

FAE HUNTER

THE KINCAID WEREWOLVES #3



L.E. WILSON

ALSO BY L.E. WILSON

Deathless Night Series (The Vampires)

Blood Hunger

Blood Vengeance

Blood Obsession

Blood Betrayal

Blood Submission

Blood Choice

The Kincaid Werewolves (The Werewolves)

To Covet The Fae

Fae Encounter

Fae Hunter

The Moss Witches (A Serial)

The Moss Witches are first introduced in the Deathless Night series. These stories go back in time to tell some of the history of the Moss Witches leading up to current day.

Each story is told over multiple volumes approximately 50-100 pages each, more or less.

Bewitching Alice

Bewitching Alice 2

Bewitching Alice 3

Copyright © 2018 by Everblood Publishing

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, email the publisher, addressed "Attention: Permissions Coordinator," at the address below.

All characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons – living or dead – is purely coincidental.

le@lewilsonauthor.com

Print Edition - ISBN: 978-1-945499-13-5

Publication Date: March 23, 2018

Editor: Jinxie Gervasio @ jinxiesworld.com

Cover: Wicked Smart Designs

Cover Photo: Kruse Images and Photography

Cover Model: Scott Nova

On a cold, winter night,
When the wind gusts and the wolves sing,
Does their song call to the wildness in your soul?
Or will you run in fear?

L.E. Wilson

CHAPTER 1



With the tip of his index finger, Keegan McRae slid the silver links of the necklace—*her necklace*—around on the polished oak table, watching as the morning light glinted off the bright metal. A soft growl rumbled in his throat, and he flattened his palm over the chain.

Resting his palms on his jean-clad thighs, he closed his eyes and rolled his head on his shoulders, trying to ease the tension. Then, with a sigh, he picked up the chain and refastened it around his neck. The tree pendant settled just below the hollow of his throat.

It was unusually cool for this time of year in Texas, and Keegan picked up his coffee, automatically blowing on the surface to cool it off.

He wondered if the Seattle pack would agree to his terms.

He wondered if *she* would agree to them.

After what had happened to his own father at the hands of a Fae—an obsession that had ended in his death—he wondered why he should even care.

Tilting the heavy mug up to his mouth, he took a good slurp. But as soon as the brew hit his tongue, he spit it back into his cup. The taste was bitter enough to make him pucker, and he craned his neck

around, looking for Corrina. The only female in the pack, she was also the only one who could brew a decent pot of coffee.

But the kitchen was completely empty.

Removing his buckskin hat, he set it on the bench beside him and ran a hand through his hair. He needed a haircut.

Stone, his new second in command, closed the door to his room upstairs, and soon, the heavy tread of his boots thundered down the wood stairs. He pulled his shirt over his head as he descended and gave Keegan a grin, his teeth a shocking white in his ebony face.

"You look like you're having a bad mornin', boss."

"I'm looking for Cor. This coffee is downright awful."

"That's because Corrina didn't make it. She went on a run last night, and hasn't come back yet that I know of. Something must be stuck in her craw."

Keegan had a good idea what that "something" was—him. Or rather, what he was about to do. Corrina had been a part of his pack for a long time, was one of his father's pack before this, and normally they agreed on how he chose to run it. But during one of their nightly sit-downs on the back porch the previous evening, she'd made it quite clear she thought he was following in the footsteps of his father.

But that wasn't the case. He wasn't under some kind of spell. It was just a normal, healthy attraction. An attraction he'd fought for as long as he could.

He picked up his buckskin hat from the table and slapped it onto his head. "Yeah, she's not real happy with me."

Stone grabbed the OJ out of the fridge and sat down across the table from him, not bothering with a glass. "Whadya do now?" Lifting the carton to his mouth, he chugged down some juice, then wiped his mouth with his sleeve.

Keegan raised one eyebrow as he watched him. "Speaking of Cor, don't let her catch you doing that. She'll skin you alive and use your hide for her new rug."

With another grin and a wink, Stone said, "She won't know, unless you rat me out."

Keegan indicated for him to carry on as he was before he picked

up the conversation where they'd left off. "I'm putting myself at 'undo risk' according to her." He was careful to keep any emotion out of his tone. "Being led around by the wrong head." This time he allowed himself to smile. "And speaking of—" he waited until Stone stuck the container back in the fridge and returned to the table—"I'm gonna need you to come with me tomorrow."

"Sure. Where are we going?"

"To meet the Seattle pack."

Understanding dawned across Stone's face. "Ahh. So, that's what Corrina's pissed about." He rapped the table with one knuckle. "I have to tell ya, man, I'm in agreement with her on this here issue, especially after what happened the last time one of those shifters came to visit. I wasn't a fan of Jace, as you know, but I respected his position in this pack."

"Jace was an ass, and he got himself killed. I'm not holding that against Marc, or his pack. He was protecting his female. Any one of us would have done the same thing." Although not all of them did as good of a job at it.

Stone considered that for a second. "All right, then. All right. But what about the rest of it? What changed your mind? I thought you didn't want to agree to an alliance. Not until there was proof. Like the soul suckers actually knocking at our door." He paused, his sharp brown eyes penetrating Keegan's skull in that uncanny way he had. "Or is there something you need to tell me?" Before Keegan could answer, Stone's hackles rose, filling the air with tension. "Did you hear something? Is it true? The Dark Fae are coming?"

Keegan held up his hand, halting any more questions. "I don't know that for sure, yet."

"Then what's this meeting all about?"

Keegan saw no sense in beating around the bush. "Cedric Kincaid has something of mine, and I want it back." He took another sip of his coffee, grimaced, and gave it up. Getting up from the table, he took his mug over to the sink and rinsed it out before sticking it in the dishwasher. It took him a moment to notice the absolute silence in the

room. Turning around, he found Stone staring at him with a strange expression on his face. "What?"

Stone cocked his head as he studied the Alpha. "You're going after her. The dark-haired one."

It wasn't a question, so Keegan saw no reason to respond.

Stone released a hard breath of air. "Are you sure you wanna go there, man?"

Keegan stilled, lowering his voice. "Go *where*, exactly, Stone?"

But Stone wasn't put off. "This is a mistake, Keegan. The pack will never accept our Alpha bringing one of *them* into the pack."

He didn't say it, but he didn't need to. Keegan could hear the implied *like your father did* loud and clear.

That, if nothing else, was enough to make up his mind. He was nothing like his father, and she was nothing like the freak of nature who'd seduced his sire into such madness his own son was the one who'd had to put him out of his misery.

The pack could accept it, or they could find themselves a new pack. Keegan took off his hat and ran his hand through his short hair before settling it back on his head. "Are you coming with me, or what?"

Stone grinned and got up from the table. "Oh, yeah. I'm coming."

"Good. Be ready by three a.m. We have a long drive ahead of us."

CHAPTER 2



The sun was sinking low on the horizon when Keegan and Stone pulled off to the side of a rural road just outside of Las Vegas. The desert held little appeal for werewolves, what with their naturally higher body temperature, all the fur, and no shelter from the sun and heat and all, and as such was considered neutral ground for the two packs to meet. Flat, sandy terrain could be seen for miles in any direction. It was a good spot. Out in the open. No way for anyone, or anything, to sneak up on them.

Keegan and Stone waited beside Keegan's pickup, watching waves of heat rise from the asphalt as a cloud of dust rapidly approached from the northwest. The front end of a lone vehicle soon appeared. And inside that vehicle would be Cedric and Marc, from the Seattle pack. Keegan checked his phone. They were right on time.

"They'll never agree to this." Stone's low voice broke the tense silence.

"Yeah, they will." In spite of Keegan's confident tone, his nerves were shot. But he couldn't show it. He was an Alpha. Alphas needed to be in control. Always.

Nothing more was said as they waited for the others to reach

them. It took quite a while longer than one would think; distance could be deceiving in the desert.

While he waited, Keegan wondered—and not for the first time—if Stone was right and he should just let this shit go.

But he couldn't let it go. He couldn't let *her* go.

A classic Chevy El Camino slowed down and came to a stop about twenty yards from where they stood. Black, with tinted windows, it was near impossible for the average human to see inside. The engine cut off and the driver's side door opened. A large male with slicked-back, dark hair unfolded himself from the seat. When he turned to close the door, Keegan saw his hair wasn't greased to his head, but pulled into a long, wavy ponytail. Ice-blue eyes caught and held his for a moment, and then the male gave a nod of greeting and strode forward.

He was big, this Alpha. Taller than Keegan, with about fifty extra pounds of muscle on him. But it wasn't his sheer size that made him so daunting, it was the Alpha in his aura. The dominant gene practically oozed from his pores. A wolf was either born with it, or he wasn't. And this male definitely had it.

Keegan could understand why he had the reputation he did.

The passenger side door opened, and Marc got out. He looked no different from when he'd been a guest at the ranch months ago, other than a bit of a softening around his eyes and mouth. Caused, no doubt, by the fact his female was safe back in Seattle and in his bed. The pup had some *cojones*, that was for sure, showing up here again after the stunt he'd pulled at the rodeo. He didn't fidget or look away, or otherwise act nervous in any way. No, he walked up and looked Keegan right in the eye, and he had to respect that about the male.

Keegan straightened as the Seattle pack leader approached and stuck out his hand. "Cedric Kincaid, Alpha o' th' Seattle pack." The Scottish brogue was heavy in his speech, even though Keegan knew he'd been in the States for a long time.

Keegan took his hand in a firm grip. "Keegan McRae."

They shook, and Cedric indicated Marc coming up on his right. "And ye ken Marc, here."

Keegan touched the brim of his hat. "Marc. How have you been?"

"Verra well, thank you." The words weren't spoken lightly.

"I appreciate ye meeting us like this," Cedric said. "And I would like tae apologize, sincerely, for all tha' happened while Marc was yer guest. It was no' his normal character tae cause such a commotion. I can trust him tae keep his wits aboot him, which is why I sent him tae ye when I couldn't come myself."

"I understand," Keegan said. *More than you know.* "Sometimes our wolf gets the better of us. Marc is an honest and upstanding guy, I knew that about him right away, which is why I didn't kill him."

Cedric pinned Keegan with those eerie eyes, and he held his stare without flinching. It wasn't a challenge. More a show of mutual understanding and respect.

Marc stepped forward until he was shoulder to shoulder with Cedric. "I meant no disrespect tae ye, Keegan. Ye ken that. But I would do it all again in a heartbeat tae save my Bronaugh and her family." He glanced over at Cedric, and straightened his spine. "That being said, I will no' argue about any punishment ye deem necessary tae get us back on even footing."

Although he'd never doubted Marc's character, Keegan's respect for him grew a whole bunch right then and there. "That won't be necessary, Marc. Jace's death was unfortunate, but not a big surprise, to be honest. If it hadn't been you, it would've been someone else. He liked to rile up any wolf he felt was a threat, throw his weight around. It was one of the reasons I made him my second, to try to keep him out of trouble. However, Stone here"—he nodded at the male next to him—"always been my true right-hand man."

Comprehension crossed Marc's face. "Ach. Aye. That explains so much. I could no' understand why ye let him treat ye as ye did," he said to Stone.

"Just keeping the peace, Seattle. Or, trying to," Stone told him. "I have to admit, I don't agree with letting you off for killing one of our pack, but I will respect Keegan's decision about it."

Marc gave him a nod. "Thank ye."

Cedric put his large hand on Marc's shoulder, pride for his wolf written all over his face, then looked to Keegan. "Can we walk a bit?"

They fell into line—the two leaders walking side by side, with Marc and Stone coming up behind them. Close enough to protect their Alphas if the need arose, but far enough back to give them a modicum of privacy.

"Thank ye, again, for agreeing tae meet with me," Cedric said. "And for yer leniency with Marc's offence."

Keegan knew better than to take the apology for anything other than what it was, a show of respect for a fellow Alpha. Cedric had no fear of him, of that he was absolutely certain. But he appreciated the olive branch. "It's all good between me and Seattle, Cedric, but I appreciate it. Now, why don't you catch me up on anything that's happened since the summer?"

"There's no' much tae tell on our side o' things. Tha' daft prince o' th' Fae has gone silent the past few months. It's verra strange. He was all up our arses, and then suddenly falls off th' face o' th' earth." Cedric shook his head. "I dinna ken if this is good news or bad."

"How is he taking the news of a soul sucker—uh, *an olc*—in his midst?" He corrected himself, but too late. Ah, well. Nothing he could do about it now. And it wasn't like Cedric didn't know the mate Marc had killed for was a Dark Fae.

Cedric gave him a sharp look, but then his features softened. "Ach. Aye. He had a wee bit o' fun with her at first but gave her back tae us unharmed. Dinna fash yerself, Keegan. We're keeping an eye on her." He glanced over his shoulder at Marc.

Keegan glanced back also, and Marc gave him an assertive nod of agreement. He turned back to Cedric. "But you still think there's a danger of the soul suckers getting out?"

"That's what I've been told," Cedric said. "But there's something else that's come tae my attention having Bronaugh and her family with us."

His tone caught Keegan's attention. "What would that be?"

Cedric stopped walking and turned to face him, and Keegan did the same.

"There are more o' th' dark ones running loose out there. Bronaugh says she kens o' at least fifty more, other than herself. Some out o' their minds with th' hunger, some no'."

"Doesn't surprise me," Keegan told him. "We had two of them locked in cells on my ranch."

"Aye. Marc told me."

Keegan heard the censor in his tone but chose not to challenge it. It would do no good. The soul suckers had provided months of entertainment before they finally gave in to their disease. A couple of his guys had found them dead in their cell just a week before. Others would think what they would of him and what he did to keep the peace, and there wasn't much he could do to make them understand. "So, what's your point here?"

"My point"—Cedric spit the word at him—"is ye ken how dangerous they are. There is no bringing them back, no helping them, in spite o' what some might say."

He mumbled that last bit so quietly, Keegan almost didn't catch it. "Anyone who thinks a soul sucker can be brought back to the living is two cans short of a six pack."

Cedric gave him a puzzled expression.

"Not all there," Keegan clarified.

"Ach. Aye. If ye ken this, I would like tae ask ye again tae consider joining our packs together. As th' two most respected packs this side o' th' ocean, it would do a lot tae increase th' trust between everyone if we were united."

Keegan crossed his arms. This was exactly how he'd hoped the conversation would go, but he wasn't ready to show all of his cards just yet. "And how exactly would that work, Cedric? There can only be one Alpha. Will we fight to the death for the position? As our law dictates?"

But Cedric shook his head. "I ken that's how it's always been done, but in this situation, I thought we could try something a wee bit different. We would swear alliance tae each other, but otherwise, nothing else would change."

"My pack will obey no Alpha but me."

"Aye, th' same with mine. I've given this a lot o' thought." Cedric stepped closer, the passion he felt for his cause plain to see. "The packs will remain as they are. My wolves will answer only tae me, and yours tae ye, as it's always been. But they will swear an allegiance o' sorts tae th' other Alpha, and we—th' Alphas—will work together tae put a stop tae th' terror that's coming."

"Why do we need an alliance to do that? We could just agree to put aside the pissing contests that normally occur between two Alphas and work together. Fight together. Send those bastards back where they belong *together*."

"Aye, we could do that. But having a joining of our packs is th' only way tae ensure no one gets any flighty ideas. And it will ensure my wolves will follow ye if it comes tae that, and yours will follow me."

"And if you die in this supposed war?"

"Then I would ask ye tae take in my pack and make them a part o' yer own. And I will do th' same. With an alliance already between us, there'll be no hemmin' and hawin' aboot it, no arguing tha' could cost lives, and I willnae have tae worry tha' my pack is taken care o'."

Keegan had to admit, he made a compelling argument. And everything he said was true. A lot of lives were lost in the last war, needlessly, because of hot-blooded wolves not wanting to obey any other Alpha but their own. Not to mention all of the dick measuring that went on between the Alphas themselves.

He agreed with all of it. He had since Marc had first proposed the idea. But back then, something had held him back from jumping into this deal. An opportunity he wasn't even aware of at the time, but one he intended to take full advantage of now. "All right. I'll agree to your alliance." He held up a hand as Cedric breathed a sigh of relief. "But on one condition."

Cedric narrowed his eyes. "Wha' condition?"

"I want the female back."

A low growl ripped from Marc's throat as he swiftly closed the distance between them. Only Cedric's large arm kept him from laying paws on him. "Ye'll no' be getting my Bronaugh back fer yer sick games."

Keegan stood his ground, holding up a hand to Stone, who had also sprung forward at the threat to his pack master. "Not that female. The other one. With the dark spiky hair."

"Bitsy?" Cedric asked. Then he immediately shook his head. "Ye'll no' be getting that one back, either. Bronaugh is part o' my pack now, and Bitsy is her family, which makes *her* part o' my pack. She is under my protection, and never again will she be used for yer games."

But Keegan held up both hands now and attempted to diffuse the situation. They'd misunderstood his intentions. "Everyone calm down. That's not what I want her for."

"Then what *do* ye want her fer?" Cedric asked.

"I want her to help me find the other soul suckers out there. As you yourself said, there's at least fifty of them roaming around. I want her to help me find them." It was an excuse he'd just come up with on the ride up there.

"What fer?"

"For my rodeo, if they're beyond help."

"And if they're no'?"

"Then I will keep them where they can be watched, or hand them over to you." He shrugged. "Whichever you wish."

"Yer a hunter. Ye can find th' dark ones yerself," Marc spit out. "As ye 'ave already proven."

Keegan crossed his arms over his chest. "But that's where you're wrong, my friend. We can find Faeries, sure. However, it's near impossible to figure out which tribe they're from. Even if they tell us, there's no guarantee they're telling the truth."

"As if ye cared," Marc ground out. Fists clenched at his sides, he turned to his Alpha. "Cedric, we cannae agree tae this! Bronaugh will nae forgive me, or ye, if we try tae take her cousin from her when she only just got her back. She will nae allow it."

Keegan couldn't blame him for being all up in arms about it. He'd seen the rodeo with his own eyes. It wasn't for pussies.

The entire time Marc was shootin' off at the mouth, Cedric hadn't moved. But those icy blue eyes had held Keegan's, steady and calculating, as though they could see right through to his soul.

When Marc finally paused, he spoke. "We'll ask Bitsy what she wants tae do."

Marc scowled, but Cedric shot him a look.

"Tis her decision," Cedric told him. "No' ours. We will ask her." With a nod to Keegan, Cedric turned and started walking back to the cars.

Keegan joined him. As they walked, the breath he didn't realize he'd been holding released on a strong exhale.

She would come back.

He would accept nothing less.

CHAPTER 3



“**B** láthnaid Dunn, you cannot do this! I forbid it!”

Bitsy made a face and covered her ears. Her mother only called her that when she was truly upset. The name, pronounced “blaw-nid,” meant “little flower.” Her father told her once it had been his idea to name her that, because she’d smelled like the wild flowers of Ireland right from the womb. And “Bitsy” had come about because, well, she was a “wee bitsy little thing” as a child.

Bitsy took her mother’s hands in hers. “Mom, calm down and listen to me. Please.”

“No! No! I will not! You cannot go back there. Have you forgotten what those monsters did to you? To me? To Bronaugh?”

Forget being roped like cattle and dragged around a dirt arena? Or being hit with their electric cattle prods? Not likely. “No, Mom. I haven’t forgotten.”

“Then why in the world would you want to go back there?”

Good question. “I’m not going back to their ‘rodeo’, Mom. I’m going to help Asshat find more like us. So I can keep them the fuck away from him and his cowboy games.”

“Bitsy! Language,” her mother scolded.

But Bitsy could tell it was more out of habit than the fact she was

actually paying attention. “Mom, if I go back, *Keegan*”—it took everything she had not to spit the name from her mouth—“will agree to the alliance. If the other packs in the area see this, they’ll fall in line. It will save lives. And, what if there are more harmless *an olc* out there like Bronaugh? Or *na maithe*, like us? Innocent Fae that would be caught and made to participate in their games if I’m not there to stop it?”

Her mother pursed her lips and shook her head, her arms crossed over her chest. “I don’t trust this. They are shifters. They don’t need you. They found *us* without any help.”

“And they made us part of their sick sport. Just like they will to any other Fae they find, no matter what tribe they are.” Anyone else would take one look at her mother and think the woman was unmovable, but Bitsy could tell she was softening. So, she laid down her best and final argument. The true reason she had agreed to this asinine plan. “What if I can find Dad?”

Her mom dropped her arms to her sides and stared at her. A glimmer of hope in her eyes was there and gone so fast, Bitsy almost missed it. “Your father will find us without you risking your life. We’ve been together a long time. We have a strong connection. He will find us.” Her tone didn’t convey the strength of her words.

“Then why hasn’t he, Mom?” Bitsy sighed, and took her hands again. “If he was able to find us, he would have been here by now.” Her mother looked away, and Bitsy knew she was thinking the same thing Bitsy was—her father wasn’t coming because he was hurt, or captured, or worse. “I’m not a little girl. I can take care of myself. And I will find my father. With Keegan along, it will be safer for me than if we tried on our own, or with Cedric. Keegan knows the other packs around him. The risk will be less.”

“And what if it’s not, Bitsy? What if they lock you behind iron bars again? What will you be able to do then?”

But Bitsy just smiled. “Wolf-man has a thing for me, Mom. He won’t be locking me away anywhere, except maybe in his bedroom.” Which wouldn’t necessarily be a bad thing. *Not* because she had any intention of acting on the attraction between them. That damn wolf had something of hers. And she wanted it back.

Her mom frowned, but then her eyes widened as comprehension smoothed away the lines on her forehead. "Bitsy!"

"Don't act so shocked. It seems to be the nature of the beast around here. They can't seem to resist us."

Her cousin, Bronaugh, gave a snort from her spot on the sofa, where she was pretending not to listen. Her own wolf-man, Marc, had made it very clear that he was completely against the idea of Bitsy going anywhere, but he'd left the three of them alone in the apartment to give them time to speak privately about it.

Bitsy looked back at her, lifting one eyebrow. "You're not helping my case here, Bro."

"Sorry." Bronaugh grinned at her "cousin."

Bitsy rolled her eyes, suppressing a smile. Turning back to her mom, she squeezed her hands. "Mom, I'm doing this. I promise I'll be careful. And I'll be back before you know it. Hopefully, with Dad in tow."

"I just don't know what I would do if I lost you, too." It was the first time her mother had admitted she was frightened the absence of her husband, and Bitsy's father, was permanent.

She took in her mother's beloved features, still handsome even at her age. Her long, dark hair barely had any gray, and her skin was nearly as smooth as a young girl's. However, a wisdom that only came with age shone from her clear, brown eyes. Eyes that were lined with strain from all they'd been through lately. "You won't lose me. I swear it, Mom. Cedric is giving me a phone with a tracking device, and he's sending Lucian and Duncan to a small town right outside of Austin. They'll be near enough, should anything happen."

Her mother, Nancy, wiped a tear from her eye and nodded. "I suppose that's as safe as you can be." Her hand was gentle as she touched Bitsy's cheek. "And you're old enough to make up your own mind. I just wish you wouldn't put yourself in danger while doing it."

Bronaugh came over to them then. "Aunt Nancy, if it makes you feel any better, I've seen the way Keegan looks at her. He may be entirely too full of himself, and a complete asshole—"

"Asshat," Bitsy corrected.

"Asshat," Bronaugh repeated. "But, he won't let anything serious happen to Bits. I honestly believe that."

Bitsy remembered the way he'd looked at her, too. The Alpha was completely in lust with her, she'd bet her life on it. And if his attraction to her would get her Dad back, then she was prepared to use it to her full advantage.

The fight visibly drained from her mother. "You promise me you will come home. Unharmed!"

Bitsy kissed her on the cheek. "I will. I promise." And then she hugged her tight.

If only she felt as confident as she sounded.

THE NEXT DAY, Bitsy was on her way back to Texas. She rode in the backseat, headphones in her ears the entire trip so she didn't have to listen to Duncan and Lucian constantly bickering. She only had a small backpack with some mix and match clothes and a few necessities. One good thing about keeping her hair so short, it required little to no maintenance. She didn't even need product to make it stick up. It just kind of did it on its own.

As the evergreens faded to brown scrub brush and the majestic mountains flattened out to nothing more than fields of straw-like grass, Bitsy asked herself for the three-hundredth and forty-second time what the fuck she was doing.

But then she'd see her father's laughing brown eyes beyond her own reflection in the window, and her anxiety would settle into a sense of calm purpose. He was out there somewhere, he had to be, and she would do what she had to do to find him.

Except be nice to Keegan. That, she could not do.

But she didn't think it would matter much. Besides, if she was suddenly all sweet as honey after everything he'd put her and her family through, it would bore him. She knew this with a female's instinct. If she wanted him to help her, she needed to keep him interested.

And if things went as she hoped, soon the Fae would no longer

have to fear his kind. She was tired of living life in secret, always avoiding everyone and everything. Since the last war between the Fae and the Werewolves, her people had survived by staying in small groups and staying hidden. But that was changing. It had already started, with Brock and Heather, and Marc and Bronaugh.

Not that she planned on being any part of the next interspecies couple. Oh, hell no. She had nothing against dating outside her kind. But she had a whole hell of a lot against the male she was about to be spending most of her time with.

The two wolves in the front seat continued to go at it, oblivious of her presence. Duncan seemed to get his kicks by irritating Lucian until he was spitting mad. At first, Bitsy was worried, afraid Lucian's irritation would get the best of him and he'd shift right there in the driver's seat. But after a few hours, she relaxed.

Because she realized what Duncan was doing. By being such a huge pain in the ass, he was actually helping Lucian learn to keep a grip on himself. The more he pissed him off, the more Lucian had to control his inner wolf. She understood what he was doing, but her headphones only blocked so much, no matter how loud she turned up the music.

Bitsy was real close to reaching up there and knocking their thick skulls together when they passed the exit sign for I-35 to Austin.

Oh, thank the gods.

They arrived in town well after rush hour, and got to her hotel shortly after. Her first stipulation in coming was that there was no way, no how, she was going anywhere near Keegan's ranch, or the fucking barn behind it. The barn that housed the arena for his rodeo. Hell, no. She would stay at a hotel, in the city.

Duncan turned onto 6th street and pulled up to The Driskill hotel shortly thereafter. A thrill ran through Bitsy as she eyed the historic exterior. She'd insisted on staying there. The place was reputed to be haunted, and her inner ghost hunter couldn't resist the opportunity.

Duncan twisted around in the seat. "All right, lass. Here ye go. Ye have yer phone?"

"Yes. And your numbers are programmed into my speed dial."

"Aye. Good. Tha' was my next question." He grinned at her, bright green eyes dancing, so much like Keegan's, and much to her consternation, her stomach did a little flip. "Yer room is paid through th' end o' th' month. If yer here longer, just tell them tae put it on th' card on file."

"Asshat's card?"

Duncan grinned at her. "Tha' would be th' one."

"Okay." Bitsy unplugged her headphones and shoved them into her bag. Her phone she would keep on her person at all times. "Thanks for the ride."

"Ach. Aye. We won't be far. Dinna hesitate tae call fer any reason." He looked past Lucian and out the window. "Seems yer friend is waiting fer ye."

Bitsy followed his line of vision to see Keegan, Alpha of the Texas pack, leaning against the washed-out stone of the building, his buckskin-colored cowboy hat pulled down low over his eyes to protect them from the setting sun. At the sight of him, tall and powerful, butterflies exploded in her gut, a hundred times worse than being on the receiving end of Duncan's flirty smile. The male oozed Alpha. Her eyes traveled from his well-worn cowboy boots, up jeans pulled tight over muscular thighs, to a short-sleeved, unbuttoned plaid shirt, biceps bulging beneath the sleeves. Underneath, he wore a white cotton tank. A silver chain hung around his neck, the pendant nestled at the bottom of his throat.

A shiver ran through Bitsy in spite of the fact that sweat ran down her spine from the Texas heat. Whether it was at the sight of her chain around that tan throat, the male waiting for her, or her body's reaction to him, was left to be determined. "He's not my friend."

No, he'd never be able to just be a friend.

CHAPTER 4



Keegan pushed his hat back on his head. Squinting against the setting sun, he watched as Bitsy got out of the car. She closed her door and leaned over the passenger window, crossing her arms and sticking her head inside—saying something to the males within—and gave him a nice long gander at her rounded bottom, barely covered in cut-off jean shorts. Little as she was, her legs were full and smooth and curvy, and he could almost feel the weight of them wrapped around his neck as he buried his face between her thighs.

A possessive growl rumbled deep in his throat, startling a couple walking past him.

The lady's head snapped around at the sound, lips parted in breathless surprise. Her eyes traveled the length of him and back. She smiled, slowing her steps until she nearly pulled her date to a halt.

Keegan touched the brim of his hat. "Ma'am." Then turned his eyes back to Bitsy's alluring pose.

Her man quickly pulled her away, scowling at Keegan over his shoulder.

Bitsy straightened and waved as the car pulled away, and Keegan tore his eyes away from her ass as she slung her backpack over her shoulder. She didn't turn around right away, and Keegan waited,

giving her time to collect herself. Honestly, he was kinda shocked she was there at all. He'd never really expected her to come back of her own free will. Hoped, yes. Expected, no. She had bigger balls than he did, after everything she'd been through the last time she was here.

After everything he'd allowed to happen.

When the seconds turned to minutes, and she still stood on the edge of the sidewalk staring after her ride, Keegan cleared his throat.

With a long-suffering sigh he heard even from behind her, Bitsy turned around. Her chin lifted high, and she somehow managed to look down her nose at him from her diminutive height. She'd filled out a bit since he'd last seen her. She was even cuter than he remembered.

"Hey, Bitsy."

Her eyes dropped to the chain around his neck. "I want my necklace back."

He tried for a smile. "Not one to beat around the bush, are ya?"

The look of disgust on her face gave away her thoughts before she spoke them. "No. I'm not. You've given me no reason to be tactful."

"You're welcome to come get it." His stomach tightened with excitement at the thought of her touching him.

She seemed to consider it, but then she crossed her arms and held her ground. "Why are you doing this? We both know you and your pack don't need any help finding Fae." Her lips curled into a sneer. "Either tribe."

She was referring to the fact that she and her mother were *na maithe*, the "good" kind of Faeries, if any Faeries were truly good, the kind that didn't pose any danger to anyone. Keegan hadn't realized what tribe Bitsy and her mom were from when they'd first been brought to the ranch, and by the time he had, releasing them would've caused more problems than he'd wanted to deal with.

Keegan took off his hat, running a hand through his freshly cut hair. It was still damn hot, even this late in the year. "Look, I didn't know you and your momma weren't Dark Fae. Lord knows, there's no easy way to tell y'all apart."

Bitsy lifted one eyebrow. Her warm brown eyes somehow frosty as

the inside of a deep freeze. “Maybe the fact that we weren’t smashing our own heads bloody against the bars every time you came near us should’ve clued you in.”

His face heated, but he swallowed down the feeling of shame. He knew what she thought of him, but she had no idea what it took to lead a pack of werewolves, or how far he would go to keep them from tearing apart the town they lived in. Without anything else to occupy them, they needed some way to blow off steam. His rodeo provided that. Good, old school Texas fun. Bitsy and her mom had just been in the wrong place at the wrong time.

However, it was a mistake he wouldn’t let happen again. “You have no intention of helping me find more Fae for my rodeo.” He didn’t try to close the distance between them, knowing in spite of the brave front she was putting on, she was as skittish as a rabbit. And he couldn’t say he blamed her.

“Nope.”

Keegan licked his lower lip, his mouth suddenly dry. “Yet, you came anyway.” He set his hat back on his head. “I know it’s hard for you see, but the rodeo was a good thing—”

She turned her face away, but not before he saw the look of disgust.

He pressed on. “I needed to keep it going because if I didn’t, my wolves wouldn’t have an outlet for the aggression that builds up inside—especially the unmated ones. And that means they’ll find some other way to let loose, whether it be fighting amongst themselves, or coming into the city here to blow off steam. Either option is bad news for the pack.”

“You’re unmated. I never saw you anything *but* controlled. Why can’t they do the same?”

“It’s not always as easy as all that, ittybit.”

She narrowed her eyes at the nickname that had slipped out from nowhere, but didn’t let it distract her from her questions. “Why not?”

He eased a bit closer to her, close enough to catch her scent in the still dry air. She smelled like moonflowers and sun-warmed skin. She smelled like home.

“Why not, Ass—Keegan?” she repeated. “If you can’t control your pack, maybe you don’t need to be their Alpha.”

Her words struck hard in places he didn’t want to examine too closely. He took another step closer, until he was towering over her. “I’m their Alpha because I fought my way into this position. And I don’t need some uppity Fae chick telling me how to control my wolves.”

A normal female would be intimidated by a large male such as him, but not this one. In spite of her small stature, she stared up at him with a blatant challenge in her eyes. “Maybe I wouldn’t need to if you had what it took to be a good leader.”

They glared at each other, caught at an impasse. Goddamn, but she made him hard. Still, Keegan was the one who backed off. She was only trying to goad him. She didn’t need to know how much her words struck home. Or how much he enjoyed her smart mouth. It would only add fuel to her fire. He offered her a tight smile. “My leadership skills, or lack thereof, aren’t up for discussion. What is on the table is why you came back.”

She turned her head away, watching a group of humans come toward them. “There’s something I want from you. Other than my necklace back.”

His pulse raced, but he gave her a nod. “Name it.”

“I want you to help me find my father. He was separated from mom and me when your gang of mutts cornered and captured us. I want you to help me find him, and I want him to go home to my mother.”

The fact that she hadn’t included herself in that scenario didn’t escape him. “So, I help you find dear old dad, and you’ll grace me with your presence. That’s the deal?”

After a moment’s pause, she nodded. “Yes.”

“What if I don’t want to give this back?” He looped the chain he was wearing over his thumb, holding it out for her to see.

Her eyes dropped to the tree pendant. Several seconds ticked by. “Keep it,” she gritted out through clenched teeth.

She wasn’t fooling him. The chain meant more to her than she was

letting on. It's why he took it from her. It was something that would link them together.

"You got it, ittybit." He dropped the necklace and stuck out his hand, and after a long moment, she took it. Her hand was ice cold, in spite of the heat, and he covered it with both of his own. He tightened his grip on hers and caught her eyes. "No harm will come to you here, you have my word."

She nodded, and pulled her hand out from between his. He clenched his fists, unconsciously seeking the warmth of her skin against his. "One last thing," he told her.

"What's that?"

"While you're here, you need to pretend to like me. At least when we're around others."

A very unladylike snort made him smile. "Why the hell would I do that?"

"So I can keep you alive. If the others think you're with me, they won't dare do anything to hurt you. You can hate me all you want when we're alone, shoot daggers at me with your eyes, cuss at me... whatever. But around others, I'm your moon and stars and you'll be mine."

"Even around your own pack?"

"Especially around my own pack."

"Which takes me back to my former argument."

He had to admire her tenacity. "Just do as I tell you, Bitsy. Or I can't be held responsible for what happens to you."

Her eyes flew to his, and he realized he'd practically growled the words at her. He was getting too caught up in the nearness of her, and he took a step back. "I don't want anything to happen to you, is all. I promised Cedric I would keep you safe if you agreed to come back. And I intend to keep that promise."

"Did I really have a choice?"

"I'll always give you a choice, ittybit."

"You wouldn't have agreed to the alliance if I hadn't come."

"Nope. But you still had the choice."

She gazed down the street in the direction her ride had gone, a

wistful expression on her face, then turned back to him. "Well then, I might as well get checked in." With purpose to her steps, she walked past him and he followed.

"Are you sure you won't come stay at the ranch? In the house, this time," he added when she shot him a look so full of venom, he was surprised his blood hadn't turned to acid in his veins.

"I'm fucking positive," she said. "I'm staying here."

"Do you kiss your momma with that mouth?"

"Every fucking day."

A young human male opened the door to the hotel for her. He tipped his hat as she passed, and she gave him a smile that made his heart stutter.

Keegan knew this for a fact, because he heard it. It echoed the noise going on in his own chest. He cleared his throat, maybe bowed up a bit, for the young male jumped.

"So sorry, sir." Moving out of the way, he held the door for Keegan.

He touched the brim of his hat politely even as he bared his teeth. "Keep your eyes in your head, kid. She's off limits."

The male's eyes widened to such a size it was almost comical as he took in the full impression of the Alpha wolf standing before him. "Y-Yes, sir." Dropping his eyes, he stepped back and waited for Keegan to pass.

"Have a good day now, kid, ya hear?" He searched the lobby for Bitsy, impressed as ever by the old hotel—grand columns throughout and stained glass on the ceiling to let in the light. He found her over by the check-in desk. As he approached, he heard the desk clerk confirming the room Keegan had booked for her.

"All right, miss. So, we have you booked in one of our Petite Queen rooms. I think you'll enjoy it. These rooms are small, as they used to be the servant rooms, but they've been remodeled and upgraded. So though cozy, they still provide every comfort."

Keegan moseyed up to the desk and leaned his back against it, resting his elbows on the counter as he kept an eye on the comings and goings of the humans.

"Yeah, about that. Do you have any other rooms available? Something larger, maybe?" Bitsy's voice practically dripped honey.

What was the little hellcat up to, now?

The clerk set the room key he'd been holding down on the desk and consulted his computer screen. "It seems we have a Landmark Suite available for an indefinite amount of time, but they are triple the cost of the Petite Queens."

"How much?" Bitsy asked.

"Landmark Suites run \$342 per overnight stay, not including tax and fees."

Bitsy looked over at Keegan and gave him a naughty grin. "I'll take it."

Keegan ran his eyes over her pixie face, his heart pounding in his chest at the promises in that smile. He barely heard the rest of the conversation.

"Shall I put it on the card on file?" The clerk glanced at Keegan politely.

It took him a moment to realize he was waiting for a response. "No."

"Yes," Bitsy said at the same time.

Keegan pushed off the counter. "Excuse us a minute, please." Grabbing Bitsy by the wrist, he tried to ignore how tiny it felt in his hand as he pulled her out of hearing range. "What the hell are you doing?"

"Securing my room," she told him matter-of-factly as she yanked her arm out of his grasp.

"Miss?" The clerk was watching them, his forehead wrinkled in concern. "Is everything all right?" He eyed Keegan nervously.

"Everything's fine," she told him with a smile. "Would you go ahead and book that room and get me my room key, please?"

With another nervous look between them, the clerk nodded. "Of course. One or two?"

"Two," Keegan told him. It would save him from paying for damages.

"One." She narrowed her eyes at Keegan. "One," she stated firmly.

They faced off, feet planted, eyes staring daggers at each other,

until Keegan gave in. Tearing his eyes from the fierce female in front of him before he busted out the zipper on his pants, he gave the clerk a nod. "Fine. One."

With a sigh of relief, the male placed one key on the desk. "Room 301."

Bitsy walked over and grabbed it up. "Thanks." She leaned in against the counter. "So, are there really ghosts here?"

The clerk gave her a secret smile. "That's the rumor. Be sure to let me know if you see any."

"I will," she told him in all seriousness. Ignoring Keegan completely, she picked up her backpack and headed to the wide staircase that would take her to her room.

He shuffled along behind her, his blood still racing from their contest of wills. As they made their way to her room, he squinted into the corners, every hair on his body standing on end.

She just had to pick the most notoriously haunted hotel in Austin.