

Saving Valor

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Chapter One

Valor walked through the kennel amused by the sudden silence. The animals knew a dangerous predator was in their midst and didn't want to draw his attention. Beside him the keeper of the animals kept giving him fearful sideways glances. It was rare that a master vampire picked out his own protector dogs, but Valor wanted to ensure that he could bond with the creatures that guarded him while he slept. If the dogs felt connected to him they were more likely to protect him with their lives.

He hadn't lived over two thousand years by being careless. The increased paranormal hunter activity necessitated that he add to his security. These hunters didn't care what they caught as long as it was non-human and the stories of the few who escaped capture were enough to make everyone in the paranormal community bump up protection and pull their families closer.

No one was going to capture a vampire under Valor's watch.

He protected his own.

A pair of steely-eyed Dobermans caught his eye. "What about those two?"

The keeper gave a nod. "They're good security animals, they're here because the company they were trained for went out of business."

"Ahh. Their loss, my gain. Stephan add them to the total."

The dark-haired vamp trailing behind him made a quiet sound of assent. Stephan wasn't the most vocal of companions but he was loyal. The quiet vamp had been at Valor's side for over three hundred years. He trusted Stephan to guard his back and oversee the security detail while Valor concentrated on ruling the vampire tribe under his control. After another walk through, four more dogs were added, two Rottweilers and two mixes.

Valor was pleased.

"Good selection." He told the trembling human beside him.

"Th-thank you sir." The keeper said careful not to meet his eyes. Valor didn't bother hiding his amusement. The idea that a vampire needed to meet the eyes of his prey was a myth. Valor could've controlled the guy from across the state if he wanted. He was about to exit the kennel when he heard a low whimper.

The sound tugged at him, the noise low and needy, impossible to ignore. It lured him forward like a siren call. Valor turned, scanning the area but even with his excellent night vision he couldn't make out the far cages.

"What's back there?"

"Nothing sir," the keeper said with suspicious speed, "just a mutt we caught a few weeks ago. He was half starved and something had ripped him apart badly. He sets off the other dogs so we keep him separated from them so there's no fighting. He's a sweet pup, not the type you're looking for."

The keeper was eager to convince Valor that he didn't need to look at the animal.

Too eager.

Another whimper called to Valor. "Let me be the judge of that."

Following the sound, he reached a large cage with a golden brown dog inside. Well-muscled, the creature had a shiny coat that glowed even in the darkness. Its large amber eyes looked up at him imploringly.

Help me, the words whispered into his mind.

Valor's head snapped back, instinctively trying to repel the mental invasion. It took him a moment to realize what it meant.

Werekin.

He looked into the dog's eyes and saw the intelligence shining out of them. There was something more in the creature's gaze than the other animals he'd chosen that night.

Human understanding.

"I'll take this one."

"But sir, he wouldn't make a very good guard dog. He doesn't have a mean bone in him." The keeper protested. Valor turned and found the man had dredged up the courage to meet his eyes in order to protect the beautiful animal.

Valor gave him a smile he knew humans found irresistibly appealing. "I won't use him as a guard, I want him for a pet." He said in his most persuasive voice.

Relief crossed the human's face. "In that case I'd be happy to let you have him. He needs a good home. I'd adopt him myself but the missus said if I brought home another animal she'd put *me* in the dog house."

"We can't have that now can we?" He agreed amiably.

Valor nodded towards the dog. "What's his name?"

"I call him Prince." Valor could see the human blush even in the dim lighting. "I know it's a common name for dogs but for some reason, it really suits him."

"Hmmm." Valor looked at the creature for a moment. "Let's get the Prince out of there so I can take him to his new home."

* * *

Caden watched the tall vampire through the bars. It had been a risk asking for help from one of the undead, but if he didn't get the hell out of here soon the pack would find him. He'd already stayed longer than he planned and he knew his brother's pack would've started hunting him once they discovered his body wasn't where they left it, and he didn't want to be a sitting target when he was found.

There were too many pack members who thought he was a good contender for the alpha title or that his existence was a danger to the current alpha, his half-brother Jameson. A danger some of the more rabid pack members were more than happy to eradicate.

Caden didn't need or want the headache of being the pack alpha. All he wanted was to live in peace and find a nice man to settle down with.

He gave a long doggy sigh.

Jameson's mother, Eliza, must be loving this. Eliza had never forgiven Caden's father for dumping her when he found his true mate in Caden's mother. She'd made Caden's life difficult in a

million little ways and it had only gotten worse with his parents' death in a car accident two years ago.

At least his night was looking better. The vampire, Valor, was the best smelling thing he'd sniffed in a long while. He had a surprisingly rich and lush scent not like the one named Stephan who smelled like fireplace soot.

The scent of deception.

"Soon little one, we will have you out of there." Valor said. The undead man watched him with a searching expression like he was waiting for Caden to spill all of his secrets.

Fat chance of that happening.

As soon as he was free he was going to get the hell out of town. He hoped his backpack was still where he'd left it before the pack mauled him. Thanks to the excellent care of the animal hospital facility and his werekin healing abilities, he was completely healed and ready to travel.

Caden's attention snapped back to the vampire when the cage door opened.

Instinctively, Caden leapt for freedom. Before he could get far, a powerful hand grabbed him by the scruff of the neck preventing his escape. "Not so fast my pretty animal." Valor said snapping a leash on the collar provided by the shelter.

Caden growled his displeasure.

"I've never seen him do that before even when we putting salve on his open wounds." The keeper said in a worried tone.

Caden turned and gave the keeper's hand a friendly lick. He didn't want the kind man distressed. The human had been nothing but good to Caden and the other animals. He'd hate for the man to get killed for offending the vampire. Caden always liked it when the keeper was around because he always smelled of a nice combination of the animals he cared for and happiness.

Caden moved between the keeper and the vampire baring his fangs protectively.

"Don't get riled pup, I'm not going to harm him." Valor said flashing a fanged smile of his own.

Unexpectedly, the keeper knelt and wrapped his arms around Caden ignoring the scary vampire holding Caden's leash.

"You be a good boy Prince and Mr. Valor will take good care of you." The keeper placed a sloppy kiss on Caden's head that he could've done without. He resisted the instinct to growl at the kind man. Instead he gave the keeper his best doggy smile and licked the man's face tasting the salty bitterness of tears.

"Don't worry about Prince he'll have a happy life at my side." Valor said.

Caden gave a low disgruntled bark only to have his leash jerked.

"Behave boy."

Don't make me bite you. He whispered into the vamp's head.

"Don't think that can't work both ways." Valor chuckled.

Caden bowed his head submissively. If Valor thought he was thwarted the vamp was more likely to be off guard. He'd let the other man think he was alpha, but he was one pup who was just biding his time.