



A COVETED PREY NOVEL

# BOUND

FOR THEIR PLEASURE

L.V. LANE

# **Bound For Their Pleasure**

**A fantasy barbarian romance**

**Coveted Prey**

**Book 18**

# L.V. Lane



Copyright © 2023 L.V. Lane

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-1-922630-34-6

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

All rights reserved. This book or parts thereof may not be reproduced in any form, stored in any retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission of the author.

The author does not grant permission for any AI solutions to read and process this content.

Cover design by Kuen

Editing by Steph Tashkoff

# Contents

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[About the Author](#)

# Prologue

## Freya

We moved to Penley when I was just five years old. Situated on the very edges of Hydornia, the estate had once belonged to my grandparents, who had died six months earlier. The house was a large, rambling wooden construction with a round turret on the north corner accessed via a spiral staircase. I decided our new home was a special type of castle made by the forest sprites and loved it instantly.

Several fields were set aside for grape vines to the north of the property, on a slope that led to the forest edge. I wasn't allowed to enter the forest and was told that monsters lived there.

My father planned to expand the smallholding into a business once he retired. He was a soldier, away more often than he was home, stationed to the far north of Hydornia where he fought the orc hordes, known as the Blighen, pushing them back lest they rampage our lands. His work seemed impossibly brave, and I held my father in awe. Although I hated that he would leave again soon, I dreamed of that elusive time when the war would end, and he would live in our home with Mama and me.

I loved the house, playing in the turret, and pretending to be a princess. I loved to run across the sweeping fields at the back of our home where a small stream dissected the land, tumbling over rocks as it emerged from the forest, having come from the highest slopes of the mountains to the west.

It was a half-day carriage drive to the nearby city, where we owned a small but stately townhouse, and our time was divided between the two residences.

I loved Penley and the adventures that could be found in the princess tower—as it became known—and the many outbuildings, most of which were not in use and provided

ample opportunity for an imaginative child to play out her daydreams. My mother, seeing me flourish, elected to spend our summers there and return to the city come the fall. We had servants, stablemen, and laborers who worked the land and vines, and there was always something going on to interest me.

I was nearing my seventh birthday when, encouraged that I had yet to see a single monster, I ventured into the forest.



# Chapter One

## Freya

Spring, and the bounty of bluebells, lure me into the forest. My arms are laden, but the promise of more of the pretty blooms which I can spend the afternoon carefully pressing in my book keeps me moving deeper inside the shade of the great trees.

Convinced that my mother made up stories about monsters to keep the younger version of me safe, for I was a baby the last time we visited and now, at nearly seven, am virtually grown up, I pay no mind to the distance I travel until I see them.

“Aye, that’s a fancy dress,” the young boy says. He holds a small spear in his right hand. One end is braced against the ground, and the pointed tip is level with the top of his head. His eyes are hazel, his cheeks and nose are covered in freckles, and his hair has golden curls and is too long for a boy. That, however, is a minor break of decorum given that he wears only rough hide pants, sturdy boots, and nothing else.

His state of undress scandalizes me.

His companion, a young girl of similar height to me, wears a hide dress that leaves much of her tanned legs and arms exposed. She has the same hazel eyes, curly golden hair, and a smattering of freckles across her nose as the boy. They are undoubtedly related.

They are also barbarians.

A flush creeps up my cheeks when they make no move to leave. Civilized people should not be in this state of nakedness unless they are about to have a bath, which is private business. My eyes settle on the leather cord around the boy’s neck from which an amber stone hangs.

“I’m Dara,” the girl says boldly. “We hail from the Baxter clan. Aston says you have moved into Mrs Bramleigh’s old home.”

I'm shaken that they appear to know my grandmother, whom I had only met a few times. "I'm Freya. Mrs Bramleigh was my grandma, and she died last fall."

"I told you," the boy says, nudging the girl's arm.

They are barbarians, yet they know my grandparents and speak the common language, which settles the flutters in my belly.

"This is Aston, my brother," the girl says. "We saw you on your own and thought you might like to come and play with us."

I glance back over my shoulder, realizing how far into the woods I have ventured. "I'm not supposed to be in the woods," I admit. "Mama said there were monsters in here."

I feel foolish for admitting this, more so when Aston chuckles. "She's one of those fancy lasses as always do as they're told. She won't be any fun to play with."

Dara thumps her brother's arm. "You are such a meanie. I don't even know why you wanted to come with me. If you taunt the lass, she won't be my friend." Turning to me, she says, "There are no monsters here. Our clan has a few shifters, and their scent keeps other beasts away."

"I didn't think that shifters were real." I'm convinced they are teasing me... or maybe their shifters are the monsters my mother talked about.

"Of course shifters are real," Aston scoffs like he is an authority on such things; as though I'm stupid for not knowing this... although if they really do have shifters living among them, I concede that he knows more than me.

Dara thumps her brother again. He smirks like he is pleased to have riled her.

"Would you like to come and have tea?" Dara asks.

"Tea?" Do barbarians drink tea?

"And pie," she says, smiling. "My mama makes the best apple pie ever."

“It is a long fucking way to the clan,” Aston says, shocking me when he uses the cursing word, which is forbidden for children. “She has tiny legs.” He points at my legs, which he cannot even see hidden beneath my dress.

“I’m nearly seven,” I say like this is evidence in my favor.

The lad raises his brows.

Dara grins, takes my hand, and gives a gentle tug. “Come on. Please. This will be fun!”

My mother will be cross if I go and visit their clan. She will not be happy that I have come into the woods at all, nor that I have spoken to barbarians. But, on the other hand, I have missed having a friend. I already like Dara. Her annoying brother, not so much. I look back, but I cannot see my home anymore.

“Her legs are too short,” Aston says. “She is a weak Hydornian lass. You know they are scared of their own shadows. She probably thinks that shifters eat lasses.”

I tip my chin. “I am six and a half, which is almost seven. I can walk a very long way.”

“Fine then. Let’s go,” Aston says. “Unless you need to run home first and ask your mama, like a little girl might.”

“I do not need to check with my mama,” I say, which is a lie. I definitely do.

“Stop taunting the lass,” Dara says crossly. “Or she will never be your friend.”

“I don’t even want to make friends with a little girl,” he says, scowling now.

“Oh, why don’t you run along then?” Dara says. “Go and pretend that you can hunt.”

“I caught a rabbit yesterday,” Aston says, puffing up his chest.

“Pft! You did not catch a rabbit,” Dara says. “You found one that was already dead.”

The lad flushes. My eyes dart between them.

Dara rolls her eyes at me. A small giggle bubbles up from my chest.

“Don’t mind Aston,” she says, as the lad stalks off in a huff. Her voice drops to a conspiring whisper. “He said you looked like a princess, and he would marry you one day.”

She slips her arm through mine while I’m caught gaping, and we follow after Aston.

“Which is nonsense,” she continues. “Because Papa says he will be an alpha, and everyone knows alphas don’t marry.”

“What do alphas do?” I ask, feeling myself soften toward Aston, who thinks I look like a princess.

“They take a lass or two as their mate.”



The walk takes longer than I expected. I’m soon tired, although I don’t like to admit this, lest Aston further taunt me. He stays attentively close, either scouting ahead or looping behind.

It’s gone well past midday by the time the village comes into view, and then my tiredness lifts, for it is beautiful. Steep slopes lined by pine trees stretch up from the valley, where the many homes are clustered to either side of a river. The lower slopes are given over to farming or livestock with sheep, goats, and horses. The cottages are pretty: a few made from stone, but mostly wood, and in good repair, with wildflowers and briar rambling up the front porches. It is the prettiest place that I have ever seen.

The clan people call out greetings as we walk past their homes. “Hail, Dara! Hail, lass!”

“Good day,” I reply.

Aston chuckles. “Hydornians have funny ways of speaking.”

“It is you who has funny ways of speaking,” I say, a little chagrined that I’m not doing this right.

“I think the way you talk is cute.” Dara smiles and tucks her arm through mine again. “My mother will adore you and want to keep you for sure.”

Her mother turns out to be a beta woman with a long plait of golden hair down her back and a plump baby at her hip. “Dara, where on earth did you find this lass?!”

“Freya is Mrs Bramleigh’s granddaughter.”

“Goodness!” Her mother says, bouncing the pink-cheeked baby, who has begun to fuss and drool. “Did you walk all the way over here on your own? Aston, were you a part of this?”

Aston goes to slink off, only to come to a stop as a huge barbarian emerges from the barn beside the house. He wears the same hide pants, with a broad chest and long wild hair. I’m convinced he is the monster my mother spoke of, for his expression is thunderous.

“Inside, girls,” their mother says, ushering us into the neat wooden home. “Let’s get you something to eat and drink. The poor wee lass must be exhausted walking all that way in such a heavy dress.”

Feeling shy, I sit at the table, where I’m given a glass of milk and a thick slice of apple pie. My eyes bulge, and my tummy rumbles noisily. I tuck in with relish.

Through the open cottage door, I can see the gruff barbarian scolding Dara’s brother. “What were you thinking of, lad, fetching her back here?”

“It was naught to do with me,” Aston says all surly.

The big barbarian is red of face and radiates menace.

“Don’t mind it,” Dara says quietly to me. “Aston’s always getting in trouble. They think that because he’s older, he must be wiser. He’s not wiser. I am far cleverer than he is.”

I want to point out that my mother will be cross, and neither of them is clever. Only if they are not clever, then I am not clever either. I have a terrible feeling I will get in trouble... a lot of trouble... and might not be allowed to play outside for a week.

The gruff barbarian enters the home, sharing a look with his wife before turning to us. “Drink up your milk, lasses, and I’ll take your friend back.”

“Oh, can’t Freya stay here a bit?”

“No, Dara. It is already well past noon. Her parents will be worried. What nonsense were you thinking of taking such a tiny lass so far from her home? What were you and Aston doing all the way over there?”

“She has no one to play with,” Dara says. “But she’d like to have a friend.”

“Well, that is very thoughtful of you,” her father says. “But best we speak to her mother afore we go any further with that, hmm?”

“Yes, Papa,” she says.

We finish off our milk and hop down from the chairs. I’m very tired and not looking forward to this walk, although the nervousness in my tummy tells me my mother will be worried, and I want to go home now.

A horse is tethered outside the cottage, and Aston is lugging a saddle over to it.

His father takes the saddle from Aston and sets it into place on the horse.

“Come on, young lass,” he says. “Let’s get you up in the saddle.” Clasp me around the waist, he picks me up and drops me in the saddle. I’ve never ridden on a horse before, for we use a carriage when we travel, and I feel a little nervous until Dara is lifted to sit behind me.

“Hold the pommel, lass,” he says to me. “Old Barley is sure-footed, and you will not fall.”

He takes me home, leading the horse the whole way through the forest until my home with the princess tower comes into view.

My mother is shaking with worry. Everyone has been scouring the lands, fearing the worst.

I feel very bad as she holds me close and thanks Dara's papa for returning me home safely. She even smiles a little when she hears of how Dara's mother gave me a glass of milk and a slice of apple pie to tide me over for the journey back.

Then she surprises me and agrees that Dara and I may be friends.





## Aston

It is late by the time my father returns from taking Freya home, and I am waiting for him by the barn so I can help him with the horse.

Dara is full of excitement that Freya's mother agreed the girls could be friends. I don't want the fancy brat around for I have gotten in enough trouble today due to her. My sister skips inside to tell our mother that Freya will visit again as I help my father put the saddle and tack away.

"You will need to keep an eye on them while they are playing," my father says.

"Huh?" I nearly drop the saddle I am lugging over to stow. "Why do I need to keep an eye on them?"

My father's eyes narrow as I more carefully set the saddle in place. "You are the oldest. Your mother has the babe to watch, and I need to work. A man should protect those younger than him and not make reckless decisions that might endanger them."

So we are going there again. My questioning of his decision has opened the door to a further dressing down.

I am eight years old. Danger and reckless decisions are not always apparent to me in the heat of the moment. Also, I admit that sometimes I am persuaded to do reckless things lest I risk losing face.

"What do you think might have happened if she were hurt on the way over?" he asks.

I shrug.

"There would have been consequences, not only for you as the oldest among them but for the whole clan."

I may be only eight, but everybody says I will become an alpha. I have a good sense of danger. "I had my spear with

me.”

“It is a small spear suited to your size and catching small game,” my father points out bluntly. “You should not have been taking your sister so far, never mind bringing lasses from another country and people, who might bring the full wrath of their king on our clan, for all we know.”

My ears heat. “I will do better.”

He nods approvingly. “One day, you will be an alpha. You must learn to carry yourself as such. An alpha defends his family and clan, and even strange lasses as visit us from other places. Many people beyond the clans have poor views of us and our ways. We are the closest clan to the border. We, above other clans, must show them, through our actions, that they are wrong.”

His words are complex, and I grapple to take them in. It upsets me that others might have a poor view of us because we dress differently and have different ways, but I also must do my part and be the kind of alpha who would make him proud.

I am still stinging from the talk when we sit at the table for supper. But I’m also hungry and so I focus on dunking a piece of fresh bread into the vegetable stew.

“Aston says he’s going to marry Freya when she grows up,” Dara blurts, grinning smugly at me.

I pause, the dunked bread halfway to my mouth.

My father’s poorly smothered chuckle does not help. Worse, my mother’s face softens in a way that tells me she also thinks I am foolish.

“I never said that,” I deny stridently, glaring at Dara.

“You did, too,” Dara sing-songs back. “He said she looked like a princess.”

“She had a fancy dress, is all,” I say. “Like one of them lasses in your storybooks.”

I know I have fucked up as the words leave my mouth. I hate my sister. Now I am lumbered with watching her and her new friend.

After my father's talk about alphas and how one should behave, I feel bad about taunting Freya about her short legs, which is not even her fault when she is only a little girl. "She has little legs and a heavy dress," I say gruffly, "and still walked here without complaint."

"The lass is very brave," my father agrees. "But, son, you know you will become an alpha and not marry. The lass and her family would be shocked at our ways, especially by those alphas who take more than one mate."

"Why would that be odd?" I ask, confused. "What if an alpha loves two lasses, and they both love him?"

"Well, it is just not done in Hydornia," my mother says.

"That sounds stupid if you ask me," I say.

"Do you have another lass you were considering as a mate, son?"

I think my father is teasing me, but I'm not sure.

"No," I say. "I don't even want this one. I only said she looked like a princess."

"He said he was gonna marry her," Dara pipes up. "But now he will need to mate her. Then she can be my best friend forever, and have babies and be my neighbor. I want to have at least five or six babies. Freya should have five or six, too."

"That's a lot of babies, love," my mother says, smiling. "You were not so keen on them last eve when your baby sister was screaming."

"Fine then, I will have four."

That is thankfully the end of the discussion for the evening but, the next day, a fancy carriage arrives with Freya, and my fun is over.

# Chapter Two

## Freya

There have been reports of a lone shifter in the woods, and I am not supposed to ride my horse there. I'm thirteen now, and a civilized lady, as my mother frequently points out, would take a carriage instead.

It is possible to reach the Baxter clan via carriage by taking a convoluted route, but I'm impatient. Using a carriage requires a man to ready it and prepare the horse before we can be on our way. I'm allowed to ride a horse in the meadow and the pastures to the south, but I am not to ride a horse into the forest to facilitate seeing my friend, at least not while this shifter is around.

My mare is fast and nimble-footed. The shifter couldn't possibly catch us. Also, this lone male shifter, from all reports, is an adolescent, and I'm convinced he just wants to join the village and not attack anybody on the path.

I used to be good at following rules and doing as I was told, but it's not just my mother who has made this determination. I might even obey if it were only my mother, for I don't like to worry her unnecessarily.

No, the reason that I pretend to be going for a ride in the pasture—when I am, in fact, going to enter the forest at the first opportunity—is because Aston ordered it.

Ordered it... like he is my keeper and can tell me what to do.

Worse, he rode all the way over to visit my mother, to put fear into her heart so that she would order me not to ride in the forest, after I told him to mind his own business.

He is fifteen now and thinks himself a man just because he will soon leave to join Hydornian forces far to our north. Some barbarians, especially the young men, leave to support Hydornia in the war against the Blighten, for our enemy is theirs. I conclude that if he can go to war and risk his life in

battle, he probably is a man in all ways that matter. It was more the manner in which he made his order that riled me. Standing with his hands on his hips outside his family's cottage, saying how I'm not to ride the fucking horse again through the fucking forest unless I want to feel his palm against my bottom.

I was red-faced and livid as he gave me a stern talk about riding my horse over there.

If he dares to put his hand on me, I shall make him very sorry indeed. Just because he is two years older doesn't mean he knows better than me. And even if he does, his delivery of the facts leaves much to be desired.

I don't know why I'm being so rebellious about this when it's not in my nature to be so. I'm a good girl. My mother often tells her friends what a well-behaved daughter she has and how lucky she is that I'm not a bit of trouble.

Aston seems to bring out the worst in me and almost compels me to misbehave. He was wicked and merciless with me as a child. I can still recall the day he tossed me in the stream after I complained about getting mud on my silk dress. He said a fancy dress wasn't practical for playing in the stream. I put fire ants in his boots in retaliation, while he was paddling ... and that's why I ended up with my gown soaked and my hair a bedraggled mess. He sat beneath a nearby oak and laughed as I spluttered and struggled to climb the slippery bank under the weight of my sodden clothes.

I grin, thinking about the fire ants in his boots... and him hopping around as he tried to get them back off.

He got the cane for his part. His father was furious and gave him a stern talking to about the ways of treating a lass, and how I might have drowned, which was an exaggeration given the stream was ankle-deep. It was more like being sat in a large puddle.

He still didn't tell on me; he just took his punishment like a badge of honor.

I take off across the meadow at a steady canter, following the worn path beside the forest until I'm out of view at the house, and then cut left into the trees, feeling an instant thrill. It won't take long to reach the village. I hope Aston is there when I turn up. I hope he's very cross, indeed. I hope he puts his hands on his hip and roars at me about my safety so I can point out to him that I'm perfectly safe and that he doesn't know everything.

It is a pleasant morning, and the sunlight finds gaps between the high forest canopy to dapple me with warmth. My horse, Beauty, is a sleek brown mare and, while a little temperamental at times, is a joy on days like today when she's in the mood to stretch her legs. I soon forget all about the shifter. Aston is harder to set from my mind—the young boy who revealed as an alpha and seems to grow an inch every other day.

I don't want him to leave, even though he won't be able to berate me if he is gone.

I might even miss him.

Huff! No, I will not miss him at all. I'll be able to do what I want more often. No one even bothers anymore when he scolds me for my actions. When Aston started yesterday's tirade his Papa only chuckled and stalked off into his workshop, leaving us to it.

What I read into that is that his Papa thinks I'm a capable lass with a sensible head on my shoulders who can defend myself against Aston and his overbearing, overprotective ways.

Beauty suddenly rears up, snapping me back to the present. I squeeze my thighs tightly and hold on as her front hooves lower and stamp.

“Steady, girl.”

Ears pinned back, she snorts and rears again, this time bucking at the same time and flinging me from the saddle.

I land among the thick ferns on the forest floor. “Uff!” The wind is taken from me. I hear Beauty scream and the thunder

of her hooves. I have to wait to catch my breath then roll onto my hands and knees and try to steady the wild beating of my heart.

She is not wishing to be ridden today, after all.

Dusting off my hands, I rise slowly to my feet. My mother's disapproval of me riding a horse is nothing compared to her disapproval of my clothing. Pants, sturdy boots, and a practical shirt are not something a young lady should wear. Still, I am grateful for them over heavy skirts, given I've just been tossed from my horse.

I take stock of where I am: thankfully not far from the Baxter village which is likely where Beauty has gone.

My fingers explore the back of my head, where a tender lump is beginning to form. My lip is a little bloody from biting it as I fell. There's no hope for it; my horse is gone, and so I must walk. When Beauty turns up at the village, someone is sure to notice and come to look for me, but I may as well start on my way.

As I step forward, a low growl from the forest to my right sets the hairs at the back of my neck prickling with unease, and I freeze then slowly turn my head to look over my shoulder.

A wolf. He is the size of a pony, with a dark gray coat and lighter markings on his snout and belly. A shifter—for he is far too big for a wolf, but smaller than the shifters in the village.

Understanding is swift to bloom—this is the juvenile the villagers have been talking about.

“It's okay,” I say, slowly turning to face him. Standing my ground, I hold out both hands. Whether shifter or not, running from a wolf is a very bad idea as it brings out their hunting instincts. If I run, he will chase me.

“Why don't you shift,” I say, “so that we might converse? My name is Freya. What is yours?” My voice shakes a little, for I'm nervous, although still convinced he means no harm.

His nose lifts into the air, and he sniffs. The urge to turn and flee is foremost in my mind, and my heart rate rises to a



gallop. While I tell myself he won't attack, I'm definitely not at ease.

“Do you want to join the village? Is that why you're always near? You will like the Baxter clan. They are kind and welcoming. I'm sure they will take you in. They have noted you in the forest. Why don't you shift? I would very much like to meet you. To meet both parts of you.”

I am rambling.

He still does not shift, but he does take a slow step forward, and I must fight the urge to run when he pauses a few paces away and sniffs again.

Slowly, oh so slowly, I hold out my hand, palm up, so that he may scent me. His jaws are big and powerful, even for an adolescent, and I try not to think about the damage he might do if he were to attack.

He lowers his snout, puffs out a little breath, then pads over cautiously until his wet nose presses against my palm.

I'm trembling, but I sense the contact to my very soul—that this is the start of something tentative—and everything inside me softens.

“Please shift,” I entreat.

His ears suddenly prick bolt upright, and his head swings to the side. A warning growl rumbles in his chest.

I glance back... a horse is approaching, the hooves like a drum-beat against the loamy forest floor.

His growl rattles, stronger, and the fur at the scruff of his neck rises as he nudges in front of me like he is seeking to protect me.

Goodness, this is the worst timing in the world. I see Aston thundering toward us on his bay gelding.

Another low growl is all the warning I get before teeth close over the back of my pants and belt, and I'm yanked backward and off my feet.

I dangle in his powerful jaws, arms flailing, and feet kicking out. “Oh! What are you doing? Put me down at once!”

I’m too heavy for him to carry away, so he drags me across the ground in an ungainly heap of flailing limbs and scrambling feet.

The wolf continues tugging me away.

Aston is down from his horse now and advancing on us with a thunderous expression.

This is a calamity of the highest order.

“Damn whelp!” Aston mutters as he stalks us down.

My failing hand connects with the wolf’s snout. I must surprise him, for he snorts and drops me.

Aston charges straight past me, fist swinging; it connects with a dull *thwump* against the side of the wolf’s head.

The wolf yelps.

I wince.

“Shift to human, runt, afore I skin your mangy hide!”

I scramble to my feet as Aston and the wolf—which, even as an adolescent, is huge—circle one another. The wolf growls. Aston growls back.

“Stop this,” I say. “He doesn’t mean any harm. He wanted to make friends.”

“Make friends?” Aston sneers, still circling the wolf. “What are you, six years old? Where do you think he was taking you, lass? He might be an adolescent, but he’s not that fucking young.”

He lunges at the wolf. The wolf tries to dart back, perhaps intimidated by the huge alpha and the aggression he radiates.

“Where was he taking me?” I ask, frowning as I catch up with his words. “Oh! Don’t hurt him.”

Aston tackles the wolf around the throat. They crash to the ground, where they continue to wrestle. All I see is a blur of flesh and fur.

A curse follows, and another yelp.

“You are hurting him!”

“Whose fucking side are you on?” Aston grunts.

I don't know why I'm defending the wolf and, further, feel a little sick as I see the gash on Aston's side where the wolf has raked him.

“Shift this instant, mutt, or I swear I'll snap your damn neck and leave you a dead carcass to rot!”

They break apart as the wolf shifts, revealing a young man not dissimilar in size or height to Aston.

They eyeball each other, a pace length between them, both breathing hard.

I should not be taking this opportunity to ogle the naked lad. I'm not even acquainted with him... not that knowing him would make this any better. Yet my eyes have a mind of their own and seek the swinging appendage between his legs with unerring accuracy.

“Goodness!” I gasp, trying to decide if it is a trick of the light or the effects of the blow to my head. That cannot be real, can it?

My eyes snap up to find Aston staring at me, nostrils flared with rage. Heat floods my cheeks.

“Fuck off, barbarian scum!” the lad pitches, stabbing his finger in Aston's direction. “I was not hurting the lass when you charged in like a fucking savage.”

Still glaring at me, Aston surges forward and punches his opponent in the jaw, sending the lad tumbling.

“Me and you shall be having words, brat,” he mutters before again tackling the lad, who has barely gained his feet.

They crash to the ground in a heap of swinging limbs and flying fists.

“Stop this nonsense,” I say.

They ignore me, being too busy wrestling on the ground. I'm certain this renewed altercation is because Aston caught me staring at the shifter's cock. Which was not my fault. I'm sure any lass would stare and wonder...

I tug at my hair and pace a little before my eyes land on a sturdy branch. I snatch up my improvised weapon and bash at them both as they roll back and forth. It is covered in leaves and makes a poor weapon, but I don't have time to find something better. "Stop, this instant!"

Aston grunts as I catch his shoulder. The shifter lad gets a strike across the meaty flesh of his ass, which makes me blush anew even as I'm charged with righteous anger to make the pair of them stop.

I land a particularly savage blow at the back of Aston's thigh.

"Gods, what are you doing, lass? I'm trying to protect you from this damn whelp who was seeking to drag you off and rut you!"

"Bollocks! I was not going to rut her!"

"No? Then why is your cock hard?"

Goodness! Is he hard? I cannot see much, given the shifter is sprawled over Aston, whose leg is wedged between the shifter's thighs.

Still holding the stick, I'm now also trying to look *there* as they continue to grunt and grapple for supremacy, trading blows and cursing at one another until, finally, chests heaving and muscles quivering, they reach an impasse of exhaustion.

"It was not hard when I was holding her, barbarian scum. My cock is just confused by all this tussling! With hindsight, I can see the lass is every bit as savage as you and assuredly does not need any protection!"

The shifter staggers up before reaching out his hand to help a wary Aston to his feet.

"Lor," the shifter says. He has his back to me, so I still cannot see his cock to verify whether it is hard.

I consider making a casual sidestep, but Aston is already on to me and my inappropriate curiosity.

“Aston,” Aston says and nods toward me. “The brat with the stick is Freya. You had bitten off more than you can chew with her, for sure. As soon as we return to the village, she will be getting her bottom spanked after disobeying my order.”

I am breathing heavily, too, still poised beside them with my branch-kosh. It is cracked and unlikely to be effective if they go at one another again.

“I’m sorry about—ah?” Lor gestures toward Aston’s lacerated ribs. “I was not thinking straight.”

“It is fine,” Aston replies. “But put your hands upon Freya again for any reason, and I will break your fucking jaw.”

“Try it, savage.” Lor straightens his stance. “The point was duly noted. You did not need to go over it a-fucking-again.”

I want to roll my eyes at their posturing. I swear, if there were a wrestling or cursing competition, I would struggle to rule between them. Dropping my branch, I take a casual step to the side.

Aston’s eyes narrow, and he stalks past Lor to fist my arm. “I’m on to you, lass. You’ve seen enough dick for one day. My pa will box my ears if he finds out I let you ogle the shifter’s knotted cock.”

“Oh,” I say, trying to glance over my shoulder at Lor as I’m marched over to the horse and all but tossed into the saddle before Aston mounts behind me. “Is that what that was?”

Lor chuckles behind me.

“You don’t look like you’ve had a decent meal in many days,” Aston calls over his shoulder. “Shift and follow. Whatever the reason for you to be out here alone, our clan are not heathens, and they will not turn you away. And don’t fucking shift back until you are in the barn, and I can give you some fucking pants.”

He squeezes the horse with his thighs, and we take off at a steady gait. I peer back just as Lor shifts back to his beautiful gray wolf and chases us down.

# Chapter Three

## Several years later...

### Aston

“Are you fucking hard?”

There was a time when saying that would have shamed him into letting go. Not anymore. Now I hear the grin on his voice as Lor says, “Why, do you like it?” —and grinds himself deeper against my ass.

We are sparring in the practice arena. This usually involves him kicking my ass and finding many and varied ways to slam me into the mat... which has led to my current predicament of being face down against the straw mat with Lor sprawled on top of me. Shifters are heavy bastards, and Lor is fucking big, even among their kind.

“I like girls, asshole,” I grunt, gasping for breath.

“I like girl’s assholes, too.”

I snort a laugh. He is such a dick.

He is also my best friend.

“But I like their pussies more,” he growls against my ear.

I know he does. I’ve seen him with enough. Lor is insatiable when it comes to rutting. He can go through three lasses in a night, leaving every one of them limp, sated puddles, while he is still fucking perky and ready to go again.

Having risen through the ranks of the army together, we now have the privilege of a shared room, which means I’m all too well acquainted with Lor and his many conquests.

Fuck! Don’t think about that. Don’t think about his massive fucking dick or how it feels wedged against my ass crack. Don’t think about his weight pinning me down. Don’t



think about the fact that he's the only bastard who can. Don't think about his insane stamina.

Definitely don't think about how he looks with a lass beneath him and his powerful hips and ass flexing as he pistons into her, growling as she moans and comes a-fucking-part.

Too late. My cock flexes painfully against the mat.

"Shit!" I try to buck him off. It doesn't work; it just gives him a fresh opportunity to crush me against the practice mat and assert his dominance over me.

He chuckles, smacks my forehead into the mat, and heaves himself off me.

I take a breath. Push up and get to my feet. "Enough," I mutter, waving him off and stalking over to where we have left our shirts.

Lor is two years younger than me. There was a time when I was the one bettering him. Then he had a growth spurt, discovered rutting in all its variety, and came into himself. I don't mind losing to Lor. No men nor shifters here can best him in unarmed combat—he doesn't even need to shift. When he does shift during battle, it's pretty much game over for anyone or anything in his way. On the few occasions I take him down during training, I feel like a fucking king, and you can hear a cheer go up.

Someone calls out to him in question, and he stalks off to speak to them. I wash up in the cold shower before returning to our shared room. It is a simple space, with two beds against the walls and room enough for our weapons and armor, and the basic necessities. I pour myself some water and take a deep drink just as Lor enters the room.

He hasn't bothered with a shirt after his shower. He hasn't even done his fucking pants up properly, I realize. His firm, muscular upper body is a little damp, as is his hair that curls down to his broad shoulders.

There is no lass with him. I was half expecting it. He's always particularly lusty after beating me to a pulp during

training.

He stalks over to me... right over to me, until we're mere inches apart. He has no concept of personal space... Taking the cup from me, he takes a drink.

“You are such a dick.”

He raises a brow.

Yeah, we're both as bad as each other.

A knock sounds on the open door, and the young lad who runs errands for the blacksmith enters to collect any weaponry or armor that needs repair.

I start to move away. Lor puts his hand on the back of my neck. I still. The lad stammers something about armor, blushing as his eyes ping back and forth between us before resting on the hand Lor has at the back of my neck.

I want to roll my eyes. The lad would probably drop to his knees at no more than a flick of Lor's wrist. It is not only the lasses who covet the big shifter. Pretty much anything sentient with a pulse gets sucked into his orbit, with starry eyes. They would sell their souls to get their hands on him and his dick in them any way he chooses.

“It's over there, lad.” Lor indicates his armor, which has some damage from our last patrol.

The lad quickly collects the items before hurrying back out the door.

It clicks shut on us, enclosing us together.

Lor's face swings my way when I fidget, and then my breath catches as he glances down to where my cock is flexing behind my leather pants, leaking pre-cum like a fucking tap. He runs his fingers absently over his stubbly jaw. “Do you want to share a lass?” he asks, eyes rising slowly to meet mine.

Where the fuck he gets all these lasses from in a military base is a mystery to me, but it's like he has an endless queue just waiting in the wings to call on.

His lips tug up like he reads my damn mind. “Derek is rutting one of the healer lasses next door, but we both know once is his rutting limit.”

I shake my head. Nope, I’m definitely not in the mood for one of Derek’s cast-offs.

His hand tightens and then releases my neck. “Good. I’m feeling particularly savage tonight, and they can’t always take it how I need.”

Well, fuck. We are doing this. How it will play out tonight will be determined by the way that we each approach it. I only know we have been here many times, and I have enjoyed every single fucking one.

The door is shut. It is late. We ought to be eating supper. But the air between us takes on an electric feel that sets every hair on my body rising and my dick thumping for release from my pants. Being the subject of Lor’s interest is a heady thing.

I’m not a passenger in this. Sometimes, I enjoy provoking the beast, just as, sometimes, when he takes me under him on the practice pit, I wish no other fucker was there, and he would rip my damn pants down, liberate that tree stump that hangs between his legs, and fuck me raw.

It’s not a civilized fantasy to have. But I’m not civilized, and neither is he. When I was younger and was still a lad, mooning over a certain lass, I never imagined I’d want to be with a man this way.

And yet, things just happen, don’t they? I am only this way for Lor—I never wanted another man as I do Lor, my best friend, who is sometimes my lover.

With him, I can let go. I don’t need to hide the rough, alpha side of me. I don’t need to be gentle, because there’s nothing I do that he cannot handle. I might not have an inner beast like he does, but there is undoubtedly a beastly side to me, one that has no means of outlet.

Save with him.

My hand encloses the back of his neck, and my lips slam against his. The kiss is aggressive, with tongues and nipping

teeth. I groan as one particularly sharp bite yields the taste of blood. My fingers tighten on his hair. He stands passive, letting me take what I need, yet matching my aggression, the hunger of his own.

It is not always like this between us. Sometimes, we share a lass. Sometimes, one of us strokes one out while watching the other rut a lass.

As I draw my lips back, and we stare at one another, sharing gusty breaths, I wonder why I've never felt jealous with Lor.

Maybe this is a fleeting arrangement and, one day, circumstances will lead us down different paths. He is a shifter. I'm a barbarian. I will die in battle, or I will return home.

He may return to the Baxter clan with me and take a mate there like I do. Or maybe he will find a different home.

It dawns upon me just how deep my feelings for him are. They crept up upon me over time. We fight together. He has saved my life many times, just as I have saved his. There's a bond between us that is unmistakably a form of love.

Part of me is sad that what we share might one day end, yet I'm not the kind of man who wallows in maybes and tomorrows when I have something good in front of me.

My hand drops away just as he reaches to enclose my throat. With a jerk, he slams me back against the wall beside the door.

Fuck! That move has my cock flexing and my balls trying to rise—I groan.

He licks his lips, his other hand on my belt, tugging it away and dropping it to the floor with a clatter. He pulls impatiently on my pants, shoving them down only far enough for him to reach in and grab my cock. His touch is bold in the way a lass's never is. A strong, firm stroke that goes from root to tip and has me fighting the need to fucking come.

He leans forward, his lips inches from mine, as he handles me with yet more rough strokes.

I'm fucking panting. My cock is engorged with blood. If I lived forever, I would never have enough of him, of this.

"Suck me," I say. "I want you to. I want you on your knees choking on my cock."

"Do you, now?" His voice is a purr.

I can be demanding. I don't always get what I want. I *like* that I do not always get what I want.

He must feel indulgent today, for the big alpha drops to his knees. I slam my head back against the wall, and a deep rumble emanates from my chest as he points my cock head toward his mouth, opens, and swallows me down his throat.

Gods, he's so fucking good at this—hot, wet mouth, the swipe of his tongue as he works magic along the length of my rod. I can't hold back, and I don't want to. He sucks me deep into his throat no more than a dozen times before I fist his hair and shoot a heavy load down his throat. He swallows around me, throat working to take all I give. Then he draws his fist upward, dragging his thumb along the underside of my sticky cock all the way to the tip, squeezing out the last heady gush of cum.

I heave a deep breath.

"Feeling better now?" he asks, smirking.

My cock bobs again as he strokes it. I'm too fucking sensitive, and I try to peel him off.

His fingers tighten, and my cock jerks again.

"Fuck!"

"Exactly," he says, rising from his knees. "It is time we fucked." Releasing my cock, he closes his fingers around my throat and shoves me toward the bed.

"Strip and on your knees."

I don't hesitate. My pants are still around my fucking thighs, but I kick them off and drop to the floor to the side of my bed. I don't look back lest I embarrass myself and come again, but I hear the drawer open and close beside me. The

wet, sticky noises that follow tell me he's lubing up his cock. There's a clatter beside me as he puts the bottle of oil on the bedside table.

One hand encloses the back of my neck to shove my face into the bed before two, sopping oil-covered fingers are driven into my ass.

I jerk. Gods, that feels so fucking good.

"Let's see how long you can last." He twists his fingers, finding that magic fucking spot that has me twitching with need, bringing my spent cock back to life. His thrusting fingers make my eyes cross every time they pass over that spot until I'm grunting and shoving back for more.

He takes his fingers away, just as I'm about to fucking come, and lines up his cock. There's that delicious stretch as the head pops inside. He chuckles. It has a dark, filthy edge. I fucking love that sound. "This is going to be rough and fast," he says. "Try not to come before I say."

He slams in. I strain to bear his savage penetration, fingers fisting the bedding as the stretch leaves me hanging on the cusp of pleasure and pain.

"Fuck you feel good," he says. "This tight ass was meant to take my cock. I'm going to fill you up."

And there he fucks me, slamming into me with deep, hefty thrusts that bang the bed frame against the wall and shove my painfully swollen cock against the bed.

It's too much. I can never get enough. As the head of his cock works over that sensitive spot with every thrust, I court madness.

I tell myself I can last. I think of dead bodies, of stock movement, of anything and everything except his cock pounding me and the white-hot bliss of being dominated, of being taken, of being ravaged, of being his.

I growl, my balls rise, my ass flutters and contracts into dark blissful waves that compel me to ejaculate all over the floor.

“Impatient bastard,” he growls before he unleashes his full force on me. Our flesh slaps together in a brutal coupling. All I can do is hold on to the bed and take every wicked stroke. I feel my ass fluttering around him, and the rush tells me he is close and tips me into yet another shattering climax as my balls reach to eject a final heady gush of cum.

He slams and holds deep, and his iron-hard dick flexes inside me as he fills me with a hot gush.

The air is filled with the sounds of ragged breathing as we both come down.

“Gods, I needed that,” he mutters.

I chuckle. “I have made a fucking mess all over the floor.”

“Stop whining,” he says. “Or I will make you lick it up.”

“Don’t,” I grunt. Is he joking? Why does his taunt make my ass clench and my spent dick jerk?

He chuckles as he pulls out. I’m not fucking ready for it, and I twitch and grunt.

“Fuck!”

He slaps my ass and staggers up. I hear him cleaning up. I think about moving. I should move.... I need to move. Sighing, I lean up. I’ve come all over the floor, the side of the bed... There is even some splattered over my pants, which are not even that close.

I glance back. His cock is clean and bobs with renewed interest as we share a look.

He grins.

“You are a savage bastard.”

He smirks and shrugs. “So I have been told.”

# Chapter Four



## Freya

Two weeks after I turned twenty, as we spent winter in the city, news arrived via a courier—a letter with a military seal, informing my mother and me that a husband and father was lost. A war hero, he died in battle, in lands far away.

And with that letter, everything changed.

I remember the servants bustling around and my mother holding me as we succumbed to our joint grief.

For a time, I wallowed in denial. Convinced another letter would come and tell us it was all a terrible mistake.

It wasn't.

He is really gone.

As shock has transitioned into the sorrow and acceptance stages of grief, other troubles have come for us. The king, his coffers stretched thin by war, has no money to spare. The final wages owed to my father are the limits of what he provides. Not only do we lose someone dearly beloved, but now we find ourselves in a situation where the money will soon run out.

A storm brings a fresh problem in the form of damage to the roof of the pretty house with the princess tower. My mother, practical even in her grief, is forced to sell the estate, deciding that the townhouse is better suited to our budget. Only no one wants to invest and live so close to the barbarian clans. The estate is sold for a fraction of its worth, stripped of all valuables, and the land turned over to grazing for sheep.

Papa always planned to retire there and dedicate time to wine-making once his soldering days were over.

But now his dream, like him, is forever gone.

I miss my former home with the princess turret and the innocent version of me who lived there.

I miss my best friend, Dara.

I miss the rustic beauty of the Baxter clan tucked away in the foothills of the mountain with the brambles running up the front porches and sheep in the paddocks.

I miss my papa, the big alpha with his purr, the cuddles on his lap, the smile that would light his face when he wrapped his strong arms around my mother and me.

When I sleep at night, I still see him in our former home, visiting me as I played as a child in the princess turret—knocking politely on the door and asking permission to come in. I know I shall never see my father or the home again except in my dreams. The memory represents a simpler time without the sorrow that feels too large for my small body to contain.

When I wake up, it is to the reality of life missing a vital piece.

Yet life continues, and we find reasons to smile again between those moments when the sadness calls.

Half a year later, an alpha warrior who served under my father arrives at our door, late in the evening.



I see little more, from the top of the stairs, than a glimpse of his uniform before my mother calls him to the drawing room to talk. It is the same uniform my father used to wear. Maybe that is why he seems familiar. Perhaps I only imagine there is something more about him and his scent that lingers in the air.

I think little of it until the next day, when I spot him from the window, his back to me as he works on our carriage.

A servant informs me that my mother is looking for me. I turn away from the alpha standing beside our carriage and the strange prickling sensation his presence manifests, to join my mother in the drawing room.

A leather case lays open on the table before her, with letters spread out.

She is crying.

“What is it?” I go to her side, eyeing the letters, wondering what terrible news they might bring.

Then I see the handwriting, and a cold tingle sweeps up my spine.

“I’m sorry, love,” she says. “I couldn’t open them last night.”

They are the letters we sent to my father, and my fingers tremble as I turn one over in my hand, recognizing the misshapen letters of my younger self’s handwriting.

It is painful to go over them, but as I sit beside my mother and we open them, reading through the news we sent him and which he saved, the process is cathartic. He saved them. I imagine him sitting quietly, on occasion, when he was far away, opening them, re-reading the news we sent, and thinking about us.

“Did the alpha bring them?” I ask. I’m already convinced he must have, given he wore the same uniform my father once did.

“He’s offered to work for us,” my mother says. “He served under your father. Your papa saved his life, and he says he has nowhere to go, having requested discharge from service. The Blighten are being pushed back on many fronts, and many soldiers are returning to their former homes. He said he should feel honored to work here—a payment of food and board is all he seeks.”

I see the softening in her face. I understand that money is tight. The winery and home we sold yielded little in the way of funds, but at least it took away a burden. What we have must last us. There is no money for a dowry. I know my mother is trying to scrape something together, but I’d sooner spend my life as a spinster than use what little we have. Not that the lack of dowry equates to a lack of suitors. Marshal, a young beta lord, had visited me before my father passed and still visits me now.

I don't love him. Don't feel even the slightest spark when he is near. But he is kind, and I know my mother approves of him, thinking he can provide a stable home for me. A part of me recognizes that I need to be practical like my mother has been and that I must accept the future bearing down upon me. Many women who wed for such reasons grow in love with their husbands and have a family and children with whom they can share that love.

Only it is hard, and my heart is not practical, and I still dream of a handsome barbarian lad who grew up to be a man.

"He claims he met you once when you were both children and before he left to take up service with Aston from the Baxter clan."

"Who did?" I shake my head, playing catch up with what she said.

"The young alpha soldier who brought your father's letters."

I fumble the letter and scramble to pick it from the floor, blushing furiously. "W-what is his name?"

"Lor," she says, smiling as she reverently folds the letter in her hand and puts it on the table, oblivious to my heightened state. "That's an unusual name, don't you think? He has given no indication, but I think he might be a shifter. His eyes seem unnatural... a little too bright, like shifters are."

"How long is he staying?"

"He didn't mention," my mother says. "But he was very insistent he would stay until such a time as we didn't need him."

My heart pounds in my chest, and my breathing is unsteady. Lor is here.

Why is Lor here?

He gave my mother reasons, noble ones, but a part of me wants to hope it might mean something more... and that makes no sense when, as he pointed out, we have met exactly once.

Also, I am virtually betrothed and should be ashamed of my wayward thoughts. My blush deepens as I remember what I saw that fateful day in the forest. I really should be ashamed of myself, given we were only thirteen then. I'm sure looking at a boy there is highly inappropriate, and thinking about it again many years later, equally so.

*He did not look so much like a boy,* the little voice inside coaches me.

Goodness, I need to think about something else.

"I need a little fresh air," I say. Rising from my seat before my mother can respond, I leave the room.

I don't know where I'm going until I find myself in the rear courtyard, approaching the carriage. I scent him even before I see him. Is it something to do with shifters that they smell so nice? My nose twitches.

I should not be here.

I don't know why I am here.

Then Lor rises to his full height from where he is bent over, rubbing oily hands on a rag, and fixes me with a stern glare, and I know exactly why I'm here. Lor is head and shoulders taller than me, and his chest is easily twice as broad as mine. His hands, which move over the rag as he cleans them of oil, are large and capable-looking.

A penniless shifter and former soldier without work is not a practical source of romantic interest. Nor should I be wallowing in his connection to Aston, who, as a barbarian, is also not practical source of romantic interest.

The last time I saw Aston was nearly two years ago when he paid a brief visit to his family. I was nineteen at the time, awkward and painfully shy. I remember Dara mentioning how all the young lasses in the clan swooned and batted their lashes at the handsome young alpha. He seemed impossibly commanding and worldly to me. I turned beet red and could barely stammer a word.

He's probably mated to two lasses by now.

“Can I help you, little one?” Lor asks in a deep, rumbling voice.

Little one? Well, I dare say everyone is little compared to him, for Lor is unquestionably huge... and stern-looking with his dark brows pulled together and bright eyes pinning me where I stand.

And now my mind decides to flood my memory with images of his cock, which is likewise huge.

Was huge.

I swallow thickly. I really hope it has not grown proportionally to the rest of him. He will surely kill the poor lass he tries to rut with that.

She would doubtless die happy with an expression of bliss upon her face. “I was thinking of going out in my carriage.” This is a bold lie, but the best I can come up with under the pressure of the moment.

He grunts and turns back to his work. Only now do I notice one wheel is completely off, and he is doing something to the spring.

“I guess I’m not going for a carriage ride today,” I say, a little cross that he is ignoring me and going back to his work while I’m a mess of conflicted emotions and near swooning from his presence and scent. I don’t even care that he is not even a sensible source of lustful interest. Let him break me on his thick cock... My cheeks heat to a blaze. At least while he is ignoring me, he does not see.

“I guess you’re not.”

“I’ll go back inside then.”

“Sounds like a good idea,” he rumbles, not bothering to glance up.

I huff a breath, consider ordering him to put the wheel back this instant, and finally about-face and stalk off.



## Lor

“I’m here to see Freya,” the pompous lord announces. His voice is high and nasal, and I already want to punch the prick.

He holds out the reins of his chestnut stallion to me like I’m a stableman... which I suppose I am, given I’m here to offer service in any way I can.

I grunt and wipe my hands off the rag while staring down at him.

“What’s your business with Freya?”

His eyes widen. He’s not used to answering to the likes of me—too bad. I recognize all the signs of an interested male, and who wouldn’t be interested in the sweet omega wannabe who spent our entire conversation undressing me with her eyes?

I smirk.

I fear it comes out predatory when the beta lordling takes an unsteady step back before he remembers he’s a lord, and I’m a nobody, and puffs up his small chest.

“None of your business. But if it were, I’d say Freya will soon be my wife, and that I have a good mind to have you flogged for your impertinence.”

“Try it,” I bite out. I step up to him, fighting a smile when he nearly pisses himself. Collecting the reins from his limp fingers, I click my tongue and walk the horse forward so I can stable it. The lordly prick hasn’t moved, and the horse barges into him as it surges forward.

“The young miss was inside last I saw,” I call over my shoulder. “If I find out your hands have been on her in ways inappropriate, I’ll break your fingers one by fucking one.”

I hear him splutter before his booted feet move off, ringing against the flagstones as he makes his way to the house.

“You got the short straw with that pompous prick as your master,” I tell his fine horse, who snorts and nudges my palm.  
“What say we go ahead and break his fingers just to be safe?”



# Chapter Five

## Freya

It's not long before I realize Lor is very bossy, at times domineering, and unwaveringly stern.

“Where are you going, little one?”

I turn, a familiar tightening in my core even as I feel cross. I'm the lady of the house and do not need to answer to him. Further, it is none of his business.

“It is none of your—oh!”

He takes me by the hand, which is proprietary and highly inappropriate, and walks me to the hall closet.

“Stay.”

I stay, confused by my compliance; angry with myself, but also curious, as he rummages within. Collecting my cloak, he settles it over my shoulder while I'm still gaping before deftly tying the first clasp.

I blush, not knowing where to look.

I end up looking at his impossibly broad chest while trying not to breathe in his scent and fighting the notion that I am a querulous child in need of a firm hand... a firm hand preferably applied to my bottom.

He has been here a matter of weeks and has already lit a fire beneath my curiosity by mentioning more than once that my bottom suffers from the need to feel a firm, corrective hand.

Lor is coarse, borderline rude, and has no filter on the words that spill from his mouth. I don't readily know why I should covet his hand on my bottom, chastising me for whatever minor misdeed I have committed, yet I do.

My legs twitch together to ease the sudden ache as my pussy performs a slow needy clench.

“Stop wriggling, lass.”

“I can put my own cloak on,” I say a little waspishly. His scent is all up in my nose. I really don’t appreciate noticing how nice it is when I’m vexed with him.

His growl warns me that I have ventured over an invisible ‘Lor’ line. I glance up to find him scowling down at me. “I swear you take to bratting just to test me. My palm is itching. Don’t make me correct you here where anyone might walk past and see me lifting your skirt and turning your bottom red.”

I don’t blink for the longest time as my body goes up in flames; the impasse is finally broken when he steps back and, without evident shame, adjusts the thick bulge tenting his leather pants.

My eyes bug in my head. My mouth opens and closes, and not a peep comes out.

“How did you survive this long?” he mutters as though to himself.

Somehow, we make it out the door, where the fresh air acts like a slap to the face, rousing me from the lusty stupor his mere presence delivers.

We go to the market. I buy the few supplies I need. We return home. During all this time, Lor does not speak a single word. He does, however, glare and occasionally growl at any man who so much as glances my way.

It is a strained outing, and I’m relieved when we have returned home, for it means I will be able to take the chance to go to my room and find some privacy to ease the growing needy ache... which is when Marshal arrives.

Only when I see the two men side by side do I realize just how imposing Lor is and how not Marshal is by contrast.

“Does the beast need to accompany you everywhere?” Marshal sneers at Lor, while sliding his arm around my waist. He has never touched me like this before, and I am shocked.

“Remember what I said,” Lor says, pinning Marshal with a look.

Marshal’s hand drops away.

Lor pivots and strides off.

Marshal orders tea... Like he is the lord here and not merely a guest.

As soon as the servants have gone and my mother arrives to join us, he drops his news. “I should like to formalize our betrothal,” he announces, taking my hand and beaming. “My father has agreed that the lack of dowry, while unorthodox, is acceptable.”

“That is... magnanimous of him,” my mother says diplomatically, her eyes on me. I did not miss her slight wince at the mention of dowry. Perhaps she senses I’m not all in, where Marshal is concerned. We talked about it only yesterday, and she made it clear I should not feel compelled to marry the man.

The truth is I do.

“When were you thinking of?” She is looking at me, not Marshal, her eyes searching mine, seeking evidence that I want this, that I am all in.

“As soon as possible,” Marshal says brightly.



I am trapped in a web of my own making.

I tell myself it is the right and practical thing to do, and then I cry myself to sleep.

Worse, I feel like some kind of hussy to be lusting after Lor when I thought myself to love Aston to the exclusion of all others. It is for the best that I am to marry Marshal swiftly for my heart is a mess.

The matter is taken out of my hands. Marshal visits every day. The web binds ever tighter around me as the plans for the

wedding proceed.

I miss my former home at Penley with the princess tower.

I miss my friend, Dara.

I miss the pretty village belonging to the Baxter clan and harbor a stupid notion that if only I could see Aston again, he might liberate me from this mess.

# Chapter Six

## Freya

“I warned you, lass.”

I gulp and try to remind myself that Lor works for us, and I don’t answer to him, but he is particularly stern-looking as he takes me by the hand, and I don’t make a peep.

Why don’t I make a peep?

I think some of my docility is due to the hand-holding, which I admit feels a flutter-in-the-belly kind of nice.

“*Make sure Lor goes with you to the market,*” my mother said when I was getting ready to leave. Like I can no longer go anywhere without the alpha’s brooding shadow. Well, there will be words about his high-handedness when we get home—

“Mind if I use your stockroom? Got a brat in need of correction.”

I blink a few times as my temper rises from mild irritation to boiling point. “How dare—”

“Quiet, lass. You are in enough trouble.”

I snap my mouth shut as the gray-haired greengrocer, whose stall we were passing, chuckles and waves us to proceed like this is a perfectly normal request.

Is this a normal request? How many lasses have been taken into this stockroom for correction?

I don’t have time to worry about this, for I’m inside the room—which definitely looks nothing more sinister than a storage place for fruit and vegetables—and tossed face down over Lor’s lap.

I wriggle and thrash. His big hand connects with my ass.

“Ow!”

“Huff, that did not even hurt,” he mutters, flipping up my skirts and applying his palm to my ass which is now shielded by nothing more than my silk panties.

“Oh!!!”

*Spank! Spank! Spank!*

“What the fuck were you thinking, leaving the house on your own?”

I wail.

*Spank! Spank! Spank!*

“Your mother was beside herself when she realized you had gone, and I was not with you.”

*Spank! Spank! Spank!*

“I’m sorry!”

*Spank! Spank! Spank!*

“You are not sorry. You are only sorry that you have been caught!”

He’s not entirely wrong. He is also not entirely right. As my bottom burns under his stern chastisement, it’s hard to hold onto pretenses. My wedding and Marshal are a cloud looming over me, and I just wanted to forget and pretend for a little longer and maybe prove to myself that the flutter low in my belly every time I catch a glimpse of Lor is not what I think.

I am sorry that I upset my mother, who deserves better from me.

I am not sorry that Lor caught me, nor even that he spanks me.

As a sob bursts from my chest, I know I’m not crying about the spanking, which, while firm and generating more sting than I expected, is of little consequence besides the ache inside my heart.

The swats stop. He turns me over and presses my cheek against his chest. “There, little one. It is over now.” His deep,



rumbly purr is like a balm over the terrible ache, one that soothes yet cannot hope to completely take it away.

“I’m sorry,” I mumble. “That was foolish and thoughtless of me.”

“It’s not me as you need to apologize to. Two young lasses were snatched from the market last week. Your poor mother was shaken when she realized you had left alone.”

I feel twice as bad now. “Please, let’s just go home.”

When I look up, I see something on his face that I can’t readily decipher. I think he might kiss me... I hold my breath, certain, anticipating, and then he nods and sets me to my feet.

My face is hot and ravaged by tears, and my bottom stings.

I feel terrible for worrying my mother and am anxious to be home.

But, for reasons I cannot readily understand, the place between my legs is hot, needy, and tingling.

## Lor

After the spanking, the lass is subdued as I escort her home and doesn't even offer even a token complaint about me holding her hand. She is also needy and keeps sneaking glances at me under her lashes.

I should not have spanked her.

But fuck it, correcting her felt right even if I must suffer a painful erection for the rest of the fucking day.

But when we return home, it is to find that lordly prick Marshal waiting for Freya yet again. Does the pompous bastard not have any business to attend?

Freya hurries off to wash her face and make herself presentable.

I'm a nosy bastard, so I find reasons to hang around the house. Only to see Freya leaving the drawing room in tears a short time later.

The fuck did he do to her? If her mother wasn't in the room, I'd already have charged in there and thumped the bastard.

Seeing the maid hurrying with a tea tray, I waylay her. She hates Marshal too, after he scolded her for cold tea the last time he visited. Asking her to leave the door open a crack after she delivers the tray, so I can listen in, meets with her swift approval.

"I don't know what he said to the young miss, but she left in tears." There is no mistaking the censure in her voice.

I nod. "Leave it to me."

"Freya only wants to visit her friend for the last time," I hear Mrs. Bramleigh saying as I loiter outside the door.

The plans for the wedding have been progressing post-haste. It is all I can do not to take the skinny fuck aside and

strangle him to get it over with. That I have no practical means of disposing of the body is the only thing holding me back.

He is pompous, a prick, and full of his own importance. He will crush every ounce of joy in Freya's heart before the first baby arrives.

"She does not need barbarian friends," Marshal says. There is no mistaking the sneer in his voice. He'd piss himself if Aston turned up here.

I grin, playing out the alluring fantasy in my mind where Aston turns up unannounced and puts a thumping on the prick. At least there would be two of us to help dispose of the body... It's not a well thought out fantasy, for the city guards would take one look at Aston and turn him away.

Having heard enough, I stalk off and busy myself in the stable.

Barbarians have a certain reputation, and many outsiders look down on their ways. It is different at the battlefield where we embrace the soldiering life, one that brings men of all kinds together with a common goal, and where rank or previous status means fuck all when you're fighting for your life against the Blighten. What use is having a father with high standing when an orc is coming at you with an ax? Nor does it mean you are a capable fighter just because you hail from a barbarian clan.

I've seen weak barbarians, just as I've seen weak lordlings and strong versions of both.

Yet one becomes adept at taking the measure of a man when one must trust them to have his back. I do not trust the weaselly lord who can't wait to get underneath Freya's skirts with his small prick.

I busy myself in the stables. And soon enough, he arrives, demanding his horse. I nod. "I've got something to show you," I say as casually as I can muster.

He gives me a withering look, but he follows me. If he knew how much I wanted to rip off his cock and feed it to him, he would not be so trusting.

I roll out my shoulders and try to trap down the image. I'm a big man. My wolf is bigger still. But I don't have leave to let that side out often, and not here in the city. I'm definitely not a man who considers himself a bully, prying on someone weaker, but I have no issue correcting stuffy lordlings who snatch the last dreams from pretty lasses for no reason other than to exert their small power over them.

I take him by the throat and pin him up against a stable door.

His face turns red. "Put me down, savage!"

I tighten my fingers around his throat as his feet kick where they hang a foot from the floor. "If the lass wants to visit her childhood friend for the last time, she will visit her friend for the last time."

"Freya is to be my wife soon! What business is it of yours?!"

"I'm making it my business." I drop him. He staggers back and bangs his head against the wall. I help straighten out the collar of his smart suit while fixing him with a look. He tries to bat my hands away. I tighten my grip.

"Don't even think about sending a couple of thugs around to thump me."

His eyes widen.

I grin and get my face right up in his.

"I'll kill them if you do. Don't mistake me for a fool. It's no hardship for you to let the lass see her friend. Think of it as being charitable." I pat down his scuffed-up lapel and tap his cheek. "The lass and her mother are destitute save for this house. You don't need to offer her much to make her happy. Happen she will be sucking on your tiny prick enthusiastically for this small kindness you offer."

His nostrils flare.

I should not have put that thought in the bastard's head.

"I will get your horse ready while you let the lass and her mother know you've had a change of heart."

I step aside. He glares at me, seething. Not that I could give a fuck. He will toe the line, or we shall have more than a chat.

I ready his horse, half expecting him to cause a ruckus or send for the city guards. I have a few friends among them, men I fought alongside during the war. He is welcome to give my arrest a go.

The next time he emerges from the house, Freya is at his side, pink-cheeked and smiling.

“Oh, thank you for understanding,” she says. I bite back a growl seeing her arm through his, but the joy on her face is a reward enough.

Marshal sends me a shifty look as he pats her hand. “Perhaps I should come with you?”

“No need,” I interject, walking his horse over and getting into his personal space. “I’ll accompany the lass. Make sure she gets back to you safely. Those barbarians are a strange lot. They don’t take to strangers. Wouldn’t want you run into trouble.”

Freya looks like she might protest on their behalf. “Don’t mind it, lass. I’ll see that you make your journey without incident. Snow is coming, and the road won’t be open for much longer. We should make that trip sooner rather than later.”

“Oh, that’s a good idea, thank you.” She smiles brightly until she cops a glare from Marshal the prick. Her smile falters before she plasters it back on and leans in to kiss her betrothed on the cheek.

My knuckles turn white around the horse’s reins. It’s all I can do not to peel him off and put my fist down his throat.

I don’t. That would be a non-civilized thing to do, and my friendship with the city guards will only get me so far.

# Chapter Seven

## Freya

“Have another slice of cake,” Dara says, pushing a freshly laden plate toward me across the table.

I have already eaten one piece, but there is always room for more where her mother’s baking is concerned. A smile brightens my face. Dara has been my best friend since we were little, from the time of our fateful meeting in the woods. Despite their different dress and fearsome reputations, barbarians are warm, friendly people with good values.

I’ve no idea what had gotten into Lor saying they didn’t take well to strangers. They are the most welcoming people I know.

Unless you wrong them. Wronging a barbarian is a very bad idea.

And now that I think about it, I cannot imagine them taking well to Marshal. I can just picture him having tea and cake with a sour expression on his face. It would have ruined the trip. I admit Lor was sensible in warding Marshal from joining us.

I savor my next bite of cake. Life is so different in the city, and that is my life now. Dara knows this... and my partiality to her mother’s baking. She is a sweet young woman full of fun and mischief, like I used to be. It has been some time since I last visited. With winter closing in, and the wedding looming, I wonder if I shall visit again.

The room is warm and cheery, but I feel cold thinking about never being here again. My wedding does not exactly fill me with cheer either. I had a stupid notion that Aston might be here, that he might see me and remember that he made a vow to marry me.

So, he was eight at the time, and it was not exactly a vow. My heart still wants to linger in a fool’s notion that there is an

escape route from this future bearing down upon me.

Also, he is an alpha, and they don't marry, they mate.

I shouldn't mind being mated, missing a fancy wedding that I do not even want, instead being claimed, because that is what a barbarian does. They woo their intended, bringing her gifts and taking her for walks, even lavishing her body with carnal attention if she is receptive.

"Have you considered any suitors yet?" Dara asks casually, as she pours me fresh tea.

"I don't want to think about suitors." I haven't told her about the wedding. If I mention it, then it will be real, and I can't bring myself to burst the perfect moment or even the smaller dream where I am free to visit Dara again. A part of my soul was forever lost when my mother sold the old, rambling home with the princess tower.

And a part of me will forever be here, in this pretty village with these warm people who live simple yet joyful lives.

"But you're a woman now," Dara points out. "You must think about such things, especially with" —she pauses, her eyes softening with sensitivity as they meet mine— "your family situation."

I swallow the lump of honey cake that has turned dust dry in my mouth. "We don't have any money for a dowry," I blurt out, before I can think better about how I'm opening the door to the painful and unavoidable future.

Her lips form a little O before her hand reaches across the table and squeezes mine. "Your people have strange ways," she says. "No clansman expects his wife or mate to come with money. It is his duty to provide a suitable home for her, ready for when they have their first babe. It sounds like nonsense to me, but I understand it's your way. Has no man shown interest?"

Before my father died, I had suitors aplenty, even though my dowry was small. A small dowry is assuredly better than none at all. I shake my head, hating that I lie to my best friend,



yet I fear I might break down in tears if I utter Marshal's name.

Her eyes narrow. "Well, that is bollocks."

I choke out a laugh. "Dara! Have you been listening in on your brother again?"

My chest squeezes even as I smile. I promised myself I wouldn't ask about Aston. There is no chance I can hide my feelings if she tells me he is mated.

"What?" Her lips tug up. Then she shrugs, and her smile fades. "I think bollocks is perfectly appropriate and fitting for this nonsense. Aston said as the king owes your family. Your father fought for him for years—a decorated hero. And yet your family was forced to leave your home and there is not enough money for you to find a husband... Even though I think it's also bollocks that these weak Hydornian men expect their women to come with funds."

I lose all my appetite for the delicious cake. The conversation is taking a dangerous turn, one I promised myself I would avoid.

"I'm sorry," she says. "That was insensitive of me. Only I'm appalled by your treatment. I overheard Aston speaking to Papa. He said it was bollocks, and our father did not disagree with him. Meanwhile, a bard came through a week ago, saying how your king is throwing lavish parties to celebrate the turn in the war and not caring that the families of those who once served him loyally, who fought battles for him and died, are forced to sell cherished homes because they can't afford to repair the roof."

"I didn't realize you knew about that," I say quietly.

"Papa offered to send one of our builders around to repair it, but your mother turned him away. You know my mama considers yours a friend."

"She does not like charity," I say. The reality is that we could not afford the upkeep either way.

"Nobody does," Dara agrees. "But we could have helped. The offer came from a place of love and concern."

“The roof was just one of many problems.” My eyes turn to the left, where the first flurry of snowflakes is coming down beyond the window. We are closing in on winter. Lor spoke true when he said the snow would soon arrive making the road between the city and the clan close, which makes me curious as to why something seemed to come up every day such that it took nearly two weeks before he could bring me.

“It looks like the snow is finally coming,” Dara says, following my line of sight.

I don’t want the day to be over, yet I sense it already is. “You’re right. I should leave in case it settles.”

I rise from my seat. As does Dara, coming around to hug me. I squeeze her just as fiercely. She has been a big part of my life. I always imagined some impossible future where we might be forever friends. Yet even without us moving away, we had different paths before us. Her father is a skilled stone mason, and her family is highly regarded. I know she has many offers of companionship... and is not innocent like me, for young clan women yet to choose a mate are free to sample many. Although she has not shared full intimacy, she has enjoyed pleasure, and I’ve listened to her many tales with unbridled interest.

A terse knock sounds before the door opens. “Time to go,” Lor announces like he is my master and not a man who works for my mother.

Dara bites her lip and shares a look with me. “We best not antagonize the beast.”

Lor grunts and narrows his eyes. The alpha is not blessed with grace or charm. Something must be wrong with me that his uncivilized demeanor and brooding presence bring a flutter low in my belly.

He is also a barbarian and a shifter, although not of the Baxter clan... perhaps they are less civilized where he hails from.

“We were just coming,” Dara says, slipping her arm through mine and leading me toward the towering alpha.

“Good,” Lor says, an ever-present scowl in place. He turns and stalks away.

His delicious scent lingers, one that Dara appears oblivious to. My nose twitches, and a strange lethargy wraps me up like a warm blanket.

“Are you sure you’re not an omega in hiding?” Dara says with a smirk. “You’ve near swooned, and your nose was twitching like a rabbit finding fresh clover to feast on.”

The word *feast* takes my wayward thoughts in highly inappropriate directions, courtesy of the many tales Dara filled my mind with regarding alphas and the wicked things they like to do. Lor has done an admirable job of adding a face to those fantasies over the last couple of months while he has been in service to my mother. “The man is too full of himself and presumptuous,” I say, trying to steady the telltale rise in my heartbeat. “My mother would send him away, except he works for us for free.”

My mother thinks Lor is wonderful. I feel shame in my harsh words and further shame of our situation anew. Dara’s face softens.

“Oh, love,” she says, squeezing me in another hug. “He is a little rough around the edges. He hails from a distant clan razed by an orc attack.”

“I never realized.” I feel insensitive for never asking him now.

“Thank the Goddess the green bastards have been pushed back now. He wandered for a long time before he came here.” Her expression turns wry. “Papa said they were all surly behemoths where Lor comes from. Also, he’s an alpha, and they do not make good handymen regardless of where they are from. Aston mentioned that your father saved Lor’s life, and it’s surely a blessing that he pays this debt in helping however he can.”

“We are lucky to have him, even if he is a little abrasive.”

Dara laughs and, slipping her arm through mine again, walks me to the door. “He is also very handsome.”

“And a barbarian shifter,” I point out. As we reach the front door, Dara hands me a round slab encased in a wax cloth—honey cake, I’m guessing. One I may share with my mother tonight. It will be sure to cheer her up.

I collect my cloak from the hook behind the door and rest it over my forearm.

“Well,” she says, smirking. “There is that. You know, I always dreamed you would marry Aston one day so we might be friends forever. He has left the army service and intends to make the clan his home.”

“Aston?” I nearly swallow my tongue as an involuntary shiver races through my body at the mention of the handsome alpha who has starred in many of my dreams. Only it feels like every time I see him, he has changed, and we have grown farther apart from the children we once were and who played together. “Is he here?”

“Out seeing to some business,” she says. “But I’m sure he will be here next time you visit.”

Next time. There will not be a next time.

He is probably visiting another clan... or a lass, who is doubtless swooning and batting their lashes at the handsome alpha. What might have happened if he stayed last time?

Then I smile because our adventures are part of me, and no wedding to a stuffy lord can take that away. “He was wicked and merciless with me as a child. I still have nightmares about that time he put stinging nettles down my gown!”

“He has a mischievous streak,” she admits.

I raise a brow.

“We all knew he would be an alpha even before he revealed. Just as we all thought you would become an omega,” she says. “For you definitely have the look. If you were an omega, it wouldn’t matter that you were poor.”

“If I were an omega, the king would suddenly love my mother and shower her with gold,” I say dryly.

“Well,” she says sourly. “The king ought to do that anyway.”

“For fuck’s sake, get your ass in the damn carriage,” Lor growls.

It’s only now that I realize he is standing, hands on hips glaring at us.

Goodness, has he been listening all this time? My cheeks fill with heat.

Dara only giggles. “Come on, the beast is getting impatient. But he does speak the truth. The sky is dark and heavy. We may well get snowed in if you linger.”

“Oh, I hope not,” I say to cover how enticing that scenario sounds. A whole month, maybe more, trapped with Aston, and where he might feel compelled to woo me with a mind to making me his mate.

Only Aston is away, and I’d be trapped instead with Lor... Which wouldn’t be so bad, either.

“Me too,” she agrees and, leaning in, kisses my cheek. “Do come and visit me again as soon as you can.”

A muttered curse reminds me Lor is waiting. I turn and make my way to the carriage that stands, door open, with the stern alpha beside it. My heated cheeks cool under his censorious glare. Maybe he hates the carriage my mother insists I use—no one uses a carriage in the clans.

As I draw level with him, my feet slow to a stop. The snow is falling faster than I realized, and it settles against his dark hair and winter cloak. An involuntary gasp escapes me as he takes the cake from me and drops it, none too gently, on the carriage seat. Then he takes the cloak from my arm, slips it over my shoulder, and, grasping the collar, tugs. I sway toward him before I can right myself, about to splutter my indignation at his handling, until I realize he is deftly closing the clasp on my cloak.

The feeling of his fingers against my throat sets my pulse pounding. As usual, I don’t know where to look, and as usual my eyes settle on his chest, the familiar broad expanse encased

in a leather jerkin beneath his cloak. His big, capable hands are close to my chin. Goodness, why does his bold touch affect me like this?

His rich scent envelopes me, and a faint sound rumbles in his chest—his purr. I tell myself that it is the shock that renders me docile and has nothing to do with his purr—which I’ve heard betas find annoying—when he lifts the hood and places it carefully over my head, even going so far as to tuck my hair in.

Does his thumb brush against my cheek by accident or on purpose?

My eyes flash up to meet his, only to find the wicked alpha smiling.

“You smell nice,” he rumbles. “Very nice indeed.”

I gulp, certain that he’s teasing me, and lift my chin a little as I glare at him. “I have heard of alphas and their sense of smell.” I indicate the cloth-wrapped package in the carriage. “Perhaps it’s the honey cake?”

His lips tug up in a disarming smirk. “Not the cake, little one,” he says. “It is assuredly you.”

*Little one.* Lor is a big, gruff alpha who more often scowls than smiles, and I’m sure I should find something disagreeable about his liberal use of the term. It is like he weaponizes those two words for, every time he says them, they drive a wedge into the wall around my heart, finding the soft place I thought belonged only to Aston.

And he does use them—often.

*Wrap up warm, little one.*

*Rain is coming, little one. You will need sturdy boots.*

*I will accompany you to the dressmaker, little one, lest some heathen trouble you in the street.*

I thought I loved Aston to the exclusion of all others, but Lor’s stern attentiveness finds all my weak spots and exploits them with ease.

It's only when he takes my elbow to help me into the carriage that I realize I've been staring at him like a fool. The carriage door clacks shut before he rounds to the front. With a click of his tongue and a shake of the reins, we take off into the snow.

A pang of nostalgia hits me hard and fast. I wave at Dara out the window, watching until the trees take the village from my sight for the very last time.

# Chapter Eight



## Lor

She smells good enough to eat.

I want to eat her. I want to throw her down on the snowy ground, lift those pretty silk skirts and make her body contort in rapture as I eat her pussy out.

I want to do a lot of wicked things to the young mistress of the household where I work.

I focus on driving the carriage in the thickening snow along the path. Only, when I get to the fork where I should turn left for the city I instead turn right.

Did she notice? Then I grin. More likely, the lass is distracted by the thick slab of honey cake. She has a sweet tooth. I'm only sorry that her father's death left her family nearly destitute after the king paid them a pittance for his many years of service.

I don't have a lot from my time soldiering, but I have an accomplice, and together we will see that Freya is well provided for. What I do not bring in wealth, we bring in other ways.

The snow is coming down heavily now. Perhaps she didn't notice that I turned right at the fork.

We knew this day was coming and made our plans carefully. By morning, the snow will be too deep for travel, and she will be trapped with us... trapped with two alphas.

Before she leaves the little cottage, which my friend has been busy preparing for her and her heat, she will be mated.

If the Goddess is willing, she will also be bred.



# Freya

I've been distracted for a while, lost in my thoughts as the carriage rocks and sways over the rutted road that leads back to the city. The snow is coming down fast, the fat, fluffy snowflakes falling steadily.

As we bounce over a particularly deep rut, I frown. The road is far from perfect, but that felt a little off.

Beyond the window of the carriage, trees whip past. My frown deepens as I scoot closer to the window. Why are the trees so close? Where on earth are we going?

I pull the window down and peer out. This is not the usual path, which is wider and set away from the tree line. When I glance out the other side of the carriage, I see yet more trees.

The horse is going at an enthusiastic clip that bounces me around in such a way that I'm soon clinging lest I be flung from the seat.

My heart rate elevates. Is it bandits or raiders? Worse, the Blighten? Please let it not be so.

A sense of malaise rises. My prized honey cake slides from the seat and drops to the carriage floor. Outside, snow is already gathering around the bases of trees.

The carriage suddenly swings around in a wide arc, and the old woodcutter's cottage that has long been abandoned comes into view.

The carriage comes to an abrupt stop, nearly throwing me from the seat. My eyes snap to the window, seeing beyond it to the door of the cottage, where a masked figure stands. I swallow down a scream. Tall, imposing, an alpha for certain, wearing the black and royal blue uniform of our soldiers with shiny black boots. A dagger rests at his right hip, and a sword at his left. It ought to comfort me that he is a man who has

been in service, yet everything about this strikes terror into my heart.

My mouth turns dust dry as he strides toward my door.

I fling myself to the other side of the carriage, scrabbling for the door, hearing Lor drop down from the box seat.

Goddess save us! Are they about to fight?

Footsteps approach. Fingers made clumsy with haste, I grapple with the door handle, finally flinging it open as the door behind me opens.

I glance back.

Hands reach for me.

I stumble out and pitch to my knees.

A curse goes up behind me. The coach creaks. I manage a single step before an arm snags my waist. Rich alpha pheromones clog my senses as a wall of firm flesh braces my back.

I scream.

“What the fuck are you doing with her?” That is Lor’s voice, only he sounds more confused than about to run through the bastard who is manhandling me.

I’m not taking any chances. My father taught me a thing or two... I let myself go limp.

“Fuck,” the masked man mutters as, unprepared for my dead weight, I slip through his arms. He comes down over me. Dark blond hair tousled and sprinkled with snow, hazel eyes, and a strong jaw covered in a dark beard. His upper face is hidden behind a black mask.

My chest contracts as his potent pheromones hit me all over again. He seems handsome and young and, for reasons that elude me, this terrifies me even more.

His grin is all teeth as he reaches to pluck me from the ground.

I knee him in the balls.

“Uff!” His grin turns into a grimace, and he crumples to the side.

I have no time to wallow in satisfaction. Scrambling up, I raise my skirts and take off into the snowy forest at a run.

“Gods!” A faint groan comes from behind me. Good, I hope the bastard suffers lasting damage, and if he comes for me, I will kick him again.

Only I don’t get very far before booted steps are gaining. I’m snatched up. I flail and kick out. Lor chuckles before tossing me over his shoulder. He pins my legs tight to his body in a no-nonsense way that denies me the opportunity to kick. I pummel his back, which he steadfastly ignores. His familiar scent is particularly heady in my heightened state.

“What the fuck is wrong with you” —I think Lor is talking to me, until he adds— “that you cannot manage one little girl.”

He’s talking to the other man. The other man whom he appears to know.

“I am not a little girl,” I hiss. In light of my predicament, one might presume me to have other, more pressing, concerns, yet I’m charged by his insult, given I’m twenty-one and virtually a spinster in the eyes of many for not being married yet.

“Lass, your wriggling has given me ample opportunity to verify that you are all woman. It was merely a coin of phrase.”

He marches toward the cottage, passing the masked man who still lies on the ground, cupping his wounded balls.

I smirk at the downed man. His eyes widen at my evident glee.

“Quieten down!” Lor barks. A sharp spank lands upon my ass, charging my temper once again. Ignoring my renewed struggles, he strides for the cottage, booted feet thudding as they hit the steps, and he enters.

Floorboards creak, and I’m greeted by warmth as I’m dropped unceremoniously to my knees before a blazing fire.

I thought the cottage was abandoned long ago, but I see it is in good repair. The main room is well-stocked, with chopped wood stacked beside the fire and a lamp casting a cheery glow to counter the darkness as day turns toward dusk. A sturdy oak table with wooden benches on either side is opposite the fire. Shelves line the far wall, stocked with jars and baskets. Through an open doorway, I spy an oak-framed bed, laid thick with warm blankets and furs. Yet more blankets are stacked neatly at its side.

It would make a welcoming setting had I not been kidnapped and brought here under protest.

I scrambled to my feet, chest heaving as my situation hits home, and plant my fists at my hips. “What is the meaning of this?” All the tussling has produced a confused state, and I’m feeling a little woozy as their combined scents settle a blanket over my wits. My nipples are hard and sensitive, and between my legs is throbbing and a little slick. “Who is the masked scoundrel who put his hands upon me?”

The scoundrel manifests in the doorway with an uneven step.

Lor chuckles. “She got you good.”

“Fuck off!” the masked alpha retorts. “She is a lot feistier than I remember.” He turns to shut the door, rattling it into the jamb and sliding a heavy bolt across.

I blink a few times as I take his words in. Does he know me?

Do I know him?

Then I take in his uniform—I huff out a breath and roll my eyes.

“The meaning,” Lor says, returning my attention to him. “Is that you are staying here with us. I’m not as stupid as my friend here, and you won’t get any lucky shots. If you try running off again, you’ll be getting your bottom spanked. And trust me, it won’t be the pleasurable kind of spanking.”

Is there a pleasurable kind of spanking? How would that even work? Why am I thinking about this now? Why am I not

screaming and making another bolt for the door?

My stomach takes a slow dip, and heat gathers between my legs. My pussy is more than merely damp. My clit, the place I sometimes pet deep in the night while imagining it is Aston doing it... or even Lor, tingles like I am petting it now.

“Oh, dear,” I say inadequately.

The masked alpha scratches his jaw and eyeballs me like he is hungry, and I represent a tasty treat. “Is she, eh, going into shock?” he asks Lor.

Lor chuckles. “Nope, the lass is merely onto you.”

# Chapter Nine

## Six months earlier...

### Lor

I have soldiered for many years, fighting against the Blighten in lands near and distant. My commanding officer, Edward Bramleigh, was a decorated war hero who held all my respect. Seeing something in me beyond my rough beginnings as a barbarian orphan, he gave me every opportunity to flourish, selecting Aston and me to be his lieutenants.

It didn't matter to him that I was poor while Aston and his family were known to him. His belief in me as a man and alpha, and his coaching, have gone a long way in shaping who I am.

And then he died. An ambush. I wasn't with him, and nor was Aston, or he would not have fucking fallen.

My father had died long ago in an attack, and my mother died a year later when the Blighten raided our clan. An adolescent at the time, I came home to find her body among the burnt-out ruins. I drifted for a time, turning half feral with my rage and sorrow, until I came upon the Baxter clan and an alpha lad who changed the direction of my life.

Aston provided friendship. Edward had filled much of what else was missing. His death still fucking devastates me, a month on. It is a testament to our closeness that he entrusted Aston and me to return his possessions to his wife and daughter. A task we accepted gladly and out of our mutual respect for him.

As I stare at the unopened letter in my hand, I'm reminded of all that has been lost. It is from Edward's family, likely sent before they received the news of his death. He loved his wife



and daughter and was a family man at heart, although his career often took him far away.

He is merely a man who took me under his wing, but it fucking guts me that he never got to read those words.

Change comes for us whether we will it or not.

As I would know.

I am young and highly regarded and have been offered command positions of my own. They gave me a fucking medal after my last mission. Yet the adventure has gone out of Aston and me, and the landscape of the war is changing. The Blighten have been pushed back in many places. With fewer troops needed, they are open to releasing soldiers from duty.

We have already been granted special leave to return Edward's possessions, but Aston and I talked, making plans for a different future, and requested permanent release instead. Two days ago, permission was granted. Now, we are just waiting on the release papers.

A knock sounds on the door, and a young beta pokes his head around the door. "The captain sent this for you."

I put the unopened letter down on the table. "Thank you." My heart rate quickens as I take the scroll from the lad. When I arrived here, I couldn't read a word—Edward saw that I had lessons, just one of many seemingly small yet significant changes he made in my life. Breaking the seal, I quickly read through the official release.

"You are leaving then, sir?"

"Aye, it would seem that I am."

A flash of ginger shoots past the lad's legs as the mangy tabby cat that keeps the base clear of rats darts in.

I curse. The lad chuckles. "I'll get him out!"

And so begins a merry fucking chase. Arnold, the resident tabby, while an excellent mouser, is also a sour, battle-scarred bastard.

The lad, young, enthusiastic, and hapless, dives for the beast. The cat leaps for the table, knocking over a pitcher of water.

“Got him!” The young, jubilant beta clasps a bedraggled Arnold to his chest. His jubilation turns to a grimace as the pitcher rolls off and drops to the floor. Miraculously, it is still whole. “He knocked the pitcher over.”

“So I see.” I stab my thumb in the direction of the door.

“I’ll take him out, then!” The lad flees. It’s only now that I see the final letter lying in a puddle of water.

“Fuck!” I open it—a little frantic that the ink will run. If I can spread it out, it might dry.

I don’t mean to read it, yet the word just pops out at me, and before I can think better, I’m drawing it closer to my eyes... which is when Aston returns to the room we share.

His eyes go from the open envelope to the soggy letter in my hands. “Whose letter is that?”

It is a pertinent fucking question given I have no family and have never received a letter before. “Edward’s,” I admit.

“Why would you fucking read it?!”

My hand is shaking. “I was” —I point at the fallen pitcher, and the water still pooled on the table— “only trying to dry it.”

“Well, you don’t need to fucking read it to dry it,” he says, scowling at me as he stalks over.

My gut tightens, but not from shame at reading the letter. No, it is about that word. “Read it.” I thrust the limp paper out.

He takes a step back, waving a hand. “I don’t want to fucking read it!”

“Read it!”

He takes it with a huff. His eyebrows go up first, then his jaw locks before his eyes lift to meet mine. “An omega.”

“It has gotten a little smudged. But her mother mentioned that the lass has taken to layering her bed like one might do

with a nest.”

“Has she revealed?” He squints at the paper, which is sticking together in places, made worse by his less-than-gentle handling.

“Really? Are you not even a little interested in this news? You have done nothing but talk about the lass. How pretty she is. How you were convinced she would become an omega. How you have been waiting for the word so that you may travel back and claim her.”

“Fine.” He is back to scowling at me. “I’m fucking claiming her now.”

“I saw the letter first,” I say, half-meaning it as a joke, for his sudden swing from vague interest to full savage bastard about to claim a mate is a little disconcerting.

“You can’t call fucking dibs,” he scoffs, clearly taking me seriously. “We are not eying some lass in the local tavern.” He screws the letter up and tosses it into the fire, collects the envelope from the table, and does the same with that.

“What the fuck are you doing?!”

They hiss and crackle on the fire.

“Do you want anyone to see that?”

I shake my head slowly.

“Good. Then we are in agreement.”

“Agreement for what?”

“Are you simple? Claiming her,” he says.

“You mean us both to claim her?” I ask, because this needs some fucking clarification.

He shrugs. “Why not?”

Okay, so we are both claiming her. “I do not know the fucking lass,” I say, backpedaling as I break out in a cold sweat. I have met her exactly once and, as memorable as that meeting was, I do not know her. Yet I have suffered through the many stories of her beauty, of her charm, of her smile, of

her mischief, and they make me feel like I know her too. I can admit I have conjured fantasies from the picture he painted from his last visit home, when he found her fully matured, telling me in detail about her ample tits and ass, her face, her shy smile. “It is not common in Hydornia for an omega to take more than one mate, and she is Hydornian. If I’d had a chance to read the letter properly, I might have had more information on how certain her mother is that Freya is an omega. From what I read, it sounded like unconfirmed speculation.”

His brows pinch together. “I didn’t read that far.”

“No.” I stab a finger in the direction of the fire, which is still hissing as the paper disappears. “We shall never know now that you’ve tossed the letter on the fire like an idiot.”

“Idiot? Do not call me a fucking idiot. Or I will claim the lass myself.”

“I have already called dibs,” I point out, which is a juvenile claim to make, and for the second time in as many minutes. But the knowledge of an omega, the elusive prize every alpha dreams of, has regressed my mental capacity to that of Arnold on scenting a fertile female cat.

Aston gives me an up-down look. “You’re a penniless bastard with no standing in any clan. How are you going to claim an omega?”

I hadn’t thought that part through—hadn’t thought any of this through. “Why would you share her with me?” Our relationship places power and dominance more readily with me, yet I sense my disadvantage in this matter. I don’t fucking like it.

He shrugs and grins, stalking closer. “Why not? You know I planned to mate the lass on my return, thinking it the right time to broach the matter with her mother, and that I would do it whether she was an omega or not. It was always at the back of my mind, though. A hope for Freya with both of us.”

He did not fucking mention the both of us part before. It is true we have often shared lasses during our deployments. Still,

this is something different. “Sharing a mate is a little different from sharing a lass for a quick rut.”

“We will work it out,” he says. “Do you want to give her up? Let some other bastards take her? In Imperium lands, where we have fought on occasion, omegas take on three or four mates, sometimes as many as five or six. And clansmen often share a mate, even a beta, if she is congenial.”

I hold up a hand to cut him off. “Fuck.” I still cannot get my head around the Imperium ways. “How would that even work with six mates? It would be like a fucking queue.” I am a lusty male who often takes two or more lasses to my bed. I can’t reconcile the idea of sharing a lass with six similarly lusty males.

He smirks suddenly. “I like watching you rut a lass. You like watching me rut a lass. Freya is the prettiest lass you have ever seen. I always knew she was going to become an omega. Whatever it says in the rest of the letter, I’m convinced of it. It is better if she does not know yet and has not revealed. That gives us time to plan.”

I swallow thickly. He is moving ahead with this very boldly, and very rapidly. But I’d be lying to myself if I wasn’t all in. “Her king won’t let us claim her. Omegas are rare, and they have strange rules in her kingdom.”

“Well, if she’s already mated, there’s not much anyone can do, now, is there?”

I am conflicted. Part of me is in denial that we can claim the lass, yet also enticed. Common practice dictates there should be wooing. Only, wooing can take time... I rub the back of my neck, where pressure begins to pulse. Her king will allocate her to some alpha bastard at a whim, especially with her father gone, who might have been able to apply some sway regarding choices.

Her father might have approved of Aston, given their families are acquainted, even before they built a deeper relationship through their service in the war. *Might*. He is still a barbarian, subject to prejudices of every kind. I’m not convinced her father’s congeniality would have stretched to

both of us—two barbarian alphas, one with shifter blood, claiming his daughter.

“Two is better for her safety. I’ve heard of them being snatched by the Blighten on occasion or humans who sell them on to the orc bastards. Which is why it is better to share. Also, they are very fucking lusty, from all I have heard.”

“Fuck,” I mutter gruffly. “We should not be fucking discussing this. The lass has not yet been wooed.”

“There will be no time for wooing,” he says, frowning. “Not if there is a risk she reveals.”

Our eyes meet. Is he saying what I think he is? That we should take a more barbaric approach like our ancestors might, take the lass and force her into heat, breed her so her fate is sealed irrevocably with ours?

Blood surges into my cock, and it thumps against my leather pants with unmistakable interest.

“It’s well known that omegas have a great capacity for carnality. They’re very demanding of an alpha and his cock.” He smirks, eyes dropping to my crotch. “Are you getting hard, Lor? Do you want me to relieve that for you so we can properly converse?”

He steps up to me and runs his knuckles along the length of my cock, which has risen to an unmistakable bulge. I growl but don’t stop him as he squeezes me roughly through my pants.

He steps away with a smirk, the bastard. He likes to push me sometimes, just to see what I will do. “We’ll claim her together, and by whatever means we must. If we don’t move swiftly, some other fucker will swoop in.”

“And that is our plan?”

His jaw sets. “I’m not willing to give her up. I want you in on this. I want to do this together. But you are your own man, Lor. You know how I feel about you, and how I feel about her. I’ve made myself more than clear. I think I always knew she was destined to be my mate. It feels fucking right to claim her with you.”

“And what about us?” I ask, more casually than I feel. It’s not unusual for soldiers to form relationships, to rut and fuck. “One of us would slip up at some point; we are too familiar with each other in that way” —and I am a dominant bastard who likes rutting done his way— “I don’t know this woman, save through your words, but any omega’s awakening must be a tumultuous time. However we facilitate this, she still has to respond and accept. Throwing us together into the mix is a lot. She may not respond to two mates, be they barbarian or otherwise. And even if she does, she might not want two mates who are also together.”

“But what if she does,” he says softly. He smiles, the smile that has ever gotten Aston all he wants.

The cocky bastard knows he’s got me.



## Present day...

### Aston

I admit that, despite planning this, I still haven't thought some of it through. As Lor said, my feisty omega in hiding has gotten me good. My balls are fucking throbbing. I nearly emptied my stomach over the forest floor a short time ago. None of this has stopped the blood from pounding into my dick. Her scent is all up in my nose, and the brief moment during which my hands were on her felt so fucking right.

I want to put my hands on her again. I want to do a whole lot more.

Only, I think we have gotten off to a bad start. One I'm not sure how to fix it. Perhaps I should have talked to her and not taken the savage approach, as Lor coached me while we were planning to snatch her.

It's too late now, and I wouldn't take it back either way. I want her. I wanted her two fucking years ago, but she was so young then. Besides, my visit was fleeting. The orcs were pushing forward, and fighting men were needed at the front. The dangers were clear and present. There was a risk I might not return, something you soon accept as you fight for your life to protect your people. How could I claim her, love her, and then leave her? Possibly make her a widow. At least, that is what I told myself, and yet it seems fate has other plans for us. I feel like I've been drawn to her my whole life. The way her cute little button nose is twitching as she scents us, and her body pumps out the unmistakable markers of lust, tells me this is not a folly on my part. She's not cowed by what we do or even intimidated.

The alpha in me enjoyed the tussle, even though my balls are fucking aching. I feel proud that she put me in my place.



Her hand lifts from her hip and settles at her throat. She's so fucking beautiful. Tiny. *Precious*. The lass is an image that would surely set the Goddess herself weeping and bring mortal men to their knees. The dichotomy that exists between alpha and omega is realized in this room. Unknown forces rush around us. It feels like the walls are closing in as I walk forward slowly, one step at a time, giving her the opportunity to back away, to tell me to fuck off, to kick me in the balls again if she is so desiring. Yet, I know she won't because the pull between us is something extraordinary.

I feel the hairs on the back of my neck rise to attention, even as my blood pounds south. As I stop before her, her eyes lift to meet mine. Lor moves closer, too, until he is behind her. He places his left hand against the back of her neck. There is no mistake in the little tell when her breath catches, breasts rising and falling unsteadily, nor the spark that enters her eyes.

My nostrils flare. I boldly told him that he would mate her as well as me. And yet, I hadn't thought that part through either, beyond the fact that I desired them both, that he had become part of my life and I couldn't imagine him not being in it, and that I'd enjoyed sharing women with him in the past. It seemed only natural that he would share this one, too: our mate.

But now, as I see his hand upon her and her response to it, it is like a fire blazing deep in my gut, igniting feelings I don't fully understand. I step closer, as does Lor until we are boxing her smaller body between ours. The faint tremble in her hand at her throat is equal to the shake in my own hand.

There is no need for the mask, yet I leave it on. Beyond the closed door and shuttered windows, there is quietness as the snow falls. It will be settling, trapping us together just as I had intended.

“A lad has been sent to your mother. He will notify her that you have been forced to shelter with the clan. She will not be expecting you back until the snow clears.”

I gather her hand from where it is locked around her throat, and, eyes on hers the whole time, I lift it to my lips and kiss

the knuckles. She shivers, her lips parting, inviting me in. And I need a taste... I need a taste more than I need my next breath.

As our lips meet, I feel a spark. A groan escapes me as she opens to the kiss, and when my tongue traces along her plump lower lip and dips inside, her tongue meets mine. A growl rumbles up in my chest, shifting to a purr. I can scent her along with Lor. The two scents I love merge, making a potent cocktail of arousal.

She emits a needy whimper. I deepen the kiss, my hand resting on the front of her throat and my thumb gentle against the pulse point, feeling it thump wildly. Gods, she is so sweet. My mouth moves over hers, gaining urgency. Her hands are on my chest, sweeping up.

Somehow, I manage to break the kiss, breathing heavily, chest heaving, aware that we are moving fast. I blink down at her, trying to rouse myself from this lusty stupor into which I have sunk. Her scent blooms richer, utterly captivating. It's like a bolt of electricity running down my body, bringing a tightness to my balls and an urgent throbbing to my cock.

“Omega.” Lor’s gruff voice barely penetrates the spell.

“Aye,” I say.

“Omega?” She blinks slowly. “How?”

“You have never been in the presence of an alpha before,” I say. “Not like this... And I’ve heard that some need more, more than one.”

Moving as though under a spell, she grasps my mask and tugs gently, pulling it down until the material settles at my throat. I feel exposed without the covering.

“Did you think I would not know you?” Her eyes roam over my uniform.

“Aston is blessed with enthusiasm and self-belief,” Lor says dryly. “It comes at the expense of brains.”

I glare at the fucker.

He grins before stepping right into her, trapping her small body between us, and letting the presence of two dominant

alphas complete its work.

Her fingers tighten over the mask she still holds at my throat, her mouth opens, and a needy moan escapes. “Oh, oh, Goddess. What is happening to me?”

Lor purrs, a deep, rumbly sound I have only heard on very rare occasions. Her face softens instantly, confirming—as if it were needed—that she is an omega. A pretty blush spreads across her cheeks, and her eyes turn a little glazed. My hands settle at her waist and slide up to cup her breasts. As I brush my thumb over her nipples, already beaded against the material of her pretty gown, she moans again and pushes up into my touch.

“Does that feel nice, Freya? Do you want more of my touch?”

“Oh, please! What are you doing to me? Where does this terrible pressure come from? Why does my body ache?”

She reaches one arm back, grasping blindly for Lor. He takes her small hand and presses a kiss to her palm as she thrusts her breasts into my palms.

I’m not mistaken. Our sweet omega, the lass who will soon become our mate, is going into heat.

# Chapter Ten

## Freya

I feel like someone has lit a fire under my skin, like flames are dancing across the surface, swallowing me up, taking me to a place I do not understand.

*Omega.* Am I really an omega? Everyone said I would be. But as the years passed, I concluded it was not to be, and then my father passed, and such matters lost importance.

*Aston.* How many times have I thought about him, yet here he is, the wicked barbarian alpha I secretly craved, knowing I was ready, and taking the most scandalous action in kidnapping me.

A part of me is furious.

A part of me delights that he has reached into my mind and plucked out my deepest, darkest fantasy in trapping me here with him and Lor, forcing my hand and my heat.

My eyelids are heavy, but I do not close my eyes, for I do not want to miss the dark intensity on Aston's face as he cups my breasts and rubs his thumb lightly over my distended nipples, making them ache so good. With the mask gone, I can see his freckles—he is still a very pretty alpha.

“Why don't we get this out of the way?” Lor's fingers are once more at my throat. Only this time, he is not doing up my cloak but releasing the little clasps.

The heavy garment drops to the floor, and then those same fingers are in my hair, drawing it to the side, and his lips find the back of my throat. A part of me is still scandalized by this, but from their actions... by the blooming understanding...

That they intend to claim me.

In Hydornia, omegas take a single mate, by appointment of the king. But we are not in Hydornia now. We are in the clans, and they have different rules and ways. Only this is more scandalous even than barbarian ways. They are throwbacks,

wicked barbarians stealing me for their pleasure—the kind of men who take what they want.

Fate wraps around me—the how and why of circumstances that bring us together are irrelevant to this burning need. A moan rises from my chest. I arch up into Aston’s touch. “I’m so hot.” I tug impatiently at my gown, wanting it off.

They are not to be hurried. If anything, their kisses turn gentle, even as my impatience rises, and I grow bolder and my cries more pronounced. I lose all sense of decorum and shame, rocking my ass against Lor and pushing my breasts into Aston’s capable hands.

“Off,” I demand more firmly.

“When I’m ready,” Aston says.

“Off.” I stamp my foot. It is an utterly ridiculous thing to do, yet I’m vexed at these men who do not give me my dues.

“Off!” It is a growl. I did not recognize this part of me.

The fingers threaded in my hair turn brutal, tugging my head painfully back.

I only moan as I glance back at Lor, seeing the wicked smirk bloom across his lips.

“She’s getting needy,” he says.

“Good,” Aston says, before he steps back, removing his hands entirely from me.

I’m not happy about this development. Not happy at all. I hiss my displeasure and try to tug my hair out of Lor’s grasp.

His hold tightens, mastering me with ease, his other arm snaking around my waist to hold my back flush to his chest. “Be a good little omega, and we will give you all you need.”

I have seen hints of his sternness. I like it very much. But even as he holds me against his firm body, my eyes are all on Aston, watching as he tosses his cloak over a nearby chair, removes his dagger and sword, and then, with one hand grasping the back of his shirt collar, he tugs it over his head.

His scent is like a wall slamming into me. And how my pussy weeps. Feral needs are rising, desires that cannot be denied.

His body is beautiful, with thick slabs of muscle making up his chest and covered with a dusting of blonde hair, brawny shoulders, and strong corded arms. A deep V leads down into the top of his pants, which hang dangerously low since the removal of his belt. My gaze lowers to the thick bulge that strains his leather.

Beneath the uniform of a soldier, he is all barbarian alpha.

I want to touch him, to lick every delectable inch of his flesh. These urges belong to a stranger who has unlawfully taken possession of my mind. It doesn't matter, does it? Not when I'm ravenous, and he represents everything I need.

“Do you like what you see?” Lor growls beside my ear. “A rough alpha beneath that more civilized uniform? Is your mouth watering for a taste of his cock?”

I swallow. He knows it is. I've never touched a man, never mind done something like that, yet I could fall to my knees and pray for the chance.

“Take everything off,” Lor barks.

Aston growls, and his nostrils flare.

“Now!” There is no mistake in the command in Lor's voice. My tummy takes a slow, sensual tumble as I feel the tension grow between them.

A low growl rattles in Lor's chest as Aston stares back.

The air thickens with their pheromones. My whimper is all need. Aston's eyes lower to meet mine, and then, staring at me, he kicks off his boots and shucks down his pants.

The sight is compelling, and my pussy clenches deeply. His cock bobs, thick and long, and sticking straight out from his body with a fat mushroom head. Clear liquid gathers at the tip. Near the base is a faint swelling—his knot.

I lick my lips.

“Do you want a taste?” Lor asks.

“Please.”

“Good girl,” he says. “Then you may have just a little taste.”

Aston growls, but he doesn't move as Lor, using my hair as a leash, guides me the few steps forward until only a pace separates us.

“Hands behind your back.”

The command surprises me. I think Lor is talking to me until Aston puts his hands behind his back. The move pushes his shoulders back, presenting his perfect, built body for my inspection, emphasizing that he is a towering alpha and an apex predator.

He glares at Lor over my head again.

That dark look is like an explosion of lust inside my womb. There is something between them, a power play, a level of dominance that I sense will unravel before we leave this cottage in the woods.

“Isn't he beautiful?” Lor says, gentling his hold on my hair, fingers now soothing as they massage against my scalp. “All that hot, hard flesh. His scent is so much richer now, isn't it? You are triggering him, just as he is triggering you, and calling him into a rut. Are you getting wet for him?”

I whimper. I want to touch Aston so badly, yet something holds me back. I presumed Aston was in charge of this, but he is not the one giving commands. Lor is. Instinctively, I know whatever happens next will be on his terms.

“You're going to have to trust me, little one. The scent is nothing compared with the taste.”

My pussy clenches, and slick trickles out. I squeeze my legs together. Aston tracks the movement.

“You're getting wet, aren't you, Freya? Is your needy pussy creaming for him?” Lor asks. “Is your mouth watering for a taste?”

“Please,” I say, “Please, yes, all of that.”



“Good girl. On your knees.” He applies the smallest amount of pressure, and I sink all too willingly to my knees. It puts me on eye level with that thick jutting cock. Now, and this close, I see in greater detail the swelling near the base, the glands that will form his knot. His balls are heavy and potent. The scent is stronger here. And then Lor reaches out, closing his hand around Aston’s cock.

Shock coils in my belly at that bold touch.

His hand is big. There is something deeply compelling about the way he handles the other alpha. His thumb presses into the underside as he strokes his fingers all the way to the end. Pre-cum weeps from the tip, creating a long thread that stretches and breaks to drip to the floor.

I scarcely breathe.

“I think he likes you on your knees, little one.”

Lor takes another firm, leisurely stroke. Aston groans, a faint tremble manifesting in his body. My eyes flash to meet his, seeing the raw need in his face before they lower again to the straining ridge of his cock, which has turned a deep, angry shade of red under Lor’s tending.

I am captivated by this huge alpha who holds himself rigid, letting another alpha handle him, waiting patiently for whatever he is told to do, just as I, too, am waiting.

“Please,” I beg. Lor’s fingers sweep up again, and yet more clear fluid pools and then leaks from the tip. The scent has me panting. The image of Aston submitting has me panting even more.

“Do you like this, omega? Seeing my hands on Aston’s cock?”

He knows I do. He knows me better than I know myself, the building torment as the pre-cum drips to the floor, the savage hunger gnawing at me, and the rising anxiety when Aston’s seed is wasted when it should be for me.

“Please let me taste. Goddess, please.”

Lor lowers the tip obligingly and, taking my hair in the other hand presents it to my lips.

“Open wide and push out your tongue like a good girl.”

I obey instantly. Aston groans, and I have not even touched him yet.

“That’s perfect. Just a little taste.” He holds me so I can do no more than lap the head, capturing a little of the pre-cum before I draw my tongue into my mouth. My eyes roll back as I suck on my tongue.

“There we go. A little more.”

Lor allows me a little closer, enough to enclose half the fat head in my mouth. I use my tongue, suck and lick enthusiastically before he pulls me away.

I’m panting. My world is centered on the cock, on the little tastes I snatch before he withdraws me.

Over and over, lap, suck, and denial. Heat pooling in my belly as I crave more.

A growl rises out of this sensual daze.

“Hold it,” Lor snarls.

“Fuck! You’re fucking killing me,” Aston bites out, but his hands remain locked at his back, and he doesn’t move.

He likes this.

I like this, too.

“Good girl. Just a little more.”

Lor lets me go deeper this time until the bulbous head moves in and out of my mouth. I’m so eager for it, I cannot get enough. I’m high on it, the taste, the smell, the sensations.

When he holds my lips away and strokes the thick shaft to encourage more pre-cum, I know I’m already lost. I’m utterly under his spell and, this time, when he presents me with the tip, he pulls my head onto it until it hits the back of my throat—I gag.

“Breathe through your nose,” Lor instructs, pulling me off only to plunge me back on.

Aston hisses.

My saliva pools as the taste of his pre-cum fills my mouth. I feel like I’m going to lose my mind. I want more, deeper, to feel it throbbing and pulsing in my mouth.

On, off. It plunges deeply. It is snatched from my mouth. He pauses to perform those leisurely strokes that make Aston growl and jerk, before I’m allowed to suck it again, elated when Aston’s growl shifts to a deep rumbling groan that is all raw need.

The torment goes on, and I submit to it, never knowing what I shall get next, whether it will be a fleeting taste or the thick length filling my mouth and plugging my throat so I cannot breathe.

I accept it all gladly and eagerly await more, my body and my needs burn uncontrolled, my clit throbbing, and my pussy weeping.

“Hold it,” Lor growls.

I gasp and sway as Aston’s cock is snatched from me. The hot flesh is taken fully away this time, and Lor’s mouth covers mine. We share a lusty kiss. I cling to him, sucking on his tongue as he tastes me and Aston on me.

His lips pop off. I’m breathing heavily. I can hear the harsh rumble of Aston’s breathing. Lor’s bright wolf eyes hold mine... and then he turns his head to the side. I watch him close his lips over Aston’s cock and suck it right back into his throat until his nose is mashed up against Aston’s groin before pulling all the way off. Aston growls as though in pain as Lor and I share another hot kiss.

I don’t understand what is happening. I don’t need to. The lust that courses through me is like a living entity under my skin. My pussy is throbbing and weeping, saturating my panties and trickling down my legs. *It is depravity* and I just want more.

And then I get more, as Lor returns my mouth to Aston's cock. Only this time, there is nothing tentative about his touch. I am worked off and on, and the hot flesh plunges deep into my throat.

I can't breathe. I'm dizzy. I never want it to stop.

“Come!”

Aston's groan feels like it is ripped from his body, and a hot, heavy flood fills my mouth. I swallow instinctively, but there is too much, and it tickles out and drips against my heaving breasts. I choke a little, trying to swallow again as I am held in place with a cock lodged in the entrance of my throat.

Darkness comes for me as terrible hoarse sounds and gurgles come from my throat. Only, some kind of rapturous entity has hijacked my brain. As the sparkles dance behind my eyes, and Aston growls his pleasure, my pussy bursts into hot climactic waves.

My mouth is pulled away, and Lor's mouth crashes over mine, kissing me as I fight to snatch breath. His tongue sweeps over my chin, lapping up the spill before plundering my mouth again.

“What a perfect, filthy, lusty little omega,” he rumbles, giving me a moment to snatch more breath. “You were sent by the Goddess herself to pleasure us, were you not?”

My jaw hangs slack. I don't understand what is happening. I just want more.



## Aston

They are kissing, hot, lusty kisses that have my belly tightening and my heart beating out of my chest.

I feel like I've been caught somewhere between heaven and hell. All alphas are naturally dominant, but Lor is something else. He was worried about how she might take to this and us. We have had many and varied discussions since we left the battle lines of the war.

But he has just blown the top right off and exposed all the raw desire underneath. And now my mind has no doubts that Freya wants us, that she wants us as we are, and that she will take well to all our deepest, darkest, and most depraved ways.

She's an omega who was destined for us and only us.

The climax has barely taken the edge off.

Worse, he hasn't given me permission to move, which sets my dick thumping for a scrap of his attention, for him to allow her to touch me, for me to be allowed to touch her.

For fucking anything.

I want to challenge him. I have challenged him before. It does not end fucking well. I know that if I do, I'll be bruised and battered, my cock fucking hardened to the point of madness and pain, and then forced to watch without relief, or endure some other torment even worse than what he's already done.

Just the knowledge that he still might has me raging with lust so potent it is a wonder I've not fucking expired.

"Please." My voice is a croak. I feel fucking weak to beg. "I'll lose my fucking mind if I cannot put my hands on her."

He breaks their kiss and rises slowly.

She whimpers. He draws her cheek against his thigh and strokes her hair. My eyes dart between them. He watches my

reaction with a stern expression.

She remains where he leaves her on her knees and rubs her cheek against his thigh.

Gods. He is so fucking natural at this. It is like his fucking calling or something.

He doesn't say anything. He waits. Making me fucking stew in my own torment. How can he be so fucking calm?

My eyes find his cock straining against his pants, and my lips tug up. "You are not fucking immune."

"I never claimed to be," he says casually, reaching down to adjust his cock. My mouth waters. I want to touch him there, to kiss him. And her, our omega with her ripe fuck-me scent. I want to spread her legs and bury my head between them.

"Come, little one," he says, drawing Freya to her feet.

Her eyes roam over me, taking how I stand to rigid attention, my cock jutting out like a welcome flagpole, jerking as if to entice her, or him, to touch.

His hand is soothing on her hair. He purrs. She is under his spell, just as I am.

"You're going into heat," he says, cupping her cheek and drawing her eyes toward his. "Do you want to make a nest?"

The bed is made. In anticipation of the cold, it is thick with furs and blankets. But there are more that we have carefully gathered over the weeks... the softest, most appealing blankets and furs for an omega in heat.

She glances at me and then back to Lor. "Please. I think I do, but I'm too hot." She tugs ineffectively at her gown.

Lor smiles. "Aston" —My body jerks to attention like he's got me on a leash. My balls draw tight, and my cock ejects a heady blob of pre-cum— "Strip her," he says. And then he steps back.

I blink a few times, thinking this is a fucking trap or a trick. When nothing manifests, I all but tear the lass from his side.

My hands shake as I cup her shoulders. I want to kiss her, but he has not given me permission for that. He told me to strip her, so I do... taking liberties within the bounds of that order. She moans and grumbles as I slide my hands all over her delectable little body, waist to hip, lower belly, cupping her pussy through the material, feeling how hot she is there as I undo the tiny little buttons that run the length of her back. She rocks against me, pushing her breasts up for more.

I swallow thickly, sliding my hand up to cup her tits, squeezing them together, and admiring the sight. I wanted her two years ago. It nearly fucking killed me to leave without claiming her, yet I knew it was the right thing to do. Leaning forward, I breathe in her sweet scent, then reach behind her and release the last few buttons on her gown.

The material is heavy, and I help it off, skimming hands over her exposed flesh as it slides down over her shoulders and chest, until her perfect, plump tits spill out. I'm halfway out of my fucking mind as I catch her pert nipples between my finger and thumb and give them a vigorous pinch.

She moans and arches up. She wants more.

The dress slides off her, and I follow it with my hands down over her ass, pushing at her pretty silk panties with the gown.

Gods, her ass. Just seeing it naked is enough to wreck me. I squeeze her plump ass cheeks together as the material catches at her hips. She twitches, and the gown and panties slip free to pool on the floor, leaving a naked beauty before me.

I lose control. My fingers are in her hair, my lips poised over hers, about to kiss her, when a deep growl brings me back from the brink.

“On the bed. You have permission to eat her out.”

My chest heaves. I sweep her into my arms, carry her to the bed, and drop her in the middle. A pretty blush stains her cheeks, spreading down her throat and over the upper swell of

her tits. I palm them, squeezing them together, pinching both nipples roughly, and she arches up, liking the bite.

Only my focus is taken by the rich, sweet scent filling my nose—*slick*.

I growl. There is no preamble. I spread her open and bury my head between her thighs so I can breathe in her enticing smell. I lick. Hot, wet stickiness—it is like fucking ambrosia to an alpha. I groan and purr as I feast on her perfect pink cunt.

Lor hasn't told me she can come. But he also hasn't told me she cannot.

Her wild moans and fingers fisting my hair tell me she is fucking close.

I feel the bed dip as Lor lays down beside her. She whimpers, and I glance up to see them kissing. Through hooded eyes, I watch him palm her tit, pinching her nipples, toying with her as their tongues tangle.

I go back to my feast. I could stay here all fucking day, and I will if he tells me to, all too willingly. Gods, she is drenched. I want to put my fingers inside her to test her, to find out how tight she is. To seek the slick gland that omegas have and find whether it is as sensitive as rumors tell.

If I petted the gland, would it make her come even more fiercely than my tongue against her clit?

I nip and bite, swirl my tongue around that hard little bud, and then flatten my tongue to cover as much of her as I possibly can.

“Come.” His command is like an electric current running through me.

It is not me he makes the command of, and yet my cock is all fucking in. My hips jerk. As our sweet omega moans and floods my mouth with her juices, my cock goes off, balls rising, reaching, and cum gushing all over the bed.

I growl against her pussy as she fists my hair and rides my face. Gods, I thought she was wet before, but I am drowning in



her now. The feral energy is rising and will not be contained. It is a beast teetering on the edge of release.

Strong fingers gently prize Freya's small fists from my hair. Lor strokes his hand over the back of my neck before he captures my hair himself, and tugs my head up. He closes his lips over mine, and his tongue sweeps inside my mouth to taste her.

"Oh, Goddess." Freya's whine only drives us on. It is not the sound of disapproval. It is the sound of lust.

He lifts his head slowly. We are both panting. And then he licks his lips.

"She tastes fucking delicious."

I nod weakly. I am weak for this man even as I am weak for the wet pussy belonging to my mate, which is once more calling to me.

He releases me. He doesn't tell me I can go at her again. And so I wait, forced to watch as his thick fingers glide through her wetness before two of them tunnel up inside her.

She arches up. Her legs spread wider, encouraging him to give her more. "Oh God, oh God, oh God."

I see his knuckles rock as he works his fingers in and out. The way she strains, arches, and humps her hips up for more tells me he is petting her slick gland.

"Are you going to come again, little one," he asks. "Are you going to come so that Aston can clean you all up? He is hungry for more. Come again, little one, so he can eat you out again."

Her deep, earthy groan is like a thread pulling on my balls. I nearly fucking empty them again. She's coming. I see the gush around his fingers and hear the sticky noises as he continues to pump, her pussy clenching over him.

"Good girl," he says. Withdrawing fingers, glistening with her juices, he sucks them into his mouth.

My jaw hangs slack as his eyes close and he savors the taste. I am fucking mesmerized, jealous that he tastes her on

his fingers even though I've just been eating her out.

"Delicious," he says as he shares a look with me.

He nods. My hands are on her thighs, spreading them open. My mouth closes over her clit, and I suck lightly over the swollen bud before taking a sweeping lick.

My face is going numb.

I become delirious with pleasure.

The bed creaks as Lor rises. I hear him moving behind me before his hand runs down my back. I shiver under his touch.

"What a vision," he says, stroking back up my spine and over my shoulder. "She is perfect and even better with you eating her out. Do you want to fuck her first?"

Is he fucking with me? I believe he is fucking with me, but I'm too far gone to work it out.

"I'll think about it," he says. "But first, she should have an opportunity to make her nest."

Nest? I want to continue, yet the mention of a nest stirs something primal. Somehow I tear my mouth away from her glistening cunt. She writhes on the bed and pushes up her hips for more.

Lor withdraws his hand from me, and I miss the touch as he helps Freya to sit up.

"Oh, why?" she looks around, confused.

"Do you not want to make a nest, little one?" he asks her before nodding to me.

I stagger to my feet and round the bed to the neat pile of blankets and furs. I bring the first over, a decadently soft blanket made of the best lamb's wool.

She looks from me to the blanket, and then she reaches out. I see the way her face softens as she touches it. She likes it.

She runs it down her body over her breasts and presses it between her thighs.

I suck a sharp breath in.

“That’s our good girl,” Lor says encouragingly, “We love your scent. Get it all over the nest, and then we will rut you well in it.”

Her glazed eyes shift from Lor to me as she takes the blanket, now smeared in her cum, and carefully pats it down beside her.

She rises onto her knees, takes the next one from me, and repeats the process. It is a sensual dance, one that we must endure as she carefully creates a nest to her liking, scenting each item against her slick cunt.

Lor moves over to the table and pours himself a drink. I don’t know how the fuck he can hold himself in check when our omega, our mate, is busy making a nest.

The clatter as he puts his cup down is loud and jarring. The omega barely notices, she is so intent on her task. A clank comes next as he removes his belt before kicking off his boots and stripping down. While his back is to me, I indulge myself. I consider myself a strong and dominant alpha, yet Lor is sheer masculine perfection carved into every rippling inch of his huge built body. He is also supremely dominant.

Gods, he is stunning—a wild beast who demands absolute autonomy and accepts nothing less. I feel no shame in submitting to him—it feels undeniable and right.

He takes another drink before he turns and approaches the bed. His cock sticks up, hard, thick, and veiny, the knot already bulging. Our mate will be tested when he takes her for the first time. He smiles as he sees the nest, now thickly layered, and shares a look with me, filled with the knowledge that all our mutual love and hopes are about to be realized in this cottage in the woods.

Freya pauses on her hands and knees; her nose twitches, and she turns toward him.

Lor steps up to the side of the bed and waits. “Do you want to touch, little one?”

She nods.

“Tell me how you want me.”

She glances toward me. Perhaps she, like me, senses that Lor is a bastard, and this is some sort of trick.

“Here,” she says, pointing to the center of the bed. “I want you here.”

His lips tug up. Gods, I want to fall on her like a fucking savage, yet he’s all calm and grace as he lays down in the middle of the bed with his back propped against the headboard before lacing his fingers behind his head.

He spreads his legs invitingly wide, his beautiful thick cock on display. “I am yours, little one. Do with me as you will.”

She glances at me again, perhaps seeking reassurance. At my nod, she crawls toward him, her long hair making a silk curtain and hiding her face. I take in the lines of her body, her natural beauty. An omega is delicate and yet with hidden strength.

They are both visions of beauty.

The omega and the alpha.

When she reaches him, she closes a small hand around his cock. It kicks in her hand. She grips a little tighter. “You won’t hurt it, little one,” he says. “Handle me how you need.”

She looks from him to his cock. Then she takes it in both hands and pumps slow and erratic.

I hope it is killing the bastard.

“Have a taste,” he says. “You know you want to.”

No hesitation. She lowers her lips and sucks the head straight into her mouth.

I groan. I don’t realize I’m moving until I’m gathering her hair and lifting it out of the way so I can better see what she does. I run my fingertips over her cheek, feeling it hollow every time she sucks him in.

“God, she is so beautiful,” I say.

“She is perfect,” he replies. “Our perfect mate.”

# Chapter Eleven

## Freya

I have been ignorant all my life and now fumble blindly for understanding. I have met many alphas during my life.

Yet that cannot hope to prepare you for what it means to be with one as a mate. And, even so, it is so much more when there are two.

They are so supremely dominant. Yet one does not consider there must be dominance between them, a hierarchy of sorts. Other than those shocking dreams of a night where I venture into the taboo and imagine not just one alpha touching me but two, I have nothing to draw on. The revelation unfurls before me as I dutifully suck Lor's cock. The taste is everything—pleasure on my tongue that invades my senses as much as his scent. It feels good when it hits my belly. The highest order of compulsion demands I lap every little drop up.

Lor holds himself in fierce check while directing Aston to his will.

Lor thrives on the act of domination, while Aston thrives on being forced to obey.

They are two distinct sides of the alpha coin. Different, and yet each perfect in their own way.

I have loved and admired Aston for many years as childish teasing ended and we matured. It did not cross my mind that I might fall so swiftly for another male or that I had the capacity to love two.

Perhaps I fall because Aston already holds my love and trust, and Lor is merely an extension.

Or perhaps this is nothing but a manifestation of my heat, and it will fade when we emerge on the other side.

No, I don't believe that when everything about this is natural... effortless. *Right.* Aston claimed my heart long since but, as for Lor, the stern alpha has worn me down over the last

few months, calling me little one and his fierce protective ways. I suspected he might have said something to Marshal to facilitate my visit to Dara. Now, I am certain, and that he had underhand reasons.

The two of them planned and prepared this all for me.

What omega could resist?

They fill my senses even as they claim my body and heart. Aston is attentive at my side, holding my hair from my face so he can better see what I do. My mouth is full of Lor's cock, my jaw aching with the strain to take more, yet I want him deeper, want to inhale him and hold him inside.

I suck him, as is my right to take him however I need, and let my mind wander. The world divides itself into predators and prey but, even within that, there are boundaries. Lor is not what I expected, but neither is Aston, and I like that discovery. I sense time will reveal many facets of their personalities, with a lifetime ahead for me to explore.

Aston skims his hand down my back, and even this light touch is heaven against my hot skin. My pussy weeps and tingles from their earlier attention: the sweet lapping sensation as Aston kissed me there, followed by the dark, twisty pleasure as Lor petted me deeply and compelled me to a climax—his fingers seeking the sensitive place inside with unerring accuracy.

Every part of me throbs with building urgency. I want more, to taste Lor's cum as I tasted Aston's, for him to explode in my mouth and fill my belly.

But I am also empty inside in other ways, and my pussy clenches, so slick and swollen with my need.

Lor's cock is so big I can only hold it with two hands. My jaw suffers the strain of taking him in my mouth, and I fear my most intimate place will not fare any better in the challenge of accepting him. I pump, perhaps a little erratically, but trying to emulate what I have watched Lor do to Aston, and the gentle pumping encourages the seed to leak and spill.



Fingers suddenly spear my hair, lifting my lips from my prize. I do not appreciate this and hiss at the male who dares to interrupt.

Lor hauls me up the bed by my hair. It stings, and I don't even care. It makes me wild and aroused. It makes me want to arch and hiss. My nails rake his chest. He gives me a little shake.

“Eyes on me. Freya. Eyes on me now!”

The bark in Lor's command snaps me out of my frenzy. I'm panting, braced on my hands and knees over him. I taste a little blood on my lips, only now realizing I've bitten him. The mark where my teeth have penetrated his throat is deeply satisfying, as are the red scratches on his chest. He shakes me again. When I bare my teeth at him, he only grins. “She needs you. She needs a good deep rutting to settle her the fuck down.”

I try to glance back, but his hold is firm. Out of the corner of my eyes, I glimpse Aston moving behind me. I start when his big hands cup my ass, and a thick cock slides against my wet pussy from behind.

A needy whimper breaks from my chest.

“Are you ready, little one? Are you ready for Aston to take you? To fill your sweet cunt with his fat cock? To rut you, knot you, and fill you with his seed?”

I try to peep back again. “Eyes on me. I want to watch your pretty face while he takes you.”

I'm panting. My pussy quakes and sparks in anticipation of something more. And then I feel Aston move, the blunt head sliding against my wet folds, making me gasp as it catches my swollen clit, before it snags at my entrance.

There he holds. My eyes lock with Lor's. His hooded gaze is intense. He is so alpha that he might as well be the definition of the word. My mouth falls open as the thick girthy cock presses, seeking entrance.

I whimper and then groan as the fat head slips past my entrance to nestle just within. My pussy flutters and pulses,

arrested by the fullness and the way sensitive nerves flare to heated life.

“Oh!”

“Does that feel good?”

“Hmummm.”

“Is that the best you can do?”

“Yes!”

“What is he doing, little one?”

I try to turn again.

“Uh uh.”

It is so intense, the feeling of being stretched and held open. “He is a small way inside me,” I whisper-pant. “It feels so good.”

Lor presses his lips to mine once, then leans back to watch again. “Good girl. Can you take a little more?”

I nod. “Please, yes, please.” I don’t look away this time. I don’t dare. I fear if I look away, he might order Aston to stop.

Aston doesn’t stop. He begins to thrust shallowly, in and out a small way, opening me up over and over again. The little nerves in the entrance to my channel quake at the enticing fullness, the thick girthingness of him. The sensation of being penetrated, of my flesh yielding to accommodate him, is sublime.

He fucks me a little deeper, and my inner muscles quiver with the new strain.

“Such a good girl,” Lor says, running his thumb over my lower lip before he presses it into my mouth—I suck. “Is he going deeper now?”

I nod, humming around his thumb. He pulls it from my mouth with a wet plop and brushes the pad over my lower lip again. My mind splinters, caught between Lor’s intense gaze and the thick cock surging ever deeper with each slow, steady thrust as, with agonizing slowness, Aston opens me all up.

A deep, wanton moan erupts from my belly as I feel the head of his cock brush against that sensitive place inside.

“There, that’s the spot, isn’t it?” —I nod helplessly—  
“That’s your slick gland.” Lor’s eyes lower to my lips, where his thumb brushes back and forth. “Such a good girl, taking this so well.”

A low growl rises behind me as Aston surges deeper still. A slight pinch is all the indication I get that my maidenhead is gone. He stills, letting me get used to the feeling of him being all the way inside. Then he moves, tentative at first, until I groan encouragement and he begins to pick up his pace, going even deeper, sliding the whole length of my channel. Every time his cock head rolls over the entrance to my slick gland, it has me twitching with need.

I feel like a flower unfurling one petal at a time, my eyes held captive by Lor’s bright blue gaze, pulling me under, drowning me in a sensual sea.

My breathing turns erratic, and strange moaning noises that do not sound human escape my lips.

Aston’s cock makes the filthiest wet noises as he shuttles in and out, our flesh slapping together as his groin connects with my ass with every deep thrust. Every penetration is a savage spark that sends me close to madness.

I shake my head. The pressure has no end. The pleasure only rises without bringing the needed release.

“Eyes on me,” Lor snaps.

My eyelids are so heavy. It’s all I can do to submit to his command. I feel like I’m drowning even as the pressure rises.

Awareness blooms—the pressure is Aston’s knot, growing, swelling, forcing my flesh to yield yet more.

Panic grips me. It’s too much, I can’t take it. But then I do. A squeal bursts from my lips as I splinter, the world stuttering before my eyes, my body rigid as my pussy contacts with pleasure on the cusp of pain around Aston’s thrusting cock.

“Such a good girl. Our perfect filthy little omega. Taking a good, deep fucking. Do you want him to knot you, little one? Can you feel it? Can you feel him opening you all up?”

“God, she is fucking perfect,” Aston growls behind me even as I’m spasming around his length. “Hot, wet, tight... See how she pushes her ass back to meet my thrusts like she is desperate for more.”

“Then give her more,” Lor commands. His lips clash with mine, kissing me. I cling to him, our tongues tangling as I feel my pussy being stretched obscenely. What I thought was Aston’s knot is only the start. There is more. Now with every thrust, the knot blooms thicker until I am nothing but an uncontrollable twitching mess, and my pussy quakes with deeper contractive waves.

I’m coming. I can’t stop, my pussy grasping his cock and knot. He’s taking me, rutting me, using my body for his pleasure, and delivering so much pleasure to me.

A vortex spinning wildly, I am grounded by Lor, who lies before me, his mouth moving hungrily over mine, and Aston’s cock that plunders my awakened body.

“Gods, she’s opening up so well,” Aston growls behind me.

The pleasure reaches a rapturous summit. The length of my channel locks rigid and refuses to accept the next thrust. I jerk, but Aston’s hands hold fast to my hips. My pussy locks tighter still, like it cannot decide whether to let his hot cock in or push it back out. I buck and fight, but he is determined and ruthless, and I’m so slick that I have no choice but to yield. His flesh spears me fully, the thick knot slipping inside to wedge snugly against the entrance to my slick gland.

I come apart, breaking into a thousand pieces that scatter into the universe under waves of white-hot bliss.



## Lor

I am an alpha who prides himself on control, but my control is about to snap. Watching her come apart as Aston fucks her is a test of the highest order. She is so beautiful in her submission to us, impossibly precious, impossibly so much more than I could ever have hoped.

To consider love when I barely know her might sound foolish. And yet, each day in her company, as I have provided service to her recently widowed mother, has worked a spell upon me. Her sweet ways, her cute little grumbles when I check her for not dressing properly or some other foolishness, or when I add a favored treat to her supper tray and her eyes light up, call to the nurturing side of me. Caring for her is so easy and so rewarding.

I did not realize it would be so.

Nor how quickly I should fall.

I love her as wholly as it is possible to love.

But mating is not only about love. It is about the deepest, most pervasive desire. It is about a sense of territory and protecting all that lies inside.

But it is also complex.

Ensuring her cloak is buttoned against the chill air does not preclude me from dominating her. They are simply different ways of worshiping her and giving her what she needs at that time.

I think she broke something in me when her small teeth found my throat. She was hissing displeasure because I was making her wait. My blood on her lips—now that was something to behold. The sting where her nails raked my body—assuredly, I want some more of that.

But I'm going to have to wait, for her cunt is well-plugged.

If the blissed expression on Aston's face is anything to go by, he is busy pumping her with seed, and it will take time for his knot to soften.

*Rut.* It comes for both of us. My body is merely slower to catch up, but I am nevertheless compelled to answer the call.

I cup her pretty face and kiss her lips, forehead, and cheeks before I pause to study her again. The two people I love so well embraced in carnal bliss; a heady vision made more potent because they did so under my command.

I've long known that Aston gets off on being dominated. I have played him that way with many a lass on many occasions and know how his mind works. Our sweet omega, the little prey squished between us, likes it too. She likes me commanding Aston just as much as she likes me commanding her. The way her eyes flare with heat and the needy sounds that escape her lips... so many little tells that she takes pleasure from what we do.

*Perfect.* She could not be more perfect if the Goddess herself had ventured to earth and made herself into living flesh.

"Does that feel good, little one?" I ask. "Is he filling you all up?"

She nods. Her sweet face, a vision of rapture, lashes damp, lips parted and puffy from my kisses. I didn't even fucking come in her mouth when she was sucking on my cock, for primitive instincts demanded my seed go first in her cunt.

She can take me that way later... and tomorrow and the day after... maybe every fucking day if it pleases me. And Aston's, too. Under our tutoring, she will be greedy for our cum like a good little omega should.

I'm just as fucking greedy for her.

I wonder what Aston would do if he knew the thoughts running through my mind even as I order him to tend to her. How, as I watched him eating her out, I also wanted to rip him off, bind him so that he couldn't fucking interfere, and then

fuck her at my leisure so that he would have no choice but to watch.

He thinks he is the savage one instigating her capture and forced heat. He's not even halfway to the savage I am. I simply hold myself on a leash.

If I get off on commanding him, I also relish self-abstinence. The pleasure is so much sweeter when I finally submit to my need for her. Because while I'm an alpha, powerful, and strong, I'm weak for her.

I want to protect her and provide for her.

I want to please her in all ways.

I want to be the alpha she needs.

I share a heated look with Aston. He understands what it means to mate, and the commitment required, one that will last our whole lives, how it is so much more than you could ever imagine before it is yours. I know he feels all I do, even as his hips work against her ass, rocking the knot, making her face contort with pleasure before he finally shifts off.

My cock jerks vigorously with renewed interest.

It is my turn.

“Oh!”

I hold her still as their combined cum drips out. As Aston collapses to the side of me, I roll, taking her under me with her back against the bed. She only coos with interest as I pin her wrists against the bed above her head and spread her legs wide, as if I need any additional enticing.

“Do you want my cock, little one?”

“Please. Oh, please. I do.” She tugs against my hold, pouting prettily on finding herself thoroughly trapped.

I smirk. “Good, I'm going to enjoy rutting you. Ruining this needy cunt and making it perfect for me.” I take my cock in hand and slide the head over her slippery folds. The pleasure is fucking intense, but I hold it down.

She mumbles nonsense and tries to rock her hips to get more of me.

“Just fuck her already,” Aston grumbles, kissing her shoulder. “You know you want to.”

I ignore the bastard. I can admit that I do. I can admit that I’m teetering on the brink of madness with the need to plunge into her hot sweet cunt.

Arm snaking under her waist, I brace one hand under her ass and plow her deep enough to bottom out.

We both groan.

Gods, her cunt is squeezing all over me in the most arresting way. I’m going to embarrass myself in a short time. But that doesn’t matter, does it? Not when we have time, however long it fucking takes; until we breed a whelp into her belly, until we mate her thoroughly, until she is without question ours, lest her king snatch her away.

I growl, thinking about any bastard taking her from us. Pulling out almost to the tip, I slam back home. The air leaves her lungs in a huff.

My strokes are punishing, but she only pushes back for more.

“Do you want more, little one? Want me to rut you? A good deep hard fucking. To pound this sweet pussy into the nest? Is that what you want? Need me to use you and ruin your cunt?”

“Please, yes, all of that!”

I give her everything she needs, taking her roughly.

She comes. It is near fucking impossible not to follow through, but I don’t, because when I come, I want to take her in the way an animal might—from behind with her on her hands and knees.

I pull my cock out, and she hisses at me with displeasure, raking her nails over my belly to make a grab for my cock. Taking a fistful of hair, I toss her over onto her front.



Aston's chuckle is steeped with male approval.

"Ass up. Right now. Present. Present your pussy for ravishment, and I will consider giving you my cock."

She growls, a cute, angry kitten sound. My grin is all teeth as I give her a little shake to remind her to obey.

Her hips pop up, and she holds there, quivering, waiting for me to give her more.

I do. Taking her hip in my hand, I fill her in a savage thrust. Letting myself go, I pound into her, using her well, no longer holding back as my knot swells, and I give into my needs. My balls tighten, my spine tingles, and a sense of inevitability slams into me as I slam into her.

Neck arched, I growl long and low as the first hot splash of cum bathes the entrance to her womb. My knot, swollen to the point of madness, locks us together. I rock against her, dumping load after load of cum, deep and exactly where it needs to be.

She twitches and dances as her hot cunt sucks down on my cock, demanding more.

She gets more.

When she finally softens under me, I reach around her to pet her clit without mercy until her pussy begins the delightful fisting again.

Aston lounges at our side and gathers her hair up to watch her face. "We're going to breed you," he says. "You understand that, don't you, Freya?"

"Oh God, please," she says. Her pussy squeezes so tightly over me it compels yet another hot batch of cum.

"She likes the sound of that," I say darkly. "She wants us to." The omega in her recognizes that we are her mates just as we recognize her as ours. There is danger before she is bred that others might take her away.

If we breed her, if she carries our child, no man, not even the king, will dare separate us.

So we fuck her, one then the other, and then together, taking her over and over again until she does not even have the energy to beg us for more, and then we rouse her in whatever way we need.



It might be the third day, or it might be the fourth. My cock feels raw, and our mate lies limp over me with her head resting against my chest. Her pussy is hot around my cock, but I'm no longer fully hard.

"Fuck, I think she has broken my cock," Aston mutters beside me. I fist his hair to draw him closer, and we share a lusty kiss. Her head pops up, and her pussy squeezes around my length, awakening my cock.

I drag my lips from Aston's to find her wearing a coquettish expression as she nibbles on her lip.

"I like it when you kiss."

I smirk. "I like it when we kiss, too."

She swallows and looks between us. "Do you... un..."

"Do we what, little one?"

She blushes... At least she is not screeching for our cock, so I believe her heat is over.

"She wants to know if we fuck," Aston says bluntly, like I didn't already guess.

She glares at him.

"What do you think?" I ask her, redirecting her attention my way.

"I think that you do and that I would like to watch."

My cock performs an enthusiastic thud inside her. I thought it was dead, but her saucy words rouse it to life—only it is not entirely pleasurable and the lass's wince tells me she needs a rest, too. "We might need a bit of time to recover," I say. "You have broken both our cocks."

She sighs. “Fine then.” She tucks her head back down. “Tomorrow.”

Aston chuckles and rolls out of the bed. I watch his ass as he stalks over to the table and gets a drink.

“Your humble servants, we shall do our best to satisfy your curiosity.”

“Good,” she says, pressing a kiss to my chest, and then, if I’m not mistaken, our little omega is fast asleep.

# Chapter Twelve

## Freya

I fall asleep in Lor's arms and wake up in Aston's. I feel like I've been asleep for a very long time, and much of what transpired before is fuzzy in my mind. My body aches, but it is a delicious kind of ache. Muscles have been tested in ways they have never been before. My throat is a little sore. Inside and out. I remember screaming out my pleasure, demanding, and growling.

I remember biting them. As I reach for my neck, I feel the distinct sting—they have bitten me too.

“Let it be,” Aston says, taking my fingers away.

“You have marked me,” I say.

“And you have marked me, too.” His lips tug up in a sinful smirk that makes me blush. I should not be shy after all we have shared yet, today, I see him anew.

I have coveted him for many years. The boy who teased me when I was a child and who grew into the man I fantasized about.

It doesn't quite seem possible, but he is now mine.

My body accepts what has been done, yet my mind is playing catch up.

“Are you blushing, Freya?” He strokes his fingers down my cheek. “After the demands you made of me these last few days, one wouldn't think you had a bit of shyness in you. But I like it. I like everything about you.”

I swallow past the sudden tightness in my throat. “I didn't think you liked me.”

He makes a scoffing noise. “What nonsense is that?”

“I could barely speak to you,” I say, lowering my lashes and remembering a few years ago when he visited.

“Hey!” He tips my chin and holds my eyes before lowering his lips to mine for a chaste kiss. “I noticed you. I fucking noticed you a lot. But you seemed so young. I wanted to give you time, and then there was the war, and I knew I had a duty there. And how could I claim you and then leave a few days later? And what if I never came back?”

“Don’t speak like that,” I say.

“You were not ready for me two years ago. And I had a commitment that could not be escaped. Much has changed in the war over the last two years, and the Blighten hordes have been pushed back in many places. Challenges lie ahead, but I also hope we are venturing into an era of greater peace.”

“I hope so,” I say.

A sound on the other side of the room draws my attention. Lor is pouring a steaming pot of water into a copper bath, making a loud splash. He dips his fingers in. I’m not looking at what he’s doing with the bath. I’m looking at him, the huge, naked alpha, and now I am blushing again.

“Our mate is filthy,” Lor says, nodding at me. “We are all fucking filthy. But the lass can have the water first.”

“Our master has spoken,” Aston says with a smirk. He scoops me up and rises from the bed with me in his arms. The blankets drop away.

Lor was speaking true. I am filthy and crusted in the most unpleasant way.

Aston strides for the copper bath, which I realize is already full. Goodness, how did I sleep through him filling it?

I’m lowered into blissfully warm water.

“I could walk, you know.”

“So you could,” Aston says, reaching for the soap and cloth. “But I like to carry you. You weigh next to nothing. Although I happen you will be putting on a bit of weight soon.” He winks at me.

“We can’t know yet.”

“Your scent,” Lor says, drawing my eyes to him and his naked body. His cock hangs long and heavy against his thigh.

How did that fit? I snatch my eyes away when I finally notice his smug grin.

“It is all yours, little one. Although I admit, it is a little worse for wear. You’re a demanding little thing when in the throes of your heat.”

I cannot blame all of it on my heat.

Aston washes me, and then Lor dries me and carries me to the table, where he sits me on his lap and feeds me from his hand.

“I can sit on my own seat,” I say.

He pauses. “Do you not like it here?”

“Fine, I like it here,” I admit.

“Good,” he says. “I like you here too, on my lap where you belong. I like to tend to you. It gives me a great deal of pleasure. But why would you deny me this if it does not bother you?”

I don’t quite know what to make of his words. “Is this how it is between alphas and omegas?”

He nods. “I believe it is. Not that I know many mated alphas. An omega mate is wishful thinking, for the most part, given omegas are so rare. But having you on my lap feels natural.”

“The king will not be happy,” I say sadly as worry worms in. “When he finds out you snatched me and brought me here to get me with child.”

“I dare say he won’t,” Lor says, reaching for the next morsel and offering it to my lips. “And that’s why we... took the liberties.”

“I’m glad you did.”

Aston chuckles. “We’re glad we did too.”



After breakfast, the nest is refreshed, and I'm told to rest.

Aston and Lor are both dressed and stand together beside the front door, talking softly. I can just spy them through the gap where the bedroom door is ajar. The fire is well stoked, and the cottage is warm. The brightness tells me it is somewhere near the middle of the day.

My hand moves to settle against my tummy, where they claim a new life grows. A mate or husband and babies was an aspiration that never seemed real before. I was in denial where Marshal was concerned. I can accept this awful truth now, and it scares me how close I came to marrying a controlling, joyless man who sought to deny me the chance to see a dear friend for the last time.

All the markers were there for his nature, yet I ignored them because I'd convinced myself I had no other choice.

Marriage to a lord and a fancy life in the city was never for me. Not when the beautiful countryside around the clans and Penley had already stolen my heart from the time of my childhood summers with Dara and Aston, where I was often found in the village and where my mother felt safe for me to venture. She had visited on many occasions and would stay and chat with Dara's mother while we played.

I wonder if my mother will be shocked at what I do, taking not one but two mates and both of them barbarians, even if one can shift. Except I already know she will be happy simply to see me happy, and ecstatic to learn there will soon be a baby. She often mentioned with pride that Papa had spoken of Aston in letters and that the young alpha had risen to be one of his trusted lieutenants. Then there is Lor, who she has talked aplenty about him being a blessing since he came to stay with us.

I chuckle, thinking about him turning up under the pretense of charity when he was, in fact, planning with Aston



to claim me as a mate. I cannot find fault with him for it when it delivered me my dream.

They are still talking, but the deep rumble has taken on an undercurrent that stirs me from happy thoughts.

The front door opens, bringing a blast of cold air to the bedroom, before they both leave.

The tiredness that fills me is no longer strong enough to lure me toward sleep. Pushing covers aside, I rise and pad over to the other side of the room where my gown is neatly hung on a hook. I seem to recall it lying on the floor, so one of them must have picked it up.

I huff a little breath as it dawns upon me that I'm a clanswoman and will need to wear something more suiting... like the hide dresses that are scandalous by Hydornian standards. My tummy takes a slow dip as I imagine my mates' heated gazes on seeing me in such clothing. How it will allow them easy access should they wish to rut me.

I'm getting distracted; this dress will have to do for now. The little buttons are difficult to do without help, but I get most of them done up. Then I lace up my boots and slip my cloak over my shoulders before I head for the front door. A little fresh air will do me good, and then I can sleep.

Only when I throw open the door I receive a surprise. There is snow, for sure, but it does not look very deep—no more than a few inches—and is patchy in places like it has rained.

A pile of clothes and boots lies on the porch. I stare from them to Aston, who is standing at the edge of the small clearing. On hearing the door open, he turns to look at me.

“What are you doing out, lass?” He stamps toward me, his long strides covering the distance swiftly.

“Where is Lor?”

“He is scouting, lass.”

The unease I felt a moment ago returns full bore. “There's not enough snow.”

He shakes his head slowly. “There are a few drifts in places, but the road is passable on horseback.”

I swallow. “Do you think they will come?”

He doesn't answer me for the longest time, and I know what that means. I stare at him, troubled. He's such a beautiful male, with his hazel eyes and those freckles across his nose, golden hair, and the darker beard on his jaw. My heart belongs only to him and Lor.

“It's too late now, isn't it?” I say. “Now I'm with child?”

I see the softening in his face, and my heart plays a sickly giddyup.

“It would have been better had we more time. A month. A couple of fucking months, so there could be no doubt in anybody's mind that enough time had passed for you to be good and bred. I know it to be true, and Lor, well, he's a shifter, and they can tell sooner still, but others, particularly bastard lordlings, can be prone to seeing things their own way, especially when there is room for doubts.”

“He might not come.” I feel sick. “It might snow again.”

“I do not like being bested. No man does. I cannot even say I would fucking blame him, when we took you as we did.” His nostrils flare. “You are mine now, and I will kill any man who dares touch you. Why would I expect the man who was set to marry you to do any less?”

I swallow. I hear his words and understand the sentiments beneath them, but Marshal will not pursue me for the same reasons. Aston is correct in some ways. Marshal would not like to be bested. We have been here a few days, not even a whole week. I'm an omega and supremely valuable, and when Marshal finds out, that will only cause him to double down. If there is a chance for him to tear us apart, he will take it. “We need to hide.”

“We are hidden,” he says. “They will not come here. They have no reason to. More likely, they will go to the clan, where our king is already forewarned of our intentions and will send them packing.”

# Chapter Thirteen

## One month earlier...

### Lor

The tavern is heaving as I push through the crowd of raucous merry-makers to where the big alpha sits, supping his ale in the corner. A drunk patron bumps into me. The curse he issues dies on his lips as he looks up and up until his eyes clash with mine.

He swallows, mumbles an apology, and steps back.

I'm a big man and an alpha, and human betas tend to sense something is off about me even if they don't recognize the darkness of my inner wolf.

Aston grins as he spots me, the crowd now parting to give me room.

I sit down opposite to him, a serving wench already weaving through the throngs with a tray full of fresh ales.

She places one on the table before me with a saucy grin. I take a coin from my pocket and slide it across the table to her.

"Anything else?"

Out of the corner of my eyes, I see Aston lean back with a grin, waiting to see how this plays out.

"No, lass. Just the ale with my thanks."

I'd have taken her up on her offer not so long ago. Maybe with Aston... Maybe on my own. Back then, I didn't think I had a fucking chance with Freya. Now I have my memories are filled with her pink-cheeked shock when I mentioned her needing her bottom spanked, her warm, pretty eyes gazing up at me with interest, and those many telling moments when her aroused scent bloomed when I took liberties in some small way as I helped her with her cloak.

In all ways, save the formal one, Freya is already mine. No other lass will ever again touch what belongs to my future mate.

As the serving wench sashays off to take the ales around, my eyes return to Aston. It's been a while since we've seen each other. Circumstances have dictated that we must go our separate ways, at least for the time being. It is the longest we have been apart since our fateful first meeting in the woods and when my wolf first caught Freya's scent and decided she was ours.

"I have news," he says, face sobering and setting off the pricklings of unease.

"What did you find out?"

His eyes turn sightless as he stares at his beer before they lift to meet mine. "It was no accident that we were not with him."

The hairs rise at the back of my neck. We were Edward's lieutenants. One or both of us accompanied him on every patrol. That was how it was done. But the day he died, we had both been called elsewhere. Thinking Edward was attending meetings, we were not concerned. Only later, when we received news he had died patrolling with other men who had failed him when he came under attack, did we question how this came about.

We were suspicious, but those suspicions were hard to justify. Edward was respected by those above him and below him. He had no enemies that we were aware of.

"I have more work to do, but it all leads back to one place. I don't have the evidence yet."

My nostrils flare. "There will be retribution."

He nods. "I'm treading carefully so as not to alert those involved. Keep a close watch on Freya. Their situation is sliding. Debts are being called in. They will soon make a move."



## Present day...

The snow is cold under my paws, and the wind is sharp as I lope broader circles around the woodcutter's cottage.

They are coming. I have not seen them or any evidence to this effect, and yet I know. And it fucking terrifies me in the way no battle with the Blighten ever did because it is not merely my life at risk but that of a woman who has claimed my heart.

My senses are on edge, and my wolf is going nuts. He has been confined all the time we were in the city, and while we tended Freya through her heat. This morning, he demanded to be set free. There was no point in denying him, so, while Freya slept with Aston, I rose and took an early scout, finding the snow was not as deep as we had hoped.

Still, I was not overly concerned until I ventured out again after Freya broke her fast and felt the rain in the air.

Our actions feel reckless now in bringing her here, although where else might we have taken her, I do not know. Then, her heat came upon her quickly, and we were all caught up in the frenzy of what followed.

She's with child now. Ours. Claimed. Bred.

There should be no more that we need to fucking do.

And it would have worked had the snow locked us in for long enough to cement our claim, but that did not fucking happen. The sky, while cloudy, is too light to offer the promise of more snow. It is no longer raining, but the damage is done. They will be coming. Perhaps they are already on their way. Marshal could be gathering forces and possibly searching for us even now.

They will not fucking take her. Only the sickness roiling in my gut tells me we will have a fight on our hands if that prick lordling decides to throw his small weight around.

Maybe I read this all wrong. Maybe Marshal is in his lordly home with his small cock in hand and questioning where it went wrong. But as I emerge at the top of a steep slope that offers views of the narrow forest path that leads from Pershore to the clans, the wind gusts, bringing me a tendril of unwelcome scents: men, horses, dogs, and the metallic tang of armor.

They are not scents of the clan's people.

They are the scents of soldiers from city-dwelling lands.

Then another scent hits me—*wolf shifter*.

My hackles rise, and my teeth curl back in a low growl as I catch the first glint of metal and feel the rumble of hooves beneath my paws.

Ten... no, twenty warriors armed with crossbows, half a dozen wolfhounds and two wolf shifters leading the way.

The men and hounds would likely have continued onto the village where our king, Alfred, would have sent them on their fucking way. But the shifters will pick up my scent and lead them straight to the fucking cottage.

My instincts war. I could return and warn Aston and my mate, yet what good will that fucking do when they are so many and can easily keep my pace. It will give me neither time nor advantage.

There are no more doubts nor suppositions; no confusion about Marshal's intent.

They are coming, and they mean to take Freya back.

My only hope of saving her is if I take the shifters out.

Yet I am alone, and the odds are not in my favor against so many. I must get past mounted men with crossbows before I can reach the wolves.

I will make the fucking odds work. I am nothing if I fail my mate. A life without her is no fucking life at all. She carries our young—our seed grows in her belly.



The man buried under my fur feels the coldness of despair, the understanding of his imminent death, and, worse, the gnashing fear that this death might not be enough.

The wolf exists in a state of instinctive purpose. Protect our mate and give Aston time to get Freya somewhere safe.

Man and beast are aligned in the course of action laid out before us.

We snatched Freya from her life and her betrothed. One might empathize with Marshal's quest as he seeks to save her from the barbarians who took her.

Aston and I know differently, for we have the measure of the man.

I cannot let that bastard get his hands on her.

As for those who seek to support him, well, they have made their fucking choices, and they will reap the consequences.

A more noble male might see other avenues of redress.

I am not noble. There is nothing I would not do to keep those I love safe. I am an alpha and a wolf. If any man dares to come for what is mine, he and his associates will be punished with their lives.

Lifting my head, I howl.



# Freya

A distant wolf howls. It raises the hairs at the back of my neck.

“They are coming,” Aston says. “I don’t know how they know where we are, but they are coming.”

They?

He means Marshal.

The man they stole me from.

The man who wants me for his wife.



## Lor

Warning issued, I lower my head to see the horses wheeling to a stop as all eyes swing my way.

The wolves are not fucking stupid. They know I'm after them and slink back to hide behind the mounted soldiers—fucking cowards.

I want to charge down the slope and rip them limb from limb but, recognizing the folly of such a move, I slip back into the forest and lope around the side. I hear the cries of confusion.

*“Where the fuck is he?”*

*“Watch your backs!”*

*“Maybe he has gone?”*

Their horses jostle as men armed with crossbows nervously eye the trees.

Finding a perfect opening, I charge.

*“Attack!”*

A crossbow bolt whistles past my shoulder and slams into the nearby tree trunk with a *thunk*.

I growl. Kicking my hind legs against the ground, I fly through the air, crashing into one mounted soldier and sending him barreling into another. We all smash together to the forest floor. I taste blood. A horse screams and charges riderless through the trees.

*“Get the bastard!”*

I leap, flash from wolf to bipedal beast mid-flight, my claws raking the next soldier's throat. As I land on the ground in wolf form, the two shifters and hounds join the attack, snapping and snarling.

Another bolt whistles past. A sword slices through the air, tearing the flesh off my flank and searing me with pain.

As I leap, I change form and back again, healing the wound before raking another soldier and knocking him from the saddle. With his foot caught in the stirrup, the wounded rider screams as he's dragged into the forest by his stampeding horse.

I flash in and out of forms, charging between them so fast I am nothing but a blur.

Then I spy on him, *Marshal*, the pompous prick who wants Freya, boxed between two of his soldiers.

I leap. The beta shifter knocks me from my course, and we land in a tangle of limbs. I tumble him, getting a lock on his throat. He rakes me with his paws, but I am bigger and stronger, and I taste blood as I snap his neck.

*"Call the dogs off! I can't get a fucking shot!"*

*"Just fucking shoot!"*

Another crossbow bolt whistles past as I barrel into the second shifter. And another.

Pain, sudden and sharp, takes my back leg from under me. I snarl, head whipping around, and launch for the bastard, taking his crossbow and arm in my jaws before he can knock another bolt. His horse and I crash to the forest floor on top of him.

Before I can turn, another arrow pierces my shoulder, slamming me into the ground.

*"Ride!"* The shout goes up. *"Ride now!"*

I try to rise, but the pain rips a howl from my chest as I must watch them ride out.

Twisting my head, I close my jaws around about the length of the arrow in my shoulder and, stealing myself, rip the barb out.

My next howl is long and mournful and filled with agony and failure.

I have another arrow in my hind leg, but it snaps off when I try to pull it out. Fuck! I cannot shift. The pain is maddening but not deep enough to prevent movement.

I rise, panting. Around me are the bodies of four soldiers: a horse, a hound, and a shifter.

Too many yet live, including the shifter who can guide them.

Lifting my snout, I howl once more.

Aston will know that they are coming. Ignoring the pain that permeates my body, I take off into the forest at a run.



## Freya

Aston flings me up into the saddle before swiftly mounting behind me. But as he wheels the horse around, I hear another wolf howl.

That sound is like being doused in frigid water. It is all visceral pain, and I know instinctively who it belongs to.

“Lor,” I say.

“I know,” Aston snarls. “We cannot linger here.”

I sob as Aston urges the horse, and we take off at a gallop along the snowy path, chased by the bay of hounds and another mournful howl.

A flash in the trees to the right. I see wolfhounds and a flash of dark fur—a wolf shifter, and mounted soldiers.

“There she is!”

As we charge the narrow forest path, I cling to the horse, trees whistling past on either side. Yet I sense hopelessness when our horse must bear two, and theirs carry only one.

They are catching us, flanking us, then surging ahead to cut us off.

Aston unsheathes his sword.

A great wolf leaps for the front riders. Dark gray fur with cream flashes to his snout and underbelly, one I have not seen since I was a girl, only so much bigger than my memory. *Lor!*

They land with a great crash against the ground.

A rider moves to cut us off—our horse dances to the side, and a clang rents the air as Aston and the soldier clash swords.

Another is on us—and yet more riders are circling. Aston spins the horse. Lor takes another rider out to our side, only to yelp as he tumbles on the ground.

“Lor!” Only now do I see an arrow embedded in his hind leg and how his beautiful coat is matted with blood. “They are killing him!”

Aston growls and wheels the horse around, clashing swords with another rider.

But we are surrounded. As he fights on one side, I am snatched from his arms on the other.

“Stay your blade, or I’ll slit her throat!”

I catch the glint of metal and feel the cold press of a blade against my throat as an arm roughly clasps my waist. Around me, the forest falls quiet.

Aston is on the ground leaning over the body of a soldier, his chest heaving, face and body splattered with blood. “You’re not going to hurt her,” Aston says.

“Are you willing to take that risk?” the man with the dagger against my throat asks.

“No!” I beg, but it is too late. I see that dreadful softening in Aston, the evidence of defeat, even before he growls and tosses his sword to the floor.

Lor issues a low growl as he lingers on the periphery, his beautiful coat stained by blood.

An arrow whistles through the air, embedding into a tree inches from him, and he darts behind the trunk for cover.

“Lor, go. Run!” Aston calls, just as a man comes up behind him and, using the hilt of his sword, knocks him to the ground with a savage blow.

Lor growls, but another arrow wards him off as the soldiers converge on Aston, beating him into the snow.

I sob. My captor only chuckles as the light dusting of snow turns red with Aston’s blood.

“Enough!” A voice snaps through the cruelty, and Marshal nudges his horse to the front, his cool gaze sweeping over the scene before landing on me. “Bring my bride to me.”

The blade disappears, and I'm hauled forward by a fist on my arm, my eyes torn between Aston and Marshal. Relief washes through me as Aston stirs.

"Marshal, please! It is over. I am not your betrothed anymore."

"It is not over, omega. Did you think I did not know what you are? Did you think there were no ways to test for such things? Did you think I would let these barbarian scum snatch such a prize from my hands?"

His eyes gleam with fervor as they turn from me to Lor, who hangs back in the shadows of the trees.

Aston heaves himself to his hands and knees and spits out blood. "For fuck's sake, Lor, run. You know what you need to do."

A soldier brings his booted foot down into the middle of Aston's back, driving him back to the floor.

The soldier hoists me up to the horse in front of Marshal as Aston's wrists are bound, and he is dragged to his feet.

Lor turns and runs, gait ragged under a fresh volley of crossbow bolts.

That is the last I see of him as Aston is tossed face down over a saddle, and we ride out of the forest, bound for Pershore.



# Chapter Fourteen

## Lor

**L**eaving them is the hardest thing I have ever done.  
They are my world, and I love them both. We have known one perfect moment of happiness, and I am fucking greedy for more.

Only I cannot save them, so I run.

Run for the only source of hope I know... if I can get there alive.

The snow begins to fall, coming down thick and heavy too fucking late. I am shaking with cold and fatigue, my hind leg has gone numb, and nearing my limit when the lights of the village come into view.

I reach the sentries and hear them call out before blackness comes for me, and I collapse.



## Aston

I fall in and out of consciousness as we travel through the forests. In the brief moments of lucidity, I hear Freya's quiet sobbing.

I finally rouse fully as I'm dropped to a hard stone floor. They chain me to the wall with enough give not to rouse me from where I slump.

My head is pounding. My body is likewise throbbing with pain, even as I shiver uncontrollably from the cold. My fingers are so stiff it is a wonder they have not snapped off. There is not an inch on me that does not ache.

But there is a relief to be free of the jostling, pounding gait of the horse I was bound over.

It takes me long moments before I can rouse myself enough to sit up and longer still for coherent thoughts to rise from the cycle of misery and despair.

If my body aches, then my heart aches more. We have failed her. We have failed our mate in the gravest of ways.

And Lor. I saw the arrow—he would not have been able to shift. Gods, I pray he made it back to the village and did not die alone in the forest from his many wounds.

Worries beat at my mind even as pain beats at my skull and weary body.

The stone floor beneath me is icy and seeps into me, but it is warmer here than outside. When I test my fingers, I find they can move.

I'm not going to fucking die yet. Not here, and not because of some bastard lord. Freya needs me. For her, I will fucking live.

There's a bucket close at hand, and I see the glisten of what looks like water. Heaving myself to my feet, I shuffle

over, dip my fingers in, and take a tentative lick.

It is water, clean, if a little stale. Now is not the time to be precious. I cup it in my shaking hands and bring it to my lips, opening cracked wounds and making them sting like a bastard. It is of small consequence amid all my other woes. I take a little more water and slowly regain more of my wits.

I don't know where the fuck we are. Somewhere in the city, I believe. I don't know how the fuck we shall get out of this but, if Lor yet lives, I know he will find a fucking way.

I put my back against the wall and let my ass slide down until it meets the frigid stone floor.

*Time.* We never had enough of it, nor the evidence we needed. So Lor and I acted. Perhaps recklessly. But what choice did we have?

I cannot lose Freya or Lor. Yet I am beaten bloody, hanging on to consciousness by a thread, and trapped behind a locked door.

The best I can do tonight is survive and be ready for whatever tomorrow might bring.



# Freya

I pass through rage into sorrow and finally despair.

Then, I pass through all three again.

Marshal, unable to handle me or my constant fighting, hands me over to one of his men, a rough brute who paws me too tightly and makes my stomach churn when he sniffs my hair.

He is scenting me. It is the omega effect and something I have never experienced before—how even beta men can be turned a little stupid by our scent.

I have never experienced it before, having never revealed.

I should not be experiencing it now, given I am mated. It leaves a terrible fear that something is wrong.

My mind is a jumble of chaotic thoughts. The images of what just happened will haunt me for the rest of my life. I worry for Lor, seeing him limp away, his coat covered in blood. I worry for Aston, lying lifeless, slung over the horse, and suffering terribly.

If Marshal thinks I shall ever be his willingly after this, the man is more of a fool than I already thought.

It's late by the time we arrive at the city, only to loop around the side under cover of darkness to a sewer entrance... telling me as if I didn't already know that Marshal's actions here crossed lines and laws.

We sneak through the dark underbelly of Pershore's capital until we pull into a tall gateway. Beyond is a courtyard and stable block, which I recognize belong to Marshal's family home—a grand townhouse in the city's most prestigious district.

A soldier unties Aston and lets him drop to the floor, and a part of me cracks deep inside. Snatching the horse's crop from

Marshall's limp hand, I beat him with it in a frenzy of emotions and rage. When his guards try to take it from me, I beat them, too.

Then I hear Aston's low moan, and the fight goes out of me. The crop is snatched from my fingers. I sob and struggle weakly as the guards take me by the arms. "Let me go to him," I beg. "Let me help him."

"Take her inside," Marshal says coldly.

I don't see what happens next, for I can barely see anything through my tears as I'm marched into the home, then thrust into a stately drawing room. The door is firmly shut. When I try the door I find it is locked, but I still rattle it vigorously against the jamb before giving up. Dark wood paneling and family portraits line the walls while a fire blazes in the hearth. The heat is cloying after the cold outside. I fear I may be sick over the priceless Pershore rug at any moment.

Not that I care about the rug. I want to rip the portraits from the walls and toss them on the fire.

I want to tear the room apart.

Head in hands, I pace restlessly before the fire, my temper flaring anew and near mindless with the potency of my rage. I will claw the skin from his face before I go willingly into his arms. And all because I'm an omega.

To think I ever looked kindly upon him when he didn't discard me after my father passed and I had no dowry. No, his only interest in me is because I'm an omega, and he covets the status that would accompany taking me as his wife.

The door opens as I'm still pacing, and I freeze as Marshal enters the room. He eyes me warily; his lip is bloody, his cheek bruised where the crop caught him, his hair a little disheveled. This is not the Marshal I know.

"You will control your temper," he says, "unless you want your mate to suffer the consequences."

My hands clench into fists so tight I feel my nails pierce my palms. "You seek to use him to control me."

Marshal shrugs, his fingers pressing to his bloody lip. “I did not go to this trouble for you to get notions of independence. He will live.”

“As your prisoner?” I demand.

He inclines his head and strides over to the sideboard, where he pours himself a drink—not even bothering with one for me.

He probably knows I will throw it at him. “How long have you known?”

“That you were an omega?” He lifts the tumbler to his lips and swallows.

I nod.

“Before your father passed.”

My brows draw together. “That is a very long time.”

He takes another deep drink before setting the tumbler down with a grimace. “My family has debts. Significant debts, but an omega is a considerable boon for any family. The king will wipe them away once we have wedded, and our claim is unquestionable. We will need to keep you out of sight until then.”

“Unquestionable?”

“With child,” he confirms.

I am already with child. I pointed this out to him earlier, and he didn’t even care.

My frown deepens as he fills his glass again and takes yet another drink. “What if my father had never passed and I had a dowry? I might have wed any suitor.”

Something crosses his face, and he takes a deeper gulp of drink.

Cold blooms inside my chest. “No.” I shake my head slowly.

He shrugs. “I did mention our debts were considerable, our standing falling, and our outlook poor.”

My chest compresses, and darkness settles over the room. “Tell me you had nothing to do with Papa’s death,” I whisper.

He takes another drink. “I couldn’t afford for there to be competition.”

A terrible, broken cry is torn from my lips before I collapse to my knees. I can’t breathe. The air makes a wheezing sound as it tries to enter my lungs.

He steps toward me, and I throw my arm out to ward him off. “Do not dare to touch me,” I hiss. “Ever. You are not worthy of me, this life or the next!”

He stops a few paces away. “I don’t need to touch you, do I? Now, one of the barbarian bastards has already bred you. That’s good enough for me. I’ll keep your man alive for your compliance. But he can never leave. And neither can you. I’ll forgive your actions tonight. But tomorrow, you will play the part of my willing bride. I had your father killed. Don’t think I can’t do the same for your mother, or the barbarian bastard you claim to love.”

He drains his drink, slams it down on the table, and strides from the room.

As I fall to sobbing, two of his guards enter. They take me up winding stairs and into the attic of the house. Here, I am tossed into a boxy room with a single wooden bed and high barred window, and the door firmly shut.

I try the door. I try the window. Then, with my hand over my belly where a babe grows, I cry myself to sleep.





## Lor

Pain is my unwelcome friend. It batters me in waves.

“Shift, you mangy mutt! I know you can hear me. I’m not above stabbing you again to rouse you if I must!”

That is the voice of my king, Alfred, and he sounds pissed.

*Shift?*

My eyes try to open but resist my command.

Fuck the pain!

“Shift!”

I shift. The pain is excruciating and then absent. I shake uncontrollably as every muscle on my spent body goes into shock. My stomach feels like it is trying to consume me from the inside out.

Hot, bloody meat is thrust between my lips. I suck it clean of juices before I slowly chew.

“Thank the Goddess,” my king mutters gruffly. “I thought I was going to lose you.”

“Please stop cursing,” a feminine voice chides softly.

I swallow the lump of meat and blink my eyes open to find his pretty sister, Lara, staring down at me. Her belly is swollen with the late stage of pregnancy. She is mated to the king’s closest friend, and this will be her third whelp. I am in a wooden cottage, a soft bed beneath me and a fire blazing to my right.

As the nourishment does its work, my shaking eases to a tremble. “He took them,” I croak, just as Lara thrusts another piece of bloody meat between my teeth.

“Who?” Alfred demands, rounding on me.

I suck the meat clean of blood and swallow it whole. “Marshal. We mated Freya. She carries our child. Then the

bastard came with men. Aston was beaten bloody—they bound him and tossed him on a horse. And Freya...” I must take a moment to compose myself. “It was everything we hoped for. She declared for us, claimed us, put her mark on us, and demanded we tend her through her heat.”

“I will skin the bastard!” Alfred begins pacing before the fire.

“Freya has been a part of this clan in all ways that matter,” Lara says, thrusting another piece of meat between my lips. “Were I not so heavy with child, I would set this lordling straight myself.”

As a young lad, I knew nothing of Hydornia and very little of the Blighten, save they are green bastards and raided our village. I had never been to a city nor even stepped beyond the clans. But there is power in numbers and weaponry, and I understand that Marshal is a lord with troops at his disposal. None of this deters me. “You will need to get in the fucking queue. Just as soon as I can stand, I’m going for my mates!”

“Mates?” The king pauses his pacing, and a brief smile finds his lips. “I always wondered about the two of you. Who is the top dog?”

“That is a terrible fucking pun,” Lara mutters, but I hear the humor in her voice as she presses another juicy lump of meat into my mouth. That I accept it without fuss is a testimony to my weakened state.

“Fine then,” Alfred says. “I will get in the queue with the rest of the Baxter clan. And you can be sure once Jack Ralston and Eric Halket find out, they will also be rallying their clans. Gage Llyon will also want fucking in, and you know how his clan loves a good fight. With the Blighten in retreat, good battles will be hard to come by.”

“Could you at least let Lor recover before you rouse him with talk of war,” Lara says, shoving the next piece of meat in my mouth with vigor. “My mate is already sharpening his ax. Not that I blame him.”

“I wouldn’t count on Halket,” I say before Lara can stuff more food in my mouth. “We snatched Freya. You know Eric Halket is a pussy-whipped bastard. They don’t believe in the old ways, and his mate will be pissed.”

Lara rolls her eyes and shoves more dripping meat in my mouth.

Snatching lasses is a Baxter thing, and we have a reputation as such. Not that we take unwilling lasses, more that we sometimes help nature along. We spoke to Alfred before we made our move, agreeing on the woodcutter cottage as the best option. It is always kept well stocked and more commonly referred to as the rutting cottage as a place for the few omegas of the clan to go with their mates when it is time for their heat. The king assured me he could handle a pompous lordling turning up and making demands, on the slight chance Marshal came. Given my king is a seven foot tall hulking brute whom I have witnessed tear the limbs from a raider who tried to take one of his sister’s whelps, I believe Marshal would have pissed himself.

Only, the snow did not come as we anticipated, and the woodcutter’s cottage turned out to be a poor choice after all.

“His mate will be leading the fucking charge herself if she finds out a mated lass has been taken. Gwen will gut the skinny prick,” Alfred says with an approving nod.

“She will,” Lara agrees, smiling and reminding me she was an accomplished warrior maiden before the whelps came along... I’m certain she could be handy with an ax even now while round enough to pop. “I expect a full account of the details.”

“Fuck! Is it still snowing? We need to make haste.” I try to rise, only to be pushed firmly back against the bed.

“Peace, warrior,” Lara says. “Do you think a little snow will hold us back?”

“Aye, we will dig our way fucking through if need be,” Alfred agrees. Stepping forward, he places his hand on my

shoulder. “We shall get them back, both of them. Make no mistake.”

# Chapter Fifteen

## Aston

I sleep fitfully, roused early the following day as guards shout orders to one another and stomp around outside the room where I'm locked.

The door opens soon after, and two burly betas enter, swords leveled on me like I'm not chained to the fucking wall. One is carrying a bowl of slop. He puts it on the floor and kicks it toward me with his boot.

Were I free of these chains, I would have disabled them and gutted them with their blades.

Well, I'd give it a go.

Only the bastards are not stupid, and my chains are secure.

I don't say anything. I don't even move; just let the rage filling me show in my eyes.

"Where is she? If that bastard has touched her, I will kill him first, then every other fucker in this house."

I shouldn't ask nor toss threats about, but I'm desperate for a scrap of news on Freya. I feel sick thinking about her being with him all night and of what he might have done to her.

"Fuck you, barbarian scum," one guard says, nudging the other one, and they back out and slam the door shut.

I pick up the metal bowl filled with gray slops and eye it with a grimace.

They call me a barbarian like it's a fucking insult when Marshal, their small pricked lordly bastard, is filth I'd scrape off the heel of my boot.

Only he is a bastard who has all the power here, and I have none, so I scoop up the dubious goo with my fingers and shovel it into my mouth.

Only after I've eaten it do I wonder if they drugged it.

Instinct tells me to shove my fingers down my throat and puke it back up. But my stomach rumbles, already digesting it with enthusiasm, knowing my body needs the nourishment to recover.

I fling the bowl away and sit back against the wall.

Nothing happens other than my stomach grumbles noisily. I don't think it was poisoned. If it was, they did not put enough in. As concerns about being poisoned abate, worries for my mate rise.

I look at the chains above me, which I have already tested for weakness, and found none. But with naught else to do, I rise, hoping the weak light spilling through the cracks in the wooden door might offer some hope.

There is none. I can't say that I blame them for their caution when I'm a trained alpha warrior who has honed his skills fighting orcs.

I expect to be left alone for a good while, so it comes as a surprise when the door creaks open and another guard slips in, closing it quietly behind him. He doesn't say anything.

I don't either. He's just caught me messing with the fucking chain. He's probably going to beat me or go and get a thicker chain and make sure they add rat poison to my next batch of food.

"I fought the Blighten to the north. Didn't serve with you, but I know of you through other men."

My heart rate quickens.

"The king has—" His head suddenly swings to look over his shoulder.

Beyond the door, I hear the sound of Marshal's nasal voice. "Open it at once! I want to see my prisoner."

The guard gives me a look I can't decipher.

I nod, hoping he will take it as my acknowledgment that I will hold my fucking tongue.

Then he thrusts the door open and Marshal stalks in, all perky and rested in his fine winter jacket. His suspicious eyes rake over me before shifting to the guard. “What are you doing in here?”

The guard flexes his knuckles. “I heard he gave the men a bit of trouble. I figured I’d put a thumping on him.”

Marshal smirks. “Go ahead then, Tully.”

“It’s already done, milord.”

I must look fucking rough because Marshall accepts this. I let my shoulder slump a little, playing into the beaten ruse. I don’t know who the fuck Tully is, but he’s not an enemy to me, that is certain. Further, he has just lied to his lord. Lor made connections to many of the city guards, some of whom we served with during the war. I did not know he had made connections with any in the employment of Marshal.

My hope soars, even as the bastard lord preens and steps over closer to me.

“The chains are secure?” he asks Tully as two more guards shoulder into the open doorway.

“They are milord,” Tully replies. “I also supervised a pinch of wormroot in his porridge this morning. His reactions will be slow.”

A prickling kicks off underneath my skin again, followed by a surge of panic as I wonder if he did.

But no. My pounding heart slows again as I sense no ill effects save for the beating I already took.

“Good,” Marshal says. “I want—”

A commotion comes from beyond the doorway, and a great cry goes up.

“What is the meaning of this?” Marshal blusters, striding from my prison room.

“Seize him!” a call comes from beyond.

I can’t see much of what goes on, only a rush of movement and the clamor of booted feet.



The two guards go to follow their lord, but Tully is faster than them. Dagger in his hand, he brings the hilt down over the back of the first guard's head. As the guard slumps to the floor, he takes the second one in a headlock and squeezes. The guard thrashes and kicks until the fight goes out of him, and Tully drops him to the floor.

Then he surprises me by dropping first his dagger and then his sword to the floor and holding both hands up.

A soldier in the livery of the king's guard nears, blade trained on Tully.

"Captain Tully, by special orders of the king," Tully announces.

The king's soldier sheaths his sword and snaps to attention. "Captain Tully! We were told to look out for you. Good to see you, sir! The criminals and their associates have been apprehended."

"The omega has been locked in a servant's quarters of the attic."

"We will find her, sir," the soldier says. Turning to the doorway, he issues an order that sees men scurrying beyond my view.

"This man is her mate," Tully says, indicating me. "See that his injuries are treated, and he receives food and clean clothes when we arrive at the palace."

"Understood, captain!" the soldier says, snapping to attention yet again and calling yet more guards to remove my chains."

Hope surges. "Can I go to her?"

Tully, who appears to be in charge here, shakes his head. "I do not know you, save you unlawfully mated a Hydornian omega. Your fate belongs to the king. Give us no trouble, and we shall give you none in return. But as for letting you go to her, that will not be happening."

And with those words, my hopes are dashed.

“Marshal?” I ask as guards come to release my chains from the wall. They leave the ones that bind my wrists, reminding me that I am still a prisoner of sorts.

“About to be served the king’s swift justice,” Tully says, as I’m escorted out into the courtyard where Marshal’s men are corralled together by a troop of city guards. “The omega will not be harmed. You have my word.”

“She has a fucking name, and it’s Freya,” I bite out, sharply, but temper the urge to lash out. I’m in bad shape, and there are more men here than I can handle on a good fucking day.

As soldiers stride purposefully in every direction, Tully makes his way casually to my side, waving away the two soldiers bracing me. “Lor is coming,” he says, his voice low and for my ears only. He stands, staring out across the courtyard. To an observer, it would not even look like we were conversing. “He does not come alone. Check yourself, warrior. Make no mistake, I will order you to be beaten down if you give me trouble. Do not make me upset the lass further. She is already broken by the news Marshal orchestrated her late father’s death. Her mother has been called to the king, where she will likewise learn this tragic news. Let them grieve. Let them take comfort in each other. Soon, Goddess willing, you will be united with your mate again.”

I reel from his words, wanting to believe them but also wary this is merely a tale to keep me compliant.

He strides off, calling the two soldiers to mind me again.

My instincts clamor. I want to go to Freya. I am her mate and should be with her and offer her whatever comfort I can.

Then Tully’s words play back. *Lor is coming*. He does not come alone.

He is coming. Soon, very soon, we will be reunited again.



## Freya

I have been liberated from Marshal's home. The captain who appears to be in charge of the operation will tell me nothing of Aston, only that both my mates are alive and well, and I cannot see them yet, pending the king's ruling on the matter.

I take some comfort from his words in this bleak time.

Amid this backdrop of uncertainty, I'm taken to the palace. Here, I'm shown to a room where my mother awaits me.

As she rises from an ornate carver chair, I see the tears in her eyes.

"You know?" I ask.

"My sweet daughter, I do."

We cling to one another, sobbing anew for the husband and father we have lost.

"It's all my fault," I say. "If I wasn't an omega, this never would have happened."

"Oh, love," she says, holding me tighter. "Never speak like that. Never. If your Papa still lived, he would not stand for it. You know as much. You could no more help your nature than the sun can help but rise. Do not take the burden of responsibility for what a wicked man has done."

I know her words are true, but the wound of loss has been opened anew. We have lost a loved one for no reason, no reason but greed, and that is the most pitiful reason of all. Papa spent years fighting the Blighten, only to be killed in betrayal by a family he dedicated his life fighting to protect.

"Your papa is with the Goddess now," my mother says and, cupping my face with her hands, she wipes the tears from my cheeks. "She will surely show him her favor. One day, when it is our time, we will join him there. Do not be sad about this. He will be looking down upon us with great relief

that the man responsible for his downfall—who sought to wed you and bring you into his family, not out of love but out of selfish greed—has been brought to justice. He will find peace that this has been done.”

She speaks true, yet it is so hard. “I miss him.”

“Me too, love. I miss him every day. But I was blessed by the many years we had together and that he gave me you.”

We hold one another and let our grief run its course. A short time later, a maid arrives with tea.

There is comfort in doing ordinary things: stirring the pot, pouring the tea, and adding a little honey and milk.

“Is it true?” she asks. “About Aston and Lor?”

I nod. “They snatched me,” I say. My smile is small but filled with joy. “It was a bumpy start—I kicked Aston in the balls.”

She chuckles. “Goodness!”

“I didn’t know it was him... And then I went into heat.”

“You’re mated?” she asks.

“I am.” My smile fades. “Only I don’t know what will happen now.”

“You want to be with them,” she says. Not a question, for her face tells me she already knows.

“I do.” I nod enthusiastically, my hand shifting to my belly.

Her eyes follow the movement. “No? Already?!”

“Yes.” Then we were both crying all over again, this time with happy tears.

“Your papa would be so proud. He spoke of both men often in his letters. Saying what fine young men they were. He wouldn’t have picked them as his lieutenants otherwise.” She takes my hands in hers. “The captain explained that he received intel from Lor and Aston regarding Marshal’s family. He said the evidence was incomplete but enough for him to be tasked with an investigation on the king’s behalf, which,

through necessity, was done in secret. Aston and Lor knew you were in danger, and I believe that is why they snatched you as they did. And then you went into heat. Well, that tells me it was meant to be.”

My mates have been looking out for me all this time. Perhaps I should be chagrined by their highhanded ways and that I wasn't consulted in this.

I don't correct my mother's presumptions about their virtue. My mates definitely sought to protect me and bring to justice those behind my father's death.

I also believe they fully intended to mate me and get me with child.

I ask myself how I feel about that.

My answer? I wouldn't change a thing, even though my future rests on a knife edge and on the ruling of my king.

# Chapter Sixteen

## Lor

Five clans: Baxter, Ralston, Halket, Llyon, and even the Darouch have roused themselves at the news a mate has been taken. Then there are the Blackrock and Crescent Moon Packs, who have thrown down their support.

We make camp in the cover of the trees as those joining us travel from far and wide. By tomorrow, the last of them will arrive, and a veritable army will converge on the capital of Pershore.

I am in Alfred's tent. On the table before us is a map of the city. Together with the leaders from those clans and packs present, we are going over the plans when the tent flap is suddenly thrust open, and a warrior thrusts his way in.

"The centaurs are here!"

"Centaur?" Alfred raises his head from his study of the map. "What centaurs? What the fuck do those bastards want?"

"Lord Axton received news from the shifters," the warrior says. "He has rallied his herd to our support. I suggested he pitch his camp to the south."

"Do centaurs camp?" Alfred asks me, like I might have a fucking clue.

"No idea. But they have human parts. I assume they get cold."

Another warrior suddenly bursts into the tent, barreling into the first who has yet to leave. "Sire, we have apprehended a spy out in the forest

"Unhand me, brute!" The voice, muffled by the tent wall between us, is ripe with outrage... and unmistakably feminine.

To a man, we surge out of the tent and into the snowy forest, where a warrior with a bloody nose tries to tame a young woman. She wears form-fitting black leather armor on

her curvaceous form, while her long red hair spills wildly over her shoulders like a fiery mane.

“Who the fuck is that?” Alfred demands, hands on hips as he glares at the source of the interruption. “What is wrong with you that you cannot manage one tiny female?”

“Sire! The lass has training. She disabled five warriors before we could subdue her.” The warrior thrusts the lass at his companion before pinching his bloody nose. “We caught her riding in the forest. She is a spy!”

The lass tosses her head, sending her red hair shimmering, and glares at the warrior. “Ha! It was a dozen. Had my dagger not become wedged, I’d have taken down a dozen more.”

I chuckle. I don’t mean to, but, well, she is a slip of a lass. Although, once I recognize her, I’m confident all she says is true. “This is Penelope,” I offer.

Alfred shifts his frown to me with an obvious effort. It did not escape my notice that he was doing more than glaring at Penelope.

“The princess,” I elaborate.

“Eh?”

The lass has broken his brain, for sure. “The princess of Pershore. She has a reputation for being a brat and disobeying the king’s orders. I don’t believe she was spying. Probably just up to mischief. Also, they speak true. She has been an apprentice of the Raven Guild since she was a child. They are skilled shadow warriors, and she has been trained in their ways.”

“For fuck’s sake,” Alfred mutters. “Bind the lass and put her somewhere until this is over.”

“She will get out,” I offer.

The lass smiles sweetly at Alfred. “I will get out. Then I will slit your throat in your sleep for daring to put your hands on me.”

Alfred grunts. “I have not fucking touched you.”



“Yet,” she says smugly, tipping her pert nose in the air. “You cannot trust your men, so you will be compelled to deal with me yourself.”

Someone snickers. I think it might be Jack Ralston, which is confirmed when the alpha king steps forward and puts a hand on his counterpart’s shoulder. “She is all yours, Alfred. I’ll go and speak to Axton and the centaurs, bring them up to speed.”

“Our meeting is adjourned.” Alfred cracks his knuckles, and a glint enters his eyes. “Looks like I have a brat to tame.”

# Chapter Seventeen

## Freya

“Sire, the omega is here.” The servant bows low as he announces me to the king when I enter the gilded drawing room.

The omega. That is what I am now, a nameless possession to be discussed as though I do not have thoughts or feelings.

The king turns and smiles. He is younger than I expected—a handsome beta with red hair and bright green eyes. He cuts an imposing figure in his dark blue jacket with silver embroidery at the cuffs and lapels. “Please come and have a seat, Freya.” To the servant, he adds. “See that we are not disturbed.”

The door closes behind me, and I still do not move.

Louie is one of many kings in Hydornia, all of whom bow to the high king who lives far to the south. His wealth is substantial. From what I have heard, he is one of the closer allies to the high king. I never thought about it much beyond my father being part of his army that served all of Hydornia at the borders to the north. I definitely never thought I would meet him. I still wish I hadn’t.

I’m an omega, valuable, and now I will be traded like some prize breeding stock.

“Please, Freya. Take a seat.”

What choice do I have? None. He has asked to talk to me. I should feel honored that he gives me this much courtesy before he hands me over to his favored lord or knight. At least it won’t be Marshal. It is a small bright glimmer upon the horizon that the corrupt lord has fallen from grace.

Bowing my head in subjugation, I walk over to join him. The crimson gown I wear is the finest silk and whispers around my legs in a perfect bell shape. The bodice is cinched perfectly to my frame courtesy of the skilled seamstress who

modified the gown to fit my figure. Who it might have belonged to, I cannot say, but it is undoubtedly the most beautiful piece of clothing I have ever worn. I still want to rip it off, and would, were someone to offer me a simpler dress.

Louie holds a chair out. I sit gracefully at the inlaid mahogany table before the broad feature windows. Beyond is the city, a sprawling network of homes, towers, and steeples in cream and gray brick covered in a light dusting of snow. “Wine?” he asks, taking the seat opposite.

I nod, needing something to steady my nerves.

Another bowing servant emerges from the shadows. He fills two crystal glasses from a decanter for the king and me. I accept it with thanks, sipping the golden liquid that tastes like summer fruits and delivers a simmer as it hits my empty stomach.

Louie motions the servant away, and the man fades into the background on silent, slippered feet.

This is all very civilized yet I fear there is a barbaric undertone to it all.

“I want to apologize,” Louie says. “Marshal’s family have been seized, and their estate— what is left of it—will go toward paying their debts.”

“And what of my mother? My father served you for years, yet you left us with nothing save a final wage. Not only did we lose a beloved husband and father, you left us vulnerable to these monsters.”

I remind myself that I’m talking to a king, one who holds my fate in his hands.

He nods, expression grave. “Your mother will be compensated.”

“Yes, now that I’m an omega with value!”

“Regardless, and for the wrong done to your family,” the king replies with sincerity, “she will be compensated.”

Relief that my mother will finally receive her dues is small compensation for the good man we lost. At least she will be

able to live comfortably, and I'm grateful for that.

"Once a suitable match is found for you," the king continues, "they will further ensure your mother wants for nothing."

So he means to hand me off... "I have a perfect match, thank you—I have two of them. One is presently in chains, languishing in your prison last I heard."

"He is not in chains." Louie grimaces and puts down his untouched glass. "He is in my prison lest he go on a rampage."

"He won't go on a rampage," I say with bite. "If you would only give me back."

"I have petitions already."

I blanch, feeling the small amount of wine roil like acid in my stomach.

"Giving you back is easier said than done."

I put my glass down with a *thunk*. "It is as easily done as said. It is literally a few words. I am bonded. I am with child!"

"You cannot possibly know that yet. My best physician—"

I huff out a breath. "My other mate is a shifter. He assuredly knows I am with child."

"None of which will deter my petitioners. And besides which, your scent has not changed."

That knocks the wind out of me. My hand reaches for my throat. Panic claws under my skin. What if I am not with child? What if they were wrong? "It must have."

His face tells me he is very certain of this claim in ways he was not certain about me being with child.

I have never thought much about what it is to be a king, but today I do. Today, I see that leading people is a delicate balance, and what should be simple and right does not always manifest in the actions a king will take. Marshal and his family have committed heinous crimes and will suffer the consequences. Even had I wedded him and then revealed, the king would have nullified the wedding and offered me up to

someone else, bending laws to that effect. I see now that the king is as trapped as I am. If he doesn't allow alphas to petition for me, he will lose support.

That is his problem and not mine. So what if my scent has not changed? I love them, and I want them. I don't even care that they kidnapped me.

I applaud that they did.

"I thought it was always an omega's choice." My voice breaks a little as my hope of a favorable resolution wanes.

He reaches for his wine, pausing when it is near his lips. "It is—within the bounds of those petitions I endorse."

My nostrils flare. "Well, that is bollocks."

He chokes on his drink, lowering the glass from his lips, and thumps his chest until it clears. And then he surprises me by chuckling. "I had heard omegas were spirited."

"You will see more of my spirit than you might like if you don't release my alpha."

A knock on the door interrupts us, and the bowing servant enters.

"Yes, what is it," the king demands.

"Sire, there are... ah... There are barbarians at the city gate!"

My heart elevates to a wild thud, and my eyes go to the window like I might see them from here. Does Lor bring help? He must have.

"What?" The king frowns. "We have enough problems and don't need their kind here. Send them on their way."

The servant hovers and does not leave.

The king raises both brows. "There is more?"

"Yes, sire. There are also shifters."

"How many shifters?"

"A hundred or so, sire... And there are more barbarians than shifters. Also, a fearsome spear-bearing herd of

centaurs!”

“Barbarians, shifters, and a herd of centaurs?! What the hell do they all want?”

“We have taken their stonemason’s son. His father is a well-respected member of the Baxter clan. They seek the young barbarian and his stolen mate, sire.”

“Stonemason’s son! Mate?! What, are we heathens to call them a mate? This is Pershore. The most refined kingdom in Hydornia.”

“Alphas take mates, even here, sire,” the bobbing servant informs the king diplomatically. “Also, a stonemason has a very high standing within a clan. To insult a stonemason is to insult the whole clan... and further to insult all the clans... I believe there is more than one clan at our gates. One might describe it best as a horde.”

I bite my lip. My time among the people of the Baxter clan has instilled in me an understanding of their ways. Aston could be born to the lowest family, and they would still rouse themselves to war on his behalf.

“This is ridiculous. Send for the city guards.”

“You might want to reconsider that, sire.”

“And why would I do that?”

“The other collaborator in the omega kidnap was a shifter and decorated war hero. Half the city’s guards have gone on strike.”

“I will hang the lot of them!”

“I would advise against that, sire.” The nervous-looking servant bobs his head again. “The barbarian horde at our city walls also has your daughter.”



A meeting is arranged to parlay between the two sides. I am escorted down into the courtyard, where horses and guards

wait. My stomach is aflutter with nerves and hope, but also a little fear.

At heart, I am a simple young woman who once met two barbarian children who went on to be her friends. One is still her friend to this day, the other became her mate, and so too, a handsome shifter who I have just found out is a decorated war hero. I covet only a simple life with them. I have no desire to cause a war.

Yet here I find myself thrust into events worthy of a bard's tale, as a horde of barbarians and various allies gather outside the capital of Pershore.

As a guard directs me to a stunning chestnut gelding, I hear a low, familiar growl behind.

“Touch her, and I will rip your fucking hands off,” Aston growls.

Aston. With his hands cuffed together before him, he is head and shoulder above the six guards surrounding him. Besides a few fading bruises on his face, he appears clean and well. A great well of emotion rises within me. I love him. If there were ever any doubts, they are banished in that instant. “Aston!”

The guard at my side is not quick enough.

The guards around Aston are wary after his warning and torn between guarding him and getting out of my way lest they piss the big barbarian off.

I crash into him, and we become a confused jumble of arms and hands hampered by his bound wrists. Eventually, he pries me off enough to slip his cuffed wrists over my head and, finally, holds me tight. I gulp down his scent. “Tell me everything will be okay.”

“It's going to be okay, lass. I promise.”

I don't know if he is lying to me, if he even knows how this might fall, or if he is merely responding to my demand for assurance.



It doesn't matter. I believe him, and that will get me through this.

Then he surprises me by setting me at arm's length and winking as he nods at me. "Aye, that's a fancy dress."

I give him a withering look even as my lips twitch.

He smirks.

"Please don't throw me in the river."

His smirk blooms into a smile as he draws me back into his arms. "It was a stream and ankle deep, and I wouldn't dream of it."

There is something deeply perfect about this easy conversation, for with those words, I know events have neither damaged him nor me, and somehow, everything will be alright.

In the distance, a deep, resonant drum begins to beat.

"That is the centaur drums, sire," someone says. "I am not well versed in the meaning behind them, but I believe they came here with war in mind and are rousing themselves to that course. If I might encourage everyone to mount so we can proceed with the parlay."

I feel Aston's lips curve into a smile as they press against my hair before he draws me away.

He pins the guard with a glare when he steps forward like he might take me in hand. "I will help her on the fucking horse." He walks me to my horse, lifts me up, and places the reins in my hands. Then, he stalks back to his horse, the soldiers taking hasty steps out of his path, seeming relieved that he gives them no trouble.

He is such a barbarian, I think with no small amount of pride.

The call comes to ride. We move off at a brisk trot: the king, his advisors. Two guards at the front bearing his standard, and a dozen more who flank our sides and the rear as we trot through the cobbled streets of Pershore, out the city

gates, and into the broad grassy plains, dusted with snow, that run between the city walls and the forest.

Here, I see the armies for the first time, and my breath catches in my throat. The standard of the Baxter clan as well of other clans I do not know. Men, barbarians, and shifters... and indeed, there are proud spear-wielding centaurs too.

As we approach, a smaller retinue breaks away from the mass, riding out to a midway point between the city and the armies.

Here we meet.



We dismount a small distance apart. The guards try to separate Aston and me but give up the idea when Aston issues a warning growl. Comforted by his presence at my side, my eyes search the small crowd for signs of Lor, my heart lifting as I spot his dark head and find his eyes already on me.

Then my hackles rise as I notice the pretty woman with long red hair at his side. Princess Penelope has quite a reputation in the city and is every bit as beautiful and formidable as rumors portray.

I am mollified when I see that Lor is looking at me and, further, Penelope cannot keep her eyes off our clan king, Alfred.

Aston and I are instructed to remain a small way back as Louie and his advisor approach the Baxter clan king.

I have seen Alfred several times during my visits, although I have never spoken to him. A veritable giant at seven feet tall, he carries a huge ax at his hip and wears an expression that says he's more than happy to use it.

I'm reminded of my earliest impressions of the clans, how they are warm, friendly people, unless you wrong them—wronging a barbarian is a very bad idea.

Alfred starts the negotiations by stating in a deep rumble, “So, you came to your senses, then.”

Louie, the head of one of the largest Hydornian kingdoms, does not appear cowed by the giant before him. “You have my wayward daughter,” he states dryly. “A man, be he king or otherwise, knows when he is outmaneuvered. Also, war is inconvenient and costly. If I’m going to spend money, I’d sooner have a shipment of Maldorian wine.”

“Aye,” Alfred confirms. “I can relate to that.”

“My daughter is well, I presume?”

Alfred makes a scoffing noise and raises his brows. “‘Well’ is a subjective term when applied to the brat. I questioned whether she was really riding for pleasure or sent to assassinate us.” Alfred motions over his shoulder, and the small group behind him parts, allowing two warriors to approach with Penelope between them. One has a bloody nose. The other is walking with a limp.

Alfred sighs heavily. “The lass has injured half a dozen men and left as many more with nervous twitches.”

The king surprises me by chuckling. “Losing the omega is also inconvenient, not to mention I now have a dozen disgruntled suitors on my hands. I might need to offer them my daughter in her stead.”

“No!” The princess says in an unladylike screech. “I cannot come back.”

“What?” King Louie demands. “This is not the time for games, Penelope. I know I have failed—”

“We are mated,” she interrupts, waving an imperious hand in the direction of Alfred.

“Eh?” Alfred grunts, looking perplexed by this development.

“He kissed me!”

“The fuck does—” Alfred begins.

“He claimed me!”

Alfred scowls down at the tiny princess, planting his fists on his hips. “It was a heat of the moment thing, and we—”

“I could be with child!”

“We did not go that fucking far, lass!” Alfred states gruffly, folding his arms.

“Enough!” Louie hisses. “If the high king hears of this scandal, Pershore will be invaded by nightfall. You will have to get married.”

“I accept,” Penelope says with fake meekness, peeking at her husband-to-be under her lashes.

Alfred glowers. “Lass, your bottom will be cherry red and sore beyond reckoning by the time I’m done with you.”

“A big lavish wedding,” the king continues. “An alliance between our kingdoms is the only way we can pitch this.” He motions his advisor over. “Draft a notice. Send for the planners!”

“I’m a barbarian,” Alfred says, gesturing toward himself, although no one is paying him much attention. “And an alpha. We do not get fucking married.”

“A small detail.” The king waves a dismissive hand.

“It is not a small fucking detail to me!”

“I don’t mind mating him,” Penelope offers.

“Damn right, you will be mated, and then I’ll show you just how a lass gets with child.”

Penelope’s eyes turn hooded, and she coos with delight.

I bite my lip to hide my smile as Alfred snaps his jaw shut, perhaps realizing he has just been outsmarted by a slip of a girl and a wily enemy king who is about to become his ally.

The king is calling orders. Penelope is sidling up to the glaring giant who will soon be her mate-husband, or whatever they finally agree on, when I become aware of a familiar scent.

*Lor.* I glance up, breath catching as I stare up into his eyes. Not so long ago, I saw his wolf turn and limp away, gravely

wounded and unable to shift. Tears of joy prick the back of my eyes—I feared I might never see him again.

He cups my cheeks and kisses me, a light promise of more that makes my toes curl, and traps my breath in my lungs.

“It is time we sort out this little matter of your unchanged bonding scent,” Aston says ominously.

“Oh?” I say, looking from Lor to Aston and back to Lor, who now wears a stern expression... with a distinctly wolfish edge. “How does one do that?”

“You have not mated all of us,” Lor says.

All? My nostrils flare. “I will mate no other man!”

“Not a man,” Aston says, smirking and confusing me no end.

“A wolf,” Lor says, grinning very broadly in a way that shows a lot of teeth.

Aston shrugs, drawing my eyes back to him. “Your half-shift form is more of a beast.”

Wolf? *Beast*? I swallow as understanding blooms, my belly tightening in a way that is assuredly not fear.

“It’s time you met the other side of me,” Lor says, tone brokering no argument. “It’s time you mated my beast.”

# Chapter Eighteen

## Freya

The falling snow brings to a head the matter of what to do next. Our many parties disband with plans to return in the spring when a lavish wedding will take place between Penelope and the barbarian king. Everyone is abuzz with the news.

With a last goodbye to my mother and the promise to visit her in the spring, we leave for home.

*Home.*

Once, I dreamed of making my home in the Baxter clan, and now that dream will come true with two of the most amazing mates.

I ride with Aston on his horse while Lor shifts to wolf and trots at our side. My eyes are drawn to him and, every time, I feel a flutter in my belly as I wonder about how I will mate his beast.

He was very clear about it being a beast and not his wolf.

But what is this beast? I don't think I have ever seen a shifter as anything but man or wolf. I don't know how it might work... Or what that side of him might look like.

I'm nervous, yet ready to accept whatever is needed, so we might all finally be bound.

As we near the fork in the road, the party stops, and a brief conversation follows before we ride off again.

The rest of the clan continues for the village.

We turn left for the woodcutter's cottage.

Aston lifts me down and takes the horse to be stabled. Not bothering to shift, Lor nudges the cottage door open and shoulders his way inside. Given he is the size of the horse, he must duck to enter.

I follow him in, wondering why he does not shift.

He shakes, sending a shower of icy snow all over the floor and me before he sits down. “Ugh!”

I belatedly notice the fire has been lit—someone must have ridden ahead to prepare it for us.

My belly is aflutter as a strange growing neediness invades me. Finally, after so much time, pain, and sorrow, I am alone with my mates.

I stare at Lor, wondering why he still does not shift.

Footsteps sound on the wooden steps before Aston enters, banging the door shut behind him and shucking out of his cloak. He comes over and divests me of mine, tossing it over the table before returning to my side. And all the while, Lor still does not shift.

“Why doesn’t he shift?” I ask in a whisper.

“He’s building up to it, I reckon,” Aston says. “Have you ever seen a shifter in half shift form before?”

I shake my head, glancing between Aston and Lor, who continues to stare back at me as a wolf. “I didn’t know they had a third form.”

Aston turns me to face him and away from Lor. “Not all shifters can hold their beast form. Only powerful alphas can do as much, and only the very strongest can hold it for extended periods. He probably looks much as you might imagine a half-wolf, half-man would—standing upright as a human does, except bigger and with features that are all beast. In place of wolf forepaws, he has beastly hands with retractable claws.”

My eyes widen. I try to turn back and peek.

“Uh-uh, eyes on me,” Aston says. “Lor would never hurt you in whatever form he might take. Unlike a wolf, he can speak in beast form. I’m not going to lie. He is a fearsome bastard.”

I gulp. “When is he going to shift, then?” I try to peek back, but he cups my chin between his thumb and fingers and holds it in place.



“He has already shifted lass.”

I squeak. I try to turn around, but the firm grip on my chin holds me still.

“Remember, it is Lor. Remember, he would never hurt you.” Aston glances up at something over my shoulder.

Why does he glance so far up?

I swallow thickly. Out of the corner of my eye, I see a hulking mass of gray and cream fur. Goodness! He is absolutely huge.

His shadow falls over me as claws skitter against the wooden floor. His scent hits me first, far more potent in this form, before his heat blankets my back, and a giant clawed hand settles on my shoulder. He squeezes lightly, and I feel a faint prick against my skin.

I fear I might spontaneously combust at the strange awareness coursing through me. Another clatter of claws against the wooden floor signals him edging closer.

A loud sniff stirs my hair, and then a sweet, deep, rumbly purr softens my whole being.

“Let me look at him, please.”

Aston nods once and lowers his lips to mine for a chaste kiss before he releases me and steps back.

I turn slowly, a little fearful but a lot intrigued, until I find myself face to face with Lor’s beast.

“Oh!” My hand flies to my throat as I look up and up, taking all of him. He stands on two legs, a towering bipedal beast, broad of chest and powerful body packed with muscle. His thick gray fur turns to cream at his snout and belly. The top of his head skims the ceiling: a wolf’s head with a long snout. But his eyes, those pretty blue eyes, filled with hunger and longing, and that I have seen on both man and wolf, tells me this is no monster but Lor, my mate.

“Goodness, you are huge.” I take an unsteady step back and bump into Aston, who stands behind me. His fingers are

gentle as they rest at the back of my neck, squeezing gently before his thumb caresses the side of my throat.

And, that quickly, any lingering fear fades as heat pools in my belly.

“And magnificent,” I add in a whisper, my hand reaching out until my fingers brush against the softest, most decadent fur at his belly.

As I curl my fingers into his fur, he rumbles an approving purr.

Emboldened, I step forward out of Aston’s hold, two hands sinking into the fur at Lor’s belly and sliding up through the softness all the way to his chest. It seems natural to rub my cheek against him and snuffle his fur.

His purr deepens to a rumbly growl. Suddenly, the world spins as I am plucked from the ground, and he takes me to the bedroom with swift strides that jostle me around, nothing but a toy in his hands. He stops at the bed, tearing furs and blankets off with one hand, before striding for the corner. Here, he drops the nesting materials on the floor and me onto them.

I scramble to my feet, feeling tiny before the giant beast who boxes me with hands braced to the walls as he lowers his snout to study me.

“Well, fine then,” Aston says from behind. “I guess we’re going to rut her on the floor.”

Lor crowds closer, a low rumble in his chest as he lowers his snout and licks my throat.

“Oh!” I try to bat him off. His tongue is large and tickles. “What are you doing?”

He lavishes my throat again before his tongue dips down into the bodice of my dress.

“Lor!” My belly is full of jitters. He growls low, his claw catching the collar of my dress. A distinct tearing sound follows, accompanied by cool air hitting my exposed breast.

“Hush, little one,” Lor rumbles. “I will not harm you.”

*Little one.* Those words, his name for me, instill instant calm. A smile breaks out across my lips as I cup the side of his snout, giggling when he lavishes my palm with his big tongue.

“Not quite the reaction I was going for.” There is no mistaking the humor in his deep, rumbly voice.

Then I gasp as his snout lowers, and he licks me from the sensitive underside of my breast all the way to my nipple. I fist the soft fur at the scruff of his neck and hold him close lest he takes his magic tongue away.

The air is snatched from me as I am taken down onto the pile of soft furs.

“So pretty,” Lor mumbles as he licks and laps and drives me near delirious with pleasure tending to my breasts. I feel his beastly hands shaking where they curl around my upper arms.

This is my Lor, I remind myself. This is the other side of him. This is what I only sensed underneath the surface—the wildness.

I arch up into his touch, wanting more of his wicked tongue. And he gives me more. His claws shred my clothing, leaving the tatters beneath me in our nest and me naked save for my stockings and boots.

With a low growl, he pries my legs apart and bends me nearly in two.

I slap my hand over my pussy. No, he cannot mean to...

A firm shake of his head and a growl as he pins me with a glare. “I wish to taste you,” he says, plucking my hands away. “I wish to taste you like this.”

I gulp and try to steady the frantic beating of my heart. My pussy flutters, and my copious slick trickles out. There is no hope. I fear I will embarrass myself in a very short time if he puts his beastly mouth there. Far from being frightened, I am fiercely aroused.

Lowering his snout, he sniffs against me, then rumbles a purr as he takes a long lick.

“Oh!” My hips thrust up, trying to get more of his tongue... where I need it.

He growls and pins me still before lavishing my clit and pussy, getting his big, long tongue all up inside me, finding the slick gland and rumbling satisfaction as I weep for him. His touch sends me tumbling into a climax that steals my breath and sets my pussy convulsing with the deepest, most compelling contractions that seem never to have an end.

Lor is not satisfied. He tongues my clit, lapping at it, setting all the little nerves there flaring to life, making me come again and again as he alternates between lapping up my slick and lavishing my clit.

I’m mindless. I don’t know where I begin and end. I’m nothing but an extension of his wicked tongue.

“Aston!” My hand reaches for him blindly, and it’s only now that I realize he is with me as his hand takes mine, and I feel his lips against my forehead.

“Good girl,” he praises. “You are taking this so well.”

I cling to him, even as Lor drives me to the edge of delirium with his insatiable appetite.



## Aston

Gods, she is a vision spread out on the furs at Lor's pleasure as he feasts on her slick cunt. My clothes are long gone, and my cock is hard to the point of pain. We nearly lost her. We nearly lost this. And not only her but the babe she carries.

A man does a lot of soul-searching when he stares into the eyes of his vulnerability and failure.

Today, I accept how precious life is... and how fragile.

How happiness can be snatched away at any time.

Yet that pain and fear remind me to embrace all I have in the now, to live voraciously, to take all the hot rutting and pleasure.

Love: how little we understand it until it is ripped away.

I love Freya.

I love Lor, too.

And as I watch him eat out her pussy, gorging his beast on her softness, I feel higher than a fucking king.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!"

She is coming again. Truth be told, I do not think the lass has stopped coming since he got his snout between her slick folds and his tongue all up in her pussy.

"That's our good girl, letting Lor take you how he needs. The perfect little omega, all spread out for his beastly needs. Does that feel good when he licks you there? Does it feel good when he gets his tongue all up inside you? It does, doesn't it?"

She nods, lips parting in an invitation. One I gladly accept, slanting my mouth over hers and swallowing her needy whimpers as she comes apart again.

When the need for air drives me to drag my lips away, I heave gusty breaths and try to find my wits.

Growling, Lor snatches her up and tumbles her onto her hands and knees. The remnants of her dress are torn off and tossed to the floor.

I rise to my knees, fisting her hair to lift her head, watching the rapture contort her pretty face as Lor, in full bastard beast mode, eats out her pussy again, this time from behind with his big, gnarled hands on her ass, holding her open for his pleasure.

“Oh, Goddess!” Her eyes lower to my rutting cock, and she licks her lips.

My grin is all teeth. “There’s our perfect needy mate.” That lass is going to need a distraction. Once Lor has had his fill of eating her cunt he’s going to be stuffing it full of his beastly rod. I’ve already copped a good look at that part of him. Hot pink flesh, slick and glistening, thrusting from the furred sheath. It makes me wince on the lass’s behalf.

“Please!” Her small hand wraps around my cock before she laps the head with her tongue.

“Get the ropes,” Lor rumbles.

“Ropes?” I am distracted by her hot mouth, and it takes me a few moments to catch up with his request.

“Get the fucking rope now. If I need to go, I will be using them on both of you!”

“Ah, fuck!” So we are going there then. I did wonder... I am wondering no more.

Somehow, I find the will to prize her small hand from my cock and stagger to my feet, smirking to myself as his demands suddenly make sense. There is no doubt this is going to be rough on her.

Lor has been preparing her, wresting as much pleasure as he can into her body until she is desperate for cock, until she can think of nothing else.

## Lor

My snout is numb and covered in her juices. I could feast on her all day. I probably would, were my cock not ready to drill holes through the fucking floor with need.

Freya is limp and well-sated as a smirking Aston hands me the rope. I take it from him, momentarily distracted as he takes his cock in hand and roughly strokes it from root to tip. Pre-cum pools from the head and drips to the floor. He groans softly before letting go.

It bobs, hopefully, like it is seeking attention.

My beast likes him as much as the man does, and I must turn from the temptation he offers to that provided by her.

A low approving purr rumbles from my chest as I take in my mate, face down in the furs with her ass stuck in the air, awaiting my pleasure.

“Oh! What?”

She makes a small, ineffective struggle as I bind her wrists at the small of her back before looping the rope around her body.

“Lor!”

She tugs. I pause, closing my hand over the back of her neck, holding her, settling her.

“You must be securely bound before I take you in this form.”

“Um... Oh... I think I’m going to...” she trails off into another breathy groan.

I nearly spill my fucking seed over the nest as her hips undulate and fresh slick trickles from her pink pussy lips down her thighs.

Aston's chuckle is dark and lusty. "Fuck! She really likes the ropes."

So it would seem.

I draw a deep breath, steeling myself for the possibility of her coming again before she is even bound, and go back to my work. Binding her body, under and over her breasts, under her thigh, testing at every stage that it is neither too loose nor too tight. She nearly comes again when I bind her legs open and out, spreading her lewdly for my beastly pleasure and trapping her thoroughly so she cannot hope to move.

The more rope is added, the more she submits, her breathing a shallow pant, her pussy squeezing out slick as her belly contracts near constantly.

Then, satisfied that she is bound to my satisfaction, I lift her from the floor, carry her to the center of the room, and secure the central rope to a ring embedded in the ceiling.

Here, she swings slowly.

"There. That is better, isn't it? Our sweet little omega, all bound for our pleasure."

"Please," she begs sweetly between pants. "Please, I need cock."





## Freya

I feel Lor's clawed hands on my ass, his thumbs brushing over the sensitive skin before pulling my ass cheek apart as I gently swing.

"Oh, Goddess!" His tongue is there again, lapping me from behind.

Only it is a thousand times more intense now I'm bound for his pleasure and mine. I can't take any more—I need cock.

Big, broad feet come into view and then stop directly in front of me. A splat of pre-cum lands on the wooden floor between them. I lift my eyes, finding my lips at the perfect height for Aston's bobbing cock. He obliges me, stepping closer, fisting my hair, and directing the tip toward my parted lips and eager tongue.

I groan, lapping up the stickiness, before he thrusts to the back of my throat, choking me on his thick length. My pussy spasms sharply at his dominance.

I grunt as Lor lavishes my sensitive pussy and clit with his wicked tongue.

I twitch and thrash, hanging on the cusp of a climax so monstrous I wonder if I shall exist on the other side... which is when the hot tongue withdraws.

"Mmunm!" I hum around Aston's cock as fur-covered thighs brush against my ass.

I want to see Lor. I want to touch him there, but I'm bound with a mouth full of hot cock, and I don't have a choice, which only makes me hotter and wetter with need.

Fingers spear me intimately, thick, knobbly, beastly, they scissor inside me, stretching me, making me ache so good.

Then they are gone, and the head of a cock presses against my entrance, breaching me, pushing and pushing and seeming

to get thicker and thicker.

“Gods, that looks fucking obscene,” Aston says above me, his fingers in my hair as he directs my head off and on his cock. “Such a good girl, taking him so well. Does that feel good?”

I hum around his thick length. I couldn’t give him a coherent answer even if my mouth were not full of cock.

Only, Lor’s cock is still surging deeper, and I twitch and thrash against the strange stretching that never seems to have an end... until it does, and he bottoms out, and the head bumps up against the sensitive entrance to my womb.

“Steady, lass,” Aston admonishes when I jerk against the ropes. His cock pops out of my mouth, and he crouches before me.

I pant, mouth open, staring into Aston’s beautiful face as Lor draws all the way out, only to slam deep, ejecting the air from my lungs. “Goddess!” A deep, achy sensation blooms. It is definitely not all pleasure, but it is also not all pain. My pussy quivers under his deep penetration. The dull pain unleashes something in me. My pussy clenches fiercely around the invading flesh, and my passage floods with slick.

Hard, unyielding flesh impales my most intimate place. It holds me a prisoner. And I love it. Just as I love the feeling of being trapped by the ropes and the determined glint in Aston’s eye. There is something dark, twisty, and yet compelling about the throbbing, deep inside, as Lor grinds against me.

“I can’t take more,” I say, shaking my head.

“Lass, you assuredly can.” Lor’s thick cock pumps into me with slow, deliberate thrusts. He bottoms out with every one, hitting right up against the opening to my womb.

I don’t know what’s wrong with me. One moment, I am merely enduring this, the next, I am ravenous with need. I become so drenched with slick that every brutal penetration is accompanied by a filthy wet slap as our flesh meets.

I’m so wet, so hot, and aroused to the point of madness.

Lor's nails prick the flesh of my hips as he picks up his pace.

"That's our good girl," Aston says. He reaches to pinch my nipple, tugging it cruelly as Lor pounds me with his beastly cock. "Our precious mate. Letting Lor take you how he needs. A good deep fucking before he fills you with his seed. It hurts so good, doesn't it?"

My pussy flutters on the verge of detonation. It doesn't even hurt anymore. No, it just feels incredibly good.

But I need something.

More than he's giving me.

I need him deep inside me.

I need to be his mate.

A low growl rumbles behind me. The claws on my hips tighten as he begins to pound into me yet harder, swinging me on and off his cock.

I'm lost. I am a vessel being battered by a storm, breaking me down, breaking me apart, penetrating me in the deepest, most pervasive of ways. Then I feel his slick knot slipping in and out of my entrance, opening me, stretching me, sparking nerves already tingling to quake and quiver for more.

The strain is impossible. I don't know how I take it, how I take *him*. Yet I would be lost should he stop.

"More," I cry. "Please."

"Come for him, Freya," Aston commands. "Come all over his cock."

With the next savage thrust, I feel something snap, and he surges all the way in. My scream is swallowed up as Aston's mouth crashes over mine. I groan into his mouth as my body shatters into white-hot bliss.

His lips pop off, and he thrusts three fingers into my mouth.

I suck, grunting around them as my pussy spasms, and I spin out of control, body locked rigid as the climactic waves

tear through me.

“Such a good girl,” Aston says. “Fuck, he’s knotted you, hasn’t he? He’s pumping you full of seed.”

Lor’s beastly hips grind against me. I feel him pumping me and flooding me until my belly aches with the strain.

Aston pulls his fingers out of my mouth and trails the wet fingertips over my cheek before his lips slant over mine in a hot kiss that sets my pussy fluttering and spasming over Lor’s cock all over again.

Inside a connection blooms, four distinct presences come together as one.

Lor, Aston, me... and Lor’s beast.

Love, deep and all-consuming.

Lust, a powerful craving to demonstrate love.

The feeling of being home in ways more than a place.

They are inside me, connected forever.

Finally, fully, my mates.

# Chapter Nineteen

## Freya

**B**y the time the snow clears, my scent has changed. We have enjoyed our time together, learning about one another and our pleasure, but now it is time to return to the village where we will make a home together.

A cute cottage has been prepared, already brimming with supplies and furniture that the villagers have generously donated. A small paddock to the back will serve us for livestock, and an overgrown vegetable patch can be revived in the spring.

Lor and Aston have already agreed to join the clan's warrior ranks, replacing two older alphas who will take on less rigorous duties closer to home.

It is a few minutes' walk to where Dara lives.

I feel like I have stepped into my very own dream by being here with my mates.

I set an apple pie to cool on the windowsill. It is a bright, if cool, day, and I sense spring is approaching. I can see my mates through the open window as they pause their woodcutting to talk. They insisted I wear the most scandalously short hide dress once we settled into home. When I complained it was winter, they got a mutinous set to their jaws, picked up their axes, and commenced chopping enough firewood to last for years.

I admit, it's no hardship watching them chop wood. Truthfully, it's a wonder the pie was ever done when I constantly find reasons to check if they need something to eat or drink.

There is nothing wrong with admiring one's mates, I decided. And I do, frequently, joyfully... and they do quite a bit of admiring back. My belly performs a slow dip as I remember how they woke me this morning.

I start as the door bangs open, and Aston enters. His eyes light up as they land on me, and he stalks over, snaking his arm around my waist from behind and planting a kiss against the side of my throat.

“That was a guilty look, mate. What was going on in your filthy little head?”

“Nothing,” I squeak.

“Nothing, hmm?” He nuzzles below my ear, which he knows feels a tickly kind of good. My squirming gives him the perfect opportunity to get his big hands all over me. “You were not thinking about Lor going down on you this morning, then?”

“Oh!” I try to ward off his icy cold hand as it slips under the hem of my dress.

He chuckles, spins me around, and hoists his hands under my ass so he can lift me onto the table. The kiss turns amorous, as kisses between us always do. I’m soon breathless and panting and no longer care that his hand is cold as it slips under my dress. I’m already wet.

“That’s my filthy girl,” he growls against my throat as he spears his fingers into my pussy, making me gasp.

He palms my throat and kisses me, fingering me with a deliberate slowness that makes me hot and urgent but is not quite enough for me to come.

His lips pop off mine, and with our foreheads pressed together, we share gusty breaths. He leaves his fingers inside me, taunting me with hope.

As he lifts his forehead from mine, my eyes shift to the closed door, and a strange guilt assaults me. I’m aware that there are matters unexplored between us. “Should we be doing this when Lor isn’t here?”

Aston grins. My pussy clenches over his fingers. His grin grows broader. “We definitely should.” His lips move to my throat again—I groan. “Do you not like it?”

I huff a ragged breath. That is not a question when he can feel me drenching his fingers.

He lifts his head and grins down at me, slowly scissoring his fingers and watching the pleasure play out on my face. “What do you think might happen if Lor were to enter and find us like this?”

“I don’t know,” I pant, wondering why I questioned him when questioning made him stop.

“Do you think he might be pissed?”

“Maybe,” I breathe.

“Was I upset that he got to eat your pussy this morning?”

I clench down sharply over his fingers. “No.” I glance toward the door again.

He takes my chin in hand and draws my focus back to him. “Sometimes, we will be alone. Just as sometimes you will be alone with him, whether I’m there to watch or not. Would it bother you to find out we had been together without you?”

“No,” my answer is immediate and heartfelt... I also feel very hot thinking about them together. “Have you?”

He grins and shakes his head. “Not since we claimed you, beyond what you have seen.” He glances over his shoulder toward the door before turning back to me. “Lor likes things his way.” His grin turns wicked. “But I enjoy poking the beast just to see what he will do.”

He slowly pulls his fingers from inside me and sucks them into his mouth.

“You want him to catch you with me,” I say, as understanding blooms.

He pulls his fingers from his mouth with a pop. “You’re going to have to trust me that a pissed-off Lor is fucking hot. He’s been holding back, worried that seeing us together might frighten you.” His mouth lowers, hovering over mine. “Let me show you how it can be.” And then he kisses me until I’m a quivering mess, desperate for him to take me and not even caring or remembering that I have another mate.



When the door bangs open, it comes as a shock, one that tips fire into my veins.

My eyes flash to meet Lor's just as Aston sucks hard against my throat and slides two fingers back inside me, this time curving, seeking, and finding the sensitive entrance to my slick gland. I groan. Lor's nostrils flare, and his chest heaves, setting a delectable kind of thrill rushing through me.

He really is pissed. Why does that make me so breathless? Why does that make me...

"Oh! Goddess!" I come hard. Gazing at the stark lines of Lor's face seems to drive me deeper, making me come longer and harder. I cling to Aston, but I'm staring at Lor as the sweet clenches slowly peter out.

I blink.

A low growl emanates from the other side of the room, and I squeeze over the fingers buried intimately inside me.

Aston chuckles against my throat, nips the sensitive skin beneath my ear, then removes his fingers while he slowly raises his head.

As he steps back from me, Lor strides forward. Aston turns to meet him. They clash, hands grappling, until in a move so fast I barely see, Lor swings Aston around, locking his arm behind his back while fisting his throat. They stand locked together, both facing me with Aston to the front, panting gusty breaths.

"Did you just make our mate come without my permission?" Lor growls.

"Yes. So fucking what?" Aston jerks against Lor's hold even as his eyes shift to mine—he winks.

My chest heaves as arousal washes over me. I cannot deny how much I like seeing Aston overpowered. My eyes lower to the bulgy tent in his pants—he likes it, too.

He likes being mastered, just as Lor likes to be the one dominating.

Lor squeezes Aston's throat hard enough for the flesh to turn white around his fingers.

Aston only grunts and tests the other alpha's hold.

"Spread your legs, little one," Lor growls. "Show Aston your filthy little pussy. It will give him something to consider while he takes his punishment."

Under Lor's spell, my legs part. I lift the hem of my dress, shamelessly putting myself on display for my mates.

"Ah, fuck," Aston mutters, staring at what I have exposed.

"Indeed, we are going to fuck."

Aston's chuckle is dark. "I probably didn't think this through."

"Well, it's a shame, to be sure, that no oil is handy. I dare say it might hurt some when I fuck you, but you'll bear it, won't you?"

Aston groans weakly. His cock flexes behind his pants, a wet stain spreading where he leaks pre-cum.

Lor jerks Aston forward until he is right up next to me. He slowly releases his arm but keeps his fingers around his throat as he trails his other hand down Aston's chest over his belly until he reaches his buckle.

The sound of its opening is loud and jarring. Aston's chest heaves, and his breathing turns ragged as the belt drops and his pants slip. The buttons come next before Lor reaches in and draws out his cock.

"Ah! Fuck! Fuck!"

I can scarcely breathe as Lor handles him, fisting the hard flesh and stroking all the way to the tip.

"Don't come," Lor growls. "Eyes on me, little one."

My head snaps up.

"Help him find where he needs to go, love. I want him all up inside your hot little cunt as I fuck him."

Aston groans weakly as I take his cock, scooting myself closer to the end of the table as Lor edges closer.

We both groan as the head penetrates me. My legs are trembling as I move my hands to hold them open, staring down at the place where Aston pierces my flesh. Then I hear Lor's buckle go, and Aston is thrust deep into me.

"Fuck!" Aston grunts—my pussy spasms over his hardness. "FUCK!" he huffs out in a ragged breath, his face contorting as he jerks against me. His cock flexes inside me again, and he grits his teeth. "Gods! You are a rough bastard, Lor."

Lor nips at his throat, his hot gaze meeting mine. "And you were made to take my cock."

"I think I'm going to come," I mutter weakly, letting myself fall back against the table.

"Come if you need to, little one. Aston will bear it along with his ass reaming, which he definitely needs."

Aston plants his hand on the table beside me just as Lor flexes his hips, and I swear it feels like he is rutting me at the same time.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!"

The table begins to bang, and the plates stacked on it rattle about under the force of Lor's thrusts. They rock Aston's cock into me more deeply, his knot swelling and making all the little nerves inside me quiver. I was close to coming again before Lor entered the room. Now I'm lit from the inside out, and my pussy falls into those sweet climactic waves.

Aston grunts and grits his teeth. Lor pistons into him, staring into my eyes the whole time he fucks Aston. It is the most beautiful, savage sight I have ever seen. Lor holds back with me, but with Aston he is free because he knows Aston can take it. As Lor's hips slam against Aston a final time, he holds still at the moment of release.

"Come!"

I don't know if Lor speaks to Aston, me, or us both, but we are slaves to his command.

I come again, even harder.

Deep inside, Aston floods me with his cum, pulsing and growling as he takes his own release. He collapses over me, supporting his body on his arms as he nuzzles at my neck.

In the aftermath, Aston lifts his head from where it is buried in the crook of my shoulder and neck and bestows me a lazy smirk, it turns to a shudder, and his cock flexes inside me.

“Are you well, little one?” Lor asks.

I peek at him over Aston's shoulder and nod. “I love being knotted,” I blurt. “I swear it is the best feeling in the world. The hard table, not so much.”

Aston chuckles and gathers me into his arms. “Gods, I needed that.”

“We all did,” Lor says dryly.

I can admit to feeling a little smug and happy as I wonder when we can do that again.

“The lass is plotting,” Aston says, eyeing me with a raised brow. “I don't think my ass can take it again any time soon.”

“No matter,” Lor says. “We know what to do with naughty omegas who plot against their mates.”

“What?” I ask, a little breathless and a lot interested.

“They are bound,” Lor says, grinning now. “Bound for our pleasure.”

# Epilogue

## Freya

“Yippee!”

The jubilant cry is from my young daughter, Rosa, and her excitement signifies the estate of Penley coming into view.

“Grandma!” A second cry signifies my mother waving from the front porch.

After the events surrounding my first snatching, my second capture, and my final liberation, my mother found city life was no longer congenial. The king, recognizing his culpability for his part in those events, and even though he lost an omega bargaining chip, paid my mother her dues. The dues he should have paid her when my father was first lost.

She sold the townhouse and returned to Penley, taking comfort from being in the place my father loved and that it meant living closer to me. The estate that belonged to my father’s parents and their parents before them is once more in our family. So she began with loving dedication and funds courtesy of a guilty king to begin the long process of cultivating vines for wine.

The vines form neat rows in the fields around the homestead, budding new growth with the onset of spring.

“Grandma!” Rosa calls again, wriggling impatiently for Aston to set her down.

“Lass, at least let me bring the horse to a stop,” he grumbles good-naturedly.

Lor trots alongside us in wolf form. Leaning across, he grasps our daughter by the back of her gown and lowers her to the floor. She toddles off to where my mother has crouched, ready to welcome her granddaughter with a hug. With her blond curly hair and the smattering of freckles, no one would

ever doubt Rosa was Aston's, even if she is shameless in her preference for cuddles with Lor.

"You'd think they hadn't seen each other in months," I say as I dismount my horse. It has been no more than a couple of weeks. At three years old, Rosa has the entire clan, my mother, and everyone she meets wrapped around her little fingers.

A man steps out of the barn to the side of the house and wipes off his hand. "There's my little poppet," he says, smiling.

"Grandpa!" Relinquishing my mother, Rosa runs over to the gray-haired beta man who has assumed that honorary role.

When my mother returned here a few years ago, Gael came from Baxter to help with some of the repairs. A widower himself, he had time on his hands. He has an easygoing way and infinite patience. I believe the love that built between them just happened over time.

I still miss my father, and I know my mother does too. Gael will never replace him, any more than my mother can replace Gael's first wife. But they find companionship in each other and a different love unique to them. One that does not detract from all they had before but grows around it.

As Aston lifts me down from the horse. Lor shifts and discreetly changes into his pants. My mother is still not used to that side of him.

Today, as I take in this beautiful setting, as my mother and stepfather fuss over my daughter, I see the many facets of love.

The love I still have for my papa, who passed.

The love I have for my mother, who has only ever wanted happiness for me.

The love I have for my mates, and which is shown through a myriad of acts as we go about our day, through intimacy in the furs, and the tender kisses that follow.

The mutual love we all feel for Rosa, a daughter and granddaughter.

The extension of all these many variations of love that reaches out to other family and friends, to Gael, who makes my mother happy, to my dear friend Dara, who is already pregnant with her second child, and to the members of the Baxter clan, who have become dear to me.

“Can I see the puppies?” Rosa demands.

“Aye, lass,” Gael says, ruffling her hair.

An empty stall has been set aside in the stable for the mother and her pups. They were only a week old on our last visit, and Rosa had to content herself with looking at them over the gate.

This time, she is allowed in after being cautioned by Aston to be quiet and gentle.

I bit my lip to curb my laughter as my rambunctious daughter applies herself diligently to this end, which manifests in everything being loudly whispered.

The pups swarm her, their small bodies wriggling and tails beating. She giggles with delight and takes on the task of ensuring they each receive a pat.

“You know we’ll be getting one now, don’t you?” Lor says, slipping his arm around my waist.

Inside the stall, Gael is petting the bitch who is wriggling and thumping her tail with joy that we have come to admire her pups.

Aston sighs dramatically. “We already have one mutt in the house. What’s another?”

Lor reaches across and thumps him on the shoulder. “Asshole,” he grumbles without heat.

“Mama, can we have one, please!”

“Yes, sweetie, we can have one. But not today. They are still babies and need to stay with their mama until Gael says they are ready.

She whoops.

I wince.



My mother chuckles.

The puppies are already smitten and swarm her anew.

“This one,” she announced. “I will call her Snowy.

“That’s an interesting name, dear,” my mother says diplomatically.

“Gods, no,” Lor mutters, for our ears only. “We are not having a hound called Snowy.” He gestures toward the tan and brown pups, not one of which bears a hint of white. Our daughter’s naming techniques are a sore point with Lor, given she has named his wolf Pawpaw and refuses to use anything else.

Aston emits a deep guffaw. “A fine name.”

As the end of the day nears, my mates and I farewell our little one, who is excited to be having a big girl visit with Grandma, and is already busy telling Gael what the puppies need. Once we set off along the track, instead of heading for home we will turn off toward the woodcutter’s cottage.

The signs have been there for a few weeks now. My greater appetite for my mates, my neediness, and my desire to add more layers to my nest.

My heat is imminent.

And my mates are more than aware.

As we wave goodbye and journey to the little woodcutter’s cottage, where it all began, I feel the quickening between us.

The cottage is warm, and the shelves are stocked, prepared for my heat. There is fresh nesting material stacked up and ready for me.

This time is different.

This time, we are a little older and a little wiser.

This time, we come together with the experience of many years; of building a relationship that has given us the gifts of a daughter and an ever-deepening love.

“It’s time,” Aston says, grinning and already kicking off boots and shucking out of pants as Lor thrusts the door into the jamb.

Lor shakes his head as I follow Aston’s lead and toss my hide dress aside.

I giggle as Aston dives for me, whooping and running because I definitely like to be chased.

He snags me around the waist, carries me to the bed, and drops me in the center, a wicked gleam in his eyes.

I push my hair out of my face, grinning back as I part my legs.

Aston groans and looks set to dive in when Lor clears his throat on the other side of the room.

He both turn to face him.

“Fuck!” Aston mutters gruffly, seeing the rope in Lor’s hands.

Lor’s grin is all wolf. “Indeed. We are going to fuck. It’s time for our mate to be bred.”

# About the Author

Enjoyed Bound for Their Pleasure?

Please consider leaving a review!

Hey, want a FREE short story?

GRAB a steamy orc romance set in the Coveted Prey universe [Mastered by the ORC](#)

Did you know L.V. Lane has a Patreon?

Join to get exclusive access to character art, cover reveals, and more! [www.patreon.com/LVLane](http://www.patreon.com/LVLane)

Want more Coveted Prey?

How about another extra spicy barbarian story... [Trained for Their Pleasure!](#)

