her with another reasonably-sized person of the opposite sex laying on a couch together?”

“Don’t know. Want to find out?” was Jacque’s reply.

Fane laughed at her silliness and much to her surprise, he shrugged his shoulders and said, “Only live once. If I’m going to die, I would rather die lying in the arms of the woman I love, even if it is by said woman’s mother.”

Fane kicked off his shoes and stretched his long body out on the couch. Jacque, trying not to be clumsy, stretched out in front of him. Fane put his arm over her waist and pulled her close against his chest. Jacque giggled when she heard him make a purring sound.

“What are you laughing at?” he asked her.

“Did you just purr? ‘Cause I didn’t think wolves purred.”

“I didn’t purr, I rumbled,” Fane said with as much dignity as he could muster.

“You rumbled? Seriously? Pray tell, what does that mean?” Jacque asked him, trying hard not to laugh.

“When wolves are content they often make a rumbling sound. I guess you could say it’s equivalent to a cat’s purr,” he explained.

“It’s cute,” was all Jacque said in reply.

Fane began humming again and would periodically kiss Jacque’s hair. The last thought Jacque had before she fell asleep was that she didn’t have any details that Jen would think were good. That made her smile.

Chapter 26

Fane didn't want to sleep. He didn't want to miss a moment of having Jacquelyn in his arms. He figured it wouldn't last much longer, because once her mom got home she would probably make Fane sleep on the porch. Still, he would sleep in an igloo if it meant he could spend this night holding his mate, his Luna. He took a deep breath, taking in her smell, cotton candy and snow, and he pulled her even tighter against him. *Mine*. Fane's wolf was restless to complete the bonding and the blood rites. *First we must fight*, Fane thought. *For her, for the future of our Pack, we must fight*.

Fane didn't realize he had fallen asleep until he felt something nudging his arm and a voice telling him to wake up. He opened his eyes, blinking several times to clear his vision. He looked down at Jacquelyn and saw that she was still asleep. She must have really been tired to be sleeping through three Romanians speaking ninety to nothing in their native tongue. He realized with that thought that his mother and father were here.

"Shhh," Fane told them, pointing at Jacquelyn to make his point. "She really needs the sleep. Can we take this to the dining room, please?"

Fane slowly crawled over Jacquelyn, trying not to jostle her too much. Once he was up, he straightened the blanket that covered her, and leaned down to kiss her on the forehead.

When Fane walked into the dining room, he realized Sorin was home.

"Sorin, did Lilly come home with you?" Fane asked his guard.

"Yes, she went straight to her room when we got home. Although, as she walked through the living room past a certain couch where two bodies lay, she did mumble something about a stinking, grubby-pawed werewolf. It was difficult to hear her, and there might have been an expletive or two." Sorin was

obviously taking great pleasure in sharing this information, especially in front of Fane's parents.

Fane chose not to take the bait, and turned to his father instead. "You brought some of the Pack with you?" Fane realized he could smell other Greys in the house. He tensed at this, and suddenly wanted to be back in the living room with Jacquelyn. Although she was his mate, they weren't bonded. An un-bonded mated male *Canis lupus* was the most dangerous kind. As if on cue, he heard a slapping sound, and Jacquelyn yell, "Get your nose out of my face, you trespassing hair ball!"

Fane was moving before she even finished her sentence. Then he had the Grey by the throat and on the ground.

"What are you doing with your nose near my mate, Boian? And why should I not snap your neck for being so near her?" Fane asked the wolf.

"I meant no disrespect," Boian answered.

"I knew we were missing something. Didn't I tell you, Sally? I said, 'hey Sally, I think something's going on downstairs', and what did you say? 'No, it's just your imagination'." Everyone turned to see Jen and Sally coming down the stairs. "Ok, Fane, we're here. You can continue strangling whoever this fine piece of meat is."

Fane slowly let the other Grey up and stepped in front of Jacquelyn. He did not take his eyes off Boian, nor did he relax his stance.

"Would someone like to clue me in as to what in tarnation is going on?" Jacquelyn asked, trying to look around at the people in the room but unable to do so because Fane was right in front of her. "Fane. Seriously, dude. You have a great backside, but I don't think this is really the time for me to admire it. So could you please get your royal butt out of my face?"

The other wolves in the room all tried to disguise their laughs with coughs, obviously finding it amusing that a little

human would talk to the Prince of their Pack in such a way.

“You can park your royal butt in front of me, Fane, I don’t mind,” Jen told him with a wink, which only made the other wolves laugh harder.

Fane growled but acquiesced to Jacquelyn’s wishes. He moved to the side but did not sit down. It was not wise to sit in front of other dominant wolves, it made you look like prey.

“Jacquelyn, Jen, and Sally, I would like you to meet my father, Vasil Lupei, and my mother, Alina Lupei.” Fane turned to three other new additions to the room, one of them being the wolf he had disciplined. “And this is Boian, Skender, and Dorian. They are upper members of the Pack.” He looked at his father. “În cazul în care este Decebel (where is Decebel)?”

“Urmărint pe ambalaj (watching over the Pack),” Vasile told him.

“*What is ‘desebell’?*” Jacque thought to Fane.

“*He is our Beta, our second in command,*” Fane replied.

After nodding her understanding, Jacquelyn stood up, attempting to straighten out her shirt. She started to fix her hair, but she knew it was lost cause so she just let it be. She walked over to stand in front of Fane’s parents and tried hard not to look as messy as she felt.

“I’m Jacquelyn, Fane’s, um, well his, you know...” Jacquelyn tried to spit it out but it just wouldn’t leave her lips.

“My mate,” Fane finished for her.

“Yeah, what he said,” she agreed. “It’s so nice to meet you. I’m sorry you’re seeing me all sleep-ified and stuff.”

“She cleans up real nice,” Jen threw out there.

“Thanks for that, Jen,” Jacquelyn retorted.

Fane walked over to her and put his arm around her waist. She was beautiful to him. Hair all a mess, sleepy eyes – she was adorable.

“Tata, mama, nu-i asomarea (Isn’t she stunning)?” Fane asked his parents

“Intr-adevar ea este (Truly she is),” Alina answered.

“*Would you care to share what exactly ya’ll are talking about?*” Jacquelyn asked Fane through her thoughts

“*I told them you were stunning and they agreed,*” Fane answered.

Alina stepped forward and pushed Fane away from Jacquelyn, taking her into an embrace. “Jacquelyn, it is so wonderful to meet you. I am so thankful Fane has found you.”

“Thank you,” Jacquelyn said simply.

Then it was Vasile’s turn. He embraced her as well, but when he spoke to her it was in Romanian, “Ai mei sint fiii cealalta jumata, el putina lumina, de o moarte sau viata te vor fi protejate de haita (You are my son’s other half, his little light, by his death or life you will be protected by the Pack).”

After he said this, every wolf in the room responded, “Asa cum veti se, Alfa, ea va fi adoptata (As you will it, Alpha, it will be done).”

“What exactly just happened? ‘Cause we all know there was some sort of pack voodoo going on,” Jen said, looking at Fane.

It was Fane’s father who spoke instead.

“That is something Fane can discuss with you later. Right now we have more pressing matters. Jacquelyn, I hate to ask this of you, but I need you to get your mother.”

“No need, I’m here. Believe it or not it’s kind of hard to sleep with a pack of wolves in your living room. I’m Lilly Pierce, Jacque’s mother,” Lilly said as she strolled into the living room.

Alina walked right up to her and hugged her just as she had Jacquelyn.

“I’m Alina, Fane’s mother, and this is my mate, Vasile,” she told Lilly.

“It’s very nice to meet you both. Please make yourselves at home while you’re here. Although, I’m not sure how we are going to accommodate all of you,” Lilly told them.

“Oh, I talked with the Henrys and they were more than happy to have whoever stay at their home,” Fane explained.

“So, what’s this pressing business that needs to be discussed?” Lilly asked Vasile.

Jacquelyn turned to sit on the couch and started to pull Fane with her, but he did not move, nor did he let her hand go. She looked back at him in question and saw that he was staring at the other wolves in the room.

“Are you just going to stand there through this whole conversation? If so, then you’re on your own ‘cause I’m tired, I’m cranky, and I want to sit down...now, Fane,” Jacquelyn told him, glaring daggers at him.

Fane was not going to sit down until the other wolves submitted first. They were being stubborn because there were females in the room and they wanted to look all big and bad. He knew his father was not going to intervene because he wanted to see if Fane could submit other dominants. Only one way to find out. *I’ve had enough of this*, Fane thought. He turned so that his body was facing each of them directly, and he looked at each wolf. First Borian, then Dorian, and last Skender, until they each dropped their eyes. Then he spoke in the voice that they could not disobey.

“Stai (sit).” All three sat immediately, eyes still lowered.

Fane turned and bared his neck to his father, then pulled Jacquelyn over to sit on the couch.

“You are going to explain that later, right?” Jacquelyn whispered.

“Do I have a choice, Luna?” Fane asked.

“Point to you,” she told him.

Alina and Lilly both sat on the loveseat while Jen and Sally sat on the floor in front of the couch. Sorin was in his usual spot, the ugly chair, and the three wolves were all sitting on the floor around Sorin's feet. They did not look happy. Vasile stood at the front of the room, looking out at everyone.

Jen looked over at Jacquelyn and whispered, "You know this really calls for some hot chocolate, right?"

Jacquelyn nodded in agreement as Sally stood up, saying, "I'm on it."

"The challenge is to be tomorrow," Vasile announced. "I will be calling Lucas Steele in a few hours to discuss the details. One thing that I would like to have set is the location of the challenge. I do not want it in his territory. It needs to be a remote location where there will be no chance bystanders will happen upon it. Do any of you know such a place?"

Jen and Jacquelyn spoke at the same time. "Field of dreams."

Jen reached up and fist bumped with Jacquelyn. "Good call, Sherlock," she said.

"All in a day's work, Watson," Jacquelyn responded.

"What's the 'field of dreams'?" Fane asked.

"It's just an empty field out in the boondocks." Jacquelyn answered.

"Ok, so why is it called the field of dreams?" he asked again.

"Jacque's just embarrassed to say," Jen told him. "It's called the field of dreams because it's where all the couples go on Friday nights and, ya know, hope their dreams come true, so to speak."

Fane looked at his mate, and found her face nearly as red as her hair.

"Do you have personal experience with this field?" he whispered in her ear.

Jacquelyn slapped him on the leg, hard. “No, you possessive cave man, and you already knew that,” she growled, forgetting briefly that she had an audience.

“She’s a feisty little thing, isn’t she?” Fane’s father commented.

“Aveți nici o idee (you have no idea),” Fane answered.

“Will there not be kids out at this field?” Vasile asked.

“Nope, they have it fenced off and gated. So we would have to do some B and E, if ya’ll are ok with a little law breaking,” Jen offered.

“What is B and E, love?” Fane asked Jacquelyn.

“Breaking and entering,” she answered.

“That’s not a problem,” Vasile told her. “Okay, good. Location is determined. The next thing I need to discuss is the challenge itself and how werewolf law works.” He paused as Sally walked back into the living room with mugs of hot chocolate and handed them out. Once she was seated on the floor next to Jen, Vasile started speaking again.

“Jacquelyn, what I’m going to tell you now is not pleasant, but it is our way and our law. It is going to be hard for you to understand and to accept, but I tell you now as your Alpha, and yes I am your Alpha as you are my son’s mate, you must abide by these laws and rules. Are we clear?”

Jacquelyn looked at Fane. He could see the panic in her eyes.

“It is okay, love. He is only trying to keep you safe. Trust me,” Fane told her.

She held his hand and turned to look at Vasile. “Crystal,” was all she said.

Vasile nodded his approval and continued. “The rules permit that an Alpha who challenges another wolf may bring his first four wolves, but the rest of his pack must stay away.”

“What do you mean by ‘first four’?” Sally asked

“A wolf pack is a hierarchy. You have the Alpha, the Beta, then your dominants and your submissives. From there they are put into order of their rank, usually just the first four are acknowledged. An Alpha’s first is basically the next in command, he is the next most dominant after the Alpha, and it goes from there to the second, third and fourth, each one descending in their level of dominance,” Vasile explained. “Does that answer your question?”

“Yeah it did, thanks,” Sally answered. Vasile tipped his head to her in appreciation.

“Now, the rules also allow for the challenged to bring his Alpha and first four, which is why I brought three Pack members, Sorin makes four. My Beta Decebel is back home, so Dorian has taken his place. The only others allowed in attendance are the Alpha female and the female over which the challenge has been issued. No others will be permitted,” Vasile said resolutely. “I realize that each of you wants to be there with Jacquelyn, but I must make you understand it would be too dangerous. There are going to be ten wolves in a small area, two of them fighting for the right to take a mate. This will make the others edgy – women tend to do that to us males. If Fane is not the victor, it will be me and my wolves against Lucas and his wolves. It will be easier to protect Jacquelyn if our attention is not divided.”

Fane did not miss the way Jacquelyn’s face fell when his father mentioned the possibility of Fane not winning. He realized then that this next part of the conversation was going to be bad, very, very bad.

Chapter 27

Jacque had to look away when Vasile mentioned that Fane might not win. The thought made her sick to her stomach. She was also scared beyond belief knowing that she would not have her friends or her mother there for support. Granted, she would have Alina and she was thankful for that, but she couldn't help suddenly feeling very alone.

“You okay, luminita (little light)?” Fane asked her.

“No, wolf-man, I'm not,” she answered.

“Jacquelyn,” Jacque turned her attention to Vasile when he called her name. “I need to make some things clear to you that I imagine my son has not because of the ugliness of it. We are not human. Some of our ways follow the way of the animal we carry inside us. When I say this is a fight to the death, that's exactly what I mean. If Lucas gets Fane by the throat and submits him, which is to say that Fane stops fighting, Lucas will still kill him. Some fights are fought until one wolf submits or is killed. This fight is not that way because a wolf will not give up his mate, so if another wants an un-bonded, mated female he must kill her mate.” Vasile paused to gauge her reaction and continued when all Jacque did was stare at him.

What else can I do? she thought. *How am I supposed to just stand there and watch another kill him?* Jacque felt like she was about to be sick.

“If Fane loses, you and your mother will come to Romania under my protection. Lucas will not give you up; he will expect you to become his mate. The only way to avoid it is to leave. Do you understand that?” Vasile addressed both Lilly and Jacque.

Both nodded solemnly.

“I'm sorry to speak of this so bluntly. Please do not mistake it for lack of care. He is my son, remember that. I am going to have to watch my son fight and maybe die and there is nothing I can do about it. Even though I know I could save

him, I am not permitted to, so I do understand your fear and pain. As your Alpha, though, I must make sure you understand the possible outcomes and results of those outcomes.” As Vasile finished, there was a small snuffle and when Jacque turned in the direction of the noise she saw that it was Alina crying. Jacque’s heart broke and her own tears began to spill.

Jacque got up and sat by Alina, wrapping her arms around her. She didn’t know what to say because she knew there was nothing that could be said that would ease the fear. So she just hugged her and cried with her. The room was silent other than the soft cries from the two women who loved Fane so much. Jen and Sally both had silent tears streaking their faces. Lilly’s eyes were closed as she tried to suppress her own tears, hating that her daughter was going through this.

Several minutes later, Alina and Jacque were able to pull themselves together. Fane got up and walked to his mother and knelt down in front of her. He touched her face gently and whispered to her, “Va rugam sa nu plânge mama, mi se rupe inima (please don’t cry mother, it breaks my heart).”

Alina kissed Fane on the forehead. “I’m your mother, it’s my job to cry. Now comfort your mate before your Alpha begins to think you aren’t taking care of her,” she teased him. Then she turned to Jacque. “I can see already I am blessed beyond measure to have you as my son’s mate.”

“Thank you, the feeling is mutual,” Jacque responded.

Fane took Jacque by the hand and led her back to the couch.

“Ok, I’m good. Let’s keep moving. What else do we need to discuss?” Jacque asked Vasile.

“I think for now that is enough. I want Boian, Skender, and Dorian to go over to the Henrys’ and get some sleep. I need them at their best at the challenge.”

The three wolves were up and moving before Vasile was done speaking. Jacque felt Fane relax as the three walked out the front door. She turned and looked at him questioningly. “Is

it really that hard to be around them?” she asked, heedless of those around them.

“We’ll talk about it later, Luna,” Fane told her gently.

Jacque shrugged. She was tired and, frankly, didn’t want to think about the challenge any more. Alina must have seen it in Jacque’s face because she tactfully asked her if she would like to take a walk with her.

“Lilly, you don’t mind, do you?” Alina asked Jacque’s mother.

“No, not at all. I think it’ll be good for her to get out of this house and away from all this testosterone,” Lilly told her.

“Amen,” Jen and Sally said in unison.

Jacque stood up and looked down at her wrinkled cloths and realized she had slept in yesterday’s clothes. *What a wonderful first impression I must have made with Fane’s parents.*

“Alina, let me take a quick shower. I feel all grimy,” Jacque admitted.

“Go right ahead, take your time. I would love to spend time with your mom as well, since we’re going to be family,” Alina told her with obvious affection.

“That sounds like a great idea. Alina, do you like coffee or hot chocolate?” Lilly asked her as the two women headed in the direction of the kitchen.

Jacque turned to Fane and told him she’d see him in a little while, but apparently that wasn’t sufficient. As she walked away he followed her to the bottom of the stairs.

“Jacquelyn, are you -”

“If you plan on finishing that question with the word ‘okay’, I just might save Lucas the trouble and strangle you myself,” Jacque growled at him.

“Man, Sally, you would think getting to sleep on the couch with her man would have put her in a better mood. Maybe he’s

not as good as he looks, if you know what I mean,” Jen was telling Sally as they walked past Fane and Jacque and up the stairs.

“Jen, we really, really need to have a conversation about when to keep your mouth shut and if you don’t then how fast you should run,” Sally retorted as she followed her mouthy friend upstairs.

Jacque lowered her head and was silently shaking it, feeling so overwhelmed. She knew she needed to give herself a pep talk or a good kick in the ass, which was even more effective. She was not a “wuss,” dad-gummet, she was not a frail, little flower that withered at the slightest show of bad weather. So what on earth was her problem?

“It’s the bond, Jacquelyn. It makes you feel things at a whole different level than that of a human. I know it’s hard to understand because it’s all so new to you. You aren’t weak, love, your spirit recognizes that I am your other half and it rebels against any notion of being separated from me. My spirit also rebels against being separated from you, and even worse, I’m constantly fighting to keep my wolf under control because all he sees is that you are our mate, you are in danger, and you need to be bonded to me,” Fane explained to her.

Jacque lifted her head and looked into Fane’s beautiful blue eyes, eyes that she wanted more than anything to be what she saw every morning when she woke up and every night when she went to sleep. Fane was right, she didn’t understand. She wanted to, but it was like her brain couldn’t keep up with her emotions. She would just have to come to grips with it all and accept it. Maybe then it wouldn’t be so scary. *Yeah, good one, Jac. You almost had yourself convinced.*

“Thank you, Fane. I can imagine it must be frustrating for you because I am so clueless. Crap, it’s frustrating for me because I know I must be frustrating you,” she admitted to him.

“I am not frustrated, Luna. How could I possibly be frustrated with the one person who gives my existence

meaning? If you begin to understand anything at all, I hope it's that you have given me what every male Canis lupus longs for, needs, and can never be complete without. You, and only you, complete the very core of who I am. No, love, I am not frustrated with you. I am wholly, ardently, unabashedly in love with you."

Jacque wrapped her arms around his waist, holding onto him as if it would keep the storm raging around them from tearing them apart. She laid her head against his chest and listened to his heart, allowing the rhythm to calm her. Fane kissed the top of her head and gently rubbed her back. As he had done before, he whispered words in his language, and they seemed to ease the tension in her mind.

"I love you, wolf-man," Jacque whispered and knew with his wolf's hearing he wouldn't miss it.

She took a deep breath and pulled away from him. He reluctantly let her go but did not take his hands off her hips.

"I'm gonna go now, 'k? So I can spend time with your mom. What are you going to do?" she asked him.

"I'm going to be with my father when he calls Lucas and then I think I will sleep for a little while. I didn't realize how tired I was until the Pack left and I was able to relax," he told her.

"That reminds me, are you going to tell me what the whole staring contest was about? And about the guys leaving and you suddenly deflating like a balloon with a hole in it?"

"I will tell you about it, Luna, but not right now. You go take your shower. I know my mother is eager to get to know you and seeing as how I plan to have you all to myself tonight, she better get her fill during the day," Fane said as he pulled her close one more time and kissed her.

Jacque pressed closer to him, wrapping her arms around his neck, pressing her lips firmly against his. She loved it when he kissed her, his lips were so soft and gentle. Fane pulled back much too soon for her liking, but she let it go.

“I’ll see you later,” he told her.

Just like when he had left to go back to the Henrys’ earlier, Jacque felt this impending sense of doom at the idea of him not being with her. She hated how desperate it made her feel. She was not the desperate type. She’d never had a problem if she and Trent went several days without talking. At the sound of Fane’s growl, she realized her mistake.

“Remember, love, when you are emotional you tend to broadcast your thoughts. I try not to listen, but sometimes it’s a little too tempting not to, and when I hear his name in your mind I can’t tune you out,” Fane explained. “I know I don’t need to be jealous, but the wolf in me considers you mine even when I didn’t know you.”

Jacque grinned at him, having just realized that she would probably be able to get some dirt on him about past girls from Alina.

“I guess I’ll just need to be more careful about not broadcasting when I’m emotional,” she told him innocently.

“That’s a thought, or you could just not think about him,” Fane told her, his voice getting deeper as they continued on this topic.

“That’s a thought, too. Albeit not a reasonable one, but a thought nonetheless.” Jacque winked at him as she turned to climb the stairs.

“See you later, wolf-man,” she called over her shoulder. Jacque heard him growl and couldn’t help the grin that stretched across her face. If nothing else made her smile, she could count on aggravating him doing it every time.

“*Glad I can amuse you, my love,*” she heard Fane’s voice in her head.

“*Me too,*” was the only reply she gave, which got her another growl.

As Alina and Jacque walked down the sidewalk, Jacque had a hard time not looking back at Sorin, who followed at a

distance – their guard as it were. She was amazed at the fact that four days ago she was just Jacque, small town teenager, fixing to be a senior in high school, and then BAM, she’s the mate to a werewolf prince who’s going to have to fight another werewolf to keep her. Seriously, what had happened that fate somehow got a wild hair up its butt and decided to throw her a curve ball. She was truly baffled by it all.

“Jacquelyn or Jacque? Which would you prefer I call you?” Alina’s voice pulled her from her disbelieving thoughts.

“Well, everyone but Fane calls me Jacque. For some reason he’s called me Jacquelyn since we met and I just haven’t bothered to say anything. Then again, he rarely calls me my name, usually it’s Luna, or love, or some other Romanian word I have no idea the meaning of,” Jacque told her, smiling at how much she liked the different endearments Fane called her.

“I think that’s a mate thing,” Alina told her. “Vasile almost never calls me Alina.”

“What does he call you?” Jacque asked, and then her manners caught up with her. “I mean, if you don’t mind me asking.”

“I don’t mind. He calls me ‘mina’,” Alina told her.

“What does it mean?”

“You’re going to laugh when I tell you because it just solidifies the fact that werewolves are indeed pushy, bossy and possessive. It means ‘mine.’ How ridiculous is that?” Alina said, laughing.

Jacque couldn’t help laughing with her.

“I haven’t known werewolves for a week, and I still see the significance of that,” Jacque told her.

“What has Fane told you about us?” Alina asked Jacque.

“Well, obviously he’s told me about the whole werewolf family trait thing, and about ya’ll being the royal family, so to speak. But other than that, not really anything.”

“Fane never has been the talkative type,” Alina said. “I suppose, too, all he’s really been able to think about is keeping you safe. Grey males tend to be a little obsessive when it comes to their mates and children.”

“Yeah, I suppose he has been a little preoccupied with the whole crazy, psycho alpha trying to get in his Kool Aid and steal his chick,” Jacque said, and then burst out laughing when Alina looked at her like she had grown a third arm.

“Do you always talk like that?” Alina asked

“Unfortunately. It’s a side effect of hanging around Jen. She’s much, much worse,” Jacque told her, shaking her head as she thought about her crazy best friend.

“You care very much for Jen and Sally, and it’s obvious they care for you. I’m sorry that they won’t be able to be with you tomorrow,” Alina told Jacque.

“I would rather them be safe. If it’s going to be dangerous for them to be there, then it’s not worth having them there. You are right, I do care for them. I love them. They’re my best friends and I honestly don’t know what I would do without them.”

They walked a block in silence. Jacque was thinking about the question Alina had asked about what Fane had told her. Was she talking about the bonding or blood rites stuff? Or was there more that Fane hadn’t talked with her about? She would ask him tonight if there was more. She was really hoping it wasn’t something like, ‘for the good of the pack you must produce a male heir within one year of the bonding’, because that would really, really suck.

“Fane has explained to you about the bonding ceremony and blood rites, I hope,” Alina said, finally breaking the silence.

“Yeah, he told me about it. Not in great detail, but the gist. The blood rites thing is definitely non-traditional compared to what we do in our bonding ceremonies,” Jacque joked.

Alina laughed, appreciating the good humor that Jacque obviously took in everything.

“So, because you’re female I know that you’ll break it down a little better. Will you give me a clue as to what to expect?” Jacque asked Alina.

“In the ceremony, Vasile will first bond you and Fane. There are three things that must happen for a bond to be made. First you will say vows. I have a copy of the vows you will say to Fane and Vasile has a copy of the vows Fane will say to you. After the vows, the male presents the female with an offering, a way to show her that he can take care of her and provide for his family,” Alina was explaining her when Jacque interrupted.

“He’s not going to give me a dead animal, is he?”

Alina laughed. “No, that is what a real wolf would give his mate. The symbolism is the same. The offering must be something of value that required him to sacrifice in order to get it. As a wolf sacrifices energy when on the hunt, so must a male *Canis lupus* sacrifice to provide for his family. Want to know what the catch is? Just as a female wolf can turn away a male wolf’s offering, so can we. You don’t have to accept what Fane offers to you.”

“What did Vasile give to you?” Jacque asked Alina before she could tell her mouth not to say what her brain was thinking.

“Before you hear it, you must first realize that Vasile and I have been mated for over two centuries, so what was ‘in’ then, is most definitely not ‘in’ now,” Alina teased.

Jacque was shocked to hear how long she and Vasile had been together.

“Well, I must say you don’t look a day over thirty five,” Jacque told her.

“Now that you know just how long ago it was when we bonded, I will tell you that Vasile gave me two things. The

first was something I needed. My family was poor and we didn't have much, so he gave me a horse. She was beautiful.”

Jacque watched as Alina's face alighted with the memory of an animal she'd obviously loved.

“She was sable with dark chocolate mane, tall and very elegant. I named her Cosmina, which means beauty. The second thing requires an explanation as well, maybe a small history lesson. In that day and age, wealthy families and nobility all had family crests or signets. Vasile comes from a long line of Alphas, which are our equivalent to royalty, and so his family has a signet. The signet was used to identify the family you were from, the social class you were in, and in our case, the pack you were in. Different families carried their signets in different ways. Vasile's was a ring,” Alina held out her hand to show Jacque the gold ring.

It had an oval-shaped face and on the face was a grid of four diamonds. In each diamond there was a symbol. The top left was a crown, the top right was a wolf, the bottom left, a sword, and the bottom right, a full moon.

“The crown represents the royal lineage, the wolf distinguishes that we are werewolves, the sword is to testify that as the Alpha family we are the sword of justice, and the moon is to acknowledge the importance of the females in the Pack,” Alina explained.

“So what was the significance of giving you the ring?” Jacque asked.

“It was his way of offering me a place in the royal line. He was telling me that no matter my lineage, if I bonded with him, I would be accepted as the Alpha of the female Pack members. In essence, he was offering me unconditional acceptance,” Alina answered.

“I take it that was really significant,” Jacque said.

“Yes, it was.”

“And what is the last thing required for the bonding?” Jacque asked.

“Since you are human, this final act might seem very weird. The third thing is the blood rites, where you will exchange blood and Fane will put a visible mark on you for others to know you are his.”

“Ok, you’re right. It is quite freaky-deaky to me because we don’t go around biting each other, but I’m trying to keep an open mind. Does it hurt?” Jacque asked, sounding very nervous.

“Well, I’m not sure how it is going to be for a human. It does cause some discomfort. It is a bite, after all, but some find it pleasurable because it is so significant to the bonding. It’s the way you complete becoming one with your mate,” Alina said, making it sound so normal, even though it was definitely so not normal.

“Well, I’m not going to say I’m not nervous because that would be the understatement of the year. I’m trying very hard to keep an open mind,” Jacque told Alina.

“I think Fane is very blessed to have you as his mate. I know it is going to be a big change for you, especially once you move to Romania, but...”

“Wait, wait, throw it in reverse. What do you mean move to Romania? Fane has not said a single thing about moving to Romania!” Jacque didn’t realize she was yelling, on the sidewalk, in the middle of her neighborhood.

“That’s what I was afraid of. Fane is next in line to be Alpha of the Romanian pack. He has to be there in order to learn what that entails. You also need to learn what it means to be Alpha to the females. It’s going to be hard for some of the females to submit to one who is half human. You are going to have to learn to hold your own,” Alina told her.

“What about my senior year? What about my friends, my mom? What the crap, man?” Jacque said, once again yelling.

“The plan is to get you and Fane private tutors for your senior year. When you are not studying, you will be learning about the Pack and traditions and how to be Alpha. As for

your mom, she is welcome to come with us, and if she doesn't the Pack will pay to fly her out any time you want. Your friends are welcome to come, too. The tutor would work with them as well. We realize we are asking you to give up a lot and we want to make every effort to make it easier on you."

Jacque just stood there, staring at Alina in total disbelief. She felt completely blindsided. Why hadn't Fane said anything to her? How could she possibly leave her life here? Would her friends parents even consider allowing them to go with her?

"Fane is so busted," Jacque said aloud, although really only saying it to herself.

"Is everything okay, Luna?" she heard Fane ask.

"You have been holding out on me. And just to prepare you, it might be wise of you to get anything I could use as a weapon as far from me as possible," Jacque told him.

Fane did not respond to the thought. She was already getting angrier because she knew he wasn't going to argue with her, that he would surrender. She wanted a good argument. She needed to vent her own frustrations at the injustice of it all.

"Jacque, are you okay?" Alina asked her.

"Not real sure just yet, but I'm not going to have a melt down or anything," she answered.

"I think we should head back now. It's nearing lunch time, and I'm sure Fane is probably edgy with you not in his sight," Alina told her.

"Right now it might be a good thing that I'm not in his sight," Jacque muttered under her breath.

Chapter 28

Fane knew he was in trouble for not telling Jacquelyn that she would need to move to Romania after the bonding, but there were so many changes happening all at once, he hadn't wanted to throw more at her. Obviously he had been wrong not to tell her. *Man, this whole mate thing is difficult.* Even if they were meant to be together, apparently that did not mean things would be smooth. Although he would still rather have her, even if she was mad at him, than not have her at all. She was actually pretty cute when she was mad. Hopefully he could smooth things out when they talked tonight.

Fane's father had talked to Lucas Steele and set up the time and location for the challenge. Lucas had asked several times if Jacquelyn was going to be there and that had set Fane and his wolf on edge. He also had the nerve to ask if she received his offering. This caused Fane to let out a ferocious growl, and his Alpha chastised him for it. "You never lose control. It gives the other wolf the upper hand," he told Fane.

Fane had to step outside to calm down and his father had followed him out. At first his Alpha didn't say anything to him, he just let him wrestle with his emotions. But then he spoke.

"Some of the intensity of your emotions is because the bond is not complete. Once it is, you will have much more control. Until then you are going to have to reign it in. Tomorrow during the challenge, if you lose control you will not be able to think clearly. The rage will fog your brain and that will slow your movements. You have to separate your emotions from your fighting. Do you understand what I'm telling you?" Vasile asked.

"Yes, but it's easier said than done. I will try." Fane lowered his head and in a very soft voice, told his father, "I'm afraid. Does that make me weak?"

Vasile went to his son and wrapped him in a tight hug, like he used to when Fane was a pup.

“That you are able to admit your fears shows how strong you are. Only a fool pretends not to fear difficult and frightening things. I am Alpha of the Romanian pack, the largest Canis lupus pack in the world, yet I am afraid too. All will be well, Fane. You are strong and able, you have trained all your life to fight in both of your forms. You will win, you will be bonded with Jacquelyn, and one day you will be Alpha,” he told Fane with complete confidence.

Fane took in the comfort that came from having his Alpha hug him, pouring his power over him. For wolves, touch was a major part of their comfort, and he appreciated his father’s willingness to give him such a gift.

As Vasile pulled away from Fane, they both turned toward the sound of a door opening.

“Sounds like your mother and Jacquelyn are back. Let’s go fill them in on what is planned for tomorrow,” Vasile told him.

Fane hesitated, he couldn’t believe it but he was actually nervous about seeing Jacquelyn. He knew she was upset with him and he felt ashamed that he had withheld information. Okay, more than that, very important information from her.

“Is something wrong, Fane?” his father asked.

“While Jacquelyn and mom were out, she learned about having to move to Romania,” Fane explained.

“Ahh,” Vasile said in understanding. “You did not tell her yourself, and now she is upset with you. Rightfully so, I might add. You know that there should be no secrets between mates.”

“I was trying to spare her any further stress, at least until the challenge is over. I wasn’t trying to be deceitful, but I see now I should have put more faith in her ability to handle it,” Fane admitted.

“You will learn, son. Granted, you may fail a lot in the process and even spend nights in, as the Americans say, the dog house, nonetheless you will learn,” his father told him, patting him on the back.

“Come, let’s go face the wrath of your little fire. Once she gets it out of her system she will feel better.”

Fane walked cautiously into the living room, feeling like prey, which was a really weird feeling since he was a predator. He didn’t like it at all. Jacquelyn was seated in the ugly chair, as he had heard her think of it. That told him that she didn’t want him sitting by her. He couldn’t help the grin that spread across his face. As if she felt his presence, she looked directly into his eyes and that look pierced him to his soul. She was his...and she was angry. In fact, if it were possible, he imagined steam would be coming off those red curls. Before he could go to her, Jen walked right into his line of vision. She didn’t look too happy either.

“A word, fur ball,” was all Jen said as she turned to walk into the dining room. Obviously she expected him to follow.

Once in the dining room she pinned him with a stare equal to the one Jacquelyn had already given him.

“I’m going to say this one time, and only once. It would be very wise of you to listen up. If there is anything, and I mean anything, even if it’s something like you have an extra toe or whatever, anything at all you are not telling Jacque, you had better come clean. What you did was so, so, so not cool. Do you get that? You have walked into her world and pulled the proverbial rug out from underneath her feet. She deserves to know the truth about everything. If there is some weird mating ritual, then I’m giving you fair warning, ‘cause in case you haven’t noticed, she’s a little touchy about the whole physical part of a relationship. If you don’t tell her now, you’re liable to end up as a rug in front of her fireplace. Are we clear, Cujo?” Jen asked.

“Very, very clear. I didn’t mean to hurt her,” Fane started to say.

Jen held her hand up to silence him. “Save it, flea bag. I’m not the one you have to convince. You make Jacque happy, that makes Sally and me happy.”

“Jen, are you done laying down the law with my mate yet?” they both heard Jacquelyn ask.

“I suppose I’m finished,” Jen said as she turned to go. But before she was out of the dining room, she added, “For now.”

Fane watched Jen walk out of the room, thankful that she had not lived up to her reputation of inflicting pain. When she was no longer in sight, he turned to look at Jacquelyn. She was leaning against the wall, arms folded across her chest. Her glare wasn’t quite as harsh as when she was sitting in the chair, but it was a glare nonetheless.

“Jacquelyn,” Fane started, but Jacquelyn shook her head.

“I don’t want to talk about it right now. I want to get something to eat, I want to get away from those wolves that just came into my living room, and I want to go lie in my bed and brood. So whatever you have on the tip of your tongue, just save it.”

Fane had been so engrossed in his conversation – well, his scolding – with Jen that he had not heard or smelled the other wolves come in. He growled as his eyes phased to his wolf sight.

“I understand,” Fane began. Again, Jacquelyn tried to silence him, but this time he would not submit. “No, Jacquelyn, you are going to listen to what I have to say.” Jacquelyn’s head snapped up at the tone in Fane’s voice. He tried to soften it but by the look on her face he was unsuccessful. “I understand you are mad at me, and rightfully so, but for the moment I need you to please trust me and do as I say. We are going to go in the kitchen and get something to eat and then we are going to go up to your room. If you don’t want me in the room with you that is fine, I will sit in the hall. As long as the other wolves are in the house you will be close to me,” he finished with a low growl.

Jacquelyn took in a sharp breath when she finally noticed that his eyes had phased. She walked over to him and took his hand and place it against her cheek. She closed her eyes,

pressing her face against the palm of his hand, and whispered, “Yours.”

Fane leaned down and blew warm air on her neck, putting his scent on her. Then he kissed her lips softly. “I love you,” he told her gently.

“I know,” Jacquelyn said in reply.

Fane pulled his hand away from her face and took her hand. He led her into the kitchen, deftly made two sandwiches, and grabbed a bag of chips and two bottles of water from the fridge. Then, turning to Jacquelyn, he told her, “I want you to walk in front of me, please.”

Jacquelyn acquiesced to his wishes without argument. They walked through the living room, and as they did she could feel the eyes of the other wolves on her. Fane snarled at them and Jacquelyn saw them all drop their gazes to the floor. Fane was holding it together by a thread. He really needed to bond with his mate or he was likely going to wind up killing one of these wolves.

Once in Jacquelyn’s bedroom he eased up a little. Knowing she was safe and with him helped calm him and his wolf. They both sat down in the floor and Fane spread their make-shift picnic in front of them.

“Do you want me to sit out in the hall?” he asked her.

“No, you dork. I’m not going to make you sit in the hall, even though I’m very not pleased with you,” Jacquelyn told him. “I don’t want to talk about that right now. Tell me about these other wolves. Why did you go all postal on Boian when he got in my face, even though he wasn’t doing anything?”

Fane took slow breaths, calming himself. Jacquelyn didn’t realize how valuable she was to a Grey male. He had to help her understand, but in order to do that he had to stay calm.

“You are a female.”

“Spot on there, wolf-man. Any more bright revelations to share?” Jacquelyn interrupted.

“You didn’t let me finish, Luna.”

“Oh, my bad. Please do continue,” Jacquelyn said.

“You are a half *Canis lupus* female, able to mate with a male. The female ratio to male werewolves is somewhere around thirty to one. To put it simply, you’re in very high demand. Now, yes, you have found your mate, but the catch is you are not bonded to your mate. No blood rites have been performed, no mating has taken place, and to unmated males, that makes you fair game. So naturally, around other unmated males I’m just a little territorial when it comes to you. I can never show weakness to another dominant wolf. For them to see weakness in me means I’m vulnerable, and vulnerability to a wolf means easy prey,” Fane explained.

“Is that why you would not sit down until they did?” Jacquelyn asked.

“That’s correct. A more dominant wolf’s head is never lower than the less dominants. As for why I took Boian to the floor, he was closer to you than he should have been and he scared you. For those reasons he needed to be disciplined. He now knows not to go near you or I will kill him,” Fane said matter of factly.

“Isn’t that a little over the top?” she asked him.

“Not when it comes to *Canis lupus*. Unmated males can be volatile and unpredictable. Giving them boundaries helps them keep their wolf in check. That’s the other reason is a mated female is not to be touched by another male unless her mate says it is okay – it’s just another way to prevent fights. I know it doesn’t make sense to you and seems archaic, but there is an animal that lives inside us and that animal has to be kept under control. The human part of me is what kept me from tearing Boian to shreds. The wolf would not have shown mercy, which is what sets us apart from full-blooded wolves,” he answered.

Jacquelyn didn’t say anything, she just took bites of her sandwich and chewed slowly, obviously in thought. Fane ate

his sandwich as well and let her think about what he had told her. He knew it was a lot to take in, but he also knew that she had a right to know everything.

“So did I freak you out?” he asked her.

“Fane, sweetie, I’m way past freaked out, but I’m dealing.”

Fane finished his sandwich and stretched out on her bedroom floor, arms behind his head. He let out a big yawn and closed his eyes.

“I’m gonna take a nap, if you don’t mind. Could you please stay up here until the other Greys leave?” he asked her, trying very hard to not sound like he was ordering her around. *See, he thought. I’m learning.*

“Since you asked, and not demanded, I will stay. I’m actually kind of tired, too.”

Jacquelyn stood up and stretched, then kicked off her shoes and climbed up onto her bed. She laughed when Fane turned and propped himself up on an elbow, looking at her questioningly.

“You’re just gonna let me sleep on the floor, Luna?” he asked her incredulously.

“Well, you are a wolf. I don’t think it’s a good idea to start the habit of you sleeping in the bed, you know, with all the shedding and whatnot,” Jacquelyn teased.

Fane stood up, unfolding his tall form, and stalked forward, eyes squinted, looking every bit the predator. Jacquelyn squealed and started to get off the bed, but before she could, Fane wrapped his arm around her and pulled her back down. They were both laughing and breathless when Fane looked down into Jacquelyn’s eyes. He kissed her on the forehead and settled in next to her, pulling her close against him. Once again, he started humming his favorite Willie Nelson song until they both drifted off to sleep.

Chapter 29

Should we wake them up?” Sally asked Jen.

“Yeah, but first we should draw on their faces. We could put paw prints on Jacque’s face and claw marks on Fane’s,” Jen said, laughing. “Get it? Paws. Ya know, ‘cause he’s a wolf.”

Sally was looking at her like she had grown an ear on her forehead.

“Oh, never mind,” Jen said, batting her hand at Sally.

“You are one disturbed little girl. You know that, right?” Sally asked.

Jen gave Sally a “go to hell” look and said, “Just wake them up already. Fane’s dad said he needed to talk to all of us and I’m guessing that means the prince and princess here.”

“There’s no need to wake us up, you dip. Nobody could possibly sleep with Thelma and Louise standing over them gabbing. And if you had drawn anything on our faces, I would’ve personally make sure the entire school knew you had a third nipple,” Jacque told her crankily.

“Who has a third nipple?” Fane perked up.

“Oh, bring up the word nipple and you’re all ears, fur ball. And you,” Jen said, pointing her finger at Jacque. “You know I don’t have a third nipple, so how can you possibly tell people that?”

“I know that, but do they? And how exactly would you disprove me, flash the school at a pep rally?” Jacque asked, sounding victorious.

Sally burst out with a loud laugh and Fane was grinning.

“Man, she so got you pinned, sista. Ha!” Sally laughed, pointing at Jen and giving Jacque a fist bump.

“Ok, fine. Whatever. Both of you get your royal arses up. Fane, your dad wants to talk to everyone down in the living room,” Jen told them both. Then she grabbed Sally by the arm

and pulled her out the door, muttering as they went. “What the hell? You’re supposed to be on my side now that Jacque has to side with her fur ball all the time.”

“Hey I side with the victor, Thelma. So next time, win, and I will be in your corner,” Sally told her with a wink.

“Why do I have to be Thelma? I’m really more of a Louise personality,” Jen whined.

“Seriously, do you really want to argue about what movie characters we are going to be?” Sally asked her in amazement.

“I’m just saying,” Jen retorted, holding her hands up in surrender.

Jacque stood up and lifted her arms in the air, stretching. She looked down and saw that Fane was watching her intently.

“What are you looking at, oh prince of wolves?” Jacque asked him.

“I’m looking at my beautiful mate, and are the nicknames ever going to stop?” Fane asked her.

“Hmmm. Well, I guess I could...nope, sorry. There are just too many possibilities and I like to explore my creative side,” Jacque said in mock seriousness.

Fane stood up and wrapped his arms around her and kissed her hair. Jacque leaned into him, loving the way he felt against her and the way he smelled. She noticed the clock on her dresser said six thirty pm and her stomach tightened. They had slept the day away and every minute that went by brought them closer to the challenge. She closed her eyes and squeezed Fane tighter, wishing she could whisk them away to somewhere safe with just a thought. *Geez, she thought, you would think with all this werewolf stuff there would be some way to teleport or something, but nooooo, that would be too weird. Not like werewolves are weird or anything.*

“Guess we better head downstairs,” Jacque heard Fane say.

She pulled away from him and put on her best smile, nodding her head. Fane took her hand and led her out of the

room, down the stairs and into the living room. Everyone was seated there already, and oddly enough they were all in the exact spots they had been that morning. The other Greys were already sitting on the floor. Jacque noticed Fane didn't hesitate to sit down on the couch.

“What did you need to talk with us about, Tata?” Fane asked his father.

“Just some finalization of the plans for tomorrow. First, I want Jacquelyn to shower over at the Henrys' in the morning.”

Fane put his hand on Jacque's knee before she could protest. *“It's so you won't have my scent on you. It will provoke Lucas and his wolves much more if you smell like me,”* Fane explained.

“Oh, alright then,” Jacque said out loud. Everyone looked at her. “Dang, I always do that. I look like a crazy person talking to myself.”

“I take it you explained why I am wanting her to do that?” Vasile asked Fane.

“Yes, I explained that she couldn't have my scent on her. What about clothes?” Fane asked.

“I've gotten that taken care of,” Lilly said. “I bought her brand new things and took them to the Henrys'.”

“Oooh, did you get her a shirt that says ‘Team Fane’ on it? ‘Cause that would so rock,” Jen said, grinning.

All eyes turned to Jen. Sally slapped her on the arm, Jacque just rolled her eyes, and Vasile cleared his throat which brought everyone's attention back to him.

“Second, the challenge starts at ten pm. Fane, I want you and the rest of the Pack there at eight thirty. I want you to know your battlefield, so to speak. You need to look at the ground, check for any soft spots, holes, or sharp objects. Knowing your battlefield can give you an advantage over your opponent. I want you to check it in both forms, wolf and man, understand?” his father asked.

“As you say,” Fane responded.

“Lastly, Mina and Lilly, I need you to prepare for the bonding ceremony. I thought about waiting to bond them until we get to Romania, but after observing Fane’s reactions, and especially after the challenge, I think it would be best for all involved if it happens as soon as possible. So the evening after the challenge, Fane and Jacquelyn will be bonded,” he announced.

Jacque started having difficulty breathing as soon as she heard Vasile say for her mother and Alina to prepare for the bonding ceremony. Now she was coughing and trying to suck in air through her closing windpipe. Jen jumped up and began pounding on Jacque’s back, hollering, “Cough it up.”

“She wasn’t eating anything, you dip weed. Quit hitting her,” Sally told Jen as she jerked her arm and pulled her back down to sit.

Finally, Jacque was able to get enough air to speak. “Don’t I get a say in when the bonding thingy happens?”

Vasile looked at her like she had grown horns out of her head. “No,” was all he answered.

“NO? What do you mean no? I mean, cripes, I’m the one bonding my life to a wolf for all eternity. I’m the one getting bitten, I’m the one being hauled off to a third world country, so NO is not good enough!” Jacque was standing now and had actually stomped her foot.

“Nu-i doar stomp piciorul? (did she just stomp her foot?),” Jacque heard Dorian say, although she had no idea what the words meant.

Fane growled at him, causing the wolf to lower his head in submission. Then Fane turned to Jacque. “It’s not a real good idea to yell at an Alpha, Luna,” he said as gently as he could. He realized a little too late he should’ve just kept his mouth shut.

“Oh, this is fixin’ to get good,” Jen whispered to Sally, who promptly shushed her.

Before Jacque could completely blow her top, Vasile spoke. There was a push to his words that made everyone, including Jacque, shut up and listen.

“I am Alpha. I know what is best for my pack. Fane is a ticking bomb right now and I will not have him kill one opponent who is in competition for you only to face five more. If you do not want to bond with him, I will not have him risk his life tomorrow. We will just move you and your mother somewhere out of Lucas’ reach. If you do want to bond with him, then you will do it when I tell you to. I’m not asking you to jump in bed with him.” Jacque flushed at his words. All the while Fane was growling and trying not to glare at his Alpha. “I am asking you to calm the beast that is raging inside of Fane. You are his other half, Jacquelyn. Only you can complete him. Are we clear?” Vasile asked after his speech.

Jacque had tears streaming down her cheeks. Good grief, when did she become such a cry baby? The thought of Fane gone, not with her, took her breath away. She did want to bond with him, it was just a shock of it all. She felt so ashamed at her outburst, realizing it had come across that she was rejecting Fane. She turned to look at him. He stared back at her, stark honesty written all over his face. Fane wanted her, he wanted her for however long they had together. How could anyone turn that down, unconditional love?

“I’m sorry,” she began. Fane surged to his feet and roared, storming out of the front door. The other wolves whined and cowered and Alina hung her head, shoulders shaking with silent sobs. Jacque was a little confused, then the light bulb hit. Naturally, Jen was ahead of her.

“He thought you were saying you were sorry that you didn’t want him, genius,” Jen told her, sounding very put out.

Jacque jumped up and ran after Fane. She made it out the front door and saw he was nearly across the street.

“Fane! Wait!” Jacque called after him still running, “I wasn’t,” huff, huff, pant, pant, “saying I didn’t want you,” Jacque told him breathlessly. “Please, how...” Jacque took

another deep breath. “Crap, hold on. I can’t breathe,” she told him. Once she caught her breath, she continued, “How could you possibly think I don’t want you?”

Fane had his back to her, head bent, shoulders slumped in defeat. He didn’t answer.

“Dammit, answer me!” Jacque yelled at him as she grabbed his arm and jerked him towards her. She saw that tears had filled his eyes but hadn’t spilled over yet. It hurt her to know she was the cause of those tears.

“Do you want me?” Fane asked her.

“Yes,” Jacque answered without hesitation.

Fane stepped forward, towering over her. She took an involuntary step back.

“Then why do you have a problem bonding with me in two days?”

“It’s not that I have a problem with it, Fane. I was just taken by surprise. You were raised knowing that one day you would bond with someone in a way that is so far beyond what humans do. I was not. It’s just a lot to swallow. But I’m good, I’m okay, I had my little fit and yes, I stomped my foot, but I’m ready to move forward,” Jacque told him, hope filling her eyes.

Fane took her hand and brought it to his lips. He didn’t take his eyes off her as he kissed her hand. Jacque’s breathing sped just a bit, noting the predatory gleam in his eyes.

“So we are good, yes?” Fane asked her.

“Nope, babe. We are great,” she answered, and stood on her tiptoes to kiss his lips. Fane growled and pulled her close. Jacque giggled and batted her hand at him.

“Stop that, wolf-man. We’ve gotta go explain to the others that I wasn’t rejecting you. Your mother was having a break down,” Jacque told him. Fane took her hand and pulled her quickly towards her house. As they entered the living room, Jacque saw that Alina hadn’t moved, but Vasile was now

sitting next to her with his arm around her. At the sight of Fane, Vasile stood and stepped away from Alina. Jacque rushed to Alina and knelt down in front of her.

“Alina, please. I wasn’t rejecting Fane. I didn’t get to finish what I was saying before he jumped up and took off. I was saying sorry for the little two year-old fit I threw. Apparently I didn’t get them all out of my system as a child. I want to bond with Fane, I will bond with him right now,” Jacque started to say, but Alina’s head snapped up and she put her hands on either side of Jacque’s face.

“You can’t bond with him yet, child. Once you are bonded, your fates are tied to one another’s. If Fane is killed in the challenge, you will die as well,” Alina explained.

“Hells bells, I forgot about that. Well, I intend to mate with him.” Jacque paused when Alina tried to cover a laugh with a cough and Fane rumbled low in his chest. “What did I say?”

“Well, Sherlock, you sort of threw out there that you were planning on doing the horizontal mamba with fur ball here,” Jen said, pointing her thumb at Fane.

“The horiz..” Jacque started to say, sounding confused. Then it hit her what she had said – mate not bond. *Crap*, she thought, blushing so badly her face was hot.

“I wasn’t talking about, I mean I wasn’t, that is to say I-” Jacque was trying really hard to correct her mistake, but she was thoroughly embarrassed at this point.

Fane walked up behind her and put his arms around her waist, pulling her against him. He leaned down to whisper in her ear. “And here I thought you were so shy,” he teased her.

Jacque pulled away quickly and put her hand on his chest as if to hold him back. “Uh uh, buddy. You back up and keep those paws to yourself. I meant to say I will bond with you once the challenge is over. Bond as in b-o-n-d. Clear?” she asked him.

And repeating what she had said to his father, he answered with a very sly, very suggestive grin. “Crystal.” Then to seal it,

he winked at her.

“Holy crap. Is it hot in here, or is it just the freaking fine Romanian prince? Cuz I am so, so burning up! I mean, did anybody else see that wink and that smile? He wasn’t even doing it to me, and I’m all hot and bothered. I mean geez, man!” Jen said, fanning herself.

The three wolves on the floor were trying very hard not to laugh, but it just wasn’t working. Vasile wasn’t even trying to disguise his laughter, and Alina was beaming. Even Lilly was laughing. *Well, great*, Jacque thought. Everyone saw her man make a pass at her and she couldn’t even enjoy it with all these butt heads laughing. Then, because she saw the grin on Fane’s face that could only mean he was listening to her thoughts, she began laughing too.

Chapter 30

Fane pulled Jacquelyn closer to him as he held her in her bed. The night had gone so quickly and he refused to close his eyes knowing that in the morning she would leave and he would not be able to hold her again until after the challenge. Her scent swirled in the air around him, her heart beat in rhythm to his own. *Mine*, his wolf told him. *Yes*, he agreed, *she is ours*. Not realizing it, he began to hum the same song he had been humming for the past two days.

“What song is that?” he heard Jacquelyn ask.

“You’re going to laugh at me if I tell you,” he told her, grinning to himself

“Why would I laugh at you?”

“It’s a song by Willie Nelson and Kimmie Rhodes. Yes, I’m Romanian, I’m a werewolf, and I like Willie Nelson,” Fane said, sounding forlorn.

“Well, admitting it is half the battle,” Jacquelyn teased.

“It’s a song that makes me think of you, of us.”

“Will you sing it to me?” she asked.

“Only if you don’t laugh,” Fane agreed.

Jacquelyn didn’t say anything in response and Fane took that as his cue. So he began to sing to her.

“Put your arms around me,
Listen to my heart beat now.
If you want to love me,
Baby, I can show you how.

Love me like a song,
Sweet as a melody,
Learn all the words to me,

And sing along.
Find the harmony
The rhythm and the rhyme to me,
On and on,
All night long,
Love me like a song

I want to be the melody,
You can't get out of your head.
Think of me as words of love,
A poet might have said and,

Love me like a song,
Sweet as a melody,
Learn all the words to me,
And sing along,
Find the harmony,
The rhythm and the rhyme to me,
On and on,
All night long,
Love me like a song.”

While Fane had been singing, Jacquelyn had rolled over to face him and was watching him, tears streaming down her face.

“That was beautiful. Your voice is absolutely beautiful. Thank you,” she blubbered on and cried even harder.

Fane pulled her tightly to him and kissed her forehead. In between kisses he whispered to her, “Un pretios (precious one), dragostea mea (my love), va rog sa nu strige (please do not cry).”

But Jacquelyn continued to cry and it just seemed to get worse. “I don’t know what on freaking earth you are saying, I just know that it isn’t supposed to happen like this. You’re not supposed to meet the love of your life only to have them have to go fight some delusional werewolf, with the possibility of him dying. Dammit, it’s not supposed to happen like this.” She sobbed and sobbed.

Fane felt the tears that had been hiding in his eyes finally spill over, he could feel the wetness run down his flushed cheeks. He didn’t know what to say. He didn’t know how to fix it or make her feel better. So he decided to just be honest.

“I’m scared,” he whispered. “I’m so scared. What if I lose? What if the other wolves attack and my father and the Pack aren’t able to protect you? What if I lose you? I can’t lose you, it would kill me. I don’t want you there tomorrow, because at least if you aren’t there they can’t hurt you,” Fane told her as he let the tears fall, completely unashamed. This was his mate. He had only just found her, he loved her, he treasured her, and he would do anything to protect her.

Jacquelyn looked up at him. She took her hand and wiped away his tears. Leaning forward, she kissed each eye. For a moment they just looked at each other, as if to memorize each other’s face.

“I’m scared, too,” Jacquelyn told him. “If I could fight Lucas for you, I would. I don’t want to see you hurt. I can’t even begin to think of seeing you die. How am I going to do this tomorrow, Fane? I’m so scared that we won’t have all the things I’ve imagined having with you.”

At those words, Fane couldn’t help the images that ran through his thoughts and he heard Jacquelyn weep as she watched them in her mind.

Fane and her at the bonding ceremony, with their family all around them. Then Fane and her in a room alone, one of his hands cradling her head, the other resting on her waist, him leaning down and biting her neck to complete the blood rites.

Jacquelyn shook with sobs as she continued to see his thoughts. She and Fane were walking through a beautiful house, hand in hand, then they were wrapped in each others arms, tangled in bed sheets with passion in their eyes. Then Jacquelyn was in a hospital bed, Fane was holding her hand, her belly was swollen with child. Next she saw Fane rocking a baby to sleep as Jacquelyn sat watching. Then they were wrapped in each other's arms, laughing, kissing, touching, loving.

Fane's shoulders shook as he wept, crying over what might never come to be.

"I'm sorry, Luna. I shouldn't have let you see all that. When you mentioned thinking of all we could have, it made me think of the things I too have dreamt about having with you."

The next thing Fane heard was a whisper so soft he almost missed it.

"Fane, make love to me," Jacquelyn said, almost too soft for even wolf ears to hear.

Fane froze. This was the rock and a hard place no man wants to get into with a woman. If he says no then he's rejecting her and she will be embarrassed. If he says yes, then he's a jerk because he's taking advantage of her vulnerability. Jacquelyn would not have asked this of him if it were just another night, and he would not make love to her until she asked him when there was no threat to any lives and nothing was creating passion that might not be as fervent as it seemed at that moment. Now, how exactly do you word that to a seventeen year old female who already has self-esteem issues? *Good luck with that, Fane*, he thought.

“Jacquelyn, look at me,” Fane told her. “I want to make love to you, are we clear on that part?” he asked her.

“Yes, we’re clear. There’s a ‘but’ coming on, isn’t there?” she asked.

“We are both really emotional right now. I don’t want you to do something that you will regret tomorrow night after the challenge. If I win, and I plan to, you will be sad that we didn’t wait. I want the first time to be special and perfect for both of us. Please don’t think I’m rejecting you, because you have absolutely no idea how hard it is to say no to you,” he told her honestly.

“Wow, I’m impressed,” Jacquelyn said, wiping away what was left of the tears on her cheeks.

“Are you mad at me?” Fane asked cautiously.

“No, I’m not. I’m a little embarrassed ‘cause you know how awkward I am when it comes to the whole physical aspect of a relationship,” she told him.

“Why are you embarrassed by it? You do realize that it will be fun, right?” Fane asked her, grinning widely.

“Why do you like to say stuff like that knowing it’s going to make me blush?”

“Because it’s cute,” Fane told her honestly. “I won’t make love to you Luna, but since we are both awake I will most definitely take advantage of your beautiful lips,” Fane said just before he wrapped an arm around her and flipped her onto her back. Jacquelyn squealed and laughed as Fane leaned over her. He bent down and gently kissed her lips. Jacquelyn wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him towards her. He rumbled in his chest at her boldness. Fane’s left hand was cradling Jacquelyn’s head while his right hand was gradually rubbing her thigh, moving slowly up to her waist. Fane was quite proud of himself for telling Jacquelyn he would not consummate their relationship, but as he lay there in her arms, feeling her lips on his, their bodies pressed close, he hoped she wouldn’t make him wait too long after the bonding. *She will*

probably want a human wedding first. He growled at that thought. It was probably going to be awhile before they mated. In that case, he better slow down. He eased off her just a bit and pulled back from her lips. They were both breathing hard.

“Is something wrong?” Jacquelyn asked him, looking very worried.

“No, everything is very right. I just need to slow down a little, my honor only goes so far. Wolf or not, I’m still a guy and you are a very fine girl,” Fane told her with no shame.

“Oh, I see. You were getting all worked up, only to realize all worked up is all there is. Am I right?”

“Yes, Luna, you are brutally right. Can I be brutally blunt?” he asked her.

“By all means,” she answered.

“At what point do you plan to make the same offer?”

Jacquelyn laughed at that. “You’re worried about how long it’s going to be before we do the deed?”

“Well, since you put it so eloquently, yes, that is what I’m asking,” Fane answered and actually looked embarrassed.

“I want to be married first.” Jacquelyn held up her hand to keep Fane from saying whatever was fixing to leave his lips. “Married in the traditional way, not just the werewolf bonding thingy,” she explained.

“You do realize that our werewolf bonding thingy is more binding than your human marriage, right?” Fane told her smugly.

“That may be, my little fur ball, but I still want our relationship recognized in the eyes of normal people as legit, got it?”

Fane grinned at her. “As you wish, Luna.”

“That’s what I like to hear, wolf-man,” Jacquelyn told him as she yawned.

“Try to get some sleep, love. It’s going to be a long day tomorrow,” Fane told her and kissed her on the head.

He began to hum the song he had sung to her earlier and even though he so desperately wanted to stay awake, his wolf knew they both needed rest and that helped push him into a deep sleep.

Chapter 31

From the minute Jacque woke up, things were a blur. Fane kissed her sweetly and held her close and then finally let her go and watched her walk across the street to the Henrys' house. She showered and put on the new clothes that her mom had bought, and they actually weren't too bad. A pair of cute jeans and a simple green, fitted, v-neck top. She was proud of her mom for not taking the opportunity to put her in a ridiculous outfit that made her look twelve. *Point to you, mom*, she thought.

By the time she got downstairs, Jen and Sally had arrived, and that put a big smile on Jacque's face.

"What are you two doing here?" she asked them, and before she could give them a chance to answer she added, "And don't ya'll smell like the wolves?"

"Nope. We went home, showered, and put on clothes that had not been at your house. So we are werewolf-smell free," Jen told her.

"Awesome. So instead of fretting by myself, I get to make ya'll miserable by fretting with you," Jacque said, sounding very forlorn.

"Shut up! Do you honestly think we would let you spend this day of all days alone? Sorry, chica, no such luck," Sally told her.

Jacque was so thankful that she wasn't going to be left to her own thoughts. Already they were beginning to feel overwhelming, but Jen took charge and before she knew it, it was eight pm. Jacque went to the Henrys' front window and looked across the street at her house. Sure enough, she saw Sorin and Fane coming out the front door. Her heartbeat sped when he turned and looked back at her. It reminded her of the night he arrived, which had only been five days ago. Could it really be possible that it had been a mere five days since she first laid eyes on him? She felt like she had known him all her

life, like he had always been there with her. He grinned at her and winked.

“I love you, Luna. More than I ever thought possible, I love you,” Jacque heard him tell her through his thoughts. A single tear ran down her face and she hastily wiped it away. She was not going to be weak. Jen and Sally had moved beside her and were looking out the window as well.

“That is one fine specimen,” Jen said with a sly grin plastered on her face.

“Why am I not surprised that is what you’re thinking about at a time like this?” Sally asked her.

“Hey, there is never a time to not appreciate a fine looking man. Am I right, Jacque? You know I am.”

“Well, when it’s one as fine as Fane, then you are right,” Jacque said with a smile. She knew that Jen was trying to lighten the mood and she was grateful.

The next hour seem to drag. Jacque spent most of it pacing the Henrys’ living room and mumbling things under her breath. She so desperately wanted to seek out Fane’s thoughts, but his father had made it very clear that Fane needed to concentrate on the challenge only, so Jacque refrained from it.

Jacque jumped when she heard a knock on the Henrys’ front door. Jen went and looked out the front window to check if it was friend or foe.

“It’s Fane’s mom. Guess it’s that time,” Jen told them.

Jen opened the door and Alina stepped in. She was dressed in black cargo, military-style pants, a black t-shirt, black boots, and her long hair was pulled back in a ponytail. She looked so bad ass.

“You look like you are planning on doing more than just watching,” Sally told her.

“It’s always best to be prepared. I’m trained in all sorts of fighting styles, so if a full-out battle ensues, someone will

have to stay in human form to take care of Jacque, and that is me,” Alina explained.

“Is there any way that we could maybe take a vehicle and just be parked close to the field as backup? Like if ya’ll need a quick get away? What do ya think?” Sally asked this and it took everyone by surprise.

“Who are you and where is my little safe Sally who won’t even go over the speed limit?” Jacque teased her.

Alina hadn’t said anything yet, and when Jacque looked at her she could tell she was actually considering Sally’s plan.

“You do realize that if I allow this I will be disobeying my husband’s orders?” Alina asked them.

“Don’t you have to do what he orders, like the other wolves? When he gives them an order sometimes they have to obey whether they want to or not.” Jen asked her.

“No, I am Alpha female and I am his mate. He cannot really give me orders. I like to think of them as firm suggestions,” Alina told them with a wink.

“Nice.” Jen gave Sally and Jacque fist bumps. “So what do you say?” she asked Alina.

“I think it is a good idea. However, you must be surreptitious. If the other wolves smell you, there will be an all out war. Do you understand?” Alina asked sternly.

“We hear you loud and clear. We’re good at sneaking. We aren’t going to go into how we got so good at it, but rest assured it’s almost a specialty of ours,” Jen told her.

Jacque was shaking her head, clearly not in agreement with the things that were transpiring.

“Wait just one darn minute! I can’t let you guys do this. Don’t you realize how dangerous this is? If anything happened to ya’ll because of me I would never be able to live with myself.” Jacque was on the verge of having one of her two year old moments.

Sally and Jen both wrapped their arms around her and squeezed her tight.

“I hate to break it to you, Watson, but Jen and I tend to do what we want even when you tell us not to. Usually we just agree with you and then do what we want. Surely you know this?” Sally told her in a sweet tone of voice.

“You two drive me crazy!” Jacque exclaimed.

“Whoa, back up wolf chick. What would you do if you were in our shoes? You cannot tell me for a minute you would sit at home and wait for us. So you just take your little safety speech and shove it,” Jen said as she let go of Jacque and backed up, putting her hands on her hips.

“Well, Jen, how ‘bout you tell me how you really feel?” Jacque said sarcastically.

Jacque knew they were right. There was no way she would let them go off to something so dangerous and sit at home. How could she possibly ask them to do the same?

“You’re right, I wouldn’t sit at home. Please promise me you will be careful!”

“Sweet!” Jen said, giving Sally a high five. “We are so going on a stakeout, this rocks.”

Jacque took a deep breath and tried not give into the panic that was threatening to overtake her.

“Jacque, it’s time,” Alina told her gently.

Alina turned, and once more told Jen and Sally to make sure they were not seen and to stay downwind so their scent would not reach the wolves. She then walked out the front door without a glance. Jacque knew that Alina trusted she would follow, but she was also giving her a moment in private with her friends.

“I love you two. Please be careful,” Jacque said as she hugged them both.

“Don’t worry ‘bout us, Sherlock. You focus on your task, and we’ll focus on ours,” Sally told her.

Jacque didn’t linger, she didn’t want to turn on the water works and knew they would come if she didn’t leave quickly. She waved one last time and rushed out the front door. She saw that Alina had pulled the rental car to the curb. She climbed into the passenger seat and they started off on what proved to be the longest ride of her life, even though the field of dreams was only fifteen minutes from her house. They were both silent on the way there, absorbed in their thoughts, coming to the realization that the man they both loved was going to be in the fight of his life tonight and they would be watching, whatever the outcome.

Once again Jacque was trying to reconcile the fact that no one could help Fane, not even his own Alpha and father. *How crappy is that?* she thought. Alina reached over and touched Jacque’s hand, startling her out of her thoughts.

“We are here. There are some things I need to explain quickly. First, I know you’ve already been warned, but I will warn you again. Do not seek out Fane’s thoughts. The images you would see there while he is in battle are images you would never forget. Also, it would distract him. Second, we don’t want to draw any unnecessary attention to you so stay close to me and keep quiet. Lastly, should the worst happen you will turn tail and run as hard as you can to the rendezvous point where the girls are. You will go straight to the airport and board the jet we have chartered. You will not wait for us, do you understand? We have wolves in position to pick you up at the necessary locations. Your friends and mother are to accompany you. There will be no argument.”

Jacque’s brain was in overdrive. This just couldn’t be happening. *Seriously*, she thought, *how had it all come to this?* Jacque shook her head to clear it of the negative thoughts, she needed to be focused. *Just accept it, Jacque*, she told herself. *This is the way it is and you are just going to have to suck it up and deal. Ok, deep breath.*

“I understand,” Jacque told Alina, looking her straight in the eyes. Alina simply nodded her head, accepting Jacque’s answer. Jacque looked up for the first time, out at the field of dreams, seeing it in a whole new light. It was nothing special, and because no one was coming here anymore, the grass had grown tall. There was a path that had been made by a vehicle driving over the tall grass, flattening all in its way. She couldn’t see very far because the path took a sudden sharp curve to the right, and the grass left standing was blocking her sight. She decided that was a good thing. Just in case someone came by, they wouldn’t see anything.

Alina opened her door and Jacque took this as her cue to get out of the car. As they walked down the manmade path, she did not hear anything. But as they walked further, she began to hear growling and deep voices. After going around the sharp curve, they took several more turns, and on the last turn the area suddenly opened up into a perfect circle. All the grass in the circle had been completely mowed. They’d set up lights that were attached to chargers all around the circle. That made Jacque think this must’ve been something they’ve done many times, and she shuddered.

As soon as she and Alina stepped into the clearing everyone froze except for Vasile. He just continued speaking to Sorin, who was trying to listen but was watching everyone else as well. Alina grabbed Jacque’s hand and began to walk towards her husband. A man Jacque had never seen stepped in front of them and fell down on one knee. He turned his neck to the side, exposing it. Jacque looked to Alina, not sure what to do, but Alina was not looking at Jacque she was staring daggers at the man on the ground. To Jacque’s surprise, Alina was growling as well.

“She is not your Luna,” Alina said in a very calm but very scary voice. “Move out of our way or I will break your neck.” Again she sounded so calm, much scarier than if she were yelling.

The guy, or wolf rather, ignored Alina completely. So, taking a page from her book, Jacque pulled her shoulders

back, stood as tall as she could, and in the firmest voice she could muster she ordered, “Go back to your Alpha. Now.”

The wolf whined, but stood up and with eyes on the ground, turned and walked away. Jacque took a deep breath, closed her eyes to regroup, and then began walking forward with Alina again. She still had not seen Fane, or Lucas for that matter. She saw that Vasile’s other pack members were here, and as soon as Alina and Jacque reached Vasile, those wolves flanked both of them. Vasile stepped in front of Jacque and looked her in the eyes. Although Jacque was not a full werewolf, she felt the power in that stare and had to drop her eyes.

“I trust you have been told what to do in any outcome?” Vasile asked her very softly.

Jacque looked to Alina, asking with her eyes if Vasile knew about Sally and Jen. Alina gave the tiniest turn of her head indicating he did not, so Jacque simply nodded, not trusting herself to speak.

“Good. Now, my wolves will stay around you and Alina for the duration. I want you all to back up about five paces and do not move.” Vasile said those last three words with his eyes once again locked on Jacque.

Am I really that bad at following orders? Jacque thought. Then she mentally nodded. *Yeah, I most definitely am.*

They collectively stepped back the five paces and stopped. Jacque realized that Alina still had her hand, and when she saw Fane step out from a curve in the circle, she was really, really glad because Jacque took an involuntary step towards him. Several things happened all at once then. Every wolf around her put a hand on her to pull her back. Fane’s head turned and looked straight at her just as all the hands were descending. Fane let out a snarl and his course of direction changed, coming towards Jacque. A huge growl came from Fane’s left, causing him to stop.

“You know, Prince, that if you so much as speak to her before the challenge begins you will forfeit, and I will be able to kill you without a fight.” Jacque realized it had been Lucas who let out the huge growl, and Lucas who was talking now.

Fane growled back, then looked to Jacque. He did not take another step towards her, nor did he speak to her, instead he looked to the other wolves and his mother.

“Restrain her if need be for her safety, but there is to be no mark left on her body, not a single scratch or bruise,” Fane told them. The other wolves in turn lowered their eyes and nodded once in recognition of Fane’s orders.

Jacque looked at Alina and whispered, “Sorry, that was so my fault.”

“It’s alright, Luna. The wolves are tense. Anything will set them off, so let’s just be as still as possible,” Alina whispered back.

Jacque nodded and turned back to look at what was happening in the circle. Vasile was standing in the center and Jacque could feel power coming off of him in waves. All of a sudden, every wolf suddenly fell to their knees. Jacque looked all around her and thought to herself with a shrug of her shoulders, *Huh, that’s different.*

Chapter 32

Jacque turned and saw that Alina was still standing, as was Vasile. That's when she realized that Vasile must have done his 'Alpha voodoo', as Jen would say.

"I stand as Alpha over this challenge," Vasile began speaking. "All rules will be followed, the penalty for any not followed is death at my hands." Vasile paused and looked around the circle at each wolf that was kneeling, none met his eyes, none so much as moved. Jacque could tell that some wanted to fight the orders that Vasile was giving, but he was more dominant and he was Alpha so they had no choice but to obey.

"Lucas Steele, come forward," Vasile said, looking straight at him. "Fane Lupei, come forward."

Both men came to stand in front of Vasile. Neither looked him in the face.

"Lucas, you challenge Fane for bonding ceremony to his mate, Jacquelyn Pierce. Is that correct?" Vasile asked the Alpha.

"Yes," Lucas growled, still under Vasile's control and not liking it.

"Fane, you accepted this challenge understanding that it is to the death?"

"Yes." Fane's voice was steady, no growl, no sign of weakness. It made Jacque want scream at how unfair this all was. She shook it off and tried to focus.

"You will fight in wolf form, and you will receive no help from your pack. Neither of you can choose to submit and live. If you submit, your opponent will still kill you. Do each of you understand the rules as I have laid them out in the presence of these witnesses?" Vasile asked them.

Both wolves spoke at the same time.

"I understand the rules as you have laid them out. I understand that should I choose to defy your orders I will be

put to death by your hands. Let it be as you have said, Alpha.”

Vasile nodded and walked towards the edge of the circle. Then he turned and gave the wolves a look. It must have meant something because they stepped apart. and in a matter of a few breaths where men had been wolves stood.

The first thing Jacque noticed was that Fane was the larger wolf. But then Fane was a large guy, so it would only fit that he be a large wolf. Fane’s fur was pitch black while Lucas’ was deep brown. They were both beautiful, and they were both snarling. Their hackles were raised, heads low towards the ground. The picture they made was terrifying.

“Begin,” she heard Vasile say, and her heart felt like it had moved into her throat.

For a few moments all they did was circle one another. Every so often one would take a step forward, causing the other to snarl and snap their teeth. Alina still had Jacque’s hand and Jacque was squeezing it so tight she hoped that she wasn’t hurting her. Suddenly Jacque heard a sound to her left.

“Come on, Alpha. He’s just a pup,” one of Lucas’s wolves yelled. The words had barely left his mouth and then he was on the ground, whining in pain. Jacque turned to look at Vasile, and sure enough, he was looking straight at the wolf and power was once again radiating off of him. All the other wolves took steps back, realizing that the Romanian Alpha was not playing.

As all that was taking place, Lucas had taken advantage of the distraction and lunged at Fane. But Fane was ready and moved before Lucas could get near him. Lucas turned to get Fane back in his sights and Fane circled around, snapping at Lucas’ back leg. The bark that came from Lucas made it clear that Fane had hit his mark. Fane backed up quickly before Lucas could react. Jacque watched them circle and lunge, nip and bark. It looked like a dance. She realized, once she started feeling light headed, that she was holding her breath. Taking a couple of good, deep breaths, she tried to relax her stance. *Yeah, fat chance that.*

Suddenly, Lucas was on Fane. He'd managed somehow during their dance to get a good grip on Fane's rear right leg. Fane snarled and turned hard, trying to bite at Lucas. Lucas hung on with a death grip. Fane shook his leg violently. When that didn't work, he began to roll his body, twisting his leg at the same time. Jacque froze. If he kept that up he was going to break his leg. Jacque felt Alina tense, and when she looked at her face she could tell that Alina realized the same thing. Jacque started to say something but Alina growled, so Jacque put her hand over her mouth as a physical barrier to keep quiet. But just as soon as she covered her mouth, she wanted to cover her ears because the snarls and whines coming from Fane were breaking her heart. Finally she heard a crack and a whine, mixed with a growl. When she looked up she saw that Fane had managed to get free of Lucas, but he had done it at the price of his leg. He was now fighting with his leg held limply off the ground.

Despite his leg, Fane still looked fierce, and quick as lightning he lunged forward and literally had half of Lucas' face in his mouth. Fane made a ripping motion as if he was tearing meat from a bone and jerked his head to the side. Jacque saw fur and flesh sling out of Fane's mouth and heard Lucas howl in pain. Lucas was shaking his head violently and desperately trying to keep an eye on Fane as he tried to recover from the attack. As they circled again, Jacque saw that Fane had nearly ripped Lucas' right eye out. There was blood all over his face and there was no way he could see from that eye. Fane had just evened the playing field.

Okay, wolf-man, let's finish this, Jacque thought to herself. But when she saw Lucas take a running leap and land on Fane's back, she knew it was far from over. Lucas didn't stay on his back. Instead she saw him bite into Fane, tear, and jump back. Lucas did this over and over and with in a matter of minutes Fane was bleeding all over, his fur was matted. Blood was all over the ground. Jacque was shaking from the effort it was taking not to scream, not to beg someone to stop this. Tears streamed down her face, her lips trembled behind her

hand. *This can't be happening.* She squeezed her eyes tight and then opened them.

She saw Lucas lunge again and bite into Fane's right side. Fane stumbled and snapped as Lucas jumped back, but only got air. Blood poured from the bite in his side and she watched Fane fall on his front paws. That was all she could stand.

"STOP! STOP THIS!" Jacque began to yell as she fought against the grip the other wolves had on her.

"Jacque, be still," she heard Alina say.

Jacque swung around and glared. "I WILL NOT BE STILL, DAMMIT! LOOK AT WHAT HE IS DOING TO YOUR SON. DO YOU NOT SEE?"

Jacque had tears pouring out of her eyes. She didn't care, she was broken inside, and she couldn't stand it any longer.

She saw Fane struggle, but finally get up. The two wolves continued to circle. Fane got a couple of good bites in and now Lucas' fur was coated in blood as well. Both wolves stopped and were very still, just staring at each other. Jacque was still crying and fighting the grip that Vasile's wolves had on her. But just as quickly as the stillness had come, it was gone. Lucas moved in low, this time grabbing Fane under his muzzle on his throat. As he grabbed him, he slid and pulled Fane up and over him so that Fane landed on his side. There was a tremendous thud, a low growl, and a high whine.

Everyone was still, almost like someone had pushed the pause button on a movie. Then someone hit play. Fane lay still beneath Lucas' jaws. Lucas' wolves had all begun to growl and howl. Alina stood next to Jacque, still as a statue. No tears streaked her face yet. Then Jacque lost it. She screamed and cried and pulled against the wolves.

"FANE GET UP! GET UP NOW! DON'T YOU DARE LEAVE ME, DON'T YOU DARE." Jacque shook with her sobs. The wolves holding her got distracted for a moment and it was her window. She tore loose from their grip, running as hard as she could. She plowed into Lucas, pushing with all her

might. "GET OFF HIM, LUCAS. GET OFF OF MY MATE OR SO HELP ME I WILL RIP YOUR THROAT OUT WITH MY BARE HANDS!" Jacque yelled and pushed to no avail; Lucas did not budge. Jacque was vaguely aware of someone wrapping an iron-strong arm around her waist and jerking her back. Jacque frantically grabbed at anything she could get her hands on. She got a grip on Lucas' fur and pulled against whoever was trying to pull her away. Instead of being able to hold on, Jacque just ripped out handfuls of hair from Lucas, and under different circumstances she would have found it gratifying. However, at the moment, all Jacque could see was Fane. Fane on his side, blood pooling around him. Fane not moving. Fane under the other wolf, whose teeth were still sunk into his neck.

"PLEASE," Jacque sobbed. "VASILE GET HIM OFF OF FANE. GOD, HOW CAN YOU LET HIM DIE. I'M BEGGING YOU, PLEASE DON'T LET HIM DIE."

"Get her out of here," Vasile turned and growled at the wolves holding Jacque. When they didn't move he snarled, "NOW! GET HER OUT OF HERE NOW!"

"NO! I WON'T LEAVE HIM. FANE PLEASE. PLEASE GET UP." As the wolves began to drag Jacque away, which they literally had to do her because of her struggles, her pleading got softer but lost none of the desperation.

"Fane, I love you. Do you hear me? I love you. I don't want a life without you. Please, love. Don't leave me." Jacque's tears stained her face and shirt. It was no use. Jacque was not strong enough to fight the wolves. She gave up struggling and instead turned inward to her pain. She began to cry so hard that she started throwing up, and when she had nothing left in her stomach, she simply retched up air over and over. The wolves must have gotten close to where Jen and Sally were parked because in between sobs and retching, she heard Jen's voice.

"JACQUE!" Jen shouted as she came plowing towards her. "Get the hell off her. you mangy mutts!" Jen began yelling at

the wolves all around her. In turn the wolves growled. “Oh, hell no. You did not just growl at me. I will castrate you while you sleep and then hang them on your car antenna, so **BACK THE HELL UP!**”

The wolves must have decided that Jen was crazy enough to act on her words. They backed up, hands in the air in surrender.

“We will not leave her, but we will let you take her into your care,” Dorian told them.

“Yeah, yeah. Whatever. Now what happened, where is Fane?” Sally asked.

The wolves all bowed their heads and their shoulders slumped in defeat. It was Dorian again who spoke. “He has fallen.”

With those words, Jacque once again felt overwhelming dread pour over her. She jumped up and turned back towards the circle and began to run. The wolves were there in a flash, once again holding her around the waist, only this time Dorian turned Jacque towards him and held her. It made her think of how Fane had held her just like that when she’d been crying in fear and it only made her cry harder. Jacque began to pound her fist on Dorian’s chest as the pain seeped out of her into the night air.

“This cannot be happening, it just can’t be.” Her body shook and that made Dorian hold her tighter. He spoke to her softly in Romanian and once again she thought of Fane. She couldn’t take it, her brain was not able to control her emotions, and so it finally just shut down. Jacque blacked out. The last thing in her mind was Fane’s voice. It said, “soon.” She didn’t know if it was her imagination or if it was really him. Whatever it was, she clung to it as the darkness took her.

Chapter 33

Fane lay beneath Lucas' jaws, weak from all the blood loss. He heard Jacquelyn's sobs, her pleading. He had seen her run into Lucas in an attempt to push Lucas off of him, and all the while he'd had to lie still. If he had moved his plan would not have worked. He kept his mind separate from Jacquelyn, making sure he did not give her any sign that he was okay. He hated seeing her hurt, but if she knew that he wasn't dead, she would not have struggled so much which would have tipped off Lucas. As soon as Jacquelyn was out of sight, Lucas gave Fane one final shake and then let go of his neck. The fact that Lucas had not bothered to make sure Fane's heart stopped was his mistake. Fane was holding his breath, which made Lucas think he had killed him.

Foolish, cocky Alpha, Fane thought.

Lucas released Fane's throat and turned his head up towards the moon and howled. While he was distracted, his vulnerable throat was completely exposed to Fane, and Fane took full advantage. With all the strength Fane had left, he lunged up and sank his teeth deep into Lucas' throat. He tasted blood and that fueled his anger. Fane gripped even tighter and felt his jaws crush the vocal cords and the wind pipe, silencing Lucas' howl. Then Fane jerked his head violently to the left, pulling so hard that his teeth ripped Lucas' throat wide open, severing arteries. Blood poured like a rushing river from Lucas' throat, pooling on the ground. In less than a minute, Lucas collapsed on his side. Fane would not make the same mistake Lucas did. He took a paw and pushed Lucas onto his back, exposing the most vulnerable part of a wolf. He leaned down and once again sunk his teeth into the wolf's flesh, tearing through skin and muscle until he disemboweled Lucas. That was an injury Fane knew Lucas would not get up from.

Fane turned to look at his father, who nodded his head once. Fane turned his head upward and howled in victory. Then he collapsed.

“Sorin, Alina. Get Fane and take him to the Henrys’. Clean him up. I will be there as quickly as I can to heal him,” Vasile ordered.

“Forgive me, Alpha, but why do you not want us to take him to his mate?” Sorin asked apprehensively.

“Jacquelyn was hysterical when she was dragged out of here. She is not likely to be any calmer yet, and she does not need to see Fane in his current state,” Vasile explained.

Sorin nodded his understanding. Then he, with Alina’s help, gathered Fane to take him to the Henrys’.

Vasile turned back to the wolves that Lucas left behind with his death.

“Who of you is Lucas’ second?” Vasile asked them.

A tall, bulky man stepped forward. “I am his second,” he answered.

“What is your name?” Vasile asked the man.

“Jeff Stone,” the wolf answered.

“You are second no longer, Jeff Stone. You stand Alpha of the Coldspring pack. You are to keep a record of your pack as is Canis lupus law. I will check on your pack to make sure you are abiding by these laws. If you do not know them,” Vasile reached into his back pocket and pulled out his wallet, from which he pulled out a card, “here is my card. Call me and I will inform you of them. Are we clear?”

Jeff nodded and turned his head, exposing his neck in submission to Vasile.

“Good. Now take your former Alpha and give him a proper burial. Let this be a lesson to each of you that you cannot claim women who are not your mates. Lucas would have never found comfort or peace with Jacquelyn because she was not his true mate. He would have eventually resented her for not being able to give him what he so desperately needed,” Vasile explained to the wolves. Then he simply said, “Go,” and watched as they collected Lucas’ body and left.

Vasile took a deep breath, preparing for the task before him: heal his son and somehow explain to his mate that they had intentionally planned for Fane to appear dead. *This is not going to be pretty*, he thought.

Fane moaned as he struggled to sit up. He was back in his human form and as he looked around, he realized he was in his room at the Henry's house. He started to stand, but got very dizzy. and had to quickly sit back down.

"Take it easy, son. You've had quite a night," Fane heard his father tell him.

"Where is Jacquelyn?" Fane asked the first question that now burned a hole in his head. He wanted her there with him so he could hold her and reassure her that he was fine. She had been so hysterical the last time he saw her, he knew she must still be a mess if she did not know he was alive.

"She is at her house. We did not take you there because I wanted you to look somewhat healthier than you did when Lucas was finished with you," Vasile told him.

That makes sense, Fane thought. He gingerly tried standing again and was successful. He was thankful that someone had thought to put boxers on him so he wasn't naked. He walked over to look in the mirror to survey the damage.

"It's not too bad, after healing you up a bit. You still have some ugly bruising and minor cuts, but no broken bones," his father told him.

He was right about the bruising. He looked like someone had taken black, gray, and blue paint and splattered it on him. He had deep cuts on his face, neck, back, and legs. Overall, though, it could have been so much worse. Fane was so thankful that he had been the victor. The thought of Jacquelyn came again to his mind and he felt bile rise up in his throat at the memory of her sobs. He had to see her, she needed to

know he was okay. Then he would have to beg her forgiveness.

“I need to see her, Tata,” Fane told his father.

“I know, but you need to be prepared for-” before Vasile could finish Fane’s door swung open so hard that it hit the wall with a loud bang.

What came through it was the picture of pure, unadulterated rage, otherwise known as Jen. Sally followed, looking every bit as angry, but in a much more controlled way.

“What on, I mean, how in the – WTF Fane!” Jen finally yelled. “How could you not tell her that you were going to go all armadillo on her? Did you not trust her? Did you think she couldn’t handle watching you lay there not fighting back? What on earth was going through that pea sized, canine mush you call a brain?”

Fane looked confused and really he was, he didn’t understand.

“Um, Jen, I hear you and you have every right to be angry, but, well, I don’t know what you mean by ‘going armadillo’.”

“You do realize that when I have to explain my comparisons and insults it takes a lot of the thunder away, right?” Jen rolled her eyes. “Armadillos play dead when they feel threatened. They fall on their sides and go all stiff, they really look dead but they aren’t. Are you with me now, flea bag?”

“Yes, okay. Now I understand. There are a couple of reasons I didn’t tell her. The first is that we didn’t decide on that plan until about fifteen minutes before the challenge started. The second was we needed her reaction to be authentic.” Fane realized as soon as Jen’s face began to turn shades of purple that that last part might not have been necessary.

“Please, please, for the love of all things that are not werewolves, tell me you did not just say you wanted her

reaction to be authentic.” Jen sounded so calm, and calm was actually scarier than her yelling.

Fane didn't get a word out before a fist suddenly connected with the left side of his face. He was truly in shock. He had never been hit by a girl, and although it didn't hurt, he felt really bad that she felt his behavior deserved physical violence.

When he turned his head, he looked at Jen only to see that she was in turn looking at Sally, who was jumping up and down, shaking her hand, and growling out any and all expletives she could think of.

“Holy crap, man. Why is your face so freaking hard!” Sally yelled.

Jen's mouth was wide open in disbelief and then a sly grin spread across it. “That was so bad ass! It's about time you recognize that my way has some definite pluses to it.”

“Well, other than my hand being broken, it was definitely worth it,” Sally told her.

Fane knelt down on one knee in front of the two girls, startling them into silence.

He laid his hand across his heart and bowed his head.

“I am truly sorry that my actions caused so much pain. It truly wasn't my intention and it tore a hole in me to see my love so broken. I beg your forgiveness, but I understand if you do not give it,” Fane told them with all sincerity.

Jen and Sally looked at Fane and then at each other. Then they looked at Vasile who had silently been watching the whole thing.

“Is he for real?” Sally asked Vasile.

“I ordered him to do it, therefore he could not disobey. Ultimately your anger should be at me. And yes, he is for real, as you put it,” Vasile explained.

“Fane,” Sally began and then used her hand to tilt his head up so that he was looking at them, “we know why you did it, and it was actually an awesome strategy. It’s just that we had to watch as Jacque sobbed so hard that she was puking up her guts, and then she just passed out. It was like her brain just couldn’t handle what her emotions were doing to her body, so it just turned off. It was horrible. So even though we know it was probably the best strategy, we had to defend our girl. Of course we forgive you. I wish I could tell you how Jacque is going to react when you tell her what you had to do, but it could go either way. She may be so thankful you’re alive that she doesn’t care, or she may be in such shock from the pain that she tries to kill you herself. So good luck with that.” And with that Jen and Sally turned and left him in silence.

“She doesn’t know yet?” Fane softly asked his father.

“No son, that honor has been left to you. As the two avenging angels who just left said, good luck with that,” Vasile told him. “Get dressed. It’s time for you to go see your mate.”

His father left him, and Fane stood up, feeling very numb. He was so broken at having hurt Jacquelyn. How was he going to face her? Without any thought to what he was doing, Fane got dressed, brushed his hair and teeth, and then headed over to Jacquelyn’s. It was the longest walk he’d ever made, and yet it was the shortest as well.

Fane opened the front door to Jacquelyn’s house and nearly turned back and shut it behind him. Everyone, save Jacquelyn, was sitting in the living room, and as he walked in all their eyes landed on him. He took a deep breath and walked in. His mother was the first to move. She came over to him and exposed her neck. Fane took a step back in disbelief at her action.

“I am your mother, and your Alpha, but I acknowledge the sacrifice you had to make.” She kissed him on the cheek as a tear rolled down her face. Fane reached up and wiped it away.

“I’m sorry I hurt you, mama,” Fane told her.

“Tsk, tsk. You did what needed to be done, that is what an Alpha does. There will be many decisions you will make as an Alpha others will not understand because of the responsibility you hold. No offense to the humans, but they cannot begin to understand the weight you will carry on your shoulders, nor the weight you carried this night. You did what no one else could have. That, my son, is what the Alpha does. Never doubt that.” When Alina turned back to the room all of the wolves and, to Fane’s astonishment, even the humans, bowed their heads in submission.

“Jacque is in her room, Fane. She isn’t awake yet. She apparently passed out at the challenge and has been out ever since,” Lilly told him.

Fane closed his eyes and squeezed them against the tears that threatened to spill. His mate, his love, broken because of him, but not with Lucas either. *She is ours*, he heard his wolf say. *As our Alpha said we did what we had to*. Fane turned from the crowded living room and walked up the stairs to Jacquelyn’s room.

As he opened the door, he used his wolf vision because the room was dark, only a night light shining. He made his way over to her bed and sat down on the edge. She laid there, hands folded across her stomach, so still. Fane leaned down and kissed her forehead. He took a deep breath and let her scent fill his lungs. He kissed both cheeks, he kissed her nose and her chin, and then he kissed her lips. He had tears running down his face and he was trembling. He wanted to hold her but didn’t want to startle her awake. Slowly, he pulled away from her, and as he sat up he realized her eyes were open, really open, like very wide open.

Jacquelyn screamed and threw the covers over her head. “I’ve finally gone crazy. His death pushed me over the edge. Here I’ve been teetering all along, and then BAM, I’m in the middle of crazy ground.” Jacquelyn was mumbling to herself, not totally hysterical but definitely on the verge. Fane thought he’d better catch her quick before she really did lose it.

Chapter 34

Luna, you're not crazy, I'm really here. I'm not dead, love, it was fake. I was faking it in order to lure Lucas into a false victory," Jacque heard the hallucination that was Fane say.

She wasn't going to fall for that. Fane would've told her that he was going to do something like that. He would have never allowed her to be hurt so deeply.

"Jacquelyn, please. It's really me. I didn't -" he paused and took a deep breath. Jacque was caught off guard by this show of emotion from a hallucination, not that she had much experience with hallucinations, thank goodness. She pulled the covers down just enough to be able to see Fane. His head was bowed so he didn't know she was looking at him. "I didn't tell you I was going to pretend to die because..." His shoulders shook with sobs. The tears fell and wet his hands.

"Because what?" Jacque couldn't help but ask.

Fane's head snapped up and then he cried more. "Luna, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you. Please know that it killed me. I didn't tell you because I needed your reaction to be real, so that Lucas would believe he had won."

Jacque sat in stunned silence. She couldn't believe it, she just could not believe it. It was the second time that night that she was in shock about something she was so sure would never happen. Her emotions were at war. Part of her was like, *Who gives a flying flip because he's alive. He's here and he can hold you like Dorian had earlier...oops. Damn, I'm always doing that.*

Fane caught that thought. Dorian had held his mate, held her close. He started to growl but abruptly stopped when Jacque sat up, leaned forward and kissed him. She wrapped her arms around him and pulled him down.

Fane's arms wrapped around Jacque's waist and when he pulled her tighter she let out a sharp yelp.

“What’s wrong? What’s happened?” Fane asked her, frantically running his hands over her.

“It’s nothing, just a little sore from the against-my-will retreat tonight. I got a few bruises from being restrained, that’s all.” Jacque told him, playing it off.

When his hands ran across her stomach she winced, even though she tried so hard not to. Fane growled and slowly raised the hem of her shirt and exposed her stomach. His growl got much, much deeper. “What the hell happened to you, and who the hell did it?” Fane growled out.

“Fane, it’s nothing. It’s -” Jacque tried to explain, but was cut off when Fane snarled at her.

“It’s NOT NOTHING! You have a bruise as dark as night and as wide as a 2x4 across your stomach, Jacquelyn.” Fane paused to think about what he had just said and then it hit him. “Whose arm is that, Jacquelyn? Don’t argue with me, Luna. Whose arm is it? You can tell me, or I will discipline each wolf down there instead of just the one.”

Jacque sat back up and to Fane’s surprise, pushed him. He was caught off guard and actually fell off the bed onto the floor. Fane looked up at her in shock.

“Listen up. Your pack restrained me so that I would not get killed trying to kick Lucas’ ass. I was trying to kick his ass, in case you forgot, because you didn’t tell me you weren’t really dead. So, you aren’t going to discipline anyone. You are going to accept that I have a bruise across my stomach, my arms, my shoulders, my shins because YOU chose to keep ME in the dark. Are we clear?” Jacque was breathing hard from her outburst.

Fane lowered his head then looked up at his mate. “Crystal,” he told her and grinned.

“Good. Now come back up here and show me how sorry you are,” Jacque told him playfully.

Fane crawled back onto the bed. He pulled the hem of her shirt up once more, exposing her stomach. He suppressed the

growl, and then kissed the bruise from one end to the other, taking comfort in the feel of her flesh.

“Okay, stop that. It’s tickling me,” Jacque told him as she laughed.

Fane pulled her shirt back down and gently wrapped his arm around her. He laid his head on her chest and listened to her heartbeat, it was music to him.

“Fane,” he heard Jacquelyn say his name.

“Hmm,” he answered.

“Why is your leg not broken?” Jacque asked, sounding confused.

“My father healed my major injuries. He can use power that he draws from the Pack to heal his wolves. I only have bruises and cuts now,” he explained.

“Oh, that’s nifty.”

Fane chuckled. “Yes, it is most definitely nifty.”

Fane raised his head and looked into her eyes. She was so beautiful. Jacque stared back and shuddered at the thought of losing him. It almost killed her when she thought he had died, she truly had not wanted to go on.

“I’m so sorry, my love, for doing that to you. I don’t deserve you, your forgiveness, or your love,” Fane told her through their bond.

“Oh, shut up. What you did, yes it was horrible for me, but it was necessary for you in order to win. I would go through it again if I knew you would be alive in the end. You deserve more than I can give. I just hope you’ll take what I can give you – just me,” Jacque told him.

“I love you, Jacquelyn Pierce, my mate, my love, meu inimă (my heart). I want you to be all mine, with no way for anyone to challenge me.”

Fane leaned down and kissed her. Jacque moaned which made him growl. Before things could go much further, Jacque

remembered the bonding ceremony and blood rites.

“Hey, wait,” she said, pushing at him.

“You do remember you thought I was dead, right? Now I’m not, and now you can have your way with me because, you know, I’m not dead,” Fane told her and began kissing her neck.

Jacque giggled and pushed him away again. “No really, wait. When are we supposed to do the bond thingy and the whole blood sucking?”

“Vampires, not werewolves, suck blood, love. It’s tomorrow, which is not right now, and because I am living in the now and not the tomorrow, I want to reconcile with my mate as wolves do,” Fane told her, leaning down again, and once again was stopped by her hand.

“Oh, we’re reconciled, we’re good to go, no problemo,” Jacque rambled on.

“Jacquelyn?”

“Yes, Fane?” Jacque said in her most innocent voice.

“You want me to say it, don’t you?” Fane asked her.

“Yep, out loud, not in my head,” she told him

Fane growled but acquiesced. “I don’t mean reconcile as in taking things seriously. I mean through touch.” He laughed when she squeaked at that.

“I will not touch you anywhere you don’t want to be touched.” And then mischievously he said, “However, just name the location and I will comply.” He pulled out of her reach when she tried to thump him for his last comment. When she simmered down, he leaned over again and kissed her.

Jacque turned her head, exposing her neck. Fane rumbled in his chest. Jacquelyn called it purring, and he smiled. He leaned down and kissed her neck, sniffing her skin, imagining the blood rites ceremony, knowing that his mark would be right there.

Jacque picked up on his thoughts. She added creatively to it and giggled wickedly when she heard Fane whisper in her mind.

“Soon.”

References:

* “Love Me Like a Song” Lyrics by Kimmie Rhodes,
Performed by: Kimmie Rhodes and Willie Nelson

From the author:

Thank you for purchasing Prince of Wolves. I hope that you enjoyed reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it. Blood Rites, the second book in the Grey Wolves Series will be coming out in late fall of 2011, so be on the lookout for it! You can follow the progress and keep up to date on other books I will be publishing in the future at my website:

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