



# Taming of a Wolf

**Author:** *C.J. Ravenna*

**Category:** Romance, Paranormal

**Description:** Jamie

Could a grumpy Viking werewolf be the missing piece my broken family needs?

Between being a single parent to my little brother and running my late grandma's bookshop, I've got no time for anyone else. I need a guy who will prioritize my brother like I do. If I can't find someone like that, I'd rather be alone forever.

When a time-traveling Viking werewolf flies out of a portal and crash lands at my feet, I get more than I could have asked for! Anders Eriksson takes one sniff and declares me his fated mate and before I know it, our fates and lives become intertwined.

Anders may be a villain in the past but to me, he's sweet, a little awkward, and he fits so perfectly into my little family that it's impossible not to fall for him.

But Anders is determined to return to the past and get revenge against the ones who wronged him.

Will he choose a future with me, or will he leave me behind like everyone else I've ever loved?

Taming of a Wolf is book 2 in the Viking Wolves series featuring a grumpy villain redeemed by his sunshine fated mate, found family, and a happy-ever-after! Though this installment is a standalone, the series is best enjoyed sequentially.

**Total Pages (Source):** 105

# Page 1

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## Chapter 1

Jamie

You know your lovelife is lacking when the characters in your latest romance novel are getting more action than you.

I mean, damn! It's just been chapter after chapter of nonstop smut, plot simmering on the back burner while the leads resolve their sexual tension. Meanwhile, I, Jamie Sullivan, can't even stick around until the end of one of the rare dates I go on. But hopefully, that will all change tonight. My good friend and coworker Jess set me up with a vet tech who is a friend of a friend. She had nothing but good things to say about this guy, and I hope he lives up to his reputation.

I want the kind of love I read about in books, but at this rate, I'm becoming more and more convinced that it's just not going to happen. For a while, I settled for one-night stands, but I want the real deal. I'm twenty-two. It's time I stopped thinking about meeting Mr. Right and got around to actually finding the guy. For my little brother's sake, I need to take my future seriously. Jace deserves stability, a family. I can't give him any of that on my own.

Setting down my e-reader on my lap, I check the time. This guy, Matt, should be here at any minute, and then we can head to the restaurant. It's a cute place on a boat moored along the harbor with fairy lights strung up and twinkling.

Matt. I wonder what he's like. He has to be a nice person if he's a vet technician. Anybody who cares about animals must have a heart of gold. From the pics Jess has

shown me, he's super handsome. I exhale some of the nerves from my belly. I'm hoping we'll hit it off. Although being fifteen minutes late isn't the best first impression...

While I wait, I check my phone. No texts from Kate or Jace. Must be a good sign, right? My little brother is having a sleepover with Kate's daughter since I said I'd be out late. Hopefully, all is well—unless something has happened. My nerves return full force.

I shoot my little brother a quick text.

Hey. Everything good?

He doesn't reply right away. Biting my lip, I try and get back into my book, but now my mind keeps tugging me toward my phone. When it buzzes in my pocket, I snatch it up.

Jace: No! The house is on fire and everyone's dead!! lol yeah everything's fine jeez

When did my little bro become such a sassafraz? I'm impressed.

“Jamie! Hi, I'm so sorry I'm late!” A gorgeous man, tall and dark-haired with neat stubble, rushes up to me.

“Matt, hey!” My heart skips as I jump up to greet him, giving his hand a shake. “Nice to meet you. Jess has told me so much about you.”

“Same, same!” He's panting, like he ran all the way over here. It's sweet that he was in such a rush. “Want to go grab a table?” He points at the boat.

My growling stomach says yes, please, so we make our way there. The heaters keep

the cold away as the host seats us at our table. “Have you been here before?” I ask as I pick up a menu.

Matt thanks the server when she delivers our water. “No. It’s really cute, though. Love the vibes.”

When the server returns, we give her our order, and I buy a bottle of wine for the table. As we drink, we get to talking. Matt asks me all sorts of questions when I tell him I own my late grandma’s bookstore, and he tells me about some of the cute, furry patients he’s met at the vet’s office.

My stomach flips when our eyes meet, and already, I’m imagining a future between us. He’s sweet and handsome, easy to talk to, and a great listener. From his scent, I can tell he’s genuinely enjoying himself. A few years back, I somehow gained the ability to... sense people’s emotions through their scent. It’s super strange, and no amount of googling has produced any answers. Emotions have a scent to them. Anger is spicy. Shame is sour. Happiness is sweet, while sadness is heavy and dark. Weird, I know, but it can be helpful in figuring out people’s genuine feelings.

I have a good feeling about Matt. Maybe, just maybe, he and I will really connect. I can see it now: we’ll go on a few more dates, I’ll introduce him to Jace and they’ll hit it off, maybe in a few months, I’ll ask him to be my boyfriend, and then—

My phone rings in my pocket just as our food arrives. When Kate’s name flashes on my screen, my heart lurches. “I’m so sorry. I need to take this.”

Matt shrugs. “Sure.” He tucks into his spaghetti and meatballs.

Rising, I pace across the deck. “Kate? Is everything okay?”

When my brother’s distressed sobs reach my ears, I have my answer. “Hi, Jamie, I

am so sorry, but Jace had a really bad nightmare, and I can't calm him down. He really needs you."

Glancing at Matt, I fight back a sigh. I'm only conflicted for a second before I know who I'll choose. Jace. Always my little brother. "Can I talk to him?"

"Of course! Jace, sweetie, it's Jamie. Do you want to say hello?"

For a moment, there's silence. "J-Jamie?" My brother's breathless, shaking voice breaks my heart.

"Hey, bud. Kate says you're having a rough night. What happened?"

But he blurts out, "Can you come home? Please? Right now. Please." His hysterical sobs make my chest tighten with guilt. If I'd known he'd get so upset, I'd never have come on this date.

## Page 2

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I'm being selfish, putting myself and my wants before his. "Yeah, buddy. I'll be right there. Promise. Do you want me to stay on the phone with you?"

He snuffles. "Y-yeah."

"Okay. I can do that. Just a second, okay?" Lowering my phone, I march to the host stand, explain that I'd like to pay and leave, and he prints my receipt. After swiping my card and signing, I jog back to our table. Shit. He's going to be upset. Hopefully, he'll understand.

"Hey, so, I am so sorry, but something's come up."

Matt's smile falls off his face. "Oh no. What happened?"

Dragging a hand through my hair, I say, "My little brother's having a tough time. I'm sorry, but I need to go make sure he's okay. I've paid for dinner, and I'd love to go out with you again another time."

When a scowl creases Matt's face, I lose hope in an understanding response. "Are you serious?" Before I can respond, he chucks his napkin on the table. "I came all the way from Jersey to meet you, and you can't stick around for dinner?"

Heat flames my cheeks. "I'm sorry, but—"

"Your brother's what, ten, right? Tell him to man up."

Anger burns in my veins. "You don't get it!" I snap. Fuck being polite. Nobody gets

to talk about my little brother like that. “I’m all he has left of our family. He needs me.”

Screw this guy. I can understand being disappointed, but insulting a traumatized ten-year-old is a low blow. If this is how Matt reacts before he’s even met Jace, that’s already a red flag.

“Forget it,” I snap. “Don’t call me again.”

Turning away, I march from the boat and back toward Kate’s house near Hudson River Park.

I need someone who will prioritize my brother like I do. If I can’t find that person, then I’d rather be alone the rest of my life.

Jace is in the middle of a panic attack when I arrive at Kate’s. “Oh, Jace.” I throw myself onto the bed and hold him tight as he sobs, his little body shaking against mine.

Kate gives me a sad smile, holding her own concerned daughter close.

“Did you have the dream again?”

Gasping, he nods frantically against my chest. He grips at my shirt, nails biting into my skin. God, poor kiddo. I hate this for him.

“D-don’t leave me all alone,” he whimpers. “Please, Jamie.”

Like our parents did.

Even though it’s been four years, tears sting my eyes, and a lump aches in my throat.

“It’s okay, bud. I promise.” I rub his heaving back as he sobs into my shirt, soaking it with his tears. “I’m here. I’m alive. I’m not going anywhere. Ever.”

God, I am so stupid. While I was out on some stupid date, my brother was suffering.

Can’t I do anything right? If our parents were still here, they’d know what to do.

Mouthing a silent thank-you to Kate and her kiddo for being there for him, I lift my brother and carry him downstairs. When Jace starts squirming, I set him down. He wipes his face dry.

“Feeling better?” I ask.

Jace shrugs and doesn’t look at me, cheeks red from crying or embarrassment or both.

“Want to take a walk over to the river before we go home? The water always calms me down.”

I don’t get a reply, but Jace doesn’t resist as we walk away from the car and toward the river. The water sloshes peacefully, and gulls cry in the night. Turning my face to the sky, I count the few stars I can see and try to calm myself down. I need to be strong for Jace.

“I still miss Mom and Dad,” Jace says.

I take in a deep breath that hitches around a sudden sob. “Me too.”

## Page 3

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I miss our parents. I wish they were here to tell me what to do. To help me raise my brother and protect him. I can't do this alone. "But it's going to be okay." Kneeling down, I squeeze his shoulders. "I'm here. We've got each other."

Jace nods, sniffing.

I pull him in for a tight hug, and he tenses in my arms. "What's that?"

I look back into the murky depths of the river. There's something shimmering within the water. It almost looks like...some kind of light? The longer I stare, the brighter the light becomes until it's almost painful to look at. What the hell's going on?

Bubbles form on the river's surface. My lizard brain screams to run, but I'm frozen in place. Something's happening. Something big. There's a tugging in my chest, like a hook's fastened in my skin, urging me closer, forcing me to watch and wait.

An explosion of water showers up into the air and sprays me right in the face. Shrieking, I wipe water out of my eyes just in time to see a shape soar in front of the full moon. It looks like a... a rowboat. And it's flying straight at me!

"Holy shit!" I hurl myself and Jace out of the way just as the boat crashes down on the pavement where I was standing. Chunks of wood fly everywhere, bouncing off my body. Shaking, I lower my hands away from my face.

"Are you okay?" I ask Jace.

He looks shaken but unharmed. "Whatwasthat?"

The scattered remains of the boat are everywhere.

And lying atop the remains is a man.

He's huge, even lying down, or maybe the bizarre armor he wears makes him look bigger. His long black hair is plastered to his face, and water glistens in his thick bushy beard. Little beads are woven into his hair and beard, parts of which have been braided.

"H-hello?" I squeak, then clear my throat.

"Is he dead?" Jace asks, peering closer.

"No! I'm sure he's fine." To myself, I mutter, "Please be fine..." I inch close enough to tap him with my foot. He groans, and I exhale in relief. Okay, he's not dead. What the hell do I do? I should probably call an ambulance, right? Oh god...

I drop my phone with a panicked curse as the massive man slowly sits up. He tosses back his head, his hair flying out of his face. The greenest eyes I've ever seen pin me in place and steal the breath from my lungs.

I position Jace behind me just in case.

Parting his lips, he speaks in a low rumble like thunder. "Where am I?"

I open my mouth, but no words come out.

His nostrils flare, his eyes shining in the dark as he takes me in.

"Who are you? What is that..." He draws in a deep breath through his nose, and his eyes fucking glow like an animal's under a flashlight. "That scent. Whatisthat?"

My legs quiver as he rises and comes toward me, his armor rattling with every slow step.

The winds change, and there's a smell unlike anything I've ever smelled before. It's like... I don't know how to describe it. Like all of my favorite smells rolled into one. Coffee and cinnamon. The whiff of parchment when you open a well-loved book, the spine cracked and the pages slightly yellowed from age.

"It's..." He comes toward me, sniffing frantically.

"You," I say, breathless as he stops mere inches from me.

Bushy brows furrow as those green eyes hold my gaze.

The hook in my chest tugs and burns, urging me toward him.

And somehow, I know nothing will ever be the same again.

Chapter 2

Anders

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:58 am*

Isle of Ulfheim, year 831

“Don’t you dare say it,” I growl, glaring at my twin.

Lyall sighs. “I told you so.”

Snarling, I slump back onto my bedroll. Beyond the window of my cabin, the distant chatter of the village reaches my ears. The fisherman calls out about today’s catch. Children laugh as they run through the streets. Wolves howl in the forest as they prepare to hunt. The little girl who sells her flowers will just be getting ready to go home. I wonder if anyone bought her flowers. Normally I do, but I’ve been confined to my home.

Who will buy them after I am gone?

“Damn it!” Jaw tight in a rare display of frustration, Lyall paces the bedroom. “I cannot fathom how in Odin’s name you thought challenging Wulfric for his position would end any other way!”

Shame burns the back of my neck. My actions, justified as they may have felt at the time, have brought my twin pain. That is not something I ever wanted. “What was I supposed to do, pray tell? Let Wulfric and that filthy human mate of his change our way of life? Humans are the enemy, in case you have forgotten, brother!”

Whether they’re trying to slaughter us and christen our corpses, conquer us and force us to give up our god Fenrir, or invade my pack’s village, humans have been nothing but trouble.

“Not Kieran!” Lyall snaps.

I normally respect my twin, and we’ve had a good relationship most of our lives. Today, though, my temper rises at his words. Somehow, he is just as blind as my worthless little brother Wulfric.

“Do not presume to know his intentions! Or any human’s. They slaughtered our father. Tortured me. How can you forgive them so easily?”

With a bitter laugh, Lyall sweeps his golden hair back from his face. “You’ve let your hatred blind you. This isn’t about Wulfric’s mate, just admit it! This is about your childish feud with Wulfric!”

My mouth falls open. “Childish? We both know if I had been Alpha instead of that runt, I could have protected our pack!” Instead, my father was murdered, most of my pack was slaughtered, and Wulfric packed us up and moved us to an island we came to call Ulfheim.

And yet, after all the pain humans have caused us, there came a day when Wulfric brought a human into our pack when he should have simply killed the foul creature. Kieran Grove. A human from the future, who’d somehow wound up in our timeline. Worse yet, the human was Wulfric’s mate. He’d claimed the gods had chosen a damned human as his mate, after all the harm they’d caused our kind.

My brother had lost his mind ever since the human came to our shores. Not only had he accepted the human as his mate, but he’d dared to give him the furs of a wolf and make him one of us! How could my brother so easily forgive their crimes against our kind?

Wringing his hands together with a frustrated sigh, Lyall says, “The past is the past! Tyr’s beard, brother, you have got to let this go! Isn’t it enough you’ve divided our

family?”

My mouth falls open. How dare he! “I’ve divided our family? It’s Wulfric who—”

“Enough!” Lyall’s voice fills the cabin. The birds outside stop twittering, and in my shock, I have been silenced as well. Lips trembling, Lyall takes in a breath, then another. As his eyes dampen, my anger cools. “Father and Mother would be ashamed. Their sons, fighting like children. They would have wanted us to stick together as a pack. Instead, you... you’re leaving.” Voice thickening, he ducks his head and conceals his face behind a curtain of hair.

Oh gods. I truly wasn’t thinking. I wanted to hurt Wulfric, it’s true, but I never wanted to hurt Lyall. I let my anger and my own personal lust for vengeance cloud my vision. “Lyall—”

“Don’t!” he snaps, finally looking at me, eyes bright with anger and swimming with tears. Sniffling, he dashes them away. He always was the softest of us, but seeing him so upset makes my throat tighten.

“I didn’t know this would upset you.”

“You had Kieran beaten bloody! Of course it fucking upset me!” Even the human’s language is rubbing off on us. It makes my skin prickle. “If you had a problem, you should have taken it up with Wulfric! You’re a gods damned coward! What would Father—”

“Stop.” I snarl the word but fail to hide my plea.

I know exactly what Father would say. By beating Kieran to hurt Wulfric, I disgraced my family name. No matter how justified they may have been, my actions were not honorable. They were the actions of a craven, not the son of an Alpha. If he could see

me now...

There's a quiet knock on the door. One of the thralls pokes her head in, face streaked with dirt. "Pardon. The Alpha is ready for you." Her words hang heavy in the air as she departs.

My time in this world has come to an end. I have been exiled, and it's time to face my punishment. Wordlessly, I rise and hold my head high as I shoulder past Lyall. "Wait." A firm hand to my chest makes me freeze. Lyall's voice wavers when he says, "Your sword. I must take it from you."

Wolf's Tooth. The blade I've had since I was a lad. It hangs heavy at my side. There's an unexpected ache in my chest at the realization that I will never feel its cool grip in my palm again. "Go ahead."

Lyall removes the sword from my belt and sets it on the table. What will become of it? "Give it to someone worthy." I hate the softness in my voice, but Lyall doesn't mock me for it.

"I shall, brother."

This may be the last time I see my twin, hear his voice. I should apologize for hurting him, for not being the brother he deserves... but the words just won't come because that would mean acknowledging how inadequate I really am.

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Tearing my gaze away from him, I step out into the chill of the evening. The thrall hands me a sack of apples and salted meat and a flask of water for my journey. On the horizon, Sol, goddess of the sun, guides her chariot beyond the ocean. Her fading light deepens the shadows and colors the skies in vibrant hues. Somehow, the coming darkness fills me with despair. It feels like I will never see her light again.

Forcing my head up high, I walk in the direction of the beach. Though I can sense Lyall following me, I keep my eyes fixed on the horizon. I shouldn't have expected him to understand. There is no animosity between him and precious Alpha Wulfric.

As we leave the village behind, my brother Gunnar comes into view. I return his glare. "I'm so pleased you've dragged yourself from the woods long enough to say goodbye."

Gunnar grabs my arm hard and tugs. "Shut up."

There's a wild gleam to his eyes, likely his berserker tugging at him. If I ever see him again, he'll be on all fours as a savage beast. It's what he gets for being foolish enough to open his heart to love, only to lose it.

Love always ends in tragedy, after all.

"How long are you going to wait to find and claim the mate the gods have chosen for you?"

"Not your concern," he bites out, sounding more wolf than man. It... scares me, I admit. He's going to lose himself unless he finds his mate, yet he won't even bother

looking.

“Would you listen to me? You’ve got to move on. Leif wasn’t even your fated—”

“Enough!” Gunnar snarls, eyes flashing as he draws back a fist.

“Stop this, both of you!” Lyall shoves me back, simultaneously seizing Gunnar’s fist.

“Gods, can we have one day without throwing punches?”

“Not my fault our brother is a fool,” I huff.

They await us on the shore. My skin prickles, and anger burns me up from the inside as I meet Wulfric’s steely gray gaze. Expression unreadable, he turns away and walks toward the rowboat moored on the shore. He stole so much from me: first, my father’s love and adoration, and now, he steals me from my home and my pack. He will pay dearly for this. I don’t even bother looking at Kieran.

As the waves crash upon the shore, I approach the boat and try to ignore my aunt Helga’s tear-streaked face. To avoid seeing the pain I’ve caused those I love written all over their faces. Why can’t they see things as I do? I only wanted to keep them all safe. I have already lost my father to humans. I won’t let my brother’s foolishness threaten our pack. No matter what, I must find a way to return and end the threat Kieran poses.

Lyall’s hand trembles at my back as he pushes me down into the boat. Through our bonds, he whispers, “Goodbye, brother.”

Wulfric keeps his eyes on the horizon as he says, “Farewell, brother. May the Father Wolf guide your path.” Then he pushes the boat out into the water, and the waves pull it the rest of the way into the sea.

Aunt Helga starts to chant, and her voice carries over the ocean. The icy wind freezes the tears I hadn't realized were on my cheeks. Ahead of me, a portal bursts into being, and I look back over my shoulder at my twin.

“Lyll. I'm afraid. Please, I—”

My boat flies through the portal in a burst of water, propelling me high into the air. My cry of alarm echoes into the night sky. The bag of provisions goes flying out of the boat and disappears as some strange-looking bird flies up to me and squawks in fright. For a moment, I'm transfixed by the view laid out before me.

Wherever I am, this world looks nothing like my own.

The buildings are as tall as the highest mountains, if not taller. Though it is nightfall here, everything is so bright. Everywhere I look, lights sparkle in the darkness like stars. I could spend an age taking in the sights of this strange new world... but then the boat hurtles back toward the ground.

I curl into a ball and brace myself, but I'm not prepared for when the boat shatters all around me. The collision with the hard ground stuns me. For a few seconds, all I can do is fight the urge to pass out. I can't. I must stay awake. Who knows what threats await me in this strange place?

A voice calls out to me, and a scent unlike anything I've ever smelled before pulls me from the dark depths, trying to drag me down into unconsciousness. This smell... I must find out where it is coming from. Who it belongs to. The ulfhednar within me stirs to life, filling me with the strength I need to find my feet and rise.

A man stands before me. He's shorter, the top of his head reaching my chest, with a lithe, lean build. He must not be a warrior, then. It looks like he lives a soft, comfortable life. How pathetic, and yet I must admit he is stunning. I usually prefer

the company of women over men, but I'd be blind to deny his beauty. I've never seen hair such a color in one so young; it's as light and bright as polished silver, though his brows and beard are as black as my own. And his eyes... so light and blue they look like shards of ice.

"Who are you? What is that..." I ask, and then the winds blow that delicious scent to me again. "That scent. Whatisthat?"

As the man's nose twitches, mirroring my own fascination, I come closer.

"It's..." I whisper.

As his scent floods my senses, the wolf inside howls for him with a yearning so deep it takes my breath away.

"You," he breathes, his voice full of the very same awe coursing through me.

He smells like the woods where I roamed with my father, like leaves and soil warmed by sunshine. Even more intriguing is the scent of his wolf, however faint. He is ulfhednar, like me. But where are his furs? I must know more about him.

## Page 6

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He smells like...

Mine.

Heismine.

“What is your name?” The words escape me in a growl. I’m surprised by how foreign my words sound. I’m not speaking the language of my people but an unfamiliar tongue similar to my mate’s. The portal’s magic must have given me the ability to speak and understand his tongue. A useful skill.

“J-Jamie Sullivan. Uh. Maybe we should get you to a hospital, or—” He yelps as I grab the front of his coat and haul him in close. With my nose to his neck, I breathe in deep and practically groan as that sweet, luscious scent fills my lungs. “Dude. What the hell? Let go!”

“I understand why I arrived here of all places,” I say against his skin. “It was so I could meet you, Jamie, son of Sullivan.”

It’s then that I notice the wooden necklace protruding from the gap in his coat. Is that ash wood? It is! I would recognize it anywhere. Yggdrasil itself is an ash tree, and my people use branches or parts of ash trees to travel between the realms. This necklace could help me return to my time, overthrow my worthless brother, and lead my pack into the future they deserve.

Just as I close my fist around it, Jamie shoves me hard in the chest and sends me stumbling back.

“Whoa there, buddy.” Jamie holds up both hands. “Usually, strange men buy me dinner before they tell me how good I smell.”

There’s a laugh, and I notice a young boy has been hiding behind Jamie. “Were you having a cosplay party on a boat or something?”

I have no idea what the lad’s talking about. “A... party?”

“Are you dressed up as a Viking? Your clothes are so cool!” The boy’s eyes light up.

“Jace, chill,” Jamie hisses.

I think the lad is complimenting my clothes, even if I’m not sure what this “cool” means. “My clothes are quite warm, I assure you.” I can’t tear my eyes from the necklace. Even the symbol carved into the wood is one all ulfhednar would recognize: a wolf slumbering at the roots of Yggdrasil. The symbol of my clan. How did he get such a priceless gift?

“Where did you get that necklace?” I ask.

He closes a fist around it, clutching it to him protectively. I can tell it means a lot to him. “It was a gift from my grandmother.”

“And her name was?” I wonder if I’ll recognize it.

“Astrid.”

A fairly common name. My clan has quite a few Astrids, but only one was a traveler.

“Did she travel?”

Jamie squints at me. “Sure? I guess. She was always adventurous.”

“I knew her when I was a lad.”

Shaking his head, Jamie takes an even bigger step back from me. “No. I don’t think you did.”

Why does he insist on arguing with me? Leveling a scowl at him, I say, “She had a saying she’d tell us boys before going off on one of her journeys. ‘Not all those who wander...’”

“...are lost.” Jamie’s eyes widen to twice their size. “Her favorite quote from Lord of the Rings.”

“Lord of the what?”

Jace huffs. “You’ve gotta be kidding. Everyone knows Lord of the Rings!”

Jamie leans back and catches himself on the railing. “Oh my god. How did you know my grandma?”

“She was a time traveler. As I am,” I bitterly add. I’d much rather not be here, contrary to how pleased my wolf is at finding our mate in this bizarre place.

Jace gasps. “A time traveler? That’s so awesome! I knew people like you were real!”

Jamie’s mouth opens and closes like a fish. Finally, he laughs. “Okay. I’d better be going. Have a good night.” He grabs the boy’s shoulders, ignoring his protests as he tries to push Jace ahead of him.

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He's leaving? He's mad if he thinks I'll let him walk away after I've only just found him—his necklace, that is. My place isn't here, it's back in my time, and that necklace is my key to getting home. This man is a complication I can't afford.

Just as Jamie spins on his heel, I grab his wrist and haul him back to me. "Hand it over. Now."

Jamie's face whitens even further, the scent of his fear making my stomach churn. I've scared him. Damn it, why is guilt gnawing at me? I need that necklace. Nothing else matters. I've stepped over others all my life to get what I want. Using others is how I've survived.

"What the hell is your problem?" Jamie squawks.

"I need it!"

"You're freaking crazy!"

A growl rumbles in my throat, and I yank him in closer. "Hand it over, or I'll... I'll..." But at his panicked gasp and the widening of his terrified blue eyes, the words lodge themselves in my throat. The growl cuts out as quickly as it began. My fingers loosen around his wrist of their own accord. My body, my very mind, can't even comprehend hurting him, no matter how important that necklace is.

How am I supposed to take it from him if not by force? Damn it!

Oh no. Do I have to ask nicely? Must I beg?

I'd rather hurl myself back into the river.

"Would you..." I grind my teeth, trying to hold back the revoltingly weak words. "May I—" I clamp my jaw shut and squeeze, grinding my teeth. I have never asked anyone for anything before. All I could possibly want has always been given, and gladly, or I've taken it by force with my fangs, claws, or sword.

"May I please have your necklace?" I can't even look at him and snarl the words at the ground, ears and face burning. "I need it to return to my timeline."

There's a long, breathless pause as Jamie and Jace look at each other, then back at me like I've grown five heads.

I swear to Odin, if I have to repeat myself, I may die from humiliation.

"Sure," Jamie says, tone light and breezy.

I jerk my head up—and yelp as his fist crashes into my nose.

"Stay the hell away from us, you creep!" Grabbing Jace's hand, Jamie tears off into the night as if Odin's Wild Hunt itself is after him.

My nose heals in seconds, though I wish I could say the same for my pride, and I wipe away the blood with a scowl.

My mate just punched me and ran away.

Since when does anyone run from me?

Gods. Can I do nothing right in this place?

Well, I can't let him get away. Not before I've gotten my hands on that necklace. It's not because I'm drawn to him in any way. That would be foolish.

Get the necklace. Get home. Nothing else matters. If I have to, I'll take a chosen mate the instant I'm back in my time. Nothing is coming between me and my goals, not even fate itself.

Drawing in a deep lungful of Jamie's scent, I pursue him away from the river. His trail leads to a strange metal contraption I've never seen before. Jamie climbs inside, and the contraption roars to life, making me jump. What in Hel's name is that thing? Is it a horse? Is that how people get around in this world? I don't see any horses to ride, so that must be it. Gods. Horses are terrifying in this timeline. The metal horse speeds Jamie away from me, moving faster than any horse from my time.

Damn it! I can't lose him.

Ahead of me, a woman opens up the inside of her own metal horse thing. I cover the distance in moments. "You there! Step aside! I have need of your horse!"

"Get away from me!" She whips something small from her pocket, and the next thing I know, my eyes are on fire. Yowling, I cover them, wiping frantically to try and clear my vision. Tears stream down my face, blurring my sight as the woman climbs into her metal horse and hurtles away.

My eyes may be compromised, but my sense of smell has only heightened to make up for it. Jamie's scent lingers on the breeze. I must follow it. Nose to the air, I pursue Jamie's scent, wiping my streaming eyes as I go. My vision slowly clears as my healing repairs whatever damage that woman did to my eyes. What was that substance she sprayed me with? It burned like silver. Could she have been a hunter? How else would she have known silver is our weakness?

Unease twists in my belly. I round the corner onto a street bustling with activity. People flood the streets, some carrying small children, others walking dogs of all sizes. They rush past, chatting to each other or into strange handheld objects I've never seen before. Humans, all of them. I'm surrounded by humans, my clan's greatest enemies. Not a single one of them smells like I do or even looks like me. They're all different, and where I'm from, anything different is a threat.

My wolf snarls below the surface, and my heart races faster than a rabbit. Sweat dampens my palms. Jamie's scent is lost to me among a sea of other smells. I try and swallow, but my throat is dry as a bone.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:58 am*

What is this feeling?

Those strange metal horses emit loud, blaring noises that make my ears ache. A man wearing rags shakes coins around in a cup. Someone slams into my shoulder. “Watch it!” the mansnarls as he bares his yellow teeth, but I barely hear him over the strange music blasting from some sort of wheeled instrument he’s dragging along behind him.

My gods, but this place is noisy!

It’s too much.

Kill them all. The wolf inside grows into a berserker beast as my fear turns to red-hot rage.

I can’t. There are too many of them. I am outnumbered. I am a lone wolf without a pack, and lone wolves never last long.

I grip at my chest as my lungs constrict.

I must follow him, get the necklace, and go home.

A huge metal horse lets out a booming blast that echoes through the street and drags me from my thoughts. Some guy yells at the metal horse to “Shut the fuck up!” How odd. As if a horse can understand them. A familiar splash of color grabs my attention. It’s Jamie’s blue horse, and I can just make him out through the window. As Jamie races off, I pursue him like the moon chases the sun.

He makes several twists and turns, and the crowd ebbs and flows until the streets are at last quiet and relatively deserted. Jamie hitches his horse along the curb and steps out, but he's unaware of my presence. I slow my steps, knowing I must plan my next move carefully. I don't want to frighten him again. I can't use force. Not against my mate. I must try another tactic. But what? I know nothing of gentleness. Where I'm from, kindness and consideration will get you killed.

There's never been a time in my life I've needed to rely upon anyone. Relying on others means trusting them, and in my world, trusting the wrong person can end with a blade in your back. But Jamie is my only anchor in the sea of uncertainty I've found myself in. My only chance of returning home. I must not lose him. I must swallow my pride, be calm, and do whatever it takes for him to give me that necklace.

Jamie walks around the side of the horse and opens one of the doors. "Come on out, bud. We're home."

Yawning, Jace drags himself from the horse's insides.

"Feel okay?" Jamie puts his hand on the boy's shoulder and guides him toward a tall house I assume is his home.

"A little. Tired." He rubs his face as they stop before the front door. Their backs are turned, so neither sees when a man in a mask steps out of the shadows, blade in hand, and lurches toward Jamie.

The man presses the blade against Jamie's back and says in a low, commanding voice, "I want everything you're carrying. Phone. Wallet. I don't fucking care. Hand it over or else."

"Jamie!" The boy clutches Jamie's arm with a frightened whimper.

Jamie's entire body stiffens, and the scent of his fear bowls over me. "I-it's okay, Jace. Listen, man, I'll give you whatever you want. Just leave my brother alone."

A red haze descends over my eyes, and my blood begins to boil. My fingernails lengthen into claws, and my fangs gnash in my mouth. The wolf within bays for blood.

I can't fight the fury a second longer. I throw my fur hood up over my head, and the shift takes hold. I drop down onto four huge paws as my body transforms. The wind roars in my ears as I charge. Jumping upon the craven thief's back, I sink my fangs into his coat and hurl him off the stoop. The boy screams, and Jamie puts himself between the boy and me to shield him, his eyes huge and full of fright.

The boy has nothing to fear from me. I direct my fury at the thief, who is scrambling backward, smelling of fear and urine as he says, "Oh shit!" All I want is to rend flesh from bone and lay the threat broken and bloody at my mate's feet so he knows without a doubt that he is safe. That he will always be safe.

Pulling back my shift, I grab the dropped knife in my hand and hold it to the thief's throat. "Lay a single finger on them, and I will kill you. Understand me, fool?"

"Oh my god," the thief babbles. "I'm sorry! I'm so sorry. Please, let me go."

"Silence!" I snarl, digging the blade in until beads of blood form on his skin.

"W-wait!" Jamie says. "Don't kill him. Let him go."

I turn a glare on Jamie. "Why should I?"

"He's just some idiot kid. Let him go. I don't want his death on my conscience."

“He tried to hurt you.” I can’t fathom my mate’s intentions. How can he be so forgiving?

“But he didn’t. You were here. You stopped him. Just let him go. I’ll file a report with the cops. He can be their problem.”

I don’t know who these “cops” are, but I suppose Jamie knows the ways of this world better than I do. If he thinks killing him will bring more trouble down on his head, then I don’t want that.

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“Fine.” I pocket the blade. “Get out of here, thief. If I ever see you again—”

“You won’t!” the thief babbles, springing up. “Thanks, man, thank you so much!” He dashes off into the night. The wolf in me longs to chase him down and kill him away from Jamie’s prying eyes, but I’m distracted when Jamie says, “Stay back. I appreciate what you did, but—”

“But he helped us!” the boy interjects, poking his head out from around Jamie.

“It’s all right. I won’t harm either of you.” I sweep my gaze over Jamie, relaxing when he doesn’t appear harmed, just frightened. The rage inside cools to a simmer as I let my gaze linger on his full, soft lips and pert button nose.

“Are you hurt?” I ask.

Jamie shakes his head. “N-no. Thanks to you.” His throat bobs when he swallows. “Just so we’re clear... I really saw you change from a wolf into a man, right? I’m not crazy?”

“You saw correctly.”

“Oh...” Jamie sounds faint as he leans his head back against the door. “Wait. No. Stop. This is weird.”

The boy looks from Jamie to me, wide-eyed. “That wasn’t weird! That was awesome!” A big grin lights up his face. “You totally went all Jacob on his ass!”

“Language!” Jamie huffs.

I normally don't like children, but the lad's enthusiasm makes the corner of my mouth tip up. “Who is this Jacob? He sounds like a fearsome fighter.”

“A werewolf from this book series my friend likes called—”

But Jamie says, “Is that what you are? A werewolf? Or a wolf shifter?”

“We call ourselves ulfhednar. Why? Is there a difference?”

Jamie nods, moving his hands animatedly as he speaks. “So, yeah. In fiction, werewolves are usually men or women who are forced to change into a wolf when there's a full moon. Like a curse. Wolf shifters can assume their form at will and are generally more sympathetic than werewolves, especially in romantic fiction.”

Fiction? What in Odin's beard is he talking about?

Jamie laughs. “You don't understand most of what I just said, huh?”

I scowl. “I understood fine.” I didn't, but like hell I'll admit to feeling so utterly lost.

“That's okay. You said ulfhednar, right?” He butchers the pronunciation, but I nod.

“Okay, so that's what I'll call you. Wow. This is wild!”

“What time are you from?” the boy asks, venturing closer to get a better look at me.

“You look like a Viking!”

“Aye, I am.” The boy's big, bright smile confuses me. Their reactions are not what I was expecting. Aye, Jamie is ulfhednar himself, and so is the boy, but they've grown up among humans. I'm surprised he hasn't been told awful things about us or taught

to hate himself. “You aren’t afraid of me?”

The boy shakes his head emphatically. “No way! This is awesome. You’re a Viking werewolf! How cool is that?”

Jamie considers my question. “Not really. You saved my life. Or my belongings, at the very least. Besides, I’ve always thought werewolves—uh, ulfhednar—were really cool. Especially in romance novels.” His cheeks flush pink.

He thinks we’re... cool? “How exactly do ulfhednar and the weather relate to each other?”

“What?” He barks a laugh. “No! I mean... I like ulfhednar. I definitely don’t hate you.”

For someone who grew up among humans, he’s more open-minded than I expected. But how doesn’t he know he’s like me?

“Thanks for saving me. I’m sorry I punched you in the face. You were kinda creepy, but you made up for it.” He shakes his head. “I feel like an asshole now.”

I just shrug. “I’ve had much worse. You’ve got a good arm! You’d make a worthy warrior where I’m from, pet.”

Jamie’s cheeks color at the nickname. Gods above, but he is lovely. He returns my smile. “All right. How about we start over, then?” He clears his throat, then sticks out his hand. “I’m Jamie Sullivan. I like reading, baking, and cozy sweaters.”

I stare at his hand. “What are you doing?”

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Jamie laughs softly. It's a sweet and musical sound. His smile is more radiant than any sunrise I've ever seen. "You're supposed to shake it. Oh, wait. Wolf shifters usually smell each other, right?"

The boy tilts his head. "Like, sniff each other's butts? Gross."

It's true we like to scent each other, though not our asses, but if I'm going to be here long, I should get used to these human customs. "Shake it? Oh." I grasp his hand and shake. Hard. Jostling his arm up and down, I say, "I am Anders, son of Erik and Matilda."

"Whoa, you've got a good grip!" Jamie says, voice breaking as I vigorously pump his arm. He frees his hand and shakes it out, laughing as he pulls a ring of keys from his pocket. "A man who can shift into a wolf and time travel. What a strange night."

"Why is that so strange?" I ask him. "You're ulfhednar yourself."

Jamie drops his keys. "Wait. I'm what?"

I thought it was strange that he'd go out and about without his furs, but his utter confusion is even more unsettling. How can he not know what he is?

"Jamie," I say slowly, "you're ulfhednar too. I can tell by your scent."

Jamie snorts, scooping up his keys. "No, I'm not."

"Did your grandmother give you any furs, by chance?"

“No, why would my—” Jamie’s mouth goes slack, his eyes bulging. “How... how would you possibly know about—”

He’s quiet for so long I start to think he’s frozen from the cold.

Finally, Jamie blinks a few times, then plasters a smile on his face. “I could really use a hot drink. Do you want to come upstairs?” His voice is decidedly casual. It worries me.

“Aye, sounds good. Have you got any mead?”

“What? Uh. Yeah. Sure.”

I don’t think he has any mead.

### Chapter 3

Jamie

Holy shit.

Wolf shifters, I mean, ulfhednar, are real! Time travel is real! I decide to gloss over what Anders said earlier, something about me being ulfhednar too. Because that’s just not possible—I’d know for sure if I was able to turn into a wolf.

Except if he’s wrong, then how did he know my grandma? How could he possibly know she gave me her treasured furs?

I really don’t want to go there. A time-traveling Viking just flew out of the Hudson River, hit on me, and tried to rob me, only to end up saving my life. Tonight has been crazy enough. Anders prowls around my living room, nose to the air, sniffing

frantically. It would be funny if it weren't so strange.

Even with his odd antics, he is the most gorgeous man I've ever seen. Sure, he's grumpy and hotheaded, but he's not so bad. There I was, lamenting over my lackluster love life, and he burst out of the river and landed right at my feet.

When Anders plops down on the sofa, my little brother bombards him with questions, his voice high and squeaky with excitement. "Jamie's a wolf shifter, right? Does that mean I'm one too? When will I shift?"

He's taking this way better than I am.

For such a gruff-looking guy, Anders is quite patient with my brother, smiling good-naturedly as he says, "Aye, lad, you will. But not until your twelfth winter when you don your furs for the first time."

"I'm almost eleven!" Grinning, Jace leans over the back of the couch and shouts, "You hear that, Jamie? I'm gonna be a wolf shifter!"

My head is freaking spinning as I lean on the kitchen counter. What shifter romance did I wake up in? "I heard you, bud. Would you like hot chocolate?"

"Yup, with lots of marshmallows," Jace chirps.

Anders jerks his head toward me. "Chocolate? What is that?"

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Oh, right. He doesn't know what half the stuff from my world is. He's probably so confused. Oh man. How do I describe chocolate to him? "It's sweet. Mine comes in a powder, and I mix it into hot milk." I make the powder myself at my café, so I know it's good.

"A sweet powder?" He wrinkles his nose. "Fine. I'll try it."

"Do you want marshmallows or whipped cream?"

Anders looks bewildered. "What in Odin's beard is a marshmallow?"

I don't have the brain cells for this... "You know what, I'll just give you some."

Jace lightly punches Anders's shoulder. "You'll love it, trust me!"

Once I've mixed the drinks, I pop in some marshmallows and add a dollop of homemade whipped cream on top. Carefully, I carry the mugs into the living room. I join Anders on the sofa, Jace sprawled out on my left. "Careful, it's hot."

He gives me a narrowed look. "I know that." After sniffing the rim of the mug, he takes a cautious sip. Whipped cream gets stuck in his thick mustache. He takes a huge gulp. "What witchcraft is this? It's delicious!"

"It's called sugar, dude," Jace says, popping a marshmallow into his mouth.

Those bushy brows furrow. "My name is Anders. Not dude."

“You’ve got cream in your beard.”

“Where?” He feels around, completely missing the spot.

Without thinking, I reach out and swipe my thumb over his upper lip. His sharp inhale makes my heart trip. Those dark green eyes glance at my thumb, and then, curiously, he leans in and licks the cream from my finger with a swift dart of his tongue.

“Eww,” Jace says, making a face.

Holy shit. I must be more pent-up than I thought because my dick jerks just from feeling another man’s tongue on even the smallest part of my skin.

I’m having hot chocolate with a Viking werewolf, and now he’s looking at me like he wants to devour me, piece by piece.

This is... normal. Completely normal.

“I quite like the cream, actually.” A heated smile lifts the corners of Anders’s mouth. “It’s delectable, especially on your skin.”

Oh hell. How did I go from getting no action to suddenly being the object of a Viking werewolf’s affection? I’ll take it. I’m not gonna complain. Even if the guy is obviously playing me to get my necklace.

“Uh, bud? How about you go brush your teeth, wash your face, and get ready for bed?”

Giving us a weird look that makes my ears burn, Jace goes into the kitchen and puts his mug in the sink. Before he goes into the bathroom, he looks back at Anders. “Will

you be here tomorrow?"

I turn to Anders. "You're welcome to stay the night. It's the least I can do."

Anders offers a smile. "Thank you."

Jace closes the bathroom door.

"You don't have sweet things where you're from?" I ask, voice cracking from nerves as those emerald eyes gaze into mine.

That indulgent smile widens. "Nothing quite so sweet as you, pet." Those low words, uttered in that sexy Scandinavian accent...

No, Jamie! Have some self-respect.

A flattering snort escapes me. "Oh, come on, man. Be less obvious, at least."

Anders tilts his head. "About what?"

"We both know you really want my necklace." I motion at the wooden necklace resting against my beige cable-knit sweater, the green collar of my plaid shirt flaring out above the neckline.

Anders frowns at me. “You think I am trying to deceive you?”

“I don’t think. I know.”

When Anders leans in closer, my heart jumps into my throat, but it sure isn’t from discomfort. As much as I wish I could have some self-respect, the fact of the matter is Anders is smoking hot, and I’ve been unintentionally celibate for weeks now.

“I don’t lie, pet. Nor do I waste my time on those beneath me. And most everyone is beneath me,” he growls. “I do want your necklace. However, I want to earn it. Normally, I would simply take it, consequences be damned. No one has ever come between me and something I want and lived.” A shiver runs down my spine. He’s being completely honest; I can see it in the coldness in his eyes. “But I can’t do that. Not with you.” He doesn’t sound happy about this at all and glowers at the floor. “When I say I like the way you taste, it is not a lie. Nor is it a lie when I say you’re the most breathtaking creature I have ever laid eyes upon. It is simply the truth.”

My mouth goes unexpectedly dry. It’s overwhelming, being someone’s sole focus like this. But I really like it.

“Oh,” I say, too flustered to speak. “Well, uh... You’re pretty breathtaking yourself.”

“So I’ve been told.” He smirks.

This fucking guy...

“It appears I must... earn your necklace.” He looks physically ill at the thought. “And

then I shall leave for my home. So, tell me what I must do to earn it. I can work well, and I'm skilled with a blade."

I gawk at him. "What do you think I'm going to ask you todo?"

He shrugs those big shoulders. "Whatever it is that needs doing. I'm a skilled hunter, so I can provide you with any game you need. I can also work. Household chores are usually attended to by my thralls, but my fool brother and that pup of his freed them. Mayhap it is good that I left." Disgust curls his lip. "I am not above doing simple chores if that is what you'd prefer." He looks like he'd rather throw himself back in the river than subject himself to menial household chores.

I suck in my lips so I don't laugh. Is this guy for real? He wants to cook for me? Clean for me? Hell yeah. "Let me think!" I flop back on the sofa, pondering all the things I could ask him to do. "So many tasks! How can I possibly choose?"

He scowls. "Don't look too pleased about it. If you were anything other than my mate, I wouldn't even consider stooping so low as to indenture myself to you."

"You could do my laundry, color-code my bookshelf, vacuum... Oh! Maybe you could—wait,whaaat?" What did he just say? If I weren't such an avid romance reader, I wouldn't have evenpicked up on what he'd just said. He's a wolf shifter, ulfhednar, whatever you want to call it. And in every paranormal romance I've read, wolf shifters have—

"Mate?" I croak, edging farther away from him on the couch. "As in... fated mate?" That explains why he's so fixated on me, so attentive, why he stuck out his neck for me. Wait. Why am I acting like any of this bullshit makes any sense! It doesn't! At all!

Anders sighs like he's on his way to the gallows. "Aye, lad. It would seem I arrived

in your timeline for a reason. The Norns themselves preordained our meeting. The ladies of fate and destiny wished for us to meet.”

Oh my god. If I hadn't seen this guy shift into a huge wolf, I would be calling 911 right now. Maybe I should do it anyway. “Wait. Hold on a sec!” I lurch from the couch and nearly knock my drink off the coffee table.

Anders pursues me, his nostrils flaring, eyes dark and fixated. It should be fucking creepy, and yet some animal instinct deep inside is preening at the knowledge that this strong, gorgeous Viking wolf has picked me of all people.

“I'm human,” I finally say, as if that makes any sense.

Anders growls, “No, pet. You're not. I've told you, you're ulfhednar. As am I. The Norns would not be so daft as to pair me with my kind's greatest enemy.”

Anders corners me against the TV stand and lowers his head, breathing in deep. Oh god. Do I have some special scent to him, like in the books? And wait. He also had some weird scent when I first saw him. That moment replays in my mind, and I remember how everything in my world narrowed down to him the moment I caught his scent.

“Do you doubt our bond, pet?” Anders rumbles in my ear. “Must I prove here and now that you're meant for me as I am for you?” Big, warm hands glide down my sides and grasp my hips, urging me closer. “The effect you have on me... it's unlike anything I've ever known.”

And he isn't lying. The proof is pressing hard against my hip. To my dismay, my own body is reacting right back. His scent is spicy with desire and longing, so potent and overwhelming that it makes my brain go all fuzzy. An odd, low whimper escapes me, and to my horror, I tip my head back and show him my neck. Like I'm... submitting

to him.

Oh no. Is he right? Ever since my eighteenth birthday, I've had an odd sense of smell and been in tune with others' emotions because of the change in their scents. Did something about that day change me? I think back. "Wait... my gran gave me wolf furs for my birthday. Furs that look a lot like yours."

I wore them to make her happy that day, but I'd internally squirmed at the thought of wearing fur. So I'd put them in my closet and never wore them again.

"Oh shit..." I whisper, knees shaking. "I... oh my god. I think you're right." His scent and the heat of his body are like a magnet, urging me closer, but I jerk back and stumble to the couch. Collapsing, I fold over and hide my face in my hands, trying to think rationally.

"I've had dreams," I say at last, "where I'm running as a wolf. Not all the time. Always on a full moon. I hear another wolf howling to me. I run to them, because I have to. Because I know that the moment I see them, smell them—the loss, the guilt, the damn grief will all go away, and everything in this fucked-up world will finally make sense. I'll finally be whole." My eyes sting, the longing in my dreams so visceral, even in my waking moments.

"It's not a dream, pet." Anders's fingers card gently through my hair, and his touch calms the storm in my head. "It's your wolf, crying out to be set free."

"Can I free him?" I lift my head, gazing up at Anders with a desperation I've never felt before. "How?"

"I will show you. Is there a forest around here? Somewhere we will be undisturbed?"

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I snort. “In New York City? Not likely... Although we have a few large parks. I’ll take you in the morning after Jace has gone to school.”

Anders grins. “I can hardly wait. Your wolf will be as beautiful as you are.”

Nerves ripple through my stomach. I woke up this morning thinking I was just a normal guy. Turns out, I’m ulfhednar. I have so many questions. Will it hurt? Are there any complications? Is it dramatic like in the movies?

I guess we’ll find out.

### Chapter 4

Anders

I don’t sleep well on Jamie’s sofa. It’s far too small, and my feet dangle over the edge. How can Jamie sleep with people all around him? The village back home was spread out, but here, I can hear every cough, sneeze, and bark of a dog from the floors above and below. Worse yet is the couple down the hall on their second—third?—round of sex for the night. The gods must hate me.

Normally, I can tune these sounds out, but I’m too restless. My wolf stirs, making my claws prick the cushions and my fangs sharp. He wants to be in the next room with Jamie. Our mate. I still can’t believe it. The ladies of fate must have it out for me to not only lead me to my mate but to make him the key to being able to return home. Mayhap Loki is controlling my fate and laughing at my expense.

When I open my eyes, the room has brightened. I managed to sleep, but not much. It's a struggle to leave the sofa as my body cries out for more sleep.

“Jace, I'm ready!” Jamie barrels out of his room, arms flailing at the shirt caught over his head. “Hurry, we've gotta go to school!”

A snort answers him. The little lad sits at the counter, munching on something sweet-smelling in a bowl. “Been ready for, like, ten minutes.” He smirks proudly and puts his bowl in the sink.

“Who put sass in your cereal?” Jamie says with an amused smile. He jogs to the door. “Eat up, we've gotta go.”

He's barely finished speaking by the time Jace is by the door. “Beat you to the car!”

Jamie sighs like he's already exhausted.

I grin at him. “The lad's keeping you on your toes, eh?”

“Tell me about it.” Jamie chuckles. “You can either wait here or come with us. We'll go to the park after I drop Jace off.”

I rise, muscles cracking as I rotate my neck. “Grab your furs, pet. It's time to show you who you're meant to be.”

Jamie drives us in the metal horse—no, the car, that's what Jamie called it. Not a horse at all but a machine, whatever that is. It's faster than a horse, louder too, and we sit inside instead of riding on top. I tried to climb on the roof, but Jamie yanked me down and made me get inside.

In any case, Jamie drops the lad off for his lessons, then drives us to some place

called Inwood Hill Park. My wolf bristles beneath my skin as my mate's sweet scent tugs at me, so potent in the enclosed space of the car. All wolves feel the urge to mate on the full moon, and although the full moon above is outshone by the sun, the urge is still so potent.

I've never liked the idea of soulmates. Oh, I know they exist, but the idea of needing someone, some so-called better half, has always terrified me. I understand why they're important, but when I was a boy, I learned that having someone only means having someone to lose.

Father was never himself again after Mother died giving birth to Wulfric, the precious Alpha. Father changed, closed himself off even from us children. The softness Mother brought out in him died when she did. I'd do anything to avoid knowing that pain myself, even if it means leaving behind the man my wolf demands I mate with. Mate or not, Jamie is a tool. Nothing more or less.

No. I'll earn his necklace and return home to challenge my foolish little brother.

There is no room in my plans for anything... anyone... else.

"Anders? Earth to Anders." Jamie waves at me. "We're here."

I jolt out of my thoughts. "I heard you the first time," I snap, shoving open the door. "Get your furs." Once Jamie has retrieved the furs from the trunk and thrown his bag across his shoulder, I follow him farther into the park. We walk for a bit until we're surrounded by trees and there's no one else around.

The wolf pelt he carries is a darker shade of silver than his hair, mottled with brown, black, and white fur.

"You had better not be playing a prank on me," Jamie says, his scent souring with

unease.

“A prank?”

“You know, a joke. You’re not gonna make me wear these furs, close my eyes, then run off on me?”

“I once killed a traveling jester who tried to rob me. The only good jokester is a dead one.”

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*Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 4:58 am*

Jamie laughs nervously. “You’re... serious, aren’t you?”

“No. I’m Anders.” All these words he uses confuse me. I haven’t heard of most of them.

“So, where’re we going?” Jamie inquires, throwing me a playful smile.

That smile does something to me. Makes my heart skip and my stomach lurch, like I’m under attack. But by what? Feelings? Not bloody likely. “Does your chattering ever cease? Keep walking. I’ll tell you when to stop.”

“Sir, yes, sir!”

The gods must be punishing me for failing to overthrow my brother.

Once the distant noise from the streets has faded, I’m confident we’re far enough. The only human scents in the air are stale. A lake reflects the sun, and the park is unnaturally quiet. There should be more birdsong, but I suppose not many birds live in the city. I keep expecting to hear the howling of wolves. The absence of their song only reminds me how far away I truly am.

“Here should work.” I turn to Jamie and find him clutching the furs close, biting his full lower lip. He could make himself bleed. Scowling, I march up to him and reach out, brushing my thumb over his lip to remove it from between his teeth. A lovely flush springs to his cheeks. “Don your furs and get ready.”

“That’s all?” He frowns as he shrugs the furs on over his shoulders.

“Usually, there is an initiation ceremony. You would consume the heart of a wolf you hunted yourself.”

Jamie’s eyes widen. “Oh shit.”

“What?”

“My gran made me try a wolf’s heart once. You’re telling me that was part of this ceremony?”

“Aye.”

Jamie shakes his head wildly. “Why didn’t she just tell me? Why be so cagey about it?”

“She truly told you nothing?”

Jamie screws his eyes shut. “No. She did. I just never believed her. She’d tell me stories about how our Scandinavian ancestors had wolf’s blood in their veins and the ability to shapeshift. I thought she was just spiritual or something, so I played along. I accepted her furs, even though I only wore them a few times when I went to see her. I ate a wolf’s heart once. It was gross. But what was I going to do? Insult her beliefs? It made her happy. But still, if I technically did the ceremony without realizing it, why did I never shift?”

“Your wolf lies dormant. All it needs is something to wake it up. As your mate, my presence should be enough.”

Jamie shakes his head. “I don’t even know what that means.”

“You said you’ve heard stories about my kind, haven’t you? Did your grandmother

never tell you of mates?”

“Like I said, I never really believed her stories.” The guilt is evident in his scent.

“The stories my people tell always have a lick of truth in them.”

Jamie groans and smacks his forehead. “I feel like such an ass. My grandma was trying to tell me so much about myself, and I just blew her off.”

“Do not hurt yourself.” I cup his cheek in one hand, brushing a thumb over his short, dark beard. “Once you have assumed your true form, you will understand.”

Jamie blinks rapidly. “This is crazy...”

“Just close your eyes and focus on the parts of yourself that have always been there, lurking within you.”

Looking more uncertain than ever, Jamie closes his eyes.

“Tell me what you’re thinking.”

“I’m thinking... I really wish I’d had more coffee.”

“Focus!” I snap.

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“Okay!” he gripes back, brows scrunching. “I... I’ve had a really great sense of smell since I was eighteen, when my grandma gave me her furs. In my dreams, I’d run as a wolf. I was looking for something. Looking for... for you. I think I was looking for you.”

Something glows warm in my chest. The thread of a pack bond, blossoming into life. I’d felt it there before, but it was subtle. Now, it’s burning brighter as Jamie’s features change before my eyes. His ears are pointed, and white fur streaks his cheeks.

“You were, pet. You’ve found me. I’m here. Find our bond. I know you can feel it.” I throw up the hood of my fur cloak and let the change flow through me.

“A bond? I don’t know what you’re...Oh.” Understanding floods his voice with sudden emotion. “Wow. Oh wow. That’s... Whatisthat? It’s warm. It feels amazing.”

The bond between us grows taut, drawing us toward each other. On four paws, I go to Jamie as he drops to all fours with a pained groan. I touch my nose to his forehead and growl, deep and low in my chest.

“Find us, mate. Find our bond.”

Gray fur covers Jamie’s face, which forms into a snout. The shift happens in only seconds, and then a beautiful wolf stands before me with eyes as bright and blue as the sky. Our bond blazes like the sun in my chest.

“A-Anders?” Jamie’s voice blooms in my mind, sweet and confused.

“I can hear you.”

Jamie turns his snout toward his paws, and his eyes grow wide. He lifts one paw, then the other. “Holy shit. I’m a freaking wolf!”

“No. Truly? I thought you were a puffin.”

Jamie bumps his head into my shoulder. “Shut up, you jerk. Whoa. This is so cool! I have a tail!” He proceeds to chase said tail, spinning around like a puppy until he grabs it, bites it, and yelps in pain.

“Aye. And what a fearsome wolf you are.” He’s so energetic, like a pup instead of the fierce servant of the wolf god Fenrir that he is.

“Dude. I’m gonna be the coolest wolf! I—Whoa. Wait. What’s that smell?” Dropping his snout to the earth, he sniffs frantically. Leaves get stuck on his nose, making him sneeze.

My tail thumps, betraying my amusement.

Jamie sniffs around until he runs right into me. Nose twitching, he inhales a deep lungful of my scent. “It’s... it’s you. Why do you smell so freaking incredible? You smelled amazing before... but now...” A shiver racks Jamie’s wolf body. My mate circles me, sniffing eagerly as he rubs his body along mine. Shoving his head beneath my chin, he scents at my throat and rumbles low.

“You smell like...mine.”

The notes in his scent make me growl eagerly. He wants me just as much as I crave him.

Suddenly, Jamie drops to all fours, tail in the air. He yips playfully, then dashes off into the woods.

A primal hunger rises in me. He wants me to chase him. Catch him. Claim him.

And oh, I will delight in it.

## Chapter 5

Jamie

Being a wolf is awesome so far.

I'm fast, faster than I've ever been.

The colors of the world are different in this form, but my eyesight is sharper, like I'm looking at everything through HD lenses.

Then there's all the scents... The world has never smelled sweeter, a kaleidoscope of aromas that bring color and life to the world around me.

And then there's him. Anders. And he smells the best of all. Cinnamon and coffee and that used-book smell that always brings a smile to my face. Except now his scent is driving me wild. I want him to chase me, catch me, and do whatever the hell he wants with me.

The moment I caught his scent, it was like everything clicked into place. I understood why no guy has ever worked out for me, and it's because they weren't him. My mate. Mine.

Of course, I still barely know the guy, and he's got a crap personality. But honestly?

The big grump isn't that bad. He had no reason whatsoever to save my neck when he could have just taken what he wanted. He sure didn't have to teach me about this amazing side of myself I never knew existed. He's, dare I say, kind of a sweetheart. Even if he pretends not to be.

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I lose momentum as I run, worry suddenly weighing on my shoulders.

This... isn't good. I've always been the kind of guy who wears his heart on his sleeve and dives in headfirst, regardless of the consequences. I fall hard and fast, often giving my all and receiving nothing back. It's gotten me badly hurt in the past. I shouldn't like Anders, and yet, damn it, I do. I think beneath all that scowling and grumbling, there's a big, frigid heart waiting to be warmed up.

Shaking my head, I take off running again, needing to leave these pesky thoughts behind. Don't go there. No matter what these weird wolfy instincts are telling me, Anders and I can have our fun, but that's all it will be. Fun. He's made it clear he has every intention of returning to his timeline and leaving me behind, regardless of our bond.

The wind whips through my fur as I run, spraying leaves and dirt behind me. Pursuing paws thunder the ground. He's gaining on me, and my heart races in exhilaration at being caught, at being claimed.

The wind goes out of me as Anders leaps onto my back, pinning me beneath him. His breath scorches my neck, his low growls vibrating against my skin and forcing a shiver from me. All my instincts scream to submit, to give him everything he needs until I'm all used up, but only in the best way.

The shift recedes as I surrender, prey grateful to be caught. A cold nose brushes the back of my neck, and his hot breath scorches my skin. Anders's growl vibrates over me. The predatory sound makes my heart gallop and my breath hitch. Somehow, though, I know he won't hurt me, even though I realize I might want him to.

I roll over and submit, baring my throat to my mate. “Please,” I whimper, and I hope he understands what I’m asking for—everything he can give me.

The wolf above me shifts to Anders the man. His emerald eyes are black with lust, fangs sharp as he bares them at me. “Please what, pet?” He purrs the words as he sweeps his fingers down my jaw.

“Please, just... I need—”

I need him, all of him, with such intense, primal yearning I can’t hope to put it all into words. My body burns hot, my cock so hard it aches.

“What is this?” I rasp, hips gyrating against him before I can control myself. The answering response of his cock, grinding on my own, has me arching up for more.

“Your wolf recognizes his mate. He’s gone into heat. Wants me to claim him.”

Embarrassment flames my cheeks. That’s what’s happening to me? It feels like I’ll burn to ashes unless he shoves his cock in me. “I... There’s no pressure. You can ignore it.”

Anders snarls above me. “Ignore it? How am I supposed to walk away when I can smell your cock leaking for me, pet?”

“I just mean if you don’t want to—”

“I have never wanted anyone more. I wouldn’t leave your side if Ragnarok itself were upon us.”

“A-and Ragnarok is?”

Anders nips the shell of my ear. “The end of the world and the beginning of another.”

That’s what being with Anders feels like, the end of my normal, empty life... and the beginning of something brand-new and exhilarating.

“Want you,” I say with a groan, rocking my hips against his. “Now. Hurry.”

I know I’ve pleased him when he yanks down my jeans and boxers in one go. His hand is around my cock, squeezing and stroking. A cry escapes me as I buck into his fist, chasing the pleasure, but it isn’t enough. I don’t want to take things slow.

“Fuck me, Anders. Please. Need it.” I fumble in my bag, which is strapped around my shoulders. It somehow didn’t fall off when I shifted, nor did any of my clothes rip. It was like the fur cloak grew over everything I was wearing. That’s convenient, though right now, I’d really prefer to be naked.

“What is this?” Anders asks, inspecting the lube I hand him.

“It’s lube. It’ll make things slick and painless. Oh, I’ve got condoms in there too.” I’d stuffed those in my bag last night, hoping my date might end on a pleasurable note. Looks like I’ll get to use them after all.

“And those are?”

“To protect against STDs. That’s diseases you can get during sex.”

Anders tilts his head. “Ulfhednar do not get sick or diseased.”

He’s immune? Huh. That’s really convenient. “Then forget the condom. Want to feel every inch of that heat you’re packing, big guy.”

I fumble with Anders's trousers, practically salivating at the outline of his impressive cock straining the fabric taut. Tugging them down to his knees, I'm gifted with the sight of the holy mother of all cocks. It's so long and thick, the shiny, leaking head protruding from his foreskin. I have got to taste him, make him come in my mouth, but not tonight.

I help him out of his shirt, and I hiss at him to be gentle when he almost rips my shirt to shreds in his haste. With a curious expression I shouldn't find endearing, Anders gets the lube open and drizzles some in his palm. He sniffs the slick, then rubs it over his cock. He gasps, eyes fluttering shut. "Gods. This is... it feels so good." He strokes himself, marveling at the easy glide of his hand up and down that thick length.

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“That’s the wonders of modern sex life for you. You have got to try sex toys sometime.” He’s in for a treat.

Slicking his fingers with more, he presses them between my legs. I lift my knees up, biting my lip to stifle my groan as he slides them easily inside me.

“Gods above, pet. You feel like Valhalla itself. So perfect,” Anders breathes, eyes falling shut as he swirls his fingers. The full sensation makes me whimper, rolling my hips to take him in deeper.

“Want you inside me. Now,” I pant.

Anders’s mouth quirks against mine. “Then roll over, pet. Offer yourself to me.”

I’m embarrassed by how quickly I’m on my hands and knees for him. I arch back, presenting myself. Little pants escape me as his bare thighs knock against my lower body. The blunt head of his cock pushes against me, then in, and I whimper as he stretches me, fills me.

A thunderous growl escapes Anders, and his claws dimple my hips. “Feel how well you take my cock, pet?” With a groan, he rocks his hips, sinking deeper into me. My body burns with the intrusion, even as pleasure sings through every nerve and has me clawing up the grass beneath my palms. “So gods damned perfect for me.”

The fire in me only burns hotter at his words. Having him inside me is the only thing that will extinguish this roaring flame. I grind my teeth, fighting back the urge to demand more of him as he rocks into me agonizingly slowly. I’m not a demanding

guy. I give and give, never liking to take or ask for more. But with him, I can't help myself. "Anders," I croak, unable to hold back.

His thick fingers curl in my hair. "Tell me what you need."

I arch back against him, smacking my ass against his pelvis. "Fuck me. Please. I can take it. Don't hold back. I need... I just—" But words fail me as Anders tugs my hair, shoving my face into the dirt.

With a snap of his hips, he slams into me, his balls slapping my ass. My hoarse cry echoes into the woods, a mix of pain and pleasure that feels so right, it brings tears to my eyes.

"This what you want, pet?" Anders snarls in my ear as he pounds back in. "To be taken, bred by my cock?"

"Anders," I gasp, "yes, yes, yes—oh fuck!" I cry out again as he drives into me, and this time, he doesn't let me catch my breath. Anders sets a brutal pace, gripping my hips hard enough to leave bruises as he pounds me with speed and force no human guy could ever hope to match.

I can't speak. All I can do is moan again and again until I know my voice will be hoarse. Anders takes me apart, leaving me drooling in the dirt, completely mindless with pleasure. I submit everything I have, all my thoughts, all my worries and cares, and let him take care of me in a way I hadn't known I needed.

All my life, I've taken care of other people. Finally, just for this moment, I can trust someone else to give me what I crave. It feels selfish to have something all my own, something just for me. But damn it, I don't fucking care.

All I care about is Anders's heaving chest against my back, his animalistic grunts and

snarls in my ear that would be terrifying under any other circumstances, his thick, hot cock stretching me full to bursting.

“Close,” I pant. “So, so close. Please. Don’t stop.”

To my horror, Anders pulls out, leaving me gaping and empty. Suddenly, I’m flipped onto my back. Anders looms over me, cock flushed red and leaking, slick with lube. “Want to see that beautiful face when you come for me, pet,” he says, then shoves my knees to my chest.

He practically folds me in half, but it’s worth it when I can watch the blissed-out look on his face as he slides back in, chasing away that horrible emptiness. It sucks that this one time is all I’m allowing us to have. I’d love to have his big dick rearranging my insides every day and night.

My eyes roll to the back of my head, and I fist my cock and stroke. Every muscle in my body coils tight, ass clenching hard around Anders’s cock. I’m so close, but only Anders can push me over the edge.

“Have I pleased you, pet?” Anders’s eyes glow preternaturally, his fangs sharp in his mouth.

“Yes, Anders, yes!”

He curls his hand around my cock and squeezes. “Then be a good pet and come for me!”

His name escapes me in a hoarse scream as I come, splashing his chest and stomach with my release.

Anders’s pace never falters as he relentlessly pursues his own orgasm. “Gods, Jamie.

Want to knot your tight, perfect ass.”

Yes. That. It all sounds perfect. “What?” I slur.

“My knot will tie us together. It will give you the relief you need. I promise.”

Wow. My life really is a smutty shifter book.

“Give it to me, all of it. Please.”

With a low, desperate groan, Anders slams all the way in, and something at the base of his cock expands. The pressure inside me, the way I stretch around him, is all too much. The fire beneath my skin erupts as I come again and again, clutching onto Anders.

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A bestial roar escapes him as with one final slam of his hips, he comes inside me, flooding me with his thick, hot seed. His knot swells inside me. A gasp escapes me, and when I squirm, I'm alarmed to find our bodies are stuck together. Anders kisses my hair and whispers, "Be still. It will not hurt. Breathe."

He's right. It doesn't hurt. It feels amazing, actually, to be so full, to be tied to him in such an intimate way. It makes my wolf howl in delight, so I decide to trust my animal instincts. Finally, the beast within me knows nothing but sated relief.

We catch our breath on the forest floor, bathed in warm sunlight. Anders drapes his furs over both of us. Big, warm hands cradle my head with tenderness no hookup has ever shown me. Chest tightening, I fight to remind myself he's only being nice because he wants my necklace, and I'm surprised by how much that hurts.

"Did I please you?" Anders asks, voice hoarse and satisfied.

I smile, curling my fingers in his wild mane of dark hair. "Yeah, puppy dog. You did."

His indulgent smile makes my heart sing, and I know I made the right choice to end things after this. I always fall too easily, hope too quickly, dream too big.

Anders can never be mine, no matter how sweetly my wolf sings for him.

Chapter 6

Anders

Jamie's face is the first thing I see when I open my eyes a little while later. The warmth of my furs keeps out the chill of the day, but nothing is warmer than Jamie's body pressed so close to mine. His silver hair is tousled, his plush and slightly swollen lips parted while he sleeps. Gods above, but he is beautiful. The Norns chose wisely when they led me to him.

Then I see the necklace, and my pride curdles and dies in my chest.

So what if I fucked him? It's not as if we mated, though my wolf came terribly close to biting him. If I'd done that, it would have been an unnecessary complication. Leaving would have been impossible. Now is my chance. I could take the necklace and run, right now. It would be so easy. Jamie wouldn't even notice it was gone until he wakes. In only hours, I could be back in my timeline. I won't have to worry about going berserk if I leave now, defeat my brother, and take a chosen mate once I am Alpha. All I have to do is take the damn necklace.

My fingers twitch, itching to reach out.

Mate, my wolf whines, and a surge of longing hits me.

No! I must not give in. I care nothing for this man. He was a pleasant distraction, I'll admit. The gods brought us together so I could find his necklace, not because I have any feelings for him.

I trace the black rope around Jamie's neck, then let my fingers close around the ash wood. I squeeze it so tight the symbol carved into the wood is surely embedded in my palm.

Why? Why can't I steal it from him? What foul spell has this man cast upon me? I've always used others, always done whatever I could to come out on top. In this world, you kill or are killed. You use others, or you get used.

I must return home, and yet my wolf is pulling me in another direction. He wants us to stay here in this wretched place, here with Jamie. I can't. My home is not here; it will never be here. Home is Ulfheim, and unless I return, I won't have a home when my brother's idiotic human mate betrays them all.

Jamie stirs beneath me, and I jerk my hand back like his necklace burned me. His ice-blue eyes should look cold, but they radiate warmth as he cracks a sleepy, pleased smile that obliterates every wall I've built around myself. Somehow, this man has enthralled me, body and soul. How will I find the strength to fight our bond if just one look in his eyes breaks down all my resolve?

"Hey, puppy dog." Jamie's gravelly voice makes my prick jerk in my trousers, threatening to fill.

"I'm not a puppy," I growl at him, but it comes out petulant rather than pissed. I can't even sound irritated by him. What is wrong with me?

A happy little hum escapes Jamie as he twines his fingers through my beard. "I didn't realize I'd fallen asleep. You really wore me out, big guy." He winces and rubs his behind.

"Did I hurt you?" Why do I care? I've never cared for the satisfaction or well-being of any of the men or women I've taken to my bed before.

"Oh, you did, and I loved it." Jamie sprawls out on his furs and stretches. Gods, the way he looks beneath me... tousled hair, dried seed on his belly and chest, slender cock soft and vulnerable between his plump thighs. I've never seen a more tempting sight. "But surprisingly, I feel okay." He digs beneath him and chucks a rock into the trees. "Much better. Amazing, actually. Nothing hurts."

"It shouldn't. You're a wolf now. You'll heal most any injuries as long as they aren't

fatal.”

“I think I like being a wolf.” He scratches the back of his head. “So, uh... I’m not great at morning-after stuff.”

“Neither am I.”

“Really?”

“No. Usually, I just leave. But... it’s awfully hard to walk away when you still smell like my seed.”

Flushing, Jamie turns his face away. “I should really get going...”

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No. I won't let him run from me—not until I've gotten that necklace. That's the only reason. "You telling me you don't want to take advantage of your newfound stamina?" I run my hand down the dried seed on his belly, then stroke a finger over his stiffening prick.

Jamie whimpers and rocks against me. We're both hard, and as we grind together, longing for him possesses me.

His jaw tightens, lust and indecision plain on his face. "Fuck it. Here." He shoves the bottle of lube at me. "Make me beg for it."

"You will, pet. I won't stop until you do."

I drench my hand in the slick stuff. Once I coat my cock with lube, I blanket him with my body. I take both of us in hand and stroke, making Jamie moan. His hot, hard cock against mine has a growl rising to my lips. I grip us both tight and thrust, groaning at the sensation of our flesh becoming one. Jamie arches beneath me with a cry, hips rolling to match my own thrusts.

The tight, hot grip of my fist coupled with the sensation of his cock grinding against mine with every thrust has my head spinning. A few more thrusts and I could spill just like this. But I won't. Not until Jamie has begged me to give him the release he needs. I separate our bodies, and Jamie whines beneath me. "No. What—"

I grab his wrists and pin them above his head. "Told me to make you beg, pet. I am a man of my word. You will not spill a drop of seed until you have begged me for release. Am I clear?"

Jamie shudders and nods. “Yes.”

Squeezing his wrists, I let my tongue trail down his chest. I circle and suck on his nipples, both of which are pierced. I flick one of the rings with my tongue, then give it the gentlest of tugs, but Jamie writhes like he’s been struck by lightning.

“I like these rings, pet. Very much.” I tug the ring again, and Jamie spits out a curse.

“Anders. Pl—” He bites his lip hard, silencing what would have been a sweet plea.

“Going to make me work for it? Challenge accepted.” I lick my way down his body, tasting the dried cum on his skin, licking until I’ve cleaned his chest and belly. Jamie pants beneath me and rocks his hips, trying to get me to pay attention to his cock, which is weeping drops of seed onto his abdomen.

“Patience. I must make sure you’re clean.” I lick and lick, moaning at the taste of him. Jamie writhes and whimpers, biting his lip so hard to keep from begging I fear it will bleed. I must work harder, it seems.

Finally, I reach his cock, hard as iron and flushed a furious red. Parting my lips, I flatten my tongue against the base and lick all the way to the weeping head. Jamie bucks beneath me with a strangled shout of “Yes! Right there. Just like that. Fuck, puppy dog, that’s so good.”

Opening my jaw wider, I swallow him down, then wrap my lips around the head and suck hard. When Jamie curses and cries out, I know I’ve pleased him. I’ve never sucked another man’s prick before, but I must be doing a good job to have him so close already.

“Yes,” Jamie breathes. “Yes, like that. Don’t stop. So close. Oh god. Anders, I’m gonna—”

So he likes it but not enough to beg for more. I haven't done enough, not yet. I pull off his cock and leave him thrusting into empty air. Jamie chokes out a dismayed cry.

"Haven't made you beg, pet. Not yet," I rasp, throat sore from sucking him so deep. I let go of his wrists and hold down his thighs, preventing him from taking control of his pleasure.

"You're a bastard," Jamie croaks.

I grin. "You wanted to beg, pet. If you want to come, you will beg."

Jamie grins. "Make me."

Once I can tell he's no longer about to blow, I take him in my mouth again. Jamie sighs and tangles his fingers in my hair, squeezing and stroking as I bob my head. I take him deeper and deeper, letting him work my throat open. I gag once or twice, but I don't stop pleasuring him. Jamie's whimpers become moans and pants as I let go of one thigh and caress beneath his balls. I press inside his tight hole, groaning as his heat wraps around my finger.

As I suck, I swirl my finger, stroking and curling. Jamie cries out above me, and I smile around him. When I go to pull off, Jamie groans and pulls my hair. "No. Don't. Let me come. Anders, please let me come. Please, please, please!"

A growl rumbles through me. I curl my finger inside him and bow my head, taking him in deep. I suck as hard as I can, bobbing my head faster, and that's it. Jamie cries out above me and spills down my throat. He shudders and shakes until he's emptied every drop. Jamie collapses back against his furs, gasping and shaking. I lick him clean and swallow my reward, though I still have yet to finish.

The need to spill my seed eclipses everything else. Grabbing his hips, I flip him onto

his stomach. I position myself between the cheeks of his perfect round ass and thrust. I dig my fingers into the meat of his ass and squeeze his cheeks together, creating a tight sheath. My eyes roll back, and my thighs tremble as I let loose, straining for my release.

“Gods, pet, you feel so good,” I snarl. “So good for me. So perfect.”

Jamie rocks back, aiding my efforts. “That’s it. Use me. Make me smell like I’m yours.”

His words light me on fire. With a roar, I spill all over his back, pearly ribbons of seed spattering his beautiful, fair skin. Jamie groans beneath me, gasping with me through my release. Even after I’ve spilled every drop, I continue to rock against his ass, chasing every sensation until I’m sensitive and overstimulated.

Panting, I run my hand through the mess on his back and smear it into his skin. He’ll smell like me, like mine, like mate. Turning in my arms, Jamie plants a sweet kiss to my lips. “Man. I’m gonna need a coffee if I wanna stay awake after that. You’ve worn me out, big guy.”

I ask, “What is this coffee?”

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Jamie gapes at me. “What the hell did you just say?”

I tilt my head, confused at his shock. “I believe I asked you a question. Answer it. What is coffee?”

“No. I can’t believe you’ve never had coffee. We need to fix this. Now!” He’s on his feet. “I can hear a lake in that direction. Let’s clean up. Then I’m getting you the best cup of joe you’ve ever tasted.”

Together, we go to the lake. We wade in and wash ourselves clean with cool water. Once we’re clean, though still faintly smelling of our lovemaking, we return to our clothes and dress.

“Where are we going?” I ask.

Jamie zips up his coat. “Well, I’d love to take you to my café over in Brooklyn, but that’s quite a trip. There’s a diner nearby. They should be open even this early. I make the best coffee in the city, but this place is pretty good too. Besides, I need pancakes. Like, now.” He takes my hand and pulls me along after him.

“What are pancakes?”

“Oh man. You don’t know what you’re missing!”

This “diner” is a boxy building. Inside, there are only a few tables. It’s an open space with little room to conceal attackers. “It appears safe for now.” I vow to stay on my guard. The air is thick with delectable smells. “Is that... bacon?” I begin to drool, to

my disgust. Gods, how I love bacon.

“You can get so much bacon. Hey, Wanda! Can I get a table for two?”

An older woman behind the counter smiles. “Sure thing, kiddo. Have a seat.” She gives me a dubious look as I trudge past, armor rattling. I make sure to sit facing the door, then throw a cautious look behind me.

Jamie arches a brow. “What are you looking for?”

“Wolf hunters,” I snap. “They could be anywhere, even in this time. By turning you, you could have a target on your back.”

Jamie’s eyes widen. “Oh shit. I didn’t know. I really do think we’re safe, though. Wanda is a good person, and her staff treats me like family. We’re safe, puppy dog. I promise.” He rubs my clenched fist.

A man garbed in black approaches our table. “Good morning!” In his hand, he grips a bundle of weapons. A snarl tears from me, and I leap to my feet.

“Get back!” I snap, shielding Jamie with my body.

The man screams and drops the weapons to the ground.

“Anders, chill!” Jamie leaps up and puts both hands on my chest. “He’s our waiter. He’s just come to take our order.”

“Jamie, get away from him! He’s armed!”

Rolling his eyes, Jamie grabs the fallen weapons and shoves them at me. “It’s just forks and knives, you dummy!”

And... it is. I only saw the tip of the knife protruding, which isn't even sharp.

"Oh." My shoulders slump.

"Sorry about that." Jamie helps the man up.

He shakily drops some stiff papers onto the table and darts off.

"Gonna have to leave a big tip," Jamie mutters, picking up one of the stiff things.

"What is that?"

"It's a menu. It's a list with all the food items on it."

I pick it up and sniff it. It smells strange. I flip the menu upside down, hoping that will make sense of it. I can't read anything that's written here. I don't recognize the writing. It's all strange symbols, nothing like the runes my pack writes with.

"Uh. Anders? You good?" Jamie's looking at me like I'm the strange one.

"How do you read this?" I ask. It seems while the portal has made it so I can speak the language of this time, it hasn't given me the ability to read these odd runes.

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Jamie gawks at me. “You gotta be kidding.”

“There are no children here, Jamie. Now, tell me how to make sense of this.”

Jamie rubs his eyes. “I’m too tired for this...”

“H-hello.” The timid man from a few minutes ago jumps when I glare at him. “Can I get you started with anything?”

“I’ll have some coffee, milk on the side, and banana pancakes with a side of sausage and scrambled eggs, please,” Jamie says. “Also, some chocolate chip pancakes to go, please.”

“And you, sir?” The man inches away from my glare. “What would you like to eat?”

Since I still have no idea what the menu says, I say, “Boar stew and a mug of mead. Some bacon as well.”

“I... I’m sorry?”

Jamie hides his face in his hands for some reason.

“What are you sorry for?” I snap. “I told you what I want. Now, get it.” If he were my thrall, I’d have him flogged for making me repeat myself.

“Anders,” Jamie hisses.

“W-we have pancakes, oatmeal, granola...”

I don't know what any of those things are.

“He'll have what I'm having! But with bacon instead of sausage,” Jamie chimes in, grinning a wide, fake smile.

“I will not—” But he kicks me beneath the table, and I'm shocked into silence.

The man leaves us alone. Jamie slumps, sighing.

“Did you just kick me?” I growl at him.

“Someone had to.”

“I should take you over my knee.”

He bobs his eyebrows. “Don't threaten me with a good time, puppy dog. Anders, you need to understand that nothing here is like what you're used to. Otherwise, you'll stick out, and this world is nasty to people who stick out.”

“If you'd just give me your damn necklace, I wouldn't have to worry about fitting in,” I grumble at him.

Hurt sours Jamie's scent. “Just because we had a good time doesn't mean you've earned my grandma's necklace yet.”

Suddenly, I wish I could swallow my words. I didn't mean to hurt him. I never want to hurt him, in fact. “I... I feel comfortable with you,” I say, focusing on tearing the paper napkin into strips to give myself something to do. “But everything else is...”

“Different, right?” Beneath the table, Jamie runs his foot up and down my ankle. His touch soothes me, at least a little.

I nod, grinding my teeth. Shame burns my neck from admitting such a weakness.

“Okay. I get that.”

I jump when our waiter arrives with steaming mugs in hand. The scent is bitter and makes me recoil. Whatever drink this is, it’s served with a side of milk and some packets. I tear open the packets and pour something white and granular into my palm. It smells good, so I lick it, humming in delight at the sweetness. “This is delicious. What is it?”

“Sugar. You had it last night in the drink I made you.” Jamie smiles, watching me.

“You’re like an angry toddler.”

“What is all this? How do I drink it?”

“You can take it as is, or you can add milk, sugar, whatever you like,” Jamie says.

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I cautiously lift the hot mug to my lips and sip. The bitter taste is so strong, I spit it all out. Jamie covers his mouth, his shoulders shaking with laughter. “Here. Try it with milk.”

Lifting the little pitcher, I pour in milk, and the black solution in my cup lightens to a brown shade. It looks like muddy water. When I taste it again, the bitter flavor has been diluted, but only somewhat.

“Better?”

I smack my lips and nod. “This tastes amazing!”

“Here. Try this.” He pours some of the sugar into my mug and stirs it with a spoon.

This time when I taste the drink, the bitterness is hardly noticeable. I hum my approval, then add another pack of sugar. Then another. It’s almost as sweet as honey now. Perfect.

Jamie’s eyes grow wide. “That’s an awful lot of sugar.”

I sip the coffee and moan at the sweet taste. “Much better.”

Jamie chuckles, like he finds me amusing. “Loving your enthusiasm, tough guy. It’s pretty cute.” He pours milk into his coffee and drinks it. Somehow, the bitter taste doesn’t bother him.

“Cute!” I’ve never been so bewildered! “There is nothing cute about me.” I should

tell him to stop calling me a puppy, but the fact is it doesn't bother me. Neither does being called cute. If anyone else did it, I'd lop their head from their neck. But when Jamie says it, it doesn't get me on the offensive.

Swallowing his coffee, he says, "I beg to differ. You're adorable. Especially in your furry form. Those big ears, that boopable snoot! So precious."

I growl at him lightheartedly, and he just laughs. The things I'd do to hear that sound...

Plates of food arrive. The "pancake" things look like stacks of flat, fluffy bread. I'm familiar with such things. What I don't expect is for them to be so sweet! They are so soft they melt in my mouth.

"Are you gonna eat them plain?" Jamie grins at my enthusiasm as I tuck in. I haven't eaten in hours.

"Why not? They're delicious!"

"Here. They're even better with butter and syrup. Real syrup, not this fake diner stuff. I'll have to make some for you at home sometime with the real deal."

I spread the butter and drizzle thick amber syrup over the pancakes. When I take a bite, it's like a taste of Valhalla in my mouth. "I imagine Odin himself must eat such fine things."

Jamie's grin widens. "Never heard somebody love pancakes so much."

I clean my plate in seconds, saving the crispy bacon for last. Oh, how I love bacon... This world may be different, but the food is incredible. My stomach feels like it will burst by the time I'm done, and still I eye Jamie's remaining pancakes with zeal.

“Want some? I’m stuffed.” Jamie spears a piece of pancake.

I eat it right off his fork, moaning my satisfaction.

Jamie’s smile is soft when I open my eyes, and it makes me scowl. I don’t like how easy it is to let my guard down around him. I feel like a different person when I’m with him, someone weak, soft, vulnerable.

“What kind of food do you eat where you’re from?” Jamie asks me.

“Nothing so complicated as all of this.” Even the bacon tastes different. “Everything has more flavor.”

“How did you even end up here anyway?”

A growl escapes me as bitter feelings sour the sweet aftertaste of pancakes. “My brothers exiled me.”

Jamie’s eyes get wide. “Why?”

“They betrayed me in every sense.”

Frowning, Jamie reaches across the table and takes my hand. All the anger drains out of me, leaving nothing but soothing calm. I don’t like it. Nobody has ever been able to affect me so easily. It feels like trickery. If Jamie wanted to, he could use the effect he has on me to his advantage and harm me.

And yet... I don’t think he’s capable of such cruelty. My wolf knows this, and his judgment has never been wrong. Although he and I are not always in alignment.

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“Want to talk about it?”

I am a man of action, not words, but it’s only fair he understands why I need his necklace.

“I have three other brothers. Lyall, my twin. He and I are the eldest. Gunnar, the second born. Wulfric, our youngest brother. Our Alpha.” The words are like acid in my throat.

“Alpha?” Jamie wrinkles his nose. “Oh, like in shifter books. Wow. The books are pretty accurate to real life.”

“I cannot say what is in these books of yours, but where I am from, Alpha is a title given to one who rules over not just his immediate family but the entire pack. It can be earned through strength alone or bestowed at birth. He or she will make the decisions that impact the community and help keep our kind safe.”

“And that’s what your brother Wulfric is?”

I grimace. “He is undeserving of the title.”

“You think you should have been Alpha.”

“I don’t think. I know.” To my horror, I realize I want to tell Jamie everything about my family history. I want to tear open old wounds and bare the most painful parts of my past to him. He wouldn’t judge me. He’d understand, I’m sure of it. For so long, I’ve carried these scars, and all of a sudden, they’re too heavy to bear alone. Grinding

my jaw to keep my painful secrets locked inside, I decide to keep things short and simple. “Wulfric has weakened our pack. Because of him, our father was murdered by human hunters.”

“Oh my god,” Jamie whispers. “Anders, I’m so sorry.”

“Don’t,” I say through gritted teeth. “I don’t need or want pity. What’s done is done.”

Jamie winces, and instantly, I want to kill whoever made him look hurt... except it was me. So I’d have to kill myself. Damn it. “It wasn’t pity. Just sorry you had to experience that. I also lost my dad. My mom too. I know how much it hurts.”

I didn’t know he’d also lost family members. We have more in common than I realized, despite our many differences.

I want to tell him everything. How the memories sometimes rear their ugly heads late at night when I try to sleep. How I’ve reimagined that day every single day, tormenting myself over everything I could have done differently. How the guilt sometimes consumes me piece by piece. It was because of me that he was killed. Because I wasn’t there. I wasn’t strong enough. If I’d just been there, I—

I force those poisonous thoughts away with a harsh clearing of my throat. “We dealt with the hunters. Wulfric took over after Father’s murder. He’s a poor imitation. Nothing like either of our parents.”

“I’m sure it must have been hard for him too, Anders. He’s probably doing the best he can.”

I shake my head, refusing to let go of my anger. I need that anger to fuel me so I can return home and challenge him. “You don’t know a thing about Wulfric, pet.” I try not to be angry at him. He knows little of our world. “Trust me when I say he’s been

a poor leader, and his actions have weakened our pack. He brought a human into our pack. After everything they'd done."

"Where'd this human come from?"

"Your time. He'd traveled to ours, no doubt with the intention of hunting us all down and killing us. Humans can't be trusted. They hate my kind. Always have."

"But I don't," Jamie reminds me. "You're super cool."

I'm caught off guard. I'm not used to having my beliefs questioned like this. If it were anyone else, I'd bleed them for questioning me, but I'd never hurt Jamie. "That's true," I admit. "But you're an exception, pet. You're ulfhednar at heart. Humans hate and fear us. Our gift of the change makes us untrustworthy in the eyes of many. Savages."

Jamie's shoulders slump. "Sorry to hear that. I'll be honest, a lot of humans even now hate wolves."

I snort. "Unsurprising."

"But a lot of them also really love wolves. For so many, wolves are considered a vital part of our ecosystem, and some people have dedicated themselves to preserving the species."

I narrow my eyes. "Preserving? Why would wolves need preservation?"

"Humans hunted wolves almost to extinction."

"So, things truly have not changed. If that's how they treat wild wolves, can you imagine how they would treat ulfhednar? They are the true monsters."

“I won’t argue with you there. Humanity disappoints me more than it surprises me.” One side of Jamie’s full lips curve up. “But I think for every lousy person, there’s a few trying to make the world better for the next generation.”

How interesting. I’d never thought of it that way, that good could rival or even outweigh the bad. My mate has a unique way of looking at things.

“Anyway, your brother’s mate was human?”

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“How did you know he was my brother’s mate?”

He shrugs. “It’s not hard to guess.”

I take a sip of my coffee. There’s a buzzing growing under my skin, and I’m itching to move. I tap my feet beneath the table to relieve the restless energy. “That’s what Wulfric believes.” I sneer the words. “As if a human could ever be one of us.”

“But I was human.”

“No. The Norns would never choose a human for my mate. They did it for Wulfric as a sign to tell us all he was unworthy. I am not. You wereraisedhuman. That’s different. Your grandmother was born to ulfhednar parents. All you needed was another wolf to bring out your innate shifter abilities. You would have manifested shifter abilities from a young age, even if you or your parents lacked the ability to change forms. Heightened senses, for instance.”

“Yeah. That makes sense. My senses have always been really strong. Still, you shouldn’t paint humans with such a broad brush, Anders. All of my friends are humans, and they’re really great. I bet if they knew—”

“No.” I slam a fist down on the table. “You can never tell them what you are, Jamie. Never. They would hate and fear you, desire nothing more than to see you dead.”

“That’s not true.” He shakes his head, anger spicing his scent. I’ve upset him. Best to change the subject.

“Kieran tried to change everything about our way of life. Modernize us. First by getting rid of our thralls. Eventually, he’ll convince Wulfric to give up Fenrir’s gift. Wulfric will obey, I know it, and then he’ll force us all to do the same! He will doom our pack.”

Chewing his pancakes thoughtfully, Jamie swallows. “I don’t know, Anders. It sounds like you’re making assumptions. I don’t blame you at all after everything humans did to your pack, but how can you know Kieran will do all of that?”

I sigh and don’t argue. Jamie is newly changed. He can’t understand. While my wolf may have insisted we trust our Alpha, I knew better than to obey my animal instincts. “Even if there was only the slightest chance Wulfric would weaken us and expose us all to hunters, I had to do everything in my power to prevent it. So I challenged him.”

“And you lost,” Jamie says, guessing correctly.

I growl out a yes. I can’t tell Jamie all the conflicting thoughts that warred in my head as I faced my brother. How angry I’d been and then how sorrowful. Old wounds had torn wide open, and I’d been forced to acknowledge my own guilt, my own helplessness and failings. I’d let my emotions cripple me.

“Wulfric should have killed me. Instead, weakling that he is, he chose exile as my punishment. He let me live, and it was a mistake.” My knuckles whiten as my fingers tighten around my utensils. “I will return, and this time, I’ll win. Once he’s dead and I claim the title of Alpha, my pack will never be threatened again, not by rival packs or hunters.”

Jamie bites his lower lip. “Anders—never mind. I’ll just say that sometimes, how we feel isn’t always a reflection of reality.”

I don’t know what he means.

“Will Wulfric kill you if you return?” Worry taints his scent.

I flash my teeth in a feral smile. “He can try, but he won’t be successful.”

“Why? What are you going to do that is different this time around? You should have a plan.”

“I will not fail. I promise you. But I will do what must be done to save my pack, and for that to happen, you must give me your necklace. I am willing to earn it. Just tell me what I must do.”

Jamie’s eyes brighten. “I do have an idea, actually.” He pulls out one of those handheld objects humans seem so fond of. “Come on, let’s get the rest of this to go. I’ve got somewhere to be, and you’re coming with me.”

Curiosity compels me to my feet. “Lead on, then.”

## Chapter 7

Jamie

“Where to next?” Anders asks.

I drive out of the parking spot. “Brooklyn.”

“What’s there?”

“When my grandma died, she left me her bookshop.”

Anders hums. I’m not sure if he knows what books are. After we drive across the Brooklyn Bridge, it’s only ten minutes to the shop. Once we park, Anders follows me

into the little blue shop with big glass windows. The sign over the shop welcomes us to Moon Beans and Books Café.

Every time I unlock the doors, memories of Gran rush back to me. When I was a kid, if my parents were busy, they'd drop me off here. I'd study at one of the tables while Gran baked fresh pastries, or I'd while away the hours reading fantasy books or blushing over a steamy romance novel. She always had the latest bestsellers. When I was a college student studying to earn a degree in entrepreneurship, Gran gave me a job and helped put me through school.

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After Grandma died a year ago, I worried the café would lose much of its heart and soul, but I've done my best to keep her spirit alive. I've created my own coffee blend that flies off the shelves and expanded our stock to include books by indie authors rather than just the latest bestseller from the big publishing houses.

My bookshelves full of diverse stories by queer and BIPOC authors are the highlight of the store. I always wanted to read more books with queer characters like me when I was growing up, and I know so many people crave that representation too, so it's important to me that my shop helps provide a platform for those much-needed voices.

This shop is my baby, so it really pisses me off when people try and take advantage of me and mess with my store. Like my former employee. I tried to be understanding, gave her chance after chance, but she kept missing work and coming in late if she came in at all. Just a few days ago, she quit without any notice and left me searching for her replacement.

Then, a Viking werewolf burst out of the Hudson River and landed at my feet. Anders wants to earn my grandma's necklace? I have an idea for where he can start.

“How would you like to work here?”

Anders almost drops a book he's lifted from a shelf. “You want me to work? Here?” His eyes go wide as he looks up and down the shop.

“It's a simple job,” I assure him, hoping I don't give the guy a coronary. “Nothing complicated like making coffee. I just need someone to stock shelves and keep the store clean. Do you think you could do that?”

Anders huffs and crosses his arms. “Do I look like I’m incapable of manual labor to you?”

I throw him a wink. “Puppy dog, you look capable of throwing me over your shoulder and carrying me off to your den to have your wicked way with me. So that’s a yes?”

He shrugs said shoulders. “Just tell me what needs doing.”

“Like I said, just cleaning and simple stuff like that. If you want, we could work up toward you being a barista.”

“For how long would I be indentured to you?”

Oh, right. Our time together has an end date. Anders will want to go back to his time. My wolf whines in my chest. I cough to try and hide the pitiful noise that escapes me. I barely know Anders. Why do I care if he leaves? “Until after the New Year, if that’s all right, so about three months. The holidays are the busiest time of year for us.”

Anders runs a hand through his thick beard, considering my offer. “Very well. I accept your offer on the condition that you give me food and lodgings until I can return to my time.”

“Of course. I’d be happy for you to stay with me.” More than happy, actually. If I were shifted right now, my tail would be spinning in circles.

“When can I start?”

“We’re closed today. There was some flooding in the basement, but that’s all cleared up. But how about tomorrow?”

Throat bobbing, Anders says, “T-tomorrow?”

Fighting back a chuckle at his nerves, I flick some of his long hair out of his rugged but handsome face. “Relax, puppy dog. You’ve got this. You’ll shadow someone and they’ll show you the ropes.”

Anders’s shoulders loosen. “Oh. Aye, I can work with ropes.”

A laugh escapes me before I can stop myself. “No, not those kinds of—never mind.”

Ah, he’s too much fun.

If I’m not careful, I could really see myself liking this guy.

Crap.

Jace is bursting with excitement when I pick him up from school. “Mr. Gladston wants us to pick our own subjects for a presentation.”

His excitement makes my chest warm with affection. Mr. Gladston is his history teacher, and Jace adores him. “That’s cool! What do you want to give a presentation on?”

“Duh, Vikings! Hey, Anders!” Jace sprints toward the car. Before I can warn Jace not to pester Anders, the big Viking squats down to Jace’s eye level and offers my brother a smile that makes me almost trip over my own feet. How is such an intimidating guy capable of looking so... sweet?

“Aye, lad? Have a good day at your school?” His deep voice is soft and warm, making my chest hitch.

“It was great! Hey, Anders, can you come do a presentation with me at my school? I want to tell my class all about Vikings!”

It's not a terrible idea. Nobody will actually believe he's a real Viking from another time, but a Viking werewolf in a classroom full of rowdy children doesn't sound like the best combination. Anders will probably be overwhelmed by the environment.