



# SPELLBOUND OMEGA

MM OMEGAVERSE/SHIFTER/PNR ROMANCE

ARIES FRANCE

# **Spellbound Omega**

Aries France

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# CHAPTER ONE

# The Wolf's Lament

The sound was low and hollow, borne on the wind and carried on a breeze that was desperate to find an ear.

Seath's ears laid back at the resonance; a sound he hoped to never hear again. Never. As long as the many years his shifter nature promised.

Even Seath, who knew grief as intimately as anyone, ached to hear this sound.

In his life, Seath had endured his own grief, in its myriad of shapes and sizes. But he was Pack Legate, as well. The next Pack Alpha. And that connection to the Pack-mind had allowed him to feel the grief of others since his Raising Day.

The private grief of Pack members filtered to him in colors and feelings. Quiet, unspoken sufferings that were present in the touch of skin, or the scent of someone who was Pack. Things non-shifters might find best left to feel alone, but that were shared with the Pack through the thread of collective

consciousness they all had. Pack suffered together, or at least with Alpha and close members.

But none of that grief had been like this. And that was just with the sound. A solitary resonance that rang out to Seath through the air.

There was no pack connection to share this grief. It existed utterly alone.

But he could hear the call on the wind.

Even Seath, who thought he knew by now all the names and incarnations of hurt, and grief, and loss, was not ready for the reedy sound of freedom—not happiness mind you—but *freedom* that clung to the last part of the howl. Threads of exhaustion braided into the grief and pain.

The sound of someone who could bear no more.

The sound of surrender after a hard-fought battle.

The sound of no other options available.

But, that thread of being freed at the end of the howl said more than all the rest.

Not that *howl* was the right word. Wolves howled to call the pack, to share joy, and to share grief. But this was different.

It was a wolf's lament.

*Welcoming* Death.

Seath was running alone, faster than his limits, to beat Death to the sound. Death would come calling to such a cry, drawn to the longing anyone could hear.



Odd, maybe, for a young wolf such as Seath to run alone as he was at that moment. But on this day, the anniversary of the day he had passed the tests, both magical and physical, and proved himself worthy of Pack Leadership, he liked to run by himself.

He liked to remember that the traditions and magic of his people had deemed him worthy to succeed Greene, the current Pack Alpha and his mentor. And that was a solitary memory worthy of a solitary memorial.

Digging his paws in the earth of his pack's land and thinking the way only his wolf-brain could was the simplest form of celebration. Of reminiscence.

How had the past year gone?

Had he done enough for his pack?

Where and who did he fail to serve?

Others would celebrate the Raising Day, a day set aside for the Pack Alpha, and Seath as the Pack Legate, but this day — the day he knew he had what it took to take the place of Pack Leadership — that was the day he privately celebrated.

And that celebration in the form of an early morning, solitary run yielded to the howl on the wind.

Following the sound of the other wolf instinctively, all he could think about was getting there, finding the wolf whose lament the wind brought to him.

His mind raced too, as his large, furry body cut through trees and over scrub or other obstacles. Thorns snagged his coat,

rocks cut into his paws, but that was nothing.

He had to beat Death to the wolf.

The wolf had to be Pack, didn't he? But no one had called to him about trouble.

His pack wasn't the only one in the area, there were nomads and others with pass-through rights, but he was solidly on Pack territory. If a wolf from another pack had crossed the border, he would have sensed it. As Legate, his senses were connected with the territorial boundary. Not as well as Greene, the Alpha, but enough he would know. The magic veil that made the boundary line would ring in magical alarm if it was crossed by someone with no right to be there. The witches in his pack would know. The vampire. The Threshold magic itself would tell all that were responsible for its existence.

Running at full speed, he still reached out with his mind, telling Luke to come. He would need the physician skills of his best friend for whatever awaited him, that he knew.

This wolf, wherever he came from, was hurt. Once he could feel Luke answering the call, he reached out again with his mind. This time to the unknown wolf, trying to locate him.

Oddly, nothing was there.

His mind expanded as he ran, and although the direction of that howl, that *lament* became his North Star, he could not sense the shifter himself. Seath's mind hit a ...hell, what was that? A void? A blank space in the woods? A numbness where there should have been someone was maybe more accurate.

He huffed as he ran, feeling his mind sliding over rather than pinpointing the location. Even as a void, he couldn't use it as a guide, it wouldn't let him.

The oddness of that made him run almost as hard as the lament.

And it made him call for the Pack's Second, his reinforcements, if this was some sort of attack to answer. Maybe it was.

As a shifter, as the next Pack Alpha, his ways were old, ingrained into his young body. Uniqueness could always mean danger. But still, the lament called to him, following the echo of that sound that spurred him on.

His nose was no help at all, which was incredibly frustrating. But, snapping himself out of the irritation of not being able to use the sense he relied upon the most, Seath used his eyes—wolf form—to follow the broken branches, the trampled grass.

The blood that gave no scent.

His hackles raised. All of his instincts were in conflict.

The lack of scent meant danger. The low, barely audible whimpers meant someone needed help. Desperate help. It was the sound of someone who didn't know they were making sound.

And that lament. No one could fake that lament.

Ignoring the potential for danger, and feeling Luke enter into the Pack-mind, closer now, Seath went forward, ears twitching and nose flaring as the whimpering stopped.

Seath could hear a heartbeat. It was faint. Not a human. Not a healthy shifter. Seath saw him under a tree, almost a ball of flesh rather than a form.

There was still no smell, but there was blood. Crushed grass and broken branches suggested the shifter had been running blindly. But where to? The Pack House? And where from? There was nothing but miles of woods between here and the coast.

The wolf had shifted to human form. Another oddity. The destruction of the forest was clearly caused by human movement, not wolf. And in human form, none of those sounds that reached Seath's ears should have been possible.

Seath checked the destruction and blood again.

No, only one wolf. Only this one.

As soon as Seath got close enough to see the man, he reached with his mind for Luke's presence; he was minutes away now. Luke's path was straight from the Pack House, closer than Seath's had been.

Scent or no, the man was a shifter. Seath's wolf nature recognized him for what he was. But there was a lot of blood, the man's skin was an unnatural grey color.

Seath took his human form and touched the man who looked malnourished and broken in ways beyond his bones.

Gently, Seath turned the man's head.

Seath gave a sharp intake of breath. The man was probably gorgeous under the dirt and bruises and blood, an ethereal sort

of beauty framed by what was likely blond hair and a long, lean body, much slighter than Seath's own. He was too thin, bordering on malnourished. Blue lips against a pale face. The body was almost naked in the moonlight, the exposure to the elements wouldn't bother a wolf. And looking him over, exposure seemed to be the least of the man's worries.

Suddenly, green eyes opened wide, staring right into Seath's amber ones.

They were glassy with pain, but also alert, as if the broken body hadn't taken anything away from his mental faculties. Or maybe that the man was pushing the last bit of his mental faculties for this moment.

"Alpha," the man said, his chest heaving with the effort to force the words through bloodied, cracked lips. Still, it was a broken whisper on a ragged breath.

A smile danced across the man's mouth, but Seath didn't like it. The smile was bitter, resigned—a visual representation of that last note of the lament Seath heard.

With great effort, the man turned his neck to Seath, exposing the most vulnerable place on his body like an offering.

A laugh, worse than the smile and the lament put together, but cut from the same cloth wheezed past the man's bloody, bluing lips.

"Do it," the man whispered, voice bearing out the last energy he had. With an exhale of breath, the man slumped to a

boneless heap, seeming to drift off after the effort of offering himself to die.

“Yes. Do it, Legate,” the Reaper said, black robes billowing despite the lack of breeze.

Seath covered the body, almost shifting back to his wolf form in defense. The Reaper stayed at the edge of the broken woods, not coming any closer to Seath or the man.

“He’s mine, Death.” Seath eyed the Reaper straight on. He didn’t fear Death, but he didn’t go looking for them either. “I beat you to him.”

Death smiled enigmatically, leaning against their scythe. “He has time, not much, but he’s been seeking me for a while. Might be best to just give him what he wants, Alpha.”

“What happened to him?” Seath demanded. He took his eyes off the Reaper to study the man a beat longer. “Do I know him?” The man seemed familiar, but he had never seen this shifter before in his life.

“I only convey souls, not their stories. And answers to questions will cost you,” Death turned their head, as if listening to something and then made a small sound in their throat. “Well, well. What do you know, Alpha, you are right. He is yours.”

Seath was too busy trying to get a scent, trying to get anything off the broken man to figure out Death’s puzzles or the quiet joke he seemed to be making. He barely registered Death still standing there until they went quiet, still even for a

Reaper. The black robes billowed, but the stillness was beyond eerie. Unnatural to Seath's senses, even in the periphery of his vision.

Death looked up, sensing the pack members Seath had called to him and with a nod to Seath, the Reaper was gone. Dissolved into the air as if he had never been.

A cold seeped sharply into Seath's bones, but he ignored it for trying to determine how to get the man to the Pack House with the least amount of harm. He wished for portal dust, but he had none and neither did any of the Pack gathering to his location.

In the next moment, Seath's pack mates were there, and Seath quickly gave orders.

"We just beat Death, so let's give them no reason to come back around."

The Pack lifted up the broken man and made toward the Pack House.

The man never stirred.

## CHAPTER TWO



# A Disturbing Onion

**B**riar put a comforting hand on his shoulder, but Seath could barely muster the focus to thank her for the effort at comfort. As always, a brush with Death had left him gloomy. As the Pack's Second, he knew Briar was someone he could—should—lean on, but he paced the large glass walls that lined the back of the Pack House.

He sipped his tea, trying to warm away the chill left in his bones from his talk with Death. It would take more than tea, but Min ran a tight kitchen downstairs and if anything could get close to chasing away Death's chill, it was likely blended by Min's mortar and pestle in the Pack kitchens.

The Pack was large enough for a true hospital and had several in other towns, but Pack mates recovered better and faster when close to the Pack Alpha, so the clinic remained and expanded in the East Wing. The library, his offices, and Greene's, remained in the middle. Residences on the west, services on the east, and the Alpha and business of the Pack front and center and accessible to the Pack as a whole.

It had been a full day since they had brought the mysterious shifter from the woods and Seath was pacing as he waited for reports. It felt like a day of nothing but tea and pacing, waiting for reports and then reading them as soon as they arrived.

Reports from the patrols he had beefed up out in the woods after finding the strange wolf without him tripping the perimeter alarms or anyones senses, and reports on the injured man himself. Reports on anyone declared missing lately.

And that's where his mind stayed. Concerned about the wolf and concerned for the Pack. Hanging there all day, between the two in a churning cycle he couldn't seem to move past except for the most rudimentary tasks.

Luke entered the study, nodding at Seath, and he and Briar took their places on each side of him at the round table. His Enforcers stepped in, each sitting in chairs that had long been designated to those who took a seat around the imposing table. It could hold almost twenty shifters.

There was no head to this table. Even if Greene was not away on Council business as he so often was, leaving Seath in charge, there would be no head to the table. Seath was going to be Pack Alpha by virtue of being the most dominant wolf in the pack. There was no need for a show of authority of a biological imperative their natures all recognized. He had passed the tests and the magic had chosen him. He led, from wherever he sat.

"I want the report from the guards, first," Seath said. Undoubtedly, the well-trained Enforcers reporting on patrols

would be the quickest item of the two on the agenda that evening. He nodded to his Enforcer Ronin and the witch Serepta.

“We found no disturbance of the boundary, Alpha,” Serepta said. “The threshold allowed the wolf in, simple as that.”

“But, we can track the shifter’s tracks to a point beyond the boundary,” Ronin supplied. “There is a beginning point, and it looks like he was running. The crossing of the boundary may have been accidental. However, his path was somewhat straight. If he had kept the course, he would arrive at the Pack House.”

“Is that supposed to be good news?” Seath’s Alpha voice carried easily without the need for any artificial amplification. His eyebrows arched. “The fact that someone could pass without our knowledge. Or that he may have done so in an attempt to seek help? Either way you cut it; it is disturbing. Whether accidental or intentional to be here, here he is, and the boundary threshold alarmed no one.”

Seath thought of the way the omega had exposed his neck for a death-bite. He had only told Luke what had happened in the woods. It haunted him. The lament, the beautiful omega driven to invite Death. Disturbing. The whole business was a disturbing onion, layers upon layers of causes for concern.

Serepta looked at him, unfazed at the frustration in his voice.

“If you would just let me examine him, Alpha,” she said, not for the first time. “Only powerful magic could cloak him as well as you say, even from the Pack’s senses.”

Serepta was Pack. She was talking about all their senses. All their concerns. The lack of awareness of a foreign wolf in his territory, the lack of boundary threshold warnings, the lack of smell. The question of why the threshold accepted him in.

“Maybe tomorrow, Serepta,” Luke said, and Seath’s attention went to the Pack physician.

“I have asked Caine to join, so it will be in the evening, when he returns,” Seath added. The Pack included a vampire, which was strange to most people but Seath and Caine got along easily and always had. If anyone could sense something beyond the witch, it probably would be the vamp.

Serepta nodded. “In a month or so, I’ll convene a coven. We can know more than what I will be able to tell myself, most likely. I will need a full moon. And I would remind you that magical investigations take time.”

“A month,” Seath said in agreement. “In a month you check him and the border with the coven. Alpha Greene agrees with that as well. You can see Jamie about the contracts to do so; we will pay the price you set for the conven’s work. Anyone you need can stay at the Brightwater House and we will take care of their accommodations.” Seath gestured to the young omega, Jamie, who served as his secretary or personal assistant. Something in between there. Jamie nodded, and Seath knew the arrangements would be taken care of.

The witch nodded in agreement, too. Serepta always tempered Seath’s expectations of what she would deliver. Many Alphas thought a witches’s magic had no end, and

although Seath or Greene rarely acted as if witch magic cured everything, she wanted the expectations he might have to be managed.

“I think the crossing was accidental, or an attempt for help, to alert us, assuming he could sense the territory boundary,” Ronin supplied. “Shifters passed through to the north of the boundary, not all wolves, not much scent to identify anything after the rain. But that was days prior, and we did check in with the group as they had pass-through rights. He didn’t come from them. Unless he dropped from the sky, he must have portaled outside the boundary. He had been running for a while. Days. He simply may have been in no shape to sense a boundary or not.”

“You agree?” Seath looked to Luke, turning over the image of the man he found. It was burned into his brain.

Easily the wolf could have run for days. The area where he was found was old growth forest, dense and rarely frequented. But from whom was he running? How had they not found him? How had the creatures of the forest not found him?

Death had known, but had anyone else?

“I do,” Luke said with a decisive nod. He looked exhausted. Likely, Luke had gotten as little sleep as Seath himself had since the find the morning before. Instinctively, Seath placed his hand on Luke’s neck, lending him his Alpha strength before he even consciously thought about the act.

Seath could feel the flow of his energy into Luke. It would drain him, but the strange wolf needed Luke at his best. Luke

leaned into the touch; the lead doctor for the pack taking comfort from his best friend and future Pack Alpha. Greene would have done the same.

“The man is in his early twenties. A shifter, but he hasn’t shifted since being here or attempted to do so. I’m beginning to wonder if he has the ability or if he is just too weak for it. Normal physiology for an omega,” Luke paused. “*Everything* is normal, except for the lack of scent, although all scent glands are intact. There is no physical reason for the lack of scent and lack of connection to the Pack consciousness. He should have reached out, once he was in our territory, and I have no explanation for why that didn’t happen.”

“His injuries,” Luke’s voice cracked as he continued, and Seath placed a heavier hand on his friend. This news would not be easy for anyone to hear, even about an unknown shifter, that much was clear. “His injuries are ... extensive. He has been malnourished, but with clearly built muscle underneath. So he wasn’t always kept weak. He was a healthy wolf, had a healthy body, but something happened to him. He has extensive bruising throughout his body, and some of the bones were broken and had to be reset. There was extensive blood loss, some from ....” Luke took a breath. “Some from what appears to be trauma ... repeated ... trauma. Not rape, but he was physically injured multiple times and unable to use any preternatural healing.”

There was a lull where the table erupted in low growls all around. Luke shook his head quickly. If the group didn’t like that news, the rest wouldn’t be any easier to stomach.

“There are markings on his wrist consistent with silver restraints, same for his ankles,” Luke paused for the next low growl to circle to table. Silver restraints were one of the few things that would keep a shifter at human capacity. Unable to shift, unable to tap into any extraordinary strength. If left long enough, there could be scars. “His hands were broken, maybe he was able to slip out of the restraints?”

A low murmur went around at how painful such a thing would be.

Seath felt a chill, even deeper than the one left by Death, at the prospect of the wolf breaking his own hands for freedom, just to offer himself to the death bite.

“There are still traces of Wolfsbane in his blood,” Luke finished.

Even Seath’s head snapped up at that. “Still?”

“Still. I can’t tell you if that is due to how high the concentration was, or if whatever is keeping his scent obfuscated also slowed the metabolization ....” Luke trailed off, trying not to put the group into a medical discussion.

“*Wolfsbane*,” Briar said, her head shaking. She didn’t even like the word on her tongue.

Luke patted Seath’s hand and removed it carefully from his neck.

“You need your strength, Alpha. Can’t be giving it all away,” Luke said as Seath processed all the information.

The broken hands were disturbing because Seath could sense that Luke believed the man broke them himself. And with Wolfsbane in his system, he would have broken them *knowing* he couldn't mend them. The act spoke to a raw sort of desperation. A shifter could break a bone while in human form and then shift and heal. Almost instantly. But, Wolfsbane was called that for a reason. And prohibited for the same one.

“What conclusions can we draw? He's not conscious, yet, for questions,” Seath said.

“Someone wanted him to be kept,” Briar spit out the word with distaste. “The silver and the ... nature of the trauma suggest that.”

“And someone wanted him hidden,” Serepta said. “The masking of his scent at the very least tells us that.”

“You think this is witchcraft?” Seath asked Serepta, unable to be anything but direct.

“We need the coven,” Serepta confirmed. “Maybe Caine,” she allowed, not willing to give the vampire too much credit. “If I could examine this omega, then I could tell you if magic was used to suppress the scent. It would make the coven more productive if I could examine the omega first.”

“And the Wolfsbane?” Seath asked.

“If he was kept, we can guess someone wanted him to be compliant. Wolf healing wouldn't help with that. Wolfsbane ensured he couldn't heal himself, nor could he shift,” Briar



mused, working through the puzzle that had landed at their feet. “Maybe he’s strong—a threat?”

The table was full of scowls, working through the same concerns. Omegas were built just like the strange shifter, slighter than Alphas, but they were still strong wolves, and often faster healers than Alphas. Many were gifted. Omegas were rare, and usually protected. Male omegas, the rarest, were the most likely to be gifted if turned into shifters rather than being born that way, although they were the least likely to survive a turning. So much so that most wouldn’t bother to try, despite the low number of male omegas. They were also the most likely to be sought after and protected. Most likely to be fetishized. Seath thought back to the trauma, and the beauty of the omega. Kept like a prize? For whom? And at what price?

There had to be more to this equation, because the numbers they had simply didn’t add up.

“Serepta, is it possible this cloaking, if magical, cloaks him from even the people who administered it? As in, perhaps if he got away, they couldn’t track him?” Seath asked.

Serepta nodded as she contemplated the question. “It would be very much possible, Alpha. In fact, such a spell that binds him, if that’s true, would be complex and thus the nuance of not cloaking these things—his scent, his strength—to certain people and not others would be impossible to weave. It would likely cloak it or not, unable to be selective.”

“Which is fine, if you are keeping him weak with Wolfsbane and in silver,” Briar said. “He can’t leave, and no one knows

he's there.”

“But he *did* leave,” Seath reminded them. “And someone very much wanted to keep him.”

The Enforcers gave the reports on the other happenings in the Pack, although the strange shifter was the most pressing issue. Seath gave an order to report any new people in the Pack territory. People passed in and out of their several port cities, but each would have Pack members on alert for anyone asking questions.

They were a small country, the NorthWest pack. Named so due to their location geographically on the continent. A peaceful continent. They were well-liked. They were well-off, having natural resources and a major trade port that kept them self-sufficient and well-funded as well as being strategically important. Greene had seen to that, as Alpha he had raised them to a time of prosperity. They had no enemies Seath knew of, but Greene was often gone to the Council, and perhaps one of their alliances was not as strong as he believed it to be.

A question he should ask.

Before long, the group dispersed. Briar and Luke lived at the Pack House and stayed behind, but most of the other Enforcers lived in their own homes on the compound of the Pack House, and a few even in the town of Lupine, which abutted the Pack House campus.

“I don't think those extra patrols will yield anything, Alpha,” Briar said, and Seath nodded. He felt the same, but until more was known, it wasn't worth the risk of not having them.

“I know. We don’t have any open disputes with anyone. But, if someone is looking for him, and they have some ability to not trigger the threshold, to not alert us to their presence ...”

“I think they are definitely looking for him,” Luke said. “But I think the cross-over to our territory didn’t register because of whatever is obscuring him in general. It may be coincidental that it didn’t trip the perimeter, and that coincidence may not be known to whomever did it. Or...”

“Or?”

Luke shrugged, “Or, for some reason, the barrier wanted to let him in. Something for Serepta and her coven to consider, I suppose. But, I don’t think getting through the border was the goal of the strange magic. He certainly was not sent over the boundary lines just to see what would happen.”

“I agree. Everything suggests whatever was done to him was to hide him, not to cross borders with impunity,” Seath agreed.

“Then who is he?” Briar asked.

## CHAPTER THREE

# John Doe of the Wolf World

*R*<sup>un.</sup> *They found you.*

*Run.*

The thought forced Lycan's eyes open immediately, and even though he couldn't adjust to the blinding light he knew he was wrong.

They hadn't found him.

If they had, he would be dead. Or hurting more than this.

And that was odd, because he did hurt—deep physical pain existed across all parts of his body that he could catalog. His brain felt too heavy to be held up in his head. But the pain didn't seem like the pain he usually knew. It was different somehow.

Softer.

*They.* He tried to get his brain to focus on who *they* were, but each time he tried to catch it, the thought slid out from his

mental grip. Suddenly, a vague face flashed before his eyes, followed by a sharp pain when he tried to focus on any details.

He remembered then, trying to get away. His plan. The pain of remembering twisted his gut, but he kept the bile down. This time.

Lycan looked at his wrists, freed but bandaged strangely, and looked around the room. This place was different. Even without his enhanced sense of smell, he could feel it.

It felt safe, but he wasn't willing to trust that feeling.

A large man came into the room, clearly an Alpha, and Lycan watched carefully as the man moved toward him, bracing for what pain might follow. Had the Alpha only allowed the pain to recede to then take the healing from him?

Lycan's eyes widened as an even larger man took up the doorway and commanded all of the attention in the room without trying.

Broad shoulders and a waist to match, biceps and thighs with muscles that his clothes only defined, the man was the perfect specimen to showcase a well-run inner wolf. Tall, broad, and strong. Not burly, but an athlete's body. As sleek and carved as a pro-footballer. Dark hair and gold eyes set off a wolfish face that anyone should be able to see for its true nature.

*Alpha.*

That second man was clearly a Pack Alpha, young though. Even Lycan's lack of wolf-enhanced smell didn't matter because it was obvious by the man's bearing, and his voice.

Lycan's wolf knew, no matter how deeply buried it remained, and any shifter, any magical being would know. A human would probably know. This man was the most dominant in the pack.

A memory flashed in his brain, but he was too sluggish to catch it. Had they met before? The thought caught in his throat.

Lycan expected a harsh voice, but instead this one was soothing, like a warm blanket or a satisfying warm drink on a cool day.

No, somehow, he had gotten away. This wasn't the same place he had been. These weren't the same shifters that had held him.

Maybe.

"I'm glad you are awake," Alpha said, and Lycan attempted to get up. Laying down when Alpha was in the room, and another Alpha as well would not do. But Lycan found he was tangled in wires and tubes connected to his body.

"Sorry, Alpha. Sorry, sir," Lycan quickly said, still trying to make his way out of the bed and keeping his head down. He could handle the beatings, handle not fighting back just to stay alive, but Lycan hurt too much right then not to try and avoid one if possible.

"Lay back, pup," the smaller man told him, kindly, and yet his body tensed for the inevitable blow of laying down when Alpha and the other Alpha were in the room.

His eyes darted back and forth, between the Alpha and the Pack Alpha, trying to figure out the test.

Lycan felt his heart race. It was a trick. Where what Alpha told him to do was always something he could not. It was a trick so Alpha could punish him. Like when he was asked questions that had no right answers. The mental games he hated more than the physical punishments.

The smaller Alpha frowned at some machine, pressing buttons, and then Lycan started to relax, as if something was trying to force his racing heart to calm down.

“We are not going to hurt you,” Alpha said. Lycan didn’t believe the statement, but Alpha made it sound convincing.

Today then, maybe they wouldn’t hurt him today.

The smaller man looked to Alpha. “Maybe we should have Trav come in, too?”

Lycan stilled and tried to make himself small for the inevitable fight. No one questioned Pack Alpha. Alpha gave orders. And they were followed.

But, the Pack Alpha merely nodded, “Good idea.”

Lycan felt his eyes widen, but said nothing, trying to hide into the mattress.

A smaller omega, smaller than Lycan, entered and immediately went to Lycan, dipping a head at Alpha on the way. The omega put his hands gently on Lycan’s arm, and a small whimper went out when the omega began touching his arm in gentle strokes.



“Is this okay?” The omega asked, and Lycan quickly nodded. It was the Alpha’s order that this be done — why wouldn’t it be okay?

The omega beamed at him, but had tears in his eyes.

Lycan shivered. It felt so good to be touched. It made him feel floaty and a little like the lights were dancing around in his eyes. His brain was wonderfully disconnected.

“He’s touch-starved, Seath,” the omega said softly, looking to the Pack Alpha. “I hit a ... barrier? Numbness? When I try to calm his senses, that is. Can I keep touching him?”

“Yes. Please do, as long as it is alright with him, of course. Thank you, Trav,” the Alpha said, looking directly at Lycan. “This is Trav. He is a gifted omega, able to sense the needs of others—a certain gift for empathy, really. We find that he helps others heal.”

Lycan nodded. He knew that some humans who were turned wolf were often gifted, the turn not only turning them from human to shifter—giving them the full slate of wolf abilities, but also enhanced any human abilities that carried over. Likely, as a human Trav had been an empath. As a shifter he could read what someone needed with accuracy and maybe even help manipulate the emotions of another. Lycan had met a similarly gifted omega before.

He knew those things, but not *how* he knew it.

“Yes, Alpha,” Lycan said, voice wobbling with pleasure at how good the affectionate touches felt. They were friendly and

nice. Warm. Wolves were tactile animals, and too long without being held or even general affection could cause health problems.

As a strong Alpha in the Pack, Seath had often given Holdings to other members. It was nothing more than that. A quiet room, holding each other close for healing. But, it didn't always have to be that formal. If a human looked at a normal gathering of shifters, or even the way the two Alphas in the room stood, it would seem too close, too encroaching on personal space. Wolves had very little personal space, though, and here in a Pack, that closeness was normal.

These touches were a version of play that Lycan would have with a friendly wolf, just in human form. Again, those weren't memories, nothing that was hard or painful to search out in his mind. It was just something he knew.

“I'm Seath Rawson, the Pack Legate of the NorthWest Pack. This is Luke Cullen, our pack physician.”

Lycan merely nodded. Not Pack Alpha, then, but almost.

“We will do something about the touch-starvation going forward,” the smaller Alpha said, making a note on some sort of electronic tablet.

“Let's,” the Pack Alpha agreed, seemingly more relaxed now that Lycan was leaning into Trav's touch. The smaller Alpha put a hand on Lycan's leg with a gentle pat, but the affection was overwhelming for the touch-starved omega and he quivered under the onslaught.

The smaller man pulled his hand away with a final pat. “Better ease back into that,” he said. “I don’t want to send you into shock.” The omega stayed close though, and that made Lycan feel as good as the drugs. Omegas needed one another and it must have been a long time since he had shared in any omega-bonding.

He tried not to whimper at the good feelings. The haze of feeling good took over his mind, clouded it, and made being afraid of these shifters seem like a far-away thing he didn’t need to worry about.

The smaller Alpha, Luke, looked at Seath and something passed between them. Lycan got a sense of pleasure from the Pack Legate at watching him and Trav interact.

“Yes, sir,” Lycan said.

“Do you know where you are? Are you familiar with our pack?” Seath asked.

“No, Alpha, I’m not sure what ... I don’t know how I got here, or where here even is.” Lycan trailed off, remembering trees and lots of green, but that was mostly it.

“Your short term memory might not come back immediately. You have a concussion and it’s very normal,” Luke assured him.

“Do you know your name?” The Pack Legate asked. *Seath.*

“My name is Lycan. I mean, I have no other, and that’s what I’m called, sir.”

The two Alphas exchanged a glance. Lycan was the “John Doe” of the wolf world. It meant he was no one, anonymous. Seath felt a chill. Whomever had kept this omega had stripped him of everything. Even his name.

“Do you know your last name?”

Lycan stiffened at that request, but tried to pull the thought out for Alpha. Some thoughts were slippery, some memories were, too. But, some were sharp and seemed to cut when he reached for them. They were there—bits of knowledge stored in his brain, but getting it out was like walking through miles of razor wire.

He knew this was one of those pieces of information, so he drew in a deep breath, trying to catch the thought, trying to hold it, until the familiar ringing in his ears began. It was okay though, he controlled the pain in his mind and asked for it, the pain he was sure to receive for not answering Alpha would be something unknown. This pain he knew.

“Lycan!” Seath’s voice was strong, worried. Even though he was not Lycan’s Alpha, or a full Pack Alpha, it didn’t matter, the command cut through everything and the implied order to stop was obeyed.

“Sorry, Alpha, I ...”

The Pack Legate studied him carefully and Trav continued the touches while Lycan’s mind swam from the sharp pain of reaching for that memory. But, before Lycan could try again, the world went dark one more time.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# Seath Tries Again

“I talked to the coven last night,” Serepta said, balancing her teacup perfectly back into its saucer with an efficient click of china.

Seath paced the library, then took a seat with Briar and Luke at the table. It was only them with Serepta this morning. Both he and Luke had slept well last night after hearing how well their patient was doing, and until the meeting with Lycan a few minutes ago, he had been feeling almost optimistic about the day. Seath’s mind replayed what had just happened. The omega had finally been conscious long enough to talk to after almost a week of recovering, only to pass out because of the question Seath asked.

Alpha Greene would be back soon, and he could use his take on the shifter in the medical clinic.

“I appreciate you going to that trouble. It couldn’t have been that easy,” Seath said. While the coven was Pack, witches were notorious for doing things on their own timetable.

“After examining him, it is clear he is spellbound. Or at least, that’s what I would call it. Whatever happened to your shifter had witch help. Part of his mind is spellbound for sure. How or what kind of magic are harder questions to answer. And I don’t think any of us believe that shifter was bound in silver and erased of scent for his own good,” Serepta replied. “Scent and memories. I’ve never seen a weave that could do that, and I can’t give you more answers without a coven convened under the full moon where I can actually examine him.”

Seath grunted. There was the Council, and a million other ways to make consequences for a shifter, if the spellbinding was some sort of punishment. There were pack laws that applied to each pack member and to things that happened under the jurisdiction of their sovereign land. They were a country to themselves, just as non-shifter countries were. Some shifters, of course, lived among non-shifters, but no matter where there was still a law somewhere to be applied.

Brutal treatment like Lycan had endured was not heard of in the modern age. That was the way of a bygone era. Of war-crimes and kidnappings. Not the way of the current world. It was not anything any sovereign Seath knew of would consider justice. Wolfsbane itself was prohibited in every country that was part of the Council and most that were not.

Then there was the Council itself, a voluntary group of sovereigns bound by morality and contract. The largest and the richest were all part of the Council. It had an ability to pull countries together when necessary through mutual accords to

which all member sovereigns had taken part in and agreed. It wasn't binding beyond the sovereign's own word, but if a shifter was making trouble outside of their own pack and the pack wasn't doing anything about it, or if the pack was making trouble, then the force of the Council allies could be effective in bringing things back in line.

Not that Seath thought Lycan was capable of an international incident. But, what he had been subjected to was beyond the pale. Such cruelty to hold him, not as some sort of punishment, or at least it didn't seem that way. Which was odd in itself. The injuries seemed personal, and all Seath or anyone could sense or observe from Lycan in the days he had been there was that he was a gentle omega, but maybe his beauty concealed something worthy of the brutality he had endured. If so, it wouldn't be the first time someone misread a captivating face.

"Lycan," Seath said, not satisfied with the name on his tongue. But, it was important to him for some reason for the man to quit being referred to as the "strange shifter" or the "young omega" but be known by his name, or at least, the name they had for him.

"Can we be sure that's even his real name?" Briar asked.

"I would say fairly certainly it isn't," Luke added.

"No body language of deception," Seath said. "So he believes it is, at least, or knows no other. Plus, if you are his captors, you are obfuscating his scent and his wolf to hide him, binding him in silver to keep him from running, taking his



name is extra leverage against escape, or at least an extra insurance to find him if he doesn't know his own identity. Not that it matters, because the pain of him searching for the spellbound parts of himself is so great he can't bear it."

"Can't exactly send out questions to the packs about a missing wolf named Lycan," Briar agreed. "Unless we know what pack had him before ...if it even was a pack."

Seath shook his head at the mere thought of attempting what Briar was alluding to. Not only would it be dangerous since it was safe to assume *someone* wanted Lycan back, it would be impossible. While some packs were large and established like theirs, many others were not, composed of nomadic bands or loosely connected groups or even lone wolves that floated from pack to pack. And that was just the wolf shifters.

"Unless they left him," Briar said.

"No," Seath answered immediately. He had seen some things—death, Pack Leadership changes that were more like a coup, the infighting of all kinds of beings with all kinds of abilities, including darker magic. But nothing, none of that prepared him for the hurt and abused omega he found in the forest, ready to bear his neck and invite his own death.

Whatever had driven Lycan to that point was not simply being left somewhere by his former pack. Of that he was certain. The wolf nature was to embrace the next passage of life, of returning to the earth, of giving back to the larger cycle and balance they were all part of. Suicidal wolves were not a

concept any of them were familiar with. And yet, that is what the omega had been driven to.

Seath stilled himself from shivering, remembering the icy presence of Death in the woods as if they were in the room. Did Death still linger near Lycan? Seath did not sense them, and he was one of the few that could see Death and feel its presence. But no, in Luke's care Lycan had gotten stronger, and Death hadn't come around again.

Luke shared Seath's look. "Agreed," Luke said, no doubt having similar thoughts to Seath's about the possibility of Lycan simply being left in the middle of nowhere. No. He had put himself in the middle of nowhere. Somehow.

"The coven said that if he is spellbound it is possible it works both ways. To hide him from others and to hide from himself. If he tries to access certain information, they could have woven it where he cannot get to those things without harm to himself, which is what I observed." Serepta chimed in.

"So did I," Seath said with a sigh. "I asked him a question this morning, and he passed out trying to answer it. He was clearly in a great deal of pain."

It hadn't occurred to him at first, but it should have. What was the point of going through the restraints and the hiding if your prisoner could just tell everything if he managed to free himself? No, someone had taken too many precautions with Lycan. If you could hide his scent and presence from others, which Seath had not ever heard of, then certainly they

wrapped up some of his memories and knowledge, something Seath knew was possible.

He needed Greene's wisdom as the Pack Alpha here. While Seath's instincts were sharp as the Pack Legate, he was not the full Pack Alpha—a distinction that rarely seemed to matter given Greene's absences to sit as their representative to the Council, but did in this instance.

That afternoon, Luke, Trav, and Seath tried again to speak to Lycan. Serepta came too, but she made it clear her role was more to observe the magic. The shifter's wolves could smell the magic that bound Lycan, but it was only Serepta who could see it.

"I'm sorry about earlier, Alpha," Lycan said, head downcast, neck exposed in submission when they asked if they could try talking again, perhaps with something else he could tell them.

Seath watched as the omega seemed to vibrate under his gaze. Was it nerves? Fear? Without scent, he had no way of knowing. Even without it, his body responded to what it saw, which was a distressed omega. A distressed omega under his protection as Pack Legate and as the one who rescued him. All of Seath's instincts wanted him to protect this omega. Fiercely.

"No, Lycan, I am the one who is sorry," Seath said and instantly Lycan's breath caught and his downcast eyes flew wide. He could not fathom an apology from the Pack Legate. His mind raced to figure out the trick.

"You must not try to answer questions that harm you. We want to know what happened to you, to help you. But, you

must not try to get information if it causes pain.” Seath had placed it as an order, reading that Lycan was better at taking orders than requests.

“Yes, Alpha.”

Seath relaxed when the slight tremors stopped racing under Lycan’s skin, and he introduced Serepta to the omega. She had observed him while he was sleeping, but this would be the first meeting.

“Can you describe what it is like? When you try to remember something like that?” Serepta’s voice was gentle, and Seath wondered if there was magic laced in the asking.

“It’s ...slippery ... like the thought slides through my fingers before I can catch it. It’s *there*, but I can’t touch it. If I try, it cuts.”

Serepta clicked lightly with her tongue but said nothing.

“Do you know how you got here?” Seath asked.

“I ran away,” Lycan said, barely above a whisper. “I submit to your punishment for that, Alpha.”

Seath blinked for a moment. Taking in that Lycan had answered truthfully, despite expecting to be punished.

“There will be no punishment for running away, Lycan,” Seath told him. “I would imagine you had your reasons, but why did you run away?”

“I couldn’t stay ... it ...*my wolf* ....” Lycan seemed to falter over the words. Not at answering the question, but on putting

together words to explain why.

Trav's arm shot out, wrapping a comforting hand over Lycan's shoulder as if he couldn't help himself. Lycan's whole body sagged with the feeling of touch.

"They hurt you?"

"Yes, Alpha."

"Bad enough you ran," Seath said, but it wasn't a question.

"Yes, Alpha."

"I'm sorry that happened, Lycan," Seath said, now sitting next to him, and placing a hand on his arm. Lycan's whimper at the contact of the Alpha, well, Legate, but still, showed both how touch-starved he truly was and how close his wolf lived to the surface. His whole body seemed to lean into the large hand on his leg.

He wanted to fling his face into Seath's neck, bury himself in the Alpha's lap and sling his slender thighs over Seath's thick ones. Lycan's hands fisted the sheets instead, the instant intensity of his desires making his head swim.

"Do you know who they are? The pack you left?"

Lycan stilled. "It's one of the sharp memories—the faces, the smells—I can't catch it ...I can remember what they did, but not who they are."

Seath took a breath, thinking that such a thing was really its own kind of torture. Truly, Lycan wouldn't know if whomever hurt him was in the same room.

“Remember you must not try to think about or remember anything that hurts you, not right now, Lycan,” Seath gently reminded him, meaning any of the pain that could come from the memories he carried.

“Yes, Alpha.”

“I am the Pack Legate, not quite Alpha, Lycan.” Seath gently said, although it was hard. He liked how Lycan called him Alpha with his breathy voice. Others in the Pack had taken to calling him Alpha due to Greene’s long absences, and Greene himself had liked it. But, still, Seath worried it was too much too soon.

“Concealing their identities, no doubt,” Luke said. At least his mind was clearly on the puzzle before them. “Lycan, can you smell? Scent things? Things that aren’t your former pack?”

Lycan frowned deeply, “I can tell there is scent there, or a different scent, but it’s like my nose is numb most of the time.”

Luke hummed in his throat, “So if you were in a room, and didn’t turn around, you would know different people were in the room because you would know there were different scents, but you couldn’t identify the scents?”

“Yes. And—I would know there were ...say four different scents, for example—like in this room with you, but the next time, I wouldn’t know it was the same scent I had met before, not more than a human could if it was distinctive. Just that there were different ones.”

“How long were you with them?” Seath asked, pleased by the long answer the omega gave him to the previous question. Lycan was intelligent and well-spoken, with a slightly accented voice Seath couldn’t place.

“I know there was a time *before*,” Lycan said, “But, those are the sharpest thoughts. Those and the images and scents of them. I was kept in a dark room for the most part and time sort of ...tilted....” Lycan’s stare went far away.

Gently, Seath rubbed Lycan’s leg, bringing him back in the here and now.

“What about names?”

“I was to call Alpha “master”—no other names were said around me, or I can’t remember them. I don’t ... I don’t have wolf hearing either ...”

Seath would guess that if he could scent Lycan there would be the air of distress around him right now. Trav’s hand moved in slow circles of comfort.

“Don’t worry,” Serepta said gently from her corner. “I’m a witch Lycan, and I can see some of the magic around you. Your wolf is there, but he’s bound. He’s not lost.”

Lycan nodded. “I feel him.” He said simply, absently rubbing his chest. “But ...” A worried, sorrowful look crossed Lycan’s big green eyes, “are you sure? He’s there?”

It was the first thing Lycan had asked of them. Not where he was or who they were or how he got there. He had been there

for over a week and that was his first question. The magic that bound him must bind his wolf, as well.

Seath felt his own wolf rise up, straining to reach out to the hurting omega. He couldn't shift here. There was no room, for one thing, but his wolf was right under the surface wanting to wrap itself around Lycan and find his wolf until it joined them. His own wolf was part of him, a connection that bound him to another part of himself, another part of his very nature. Being cut off from it would be its own kind of torture.

“He's there, Lycan,” Serepta reassured.

Seath took a deep breath at the look of hope that quickly flitted across Lycan's beautiful, but still downcast face. They had asked enough for now, but somehow he had to get this shifter his wolf back. If nothing else.



## CHAPTER FIVE

# Enter a Curious Vampire

“**E**asy, little wolf,” the icy smooth voice said. “I’m Pack.”

Lycan’s heart thumped wildly in his chest as he blinked himself out of sleep, and he didn’t feel Trav again at his side; the touches now more bearable and enjoyable than they were the first few times. It was almost addictive—touches after so long without anything like that sort of kindness—but Alpha and Luke knew to be careful and weren’t giving him too much at once. Lycan still craved it, though, but Luke told him the craving would ease.

That wasn’t the issue right now, the issue was the vampire in the room. His icy presence was all that was there, with Trav’s energetic warmth gone. Lycan could feel the cold in the room, whatever was going on with his senses not encompassing the vampire and how the temperature dropped.

Suddenly, the vamp moved next to him. His wolf eyesight was not affected by whatever it was that affected the rest of

him. He tracked the movements of the vamp, even at his speed. The vampire undoubtedly noticed.

“I’m Caine,” the creature said. He was beautiful, Lycan supposed. In the way that all his kind appeared to be. A marble statue come to life, although the smile Caine offered him appeared to be genuine.

Caine had dark hair and brown eyes so dark they almost looked black. But his face was beautiful, making someone forgive the eyes. He also had ever-present youthfulness that didn’t seem to match the confidence that emanated off of him, unless you factored in the fact he was vampire.

He looked royal, Lycan thought.

“My name is Lycan, exalted one,” Lycan replied smoothly.

Caine gave a nod to the honorific.

“Relax,” Caine said, sitting down on the bed, on what seemed to be the place everyone sat when they came into Lycan’s room. “You should just call me Caine.”

Lycan nodded and kept his eyes averted, to the left, although he wanted to stare.

Caine laughed, a sound like little bells tinkling. He carefully placed a long finger under Lycan’s chin and tilted it up.

Caine pulled back from his inspection when he noticed how Lycan submitted to it so easily. And tutted under his breath.

“Oh, Little Wolf,” Caine sighed, and lightly ran a hand down Lycan’s cheek. Dutifully, Lycan raised his hand, wrist up to the

vampire.

Caine smiled and ran his nose over it, the proper vampire greeting, although the last time someone had properly addressed him in that way, the offer of the wrist or the correct form of address, was something he hadn't experienced since well over three hundred years ago, at least.

“Couldn't stay away, Caine?”

Lycan moved to duck his head as Alpha's voice filled the room. Caine laughed again, his eyes running over Lycan's flushed face, but he didn't move the strong hand keeping Lycan's face tilted up. The vampire's face looked as amused as Seath's voice. Something flicked across his face as he studied Lycan's reaction to Seath's entrance.

“Oh no,” Caine replied. “This Little Wolf may provide endless entertainment.”

Caine barely gave a glance at the low growl from Seath at his words.

Lycan frowned, unsure what to make of the interactions of the Legate and vampire. Still, those words had a certain conclusion one could draw. As nice as everyone had been, he was still to be entertainment, then.

“Not in that way, Little Wolf,” Caine said gently, noticing that rather than look panicked or fearful of how his comments could be taken (*would* be taken, Caine guessed after seeing Lycan's reactions) Lycan looked resigned. Seath's reaction was curious, too. The Pack Legate was often fierce in his

protection of anyone considered Pack, but this Little Wolf had just arrived.

Caine let Lycan's face fall downward as it wanted. Caine brushed the hair off of Lycan's face with a gentle hand.

"We are friends here, Lycan. I hope you will see me as one. But, you have nothing to fear, not with this Pack." Caine said in a voice that almost compelled belief. "I forget myself when I speak, as Seath is sure to tell you."

Seath gave a snort that could have been laughter. "Quite true, I assure you." He muttered.

"Yes, Caine," Lycan said.

Seath came close to both of them. "Let's take this to the library, Caine," he said, and to Lycan's surprise clasped the shoulder of the vampire with a sure familiarity.

"Are you okay, Lycan?" Seath asked.

"Yes, Alpha," Lycan responded.

Seath wanted to say more, but Trav knocked on the door, tray of fruit in hand and a smile for Lycan and a quick hug to Caine. The omegas had already started creating a bond, and sure enough, another omega, Van, followed Trav into the room, and then yet another named Uri. Lycan was working his way into a true omega nest.

"We will check on you later, Lycan. Enjoy some omega-bonding." Seath gave him a smile and Lycan forced his gaze not to linger on Seath's lips. There was something about them,

the fullness of what appeared to be soft lips on such a masculine face that held Lycan's attention.

Once out of the room, Caine laughed all the way to Seath's office.

"Does he ever tell you something other than 'yes, Alpha?'" Caine asked as they entered and Seath immediately went to get them a drink.

"No, and that was a struggle. I think he would prefer to talk to anyone but me."

"Well, he has been treated horribly by his own kind, if the rumors of your Little Wolf are true, and that's not going to heal like a broken bone," Caine said pointedly, but Seath just raised an eyebrow.

"You know how some of your fellow Alphas conduct business in their packs, surely I'm not shocking you that I am not surprised? A beautiful omega in distress?" Caine asked. "Shifters don't have a monopoly on sex and power games. And none of those games are new. I'd say they have been around as long as I have. He's been hurt, yes, but he's not shattered like glass."

Seath motioned for Luke to join them, sensing him at the door.

"Sex and power games?" Seath asked.

Caine smiled wide enough to show his sharp teeth. "A beautiful omega like that? Held by someone? Does your first thought not go to some sort of sex-trafficking? An attempt to

auction him off to the highest bidder? Or perhaps his next large heat? Surely, you can imagine what a price that would bring.”

Seath felt a chill ripple through him, as if he were shifted and snow slid down his fur. Omegas had small heats every month, lasting 24 or maybe 48 hours. They were mild as heats went, and then, every two years or so, a much more intense heat. One that was difficult for an omega to get through without an Alpha. The smaller heats were generally tolerated by toys or heat suppressants, or an Alpha if the omega so chose. Or in some places, with heat-mates, other omegas that were on the same heat cycle. A large heat would require an Alpha, or be suffered through alone with nothing that would ever satisfy. Given Lycan’s youth, he probably never had gone through a large heat before.

“No,” Seath confessed. “I have thought about why someone would do to Lycan what has been done ...but, no. Not that.” It made him irrationally angry. Go storm the fortress and burn the enemy to the ground sort of anger.

“Do you ever show up here without looking smug?” Luke asked upon entering the study and giving a crushing hug to Caine, who despite the general idea that vampires didn’t care for such things, seemed to give it back with equal measure, just as he had with Trav.

“I’m just here for the Little Wolf, although,” Caine positively smirked as he sat on the couch in the library, across

from Luke and Seath, “I think I’ll wait a while to claim my rights to my smugness.”

“Appropriately vague,” Seath said, expecting nothing more from Caine. At least the feel of Luke and Caine’s warm humor eased his anger at Lycan’s situation. He had wanted Caine here days ago, but he had been away, and Seath tried not to force his desires to have Caine around as much as possible on the vampire’s tendencies to see time much differently than shifters did.

“I think I’ll just see how it plays out. If I’m right, I think it will be entertaining at the very least.”

“So, you came for the wolf,” Luke said, ready to move on from Caine’s vagueness.

Caine smiled, “I did, at the Legate’s request.”

“All this way so quickly, you better hope that doesn’t get out and ruin your reputation,” Luke said, clearly teasing Caine.

Caine brushed the words away with an absent sweep of his hand. “I came the minute I could, actually. At my age, anything that hasn’t been seen before is worth getting up for. It’s a rarity you don’t appreciate as much as you should.”

Seath smiled at Caine. Almost a decade ago, Seath had sought out the vampire’s help and found in Caine as good a friend as he had in Luke.

It was a feather in the cap of the Pack, said those who approved of the rare addition of a vampire and knew what it meant for notoriously un-pack like vampires to become Pack



members. History was full of stories of great Packs, noble kingdoms, and they all had a vampire in them. Whether causation or correlation, the historians would disagree, but the point remained that a Pack with a vampire in its ranks was rare, and often remembered. Those who did not approve said nothing, but tread lightly around the vampire.

“I was hoping there was something Caine’s senses might pick up that we can’t,” Seath said. “He knows all the relevant details.”

“It’s a good point. I don’t rely on my supernatural nature as much as you canines.” Caine said with a laugh as both Seath and Luke rolled their eyes and the amusement of all of them scented the room. “Be honest, how much does it bother you he has no scent?”

Seath bristled a bit, because it did bother him. Maybe it was a warning he relied on his wolf-nature too much. Except ...it didn’t feel that way. It felt like something unique to Lycan. His wolf was unsettled that he couldn’t rely on scent, but he was equally unsettled that he couldn’t scent this particular wolf.

Caine gave a knowing sort of sound and Luke laughed out loud.

Seath smiled.

It wasn’t often Seath could take off the mantle of responsibility that came with being the Pack Legate. But, somehow Caine relaxed him, despite their contrary natures. Wolves ran hot, and vampires cold and that was not just in matters of body temperature. Caine certainly would not have

burst into the forest after the wolf's lament as recklessly as Seath had.

But, for some reason, Seath could relax with Caine. He liked Caine's perspective, sharpened by many years and infinite patience.

He also liked how Caine deferred to him as Legate of the pack, but didn't get strange about it. Some of the pack seemed to think that being Legate and the heir apparent to Alpha Greene made him less shifter and more perfect or infallible in some way. Caine didn't suffer from those delusions. Luke, as his best friend since they were cubs, certainly didn't have those delusions, either.

For the first time since the strange shifter arrived, Seath felt his shoulders relax a bit, as if he could sit the weight of all the responsibilities down.

"So, what can you tell us, worthy of all this smugness?" Luke asked.

"Oh no, my smugness is officially reserved. But, as I told Seath, Little Wolf has been hurt. In several ways, but surely even you can pick that up without having to *smell* the poor man."

"So, can you tell us something we didn't already know?" Seath asked.

Caine paused, appearing to contemplate the question for a while.

“He’s been held, unable to fully heal himself. There is a mental harm to that, beyond physical pain. On the surface, he’s automatically submissive, ready to please, but we could only guess if he learned most of that or if it is his omega nature. Allowing him to bend and not break.”

“And beneath the surface?” Seath asked.

“He’s strong, your Little Wolf,” Caine said, his smile already affectionate when he thought of the omega in the next room. For someone who could literally live forever and therefore take their time, Caine did tend to make snap judgments about people. “Not just physically. I can see the weaves of the witches’ magic. As Serepta said, some are tightly woven and intricate - those would be the things they want him to remember the least, the most dangerous things for him to know. But, the other things, woven against his scent and his wolf, those were woven for a different purpose, to keep him dependent and hidden, I would guess. I would think those could be fully restored. Whatever is binding his memory will be harder.”

Seath sighed, and Luke placed a hand on the Alpha Legate’s neck.

“It won’t be a quick process to do. But, I will lend my magic to the witches, were they to need it. It can make them stronger, but that’s about it.”

“You will?” Seath asked before he could stop himself.  
“Truly?”

Caine laughed, then shrugged an elegant shoulder. “You would have asked, Seath. I’m just letting myself believe it was my own idea, if you don’t mind.”

Seath smiled. He would have asked, it was true.

“The Wolfsbane is almost gone, so his physical healing should begin quickly,” Luke said. “Even without access to his wolf, it should be faster than things have been going. I would hope by the full moon he would be ready for whatever needs to be done on the weaves.”

“The touch therapy, it should continue,” Seath said, looking to Luke.

“Yes. Without it, a coven might be unbearable for him.”

“He will need you, Seath, to heal his wolf,” Caine said. “And Greene. But, I am of the mind that he sees you as his Alpha.” Seath nodded, he figured as much having done many Holdings with members of the Pack when they had suffered the more fatal forms of injury or, once, when an older pack member had lost his mate and his wolf suffered severe depression. He knew the feel of one’s inner animal looking to him for that kind of leadership.

His mind snagged on the idea of he and Lycan in a dark room, skin-to-skin. A Holding was a formal way for a wolf to get the intimacy it may need. Holdings weren’t sexual in nature at all, but in Seath’s mind, it was hard to make the scene platonic when his mind wanted to think about large expanses of Lycan’s creamy skin. He sighed at himself for having his

thoughts go that direction. But still, perhaps Greene could do the Holding when Lycan was strong enough for it.

“So much to heal. His body, his wolf, his shifter magic, his mind,” Seath felt the weight of it.

“Right now, Alpha touch, Legate or no, might be too much, but if we could restore his wolf, continue with Trav and the omegas he’s been nesting with in the clinic. Allow him the ability to shift again,” Luke looked off musing the idea. “I think he will need you.”

“I would guess that he was never made pack,” Caine said, drawing the attention of both Luke and Seath quickly. “How is the omega nest going?”

Luke smiled. He had been the one to figure out the bouts of healing Lycan experienced were due to the presence of other omegas. “Very well. There is at least one omega nesting with him every night. He can tolerate that sort of Holding quite well now.”

Seath nodded. Omegas were better in groups, in a community, and he was glad their pack was strong enough and blessed with male omegas, although not many in relation to their overall population. The addition of male omegas to the nest had proved the most beneficial for Lycan.

“To be without a pack for so long, and treated the way ....” Luke ran his hand over his face, not wanting to contemplate what that had to be like. It was a torturous sort of trauma.

“Little Wolf is strong,” Caine assured them again. “But, it would be too risky to link his mind to the Pack now, if he would want that. We should give him time to recover before we ask him to make decisions. Have we considered the reasons why they would want to conceal him? Someone went through a considerable amount of trouble to hide Little Wolf.” Caine had morphed his descriptor into a name now.

“Either he’s dangerous or he’s important, that seems to be the most obvious,” Seath said.

“Sign me up for the betting pool on important over dangerous,” Caine said. “Although maybe we should contemplate some sort of obsession? A kept lover? Wars have been fought over less beautiful men. And an omega to boot.”

Seath felt himself heat, but said nothing, afraid to give away the strange pull he had to the new wolf. It was wrong to be so taken with a wolf that was not his betrothed. Honestly, Seath didn’t know what to do with the fact he was so enamored with the beautiful omega. He wasn’t a man given to obsessions. So far, he had tried to ignore it and pretend it was the concern of the Legate for a new member of the Pack. But it was more than that, and he hadn’t thought himself to be the kind of creature to let a pretty face take his attention from his intended. He was a betrothed Alpha, and he needed to act like one.

“He could be dangerous *now*, though, after all he went through,” Luke mused.

Seath looked hard at his best friend. “Luke, you can’t be serious...”

“Look,” Luke retorted, “we need to accept the fact that he was likely torn from his pack at a fairly early age, severed from them and joined to a new pack, but probably never made part of it in a real way. In the pack he was placed into, although not part of, he was harmed in a brutal way. His mind is spellbound. His wolf locked away. The memories of his old pack were taken, his senses deprived, his wolf nature deprived. He was kept weak and submissive and was *brutalized*. It’s a miracle he didn’t go feral.”

“Or he went close enough to feral to get away,” Caine mused.

“We don’t know; and I accept that,” Seath said. “We don’t know what the result of trying to help him will be, but we have to try. It’s not enough to heal his physical body. The coven or whatever it takes for the rest of it, too. That’s what we need to focus on.” He tried not to think of Caine’s comment about becoming almost feral, and shivered at the memory of the lament on the wind.

“Agreed,” Luke said.

“Can you imagine? Not able to remember who you are? Not able to remember who hurt you? It must seem like he is trapped in his own mind,” Seath said.

“And back to that,” Caine said. “I would imagine that he is the son of someone important. The only issue is that the pack

he was stolen from would never admit to such a thing, at least most Pack Alphas wouldn't."

"We've already contemplated the part where we can't ask around either, even subtly, without giving away where he is," Luke agreed.

"Any chance they already have an idea where he is?" Caine asked.

Luke shared a look with Seath who nodded his head slightly.

"There was portal dust, residuals anyway, beyond the territory border, so the working theory now is that he stole it and portaled himself. Nothing indicates it wouldn't work for him, I mean, there isn't anything inside him they could have tied off with magic to deny him the ability to portal, even a human could do it if they had the dust and knew how to use it. The precautions were taken so that he would be too physically weak for escape, not that he couldn't use portal dust or other means. Portals are untraceable, so they wouldn't know where he went and then he ran for *days* to get from where the portal dust was to where he was found. I assume they looked for him, but they couldn't have known where to even begin such a search. If they got close, they would have found him. Even with no smell, the blood and his trail was too obvious. Anyone would have seen where he crashed through the forest."

"He may have had help in the escape, you know," Caine said, knowing Seath's mind for strategy had already thought of such things.



“If he did, it was a friend who stayed behind,” Seath replied. “The only residual signatures the witches could find in the area was around the portal dust. It was miles from the territory border, with nothing else around. So either no one came to look for him or they could cloak the residuals, which even he could not do. He may not have had a scent, but I could determine the lack of one. A sort of numb void. That, the witches could pick up, but no other.” Building theory from the confusing puzzle was giving Seath a headache.

“I don’t know how it gets any clearer than that,” Caine agreed. “No one knows where Little Wolf is, and I would imagine that makes some Alpha very nervous.”

“The family though,” Seath said. Although he wasn’t mated, yet, nothing was more important to pack life than family—family found and family by blood. “I can’t imagine not knowing where your son went—a beautiful omega son at that—not knowing what happened to him.”

“It would be a lot to stomach, Seath,” Caine cautioned.

“I know,” Seath agreed, no more happy about the prospect than he was earlier.

Caine tapped his glass absently on the table.

“Unless the family did know,” Luke said. “I don’t think we can take any possibility off the table. His family could have sold him.”

A low warning growl came from Seath. “I can’t contemplate that, on top of everything else ... I know it’s a possibility, but

....” The large Alpha shook his head because there it was again. The thought of someone seeing this omega as a commodity instead of a person.

A moment of silence followed as they all took a drink, contemplating that even in the modern world, some very antiquated ideas still existed. Some existed even more strongly than they had years ago.

It was Caine who broke the silence. He had seen enough time pass to know the pendulum always swung back, and the progress of one generation was easier seen as two steps forward and one step back with the hindsight of a few more generations. There was no reason to dwell on it.

“You know, there will be an in-between, when his body heals and the rest is a work in progress. You will need to engage him in something in the meantime, and it might be quite the opportunity to see where his *interests* lie. What does he know about? They might have erased the memory of his first pack, but those weaves wouldn’t take away the things he learned and knew before he was taken. It won’t take away favorites or familiarity, and there may be a lot to be learned from Little Wolf’s favorites and familiars.”

“That’s a great idea, Caine. Maybe we can piece together something based on what he knows, or what he’s good at,” Seath agreed.

“The body remembers a lot, even if the mind doesn’t.” Luke’s head nodded in agreement with the idea. “He can meet

the Pack to get comfortable and we can see what he has an aptitude for.”

“We don’t even know how long it has been,” Seath said. “How long he was there.”

“Not too long, he’s in his early twenties now, so he had to be taken in his late teens to twenties I would guess. A couple of years at most. Any longer and he wouldn’t have survived.” Luke’s opinion weighed heavily on the group.

“Little Wolf is strong,” Caine said with a smug look at Seath, one more time.

## CHAPTER SIX

# The Future Pack Alpha

Seath slid into his bedroom chambers, what was more like his den, with a long sigh. It had been almost a month ago that Lycan had arrived at the Pack House, and worrying about him had taken up the free space in his mind not jumbled otherwise with the picking up of Pack business now that the seasons were due to change.

Greene was still at the Council, and although they spoke frequently, Seath managed the day-to-day life of the pack almost without much conscious thought. It was just part of him now. He was due back soon, though, and that gave Seath some comfort. He needed his Alpha the same as anyone.

Just that day, Lycan had been moved to his own rooms and out of the hospital. He was actually closer to Seath, something Seath liked very much. Too much. He cared for the little omega, and watching him get stronger every day filled something inside of him. The Alpha instinct, he supposed, to always protect.

But seeing Lycan in the gym, swimming laps or engaging in Krav Maga like he was born for it, made Seath feel even better than the reports from Luke. Seath liked seeing how much better Lycan was doing with his own eyes. He liked seeing more of Lycan's beautiful, creamy skin emerge from the bruises. More weight on his limbs. More movements from his once-broken hands.

More careful smiles. A joke now and then, especially when he interacted with the younger pack members.

And if Seath found himself distracted by the curve of Lycan's trapezius or the soft whimsical smile he sometimes gave, well, that was no one's business but his own. Lycan was a pretty omega, of that there was no doubt.

Seath forced those thoughts away, just like he had and would keep doing.

Lycan would need a job before long, as Caine had said. A place to plug into Pack life beyond being a strange sort of visitor. Lycan had agreed to stay, at least for the meantime which made Seath feel a sense of pride he likely hadn't earned. Where would Lycan go, exactly, if he hadn't, though? So, Seath steeled himself to get Lycan to a place where he had choices. Strong enough physically. Mentally restored and rested. And then he could ask again if Lycan wanted to stay, when there was a real answer to be found. And then he could ask Lycan to be Pack.

Restless, Seath stepped out onto the balcony that set out from the Pack House in such a way to allow him a view of the

beach and the forest. Pacing in the night air wasn't enough, so he made his way down the stairs that led from the balcony to the ground. Barefoot, he let his feet sink into the dirt of his Pack, connecting him to the land. He sighed, imagining a complex web of root systems like the forest, and further imagining that now he was plugged into that ancient history. Wisdom.

*Tell me what to do*, he asked it, letting his thoughts go where they wanted, and asking the one thing he couldn't say out loud. Instead, he felt it and let the connection know those feelings. The way Lycan tightened his stomach and made his head buzz. The way just watching him try, again and again, to get something right — like his foot placement when he was sparring. Lycan's sunshine bright hair in his face as he was bent over a book. The faraway look he got in his eyes, sometimes, as he worked with Caine to not remember with his mind, but to let his body tell him the secrets it held about himself.

He wanted Lycan, but it was more than a sexual desire for someone he found attractive and with whom he had chemistry. And he was betrothed to someone else.

“It must be something, to have you out here meditating with your feet in the dirt,” a deep rumble of a voice came from behind Seath.

Seath turned, practically running to throw himself around the bear shifter.

“Greene! I wasn't expecting you today.”

Greene gave as good as he got, clutching Seath to him and filling his Legate with the warm, Alpha energy only Greene could provide. When they pulled apart, Seath looked for Evan or Teller, Greene's assistant and his bodyguard.

"They went up to chambers, we had a full day at the Council." Greene said, before Seath even asked. "I thought maybe you would be up for a stroll on the beach, since you are up and restless."

Seath nodded, raising an eyebrow at Greene, who merely shrugged. "I can feel something coming off of you in waves, Seath."

So, they rolled up their pants and took off their dress shirts until it was nothing but chinos and t-shirts and found themselves walking on the sandy shore as the moon came up over the water.

"It's good to be home," Greene said, "I hope I am not putting too much on you, but the Council—we are having some reports of strange activities in the Seelie and Unseelie Courts. It has everyone on edge and that has, in turn, caused even more work."

Seath smiled. "It's fine, Greene, I can handle things here."

Greene smiled, staring out into the night as they walked with an even pace.

"I would like to know about this conflict inside of you. What's going on? Is it the new wolf, Lycan?"



“I’m attracted to him,” Seath burst out, the words coming fast, yielding to the unspoken demand of his Alpha to tell the truth and not hide his feelings. “But attraction isn’t the right word. It’s ...different than just that.” Seath faltered, unable to explain how Lycan haunted his thoughts and seemed, some days, to be taking up residence in his very soul.

“And you are worried because of your pledge to your fated mate? And Prince Donovan?”

“I am,” Seath confessed. “What kind of man, what kind of leader will I be if I can’t contain my desires when I am already betrothed to another?”

Greene cut Seath a look. “You are hardly celibate, Legate.”

“This is different.”

“Different how?” The question was gentle and Seath felt his mind take over, and his mouth follow, with words explaining how he felt about Lycan. It was his feet in the dirt again, the same feeling of connection present with Greene.

“Some people,” Seath finally stumbled to putting an end to his ramble, “don’t believe in fated mates, like Luke, but I’ve seen it. And once you’ve seen it ...” Seath shook his head then. “Once you know that’s out there, it’s impossible not to want it. I claimed that betrothal as soon as the astrologer spoke it. I don’t want to disrespect it now.”

Greene laughed so low it was more of a rumble. “One person fate says will balance me out? Be my perfect companion in

every way? Be made of the dust of the same star as me? Seems ambitious, at best.”

Seath laughed, too. Greene had been married, but it had not been fated.

“Ambitious,” Seath said, shaking his head at Luke’s use of the word. “I’ve been called worse, I think.”

Greene grunted in response.

“The astrologers predicted a match for me, and I agreed to the celestial betrothal, Greene. You know that. Prince Donovan is fated to me.”

Greene sighed with an affectionate smile. “You do love the old ways. Fated to a human prince you have never met for the sake of tradition and lore.”

Seath smiled. “It’s more than tradition and lore, Alpha. I am due to begin the courting process this year. Perhaps we should move that up.”

Greene paused in their strides. “Is that what you want? Seath halted, something sick and icy in his gut that had never been before when he thought of his betrothal. He wanted Lycan. That was all his mind seemed to know, all his body seemed to know. And for the first time since accepting the celestial bond to his fated mate as a young boy, and then accepting the bonds of the astrologer’s prediction to Donovan when he was a young man, he had a feeling that was close to regret. To wrongness.

“Seath.” Green laid his large palm over Seath’s heart. “I know you will make the right decision here. You have not mated with omegas, out of preference for your bond with Donovan, so I understand the pull of someone you find so alluring. I cannot tell you what to do. But, if you want me to press the issue of your promise with Donovan, I will. However, if you don’t—” Seath’s startled gaze raised to Greene’s steady one, “for any reason, then understand that King Tremon and the country of Taured in general has been very quiet for the past few years on the subject of your engagement to their prince. So you have all the time that you need to sort out your thoughts on the matter.”

Seath swallowed hard. He had needed his Alpha, and there he was. He could only hope to be that kind of man for his Pack one day. So, he just nodded, unsure of what the answer would be.

“Come on, “ Greene nudged him with a large shoulder. “Let’s hit the hot springs and then get some rest.”

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## Lycan is more than he seems

Lycan stared at his hands. They were pink-clean, with the nails buffed to a slight shine. He had been taken care of in terms of cleanliness before he came here, but it wasn't his own. It had the cleanliness desired of his captor, to show him off from time to time. This he had done himself.

He stared at his wrists, only the dullest amount of scarring from the silver restraints still marred his skin, his broken hands had been set and his wolf healing had done the final job and repaired them.

Not as much healing as would happen if he could shift, he was told. Still, without the Wolfsbane in his system, all the healing seemed to accelerate. What took days now took minutes.

Instead of the magic that bound his mind, apparently most of his healing abilities were weakened with the Wolfsbane drug. Whether that was because wolf-healing was harder to tie off than some of his senses or the drug was just expedient, he did

not know. But now, the last was finally pushing out of his system, and he was able to heal like a normal wolf.

Well, a normal wolf that couldn't shift.

"How do you want your hair?" the pixie-like omega named Van asked as he perched on Lycan's bed next to Trav.

His hair had always been cut to the liking of captors, and his captors had liked it shorter.

"Longer," he said, decisively. "Can it look presentable and still grow?"

Van nodded with a smile, and began pulling it back into some kind of bun. "Just wait until these curls grow out even more," Van smiled, "beautiful." As Van worked on his hair, Trav briefly touched Lycan's ear.

"Do you want your earring in?" Trav asked softly.

"No," Lycan said reflexively. The piercing itself didn't bother him, he liked that he had it and knew it was something he had done himself *before*, but the precious gem he wore in it when he was found had been a gift from when he was held captive and he didn't want it against his skin ever again. He had taken it out while still in the hospital, and left it out.

"That's worth a fortune, you know," Van said, gesturing to the emerald stud, Asher cut and large. The deep green, the perfect compliment to Lycan's eyes. The cut, color, and size were to show the expense of the thing. An in your face sort of gesture to obscene wealth. A fancy jewel that made Lycan feel uncomfortable in what it signaled.

“Then let’s give it to the Pack,” Lycan said. “If they can trade it to a dragon, it can offset my stay here, and the Pack resources used on me.”

“Are you sure?” Van asked. But, Lycan was already nodding decisively, his slim hands making quick work of tucking it in his pocket to deal with later. Now that he had a plan, he wanted the thing gone.

“I will never wear that again,” he said. Caine had promised to find him suitable work once he was healed and he didn’t want to owe any more than he already did to this Pack. They had given him food, clothing, shelter, and medical care. “Witches aren’t cheap.”

“Perfect match to your eyes, though, the emerald,” Trav said with a smile.

“That was the idea, I think,” Lycan said.

It was as close as he had come to talking about what had happened to him before he came to this pack, but he felt everyone knew some of it, seeing him in the shape he was in when he arrived. He had told Luke what he could, and he assumed that got shared with Alpha or the Legate. He had shared some with Caine, also, who he felt didn’t judge him as broken for what had happened. At most he could share impressions and feelings. Memories stayed inaccessible.

“The diamond, then,” Trav said. “It’s clear, a sign of hope for the future.”

Lycan nodded with a large smile, and Trav handed him a diamond stud.

Lycan wrapped his hand around it softly before putting it in his ear, liking the weight of it, grounding him. The diamond stud had been a gift from Trav and Van for good luck with the coven tonight, and he had yet to wear it, saving it for that day.

While Trav and Van gifted it to him, it had actually been Seath who picked it out for him. That made his chest burn. He found that out by overhearing a conversation between Min in the kitchens, and Seath himself. The words had drifted to him down a hallway, almost as if they had been carried to his ear, just so that he would know.

He looked in the mirror and smiled, liking the effect. Not only that, but it was the gift from a friend—freely given and despite its expense, he had accepted in the nature it was intended. A friend had given it to him, Seath had picked it out, and now those friends enjoyed seeing him wear it, and he hoped he did their generosity well. He would make sure to tell anyone who commented on it where it came from. In his own heart he would keep the knowledge of who picked it out for him. Knowing it was Seath felt much different than wearing the emerald.

Lycan ran a hand down the dark denim of his jeans. They sat low on his hips, but tight, and he had a soft, dark green tee on above it and some tennis shoes Van said shared his name. He liked picking it out more than he would have thought. It



seemed reclaiming in a way to choose what he wanted to wear rather than be dressed-up for someone's pleasure.

Van finished with his hair and he looked at how he had tied it back, wisps coming back into his face. It was soft and clean, shiny under the light.

Lycan didn't think of himself as vain, but people stared when he went out. He was the curious omega who had arrived half-dead and with no scent. So, he wanted to look presentable. The Pack had rescued him. It seemed only honorable to look his best in response. If he didn't look his best, it might say something he didn't intend about Seath, and he didn't want that.

For the first time when he checked himself, the mirror reflected a normal twenty-something. No scars, no bruising, no sunken cheeks. *Normal*. At least on the outside.

"Look at that muscle, Lycan," Trav said, patting his biceps.

Lycan smiled. He would always be smaller, but the lean muscle from the gym at the Pack House and the regular meals had filled out the shirt that now caught across his chest and arms. More than anything, Lycan wanted to be physically healthy enough for his wolf, if his wolf ever fully presented itself. It was there, but faint. For some reason, it never wanted to come back as strongly as it had been in those first few meetings with Seath.

He knew it was a long shot, but Luke and Caine had both been clear that the healthier his body was, the more ready he would be for what was coming with the witches.

*If anything can be done*, he reminded himself, trying not to get his hopes up.

So, he had trained hard, slept well, ate well, and kept himself in shape in order so he could be ready for the coven. He was as ready as anyone would be to have witches delve into their mind. Thankfully, he had friends who were determined to distract him first.

“You are beautiful, Lycan. A package of all the best omega features,” Van said softly, and they clasped hands as the good friends they had become. “Puck wants to come with us today, is that alright?”

Lycan’s breath caught but he nodded. Puck and Van were fated mates, a concept Lycan knew. It wasn’t that though, it was that Puck was an Alpha. He was so Alpha he constructed houses, even human ones. He was big and intimidating and even though he doted on Van, who was smaller than even Lycan, Lycan had to work not to agree to Puck’s every request. He had gotten better with Caine and his omega friends at rebuilding his real personality, but Alphas were still hard to trust with anything other than agreement.

“Remember, what are we working on today, Little Wolf?” Caine’s icy voice asked, still full of humor somehow. He had managed to slip quietly into the room. Lycan wondered what it would take for Caine to make an entrance and not slide in quietly.

“I will tell someone ‘no’ today, Caine,” Lycan replied dutifully, but rolling his eyes slightly.

It had been long weeks of recovery, and Caine was working hard to bring out the man inside of Lycan. He laughed at the eyeroll, delighted to see it. The Little Wolf might prove to be even more of a handful than Caine himself. Most definitely would be for Seath, if Caine's instincts were correct.

“You will tell *an Alpha* ‘no’ today,” Caine clarified and watched as Lycan swallowed hard, but nodded. “And I will be right beside you when you do.”

Caine liked to give him these strange assignments, but Lycan could tell he meant well by them. Caine was convinced he could figure out where Lycan was from, and maybe even who he really was.

But not today.

Soon, they were off, the still skittish omega, the vampire, the empath omega, and the fated Alpha-omega pair. They walked from the Pack House to the nearby town of Lupine on wide sidewalks that ran parallel to a bike and running path, Lycan adjusting to the noise and chaos of busy town life, although the Pack House was always full of energy, too.

Lycan did not like just arriving in town via a vehicle like the large dark SUV's the pack kept around the Pack House. He enjoyed easing into it on foot. Additionally, he loved the slightly salty smell of the ocean. Luckily, shifters liked walking much more than riding in vehicles, preferring them only for long distances, and footpaths were everywhere.

The Pack House sat close to the beach, and from the top floors, the view was amazing. But in Lupine, they could walk

out to the pier. People passed them on the sidewalk on foot, on skateboard, on bike, and the group greeted each of them by name.

“Do you have your phone?” Van asked him and he nodded. He had no real need for the internet or to call or text, but apparently it was a safety measure he was expected to follow. Lycan did like knowing there was help, and that if called, help would come.

They walked and browsed for hours. Lycan didn't go into Lupine often, and so it made for an easy place to find the distractions his friends had promised before the coven convened that night. His footsteps faltered only outside a bookstore, and Caine noticed immediately. Caine's curiosity at his reactions to things was ever-present. Smells that he liked, smells that took a moment longer for him to process, things that made him comfortable, things that made him uncomfortable. He felt like Caine's science experiment in a way, and it was amusing to see how Caine cataloged even his smallest reactions.

“Let's go in here,” he offered and Lycan nodded immediately, eagerly pushing open the door.

The scent of books washed over him, and even without any additional ability to scent things with his wolf-nature, the smell was definitely comforting and Lycan could feel his entire face light up with the delight of being in the bookstore.

“What do you like to read?” Caine asked.

*“Everything,”* Lycan responded, breath coming quickly and eyes bright. Caine let him browse the shelves, observing what interested him, but not so much that he distracted the wolf.

Soon, it became obvious that Lycan could stay in the bookstore for hours, but the sheer joy that seemed to buzz off of him around the books made it almost impossible to deny him the pleasure of it. Caine would guess Lycan had no idea the amount of time that was passing and so he left Lycan to it. Trav, Van, and Puck all moved on to other errands, but Caine stayed to watch Lycan get completely absorbed in the large selection the store offered.

It was getting on in the afternoon though, when Caine looked over Lycan’s shoulder, peering at the title. They were in the Philosophy section, a section that once Lycan had found, he hadn’t left.

“Cicero,” Caine said, reading the spine of the book Lycan held. “Not a bad choice.” Caine looked at the title of the other book Lycan had, this one protectively tucked under his arm, “neither is Nietzsche for that matter.”

Lycan smiled and it lit up his face in a whole new way, behind him Caine could see another customer, an attractive Alpha, stumble into a shelf. No doubt Lycan had that effect on people without the smile, with it, he was a hazard.

Caine watched as Lycan’s long fingers brushed over the pages with a bit of reverence.

“Well, I think that Cicero could well have been the perfect philosopher, at least from Plato’s perspective, you know? But

Nietzsche ... Nietzsche questioned many assumptions about society, religion, and morality ... He *unapologetically* created a philosophy that put the individual responsible for creating meaning in life.”

Caine blinked a few times, enjoying the thrill of still being shocked from time to time.

“Well now, Little Wolf, I can’t say that you are wrong. I met Nietzsche briefly in Germany ....”

“Did you?” Lycan sounded eager, “You must tell me the story, Caine.”

Caine nodded with a smile. “Of course, and I think this book,” he plucked the Nietzsche from under Lycan’s arm, “would be a great addition to the library at the Pack House.”

“There’s a library?” Lycan’s eyes looked as bright as they did when Caine had told him there was a gym at the Pack House.

“Indeed, there is. Now, let me have this,” he said, slipping out the other book from Lycan’s hands.

“Wait,” Lycan said softly, his long fingers carefully catching the vamp’s wrist. “Caine - I - I mean, I don’t have a job, yet, and you can’t just ...I mean all of you can’t just ....” Lycan tilted his head, a proud stance, and Caine smiled at the thought of him standing up for himself. “First, the earring,” he touched it briefly, “and now this. It’s not fair for you all to spend your money on me like this. Not when I can’t repay the favor.”

“Am I your friend, Lycan?”

“Of course you are, but I must insist ....”

Caine put a hand on Lycan’s shoulder. “Then allow me, please, to give you something that brings you joy. Your friendship has already repaid me.”

“How?”

“You, Lycan, are both an enigma and a delight. Has Seath mentioned how he found me, years ago?”

“No, not to me.”

“Well, let me buy this, you can keep it in the library at the Pack House if you would like, although I would be honored to help you start building your own, personal collection, and I will tell you the story on the way back. Then maybe you can understand.”

Lycan nodded, dropping the wrist he still ensnared. “Thank you, Caine,” he said with a smile, and Caine noted the propriety of his manners, refusing once, then, accepting with grace. That was something ingrained in him, not something magic could bind.

“Do you know much of vampires?” Caine asked as they began strolling back from Lupine to the Pack House, the group reunited once more after lunch and walking on the pier. Lycan would still need to rest before the coven that evening.

Lycan’s forehead creased in concentration. “I think I know some things.”

“It never ceases to amaze me how vampires are portrayed in movies and books by humans and shifters alike. Take the fact I

am walking in the sun same as you right now. Humans would have you believe I cannot, although the truth is I am just not at my fullest strength, and I prefer the night. That's the ego of humans, though, is it not? Supernatural they call anything that can do things a human cannot—always setting the homo sapiens as the baseline to guide all understanding.”

Lycan laughed. “Well, humans can become shifters and vampires, but vampires and shifters cannot become each other.”

“A good observation, Little Wolf. In the many realms that surround us, this one is often seen as a neutral plane, that's true. And humans inhabit this realm and no others because they themselves are neutral in a way, as you observed. But, often humans like to show vampires as distant—as if we are cold and somehow restless, bored to tears after years on this Earth with only more years to come.”

“This Earth? Can vampires not travel the realms beyond Earth?”

“We can, just not as easily as the Fae.”

Lycan made an agreeable noise, waiting for Caine to continue. “So you aren't?” He prodded, “cold, restless, and distant?”

“The truth is, our kind is made to live forever. This is evidenced in our diet, for example. We can survive on the blood of any living being, and never need to kill our host. But, we can also eat food the same as the Fae, humans, shifters. We



do not require sleep in the sense that humans think of it. We are notoriously hard to kill.

Humans would have you believe that we are bored by our own existence, having lived long enough to see it all and do it all. It makes sense, as some humans feel this way after only forty or so brief years.”

Lycan laughed at that, and it was delightful. Caine wished Seath could have heard it. But, certainly Lycan and maybe also Seath didn't appear aware or ready to acknowledge the longing looks he caught between them. The way they shifted their gazes automatically to each other when one entered a room. The universe rearranged itself when they looked at each other, and it was only getting worse.

“Anyway,” Caine said, “none of that is true. Vampires thrive on the long game. It helps, in the long course of a never-ending life, to be easily entertained. You will find my kind suffers from fear of missing out more than from ennui.”

Van snickered and muttered, “Vamp FOMO.”

“Truly?” Lycan asked. “I did have the impression of a certain aloofness, or being removed from the world. Not from you, specifically, but your kind in general.”

“Fucking hardly,” Cain replied. “It is more self-preservation or the fact that time means something different to us. To my kind, we are engaging in intense study, but to everyone else, a decade has passed. We are easily drawn to things. More like magpies, really.”

“And yet your kind can be feared.”

“Rightfully so, I’m afraid. We are strong. Again, hard to kill. A different sort of magic powers us. And, we hold grudges.”

“And you are Pack.”

It was a statement, not a question, and Caine appreciated Lycan’s tact.

“I am. I am useful here, and vampires are usually uncanny judges of character. It can make us seem rash or unmoving, but in reality, we are just confident in what we know. I met Seath when I was a bit unsure about my place. I thought to journey beyond the realms, but he needed me.”

“I don’t understand, didn’t you say it was normal for vampires to journey so?”

“It is normal, common even, but it does have risks. Given our easy fascination with new things, vampires can get ...lost in the realms, seeking new information. It’s not restlessness or boredom, it’s fascination.”

“And this almost happened to you?”

“It did. Seath actually found me when I had come back to this plane. I only intended to rest here a bit and take care of some business for a friend. That business ended up being with Seath, and once I met this Pack, full of witches and humans and shifters and god knows what species Seath and Greene decided to add today,” Caine paused and Lycan laughed again. A smile twitched up Caine’s face. “Well, you see, my

fascination grew. I want to see how this plays out, so here I am.”

“And this causes you to want to buy me a book?”

Caine gave him an enigmatic smile. “It does. You are fascinating, Little Wolf. Full of mystery, which is my favorite thing.”

## CHAPTER EIGHT

## Lycan Says “No”

Seath didn't sit comfortably, even though he was only looking over requests to join the pack, an easy job. The truth was Lycan was out of the house, and although he would be safe with Caine, Puck, Trav, and Van, Seath felt unsettled without Lycan near.

The past month had caused them to share plenty of space - the kitchen in the morning, the gym, random meetings in the hallways of the Pack House.

Seath sighed, having no doubt that his free-floating irritation was felt by the other shifters, and likely why they left him alone. They also knew why he had the irritation, Jamie now giving him solitary tasks whenever he knew Lycan would be out of the house.

He didn't have time to contemplate the reason for it, but his wolf paced, unsettled when Lycan wasn't near. Then his muscles unbound, and he knew they were back home again.

The threshold of the house itself seemed to sigh right along with Seath when Lycan finally returned.

Greene was off again on Council business, and he was stepping into the role of Pack Alpha more and more. Still, even the Alpha being gone was not as difficult as Lycan's absence.

He didn't expect to see Lycan, as the coven was that night under the full moon and no doubt he needed rest after his excursion to town. But, right after Caine entered without a knock—*of course*—Lycan followed behind him.

“Jamie said we might borrow a moment of your time, Legate,” Lycan said, head bowed, eyes down, and behind Caine. He had taken to trying to call him Legate, not Alpha, although sometimes it still slipped. Seath liked it when it did.

The downcast eyes, though. It wouldn't do.

Seath moved in front of Lycan and tilted his head up gently with the soft pads of his fingers.

“You look very well, Lycan,” Seath said, enjoying how the diamond earring's brightness played off Lycan's face and how his clothes in general gave him the look of a healthy man in his early twenties. Seath's wolf surged in pride. He had sourced the diamond himself when Trav had mentioned wanting to replace the jewel Lycan had been wearing when found. The omega had taken off a sizable emerald and never put it back on. Now, the diamond completed the look of a much-recovered Lycan.

He had done that. As Legate, as Alpha taking care of his pack.

But, there was something more there, too. Something about this omega wearing something he had picked out. Enjoying something beautiful just for himself.

Seath shut down his scent. The ability to do so was a talent he always had on a smaller scale, but now that he was Legate, the ability was stronger. Easier to call upon. And he was grateful for the timing, because Lycan stirred something in him that had been dormant. Something big and something growing. Something he needed to figure out for himself before others scented it and figured it out for him.

In the meantime, it also wouldn't do for others to scent arousal from him to the beautiful omega.

“Thank you, Alpha.”

“Was there a problem in town?” Seath asked, his gaze falling also to Caine, who had managed to silently move over to the wet bar area, leaving them on the other side of the study. But it was Lycan who answered.

“No, I just ....”

Seath stepped back, taking the drink Caine made for each of them and handing one to Lycan as he looked out the windows.

“We went to a bookstore and it was amazing,” Lycan reported with a smile.

“I will have to show you the library, then,” Seath said. “It adjoins this study, but I don't think you have seen it. You can

go there whenever you like, of course.”

“Thank you, Alpha.” Lycan looked back down at his feet. “I know we don’t know about tonight and ... what ... well. Whatever is possible, but,” Lycan looked up at Seath, fully in the eyes, and Seath had the urge to hold him. Lycan’s full gaze was a rare gift.

He wanted to wrap this omega in his arms and keep him close, tightly bound to him. There were mysteries in his eyes, in the way he moved his hands, in his small smiles and Seath felt compelled to learn them all.

“What I meant to say is thank you, even if nothing can be done about me tonight with the coven,” Lycan gestured vaguely to his head. “But,” Lycan began again, stopping Seath from trying to say anything to interrupt him, “I know witches are not inexpensive, even in service to Pack, and I came here with nothing, but, I do have this ....” Lycan reached into his pocket and Seath tried not to be fixated on how Lycan’s hands looked digging in his front pocket. It shouldn’t have been something to catch his attention. Oh, but it did.

Lycan laid the emerald earring, practically flawless, on Seath’s palm.

“You were wearing this when I found you,” Seath said. They had tried, unsuccessfully, to scry with the gem to understand where he came from, but it had been wiped clean of carrying such information.

“Yes. The piercing was from *before*, but this—this stone—was to please someone and I...” Lycan’s voice broke off then,



and he quickly cleared it and set his shoulders.

“I don’t have much to offer in response to your kindness, Alpha, except to endeavor to be worthy of it. However, I do have this thing and it is of value. I ask that you, please, consider taking it to a dragon in exchange for gold. Please apply it to my debt to the pack.”

Seath looked at the precious gem for a moment, knowing that even if he was to tally the price of the witches, Lycan’s healthcare, even room and board, the value of the old and perfect emerald would far exceed all of it.

Sensing his hesitation, Lycan curved Seath’s hands around the gem, digging the sharp post slightly into the Alpha’s skin.

Seath liked being marked by something from Lycan. He liked the brush of Lycan’s skin against his. The confusing swirl of arousal and awareness he had where this omega was concerned grew, a tropical storm in his gut gaining force.

Green eyes stared into his, and Seath found he was holding his breath.

“Please. I do not want this gem. No matter how precious, it is a reminder of being held as I was. Even if I remain spellbound, I want no artifacts of that time. No mementos.” Lycan swallowed hard. “This part I can remember well-enough, and I ask you to take it from me, Alpha.”

Lycan looked at Seath with pleading eyes, and Seath nodded. He probably couldn’t resist even the most casual of requests from Lycan, but this one, this one he would gladly do.

He knew a dragon, or rather Caine did, and he would bargain with him, but then place the money in an account for Lycan's future. The witches' bill wouldn't be cheap, but Seath was paying for that himself.

"Do you give this to me to do as I wish, then, Lycan?" Seath asked, unfairly perhaps, but he wanted even that slight amount of Lycan's consent for his plans.

"Of course I do, please, take it."

"I accept then," Seath said, with a smile at Lycan. "Thank you, and you should probably get some rest before Luke comes in here yelling at us both."

"That's true," Caine said with a smile from his corner. "He's rather fussy about you being well rested for this coven."

"You don't want to be late for a meeting with witches, do you?" Seath asked, and Lycan's eyes suddenly lit up. Seath watched Lycan as he gave Caine a meaningful look.

"No," Lycan said, putting both purpose and power behind the word. "No, Alpha, I don't." Lycan smiled like he won a prize as he said the words.

Caine started laughing, the bell-sound drifting around the room as Lycan spun on a heel and walked out.

Caine shook his head in amusement as he watched Lycan leave the study. The Little Wolf had managed to meet his request for the day, he had said "no" to an Alpha, the Pack Legate, actually. Not just any Alpha. Little Wolf was witty, and the mystery deepened.

“What are you laughing at, vampire?” Seath asked Caine, his eyes never leaving Lycan’s retreating form.

As much as Caine observed Lycan, he had also cataloged Seath’s reactions to the wolf as well. Caine had known Seath for years, but the way Seath’s eyes fixed to the denim of Lycan’s jeans as he walked out the door was something he had never seen from the Pack Legate. Caine didn’t need Seath’s scent to understand it.

“Today I learned that Little Wolf has opinions on Cicero, reads Nietzsche, knows the price of witches, and the exchange rate of dragons. And we haven’t even needed the coven for any of that,” Caine said with a smile, as if he hadn’t had this much fun in a few centuries and perhaps was a bit smug not to have needed witchy help to learn what he had.

“You learned all of that from a trip into town?”

“I did. And, not only that, but I also think that after this coven, we need to find Lycan a job. Let’s start figuring out what he knows and what is familiar to him.”

“You are determined to get to the bottom of this.”

“You have ensnared my interest, Alpha, and Little Wolf is important. Important to this pack. I don’t need to sniff him to know that.”

Seath’s forehead crinkled. “What makes you say that?”

“Hearth magic, or hedge magic is so easily forgotten because it is an everyday kind of magic. Makes gardens grow and

protects our homes. But, everyday magic is sometimes the best kind.”

“Caine, I don’t need a lecture on magic.”

“Don’t you? Have you even realized that the threshold of your own home, your Pack’s House, lets in Little Wolf and awaits his return? He’s part of the fabric, one of the members the threshold will protect. Not only that, but it likes him. Adjusts to his temperature, to the scents he likes the most.”

Seath paused. The house had relaxed when Lycan returned, but that seemed like it was him, not the house. He hadn’t separated the two.

“Well, then, let’s start him in the kitchens and see how tightly the threshold wants to bind him. If it goes well with Min, then the library.”

## CHAPTER NINE

# A Coven is Convened

**L**ycan wore a simple white robe and briefs underneath, but that was it.

At least the coven wasn't a public spectacle. He liked the Pack and its members — most of them anyway, but he didn't want to be on display for this. The things he could remember about his captivity were not many but they were not pleasant. He didn't want an audience for whatever would happen as the coven searched his mind.

His lack of memory of his own self kept him in a permanent state of vulnerability he didn't like, and he would prefer if anything were revealed during the coven, that it not be revealed to the entire Pack the same time it was revealed to him.

Lycan had ridden with Seath in one of the Pack's SUV's over an hour into the forest to reach their destination—a cave carved into a mountain. As he exited the vehicle, the wolves approached in their shifted form, and Caine materialized or

flew — whatever it was that he did. Lycan didn't know how the witches arrived.

Serepta gave him a nod when he entered the stone room, following a procession of what would be the coven members. Stone steps carved from the stone of the mountain itself led down, down, down, the air getting colder, the stone more damp and only lit by the flames held in the hands of the witches. When the twisting path opened up to their destination, the cavern was smooth as if carved by the flow of water, with a stream to the far end still running. High above him was a small hole that allowed in the moon.

At least it wasn't cold. Fires along the wall kept the air warm, and the stone was cool, but not chilled.

Lycan followed instructions, laying on a large stone table in the middle of the space, feeling like a sacrifice. Underneath him the stone seemed to pulse with its own energy, and that fact somehow made the rest of it all seem more real. Maybe, in a way, he was a sacrifice, but he was a willing one.

He shook a bit. With nerves. Fear. Would it hurt? Maybe not physically, but what he learned? What would be worse, the coven removing the spells that held him or not being able to do anything at all? Lycan trusted the Pack, but as he lay still and vulnerable, he just could hope that trust was well-placed.

Too late now, he reminded himself, trying to seek out Seath from his limited range of vision from where he lay.

A coven of seven witches stood around him, not close, but there.

Thirteen witches would be a full coven, but this coven was convened with hand-picked members. If it was needed there would be a circle of seven, ringed again by a circle of thirteen. If it came to that, it would be another coven, another full moon. There were not enough people in the room for a full coven.

Lycan hoped it would not come to that.

Serepta led the way, explaining to the witches what she had learned after weeks of studying him and the weaves of the magic the witches could see around him. She had explained to him the weaving threads of magic into the fabric of his mind.

*More like lace and less like a tapestry*, she had said. Now, it must be undone. Unraveled, although he didn't like that word for it, didn't like the idea of his mind becoming *unraveled*. He shivered harder at the thought.

"It's okay, Little Wolf." Lycan turned his head, and Caine was beside the table. "I'm right here, as is Seath." Lycan could see Seath appear from behind the witches.

Seath nodded at him, laying a hand on Lycan's shoulder that made him tremble. Alpha-touch was powerful, and in his still touch-starved state it made his eyes roll and warm pleasure wave through his body.

Still, having Seath beside him made Lycan a bit braver.

"Steady on, Alpha," Serepta said, "can you keep your hand there?"



“Of course,” Seath answered, his thumb sweeping down toward Lycan’s collarbone and back up in a soothing gesture.

It tingled and it soothed, making him feel a bit floaty, but most importantly it distracted Lycan from whatever was about to happen because it was hard to focus on anything other than where Seath touched him, even with a coven forming around them.

There was no pomp and circumstance to the meeting, no endless ritual. Rather, it was more like a medical exam. Or at least this part. The witches had been at the cavern prior to his arrival, and he imagined that was much more ceremonial than his part.

Lycan listened as the witches mused about the tightness of how the magic was braided together or how it was anchored into him. They slipped off from English into witch-speak, and he just focused on the cadence of their speech. Witch-speak was buffered to the ear that wasn’t meant to hear it, and even if he could have understood the words, he couldn’t hear them.

In his mind’s eye he saw flashes of what they saw, threads of every color tightly bound in weaving. But, the threads were pulsing, living things, parts of him. The magical existence of a living thing reproduced as a vibrant pattern. Lace, as Serepta had said, but more geometric in pattern than any lace he knew.

There were other parts too, where the pulsing threads were braided in with a lifeless, dull one. The new threads were sharp and pointed, like mental barbed wire. Others had thick

matte black threads wedged in, as if rebar were set into the pattern.

When those were examined, the unease through the witches could be felt.

“This is dark magic,” Serepta said, back in English.

“But, just magic of witches,” Caine added. “No Fae. None of my kind.”

An image flashed in Lycan’s mind.

“These are anchor points,” Caine added, reminding Lycan he had his own magic to throw into the mix, “some are deeper than others.”

Serepta nodded, and conversed again in the witch’s language. Even Caine did not know what they were saying. Witch-talk was a gift, and only witches were able to learn it. It was old and a secret protected fiercely. Even keen wolf-hearing would not be able to make out the words, and every attempt to record the language had failed. Technology, no matter how sophisticated, could not bend the rules that governed magic. Witch-talk was unrecorded, unwritten, and would remain that way. A culture kept in the oral tradition only.

“We will begin.”

That’s all the warning Lycan had before his brain went fuzzy. It didn’t hurt, not exactly, more like being suspended in a sensory deprivation tank, while laying right on the stone table.

Serepta tiskd under her breath as they worked to loosen and free even a precious few tangles in the weaving. The poor boy. He was wearing a clear diamond she had helped Seath pick out. The Legate had been tasked with finding a suitable earring for Trav and Van to gift Lycan, but Seath had surprised her by being astute enough to check in to see if there were any stones that could aid in the channeling they must do this evening. The clear diamond would help, but it would still take all Lycan's energy for this.

Even lying on the stone table, in robes that prevented interference from other fabrics, the young man was stunning. Had he had been captured for his beauty?

He was obedient too, working as directed to become healthy. To become ready for his body to handle the work they must do.

Would she only untangle memories that harmed him? Would the things she unravel only cause more confusion to a wolf that had clearly been harmed enough? "Do no harm," may be the creed of human doctors, but they learned it from witches in a time when they were one and the same.

*I will do no harm to you, Little Wolf,* Serepta vowed, shaking her head at using the nickname from Caine. The vamp had a way of wedging himself into things.

Still, Caine lent his magic to the circle, not interfering with their work, but providing an energy source. Seath had his own power to give, a different sort of magic, but it was there,

flavoring spells the coven needed for its work. Her skin buzzed with the extra magic, fully charged to the task at hand.

She focused. She had studied this weaving until she knew it, like a neurosurgeon going into surgery. It would be a long night, the work tedious in places, but she would give this Little Wolf what she could. She would unravel what needed unraveling, and then with the power of the coven, delve deeper into the secrets the weaving wanted to keep from her. One coven would not be enough for this kind of magic, but it was a beginning.

Hours later, it was done. Not completely, of course, but progress had been made.

Some, if not all, of Lycan's wolf powers should be restored in time. Wolfsbane had kept his healing in check, but there were weaves that spellbound his wolf, too. He might be able to shift soon, and that would accelerate healing. His scenting abilities might return. All in all, he may have some new memories as well, but he should have the full compliment of wolf-abilities restored. Eventually.

Serepta watched Seath as his large hands carefully carried the smaller wolf as they made their exit from the cavern. Seath was a good Alpha. He was strong and fierce, but he cared deeply for his people. He held and looked at Lycan with a particular kind of care. An awe for the Little Wolf and Serepta was glad he was here. Lycan would need him.

Seath tried to manage his breathing, pulling Lycan's body next to his sent a wave of awareness rippling through him. He

shouldn't like the weight of the Little Wolf so near him. He was betrothed, after all.

Still, Lycan in his arms stirred something deep within himself.

*It's only because you haven't ever been with an omega,* he told himself forcing his focus back to the present.

They made their way out of the stone, and it was almost first light.

“We should take him to the sun porch at the Pack House,” Serepta directed. “He should rest there until we see how he recovers. And let it be under the full moon.”

Seath nodded, careful to not even jostle Lycan, as they used the portal dust to carry them back to the Pack House. “I'll call Trav.”

He wished it was him, that he could be the one to lay with Lycan and help him ease from what the coven had done with its magic. That he could give the Holding, but it was too soon for that. Lycan needed the omega energy more than his.

The sun porch had pallets, more suited to a wolf than a person, and was used as the name suggested — as a place for wolves to sun themselves, usually for recovery. They could also soak in the light of the moon, if that was needed for healing.

In the silver light of the morning, Seath could see that Trav and Van had made more of a nest than a pallet, and he carefully put Lycan down on the nest. He could feel the pull of

the moon, even as the sun was coming to take over. The moon, and its power, was still there, though.

“Should he be awake yet?” He asked, he couldn’t help it. Luke appeared by his side, and Caine gave him a sharp smile.

“Little Wolf is resting. That’s a good thing, Alpha,” Serepta said.

“Let the omegas do their thing,” Luke murmured, as Van and Trav slid in next to Lycan, covering him with blankets and snuggling close.

It made quite the picture, but omegas always did, especially in bonding like this. Omega energy was healing, and they were stronger together. The three in the grey-silver light gave Seath hope that Lycan would be healed.

“Tomorrow,” Serepta said, “you should make time for a Holding with Lycan in the full sun, Alpha.”

Seath took Serepta’s words to heart, making sure he was ready for a Holding with the wolf he couldn’t get out of his head.

Holdings were just that, he reminded himself, a type of ritual that played into the wolf’s tactile nature and desire to be close to another wolf. It accelerated healing and Seath had done plenty during his time as Pack Legate. He had done some before, when he was merely a strong Alpha wolf. It would be different than the Holding the omegas did last night, a picture he still could not fully remove from his mind.

He never had to worry before about a Holding. They weren't sexual in nature. He could hold an attractive omega skin-to-skin in human or wolf form and it never felt odd or strange to be doing so completely bare. The same was true for another Alpha.

But, Lycan, he could barely think of the Little Wolf without thinking of his lean body, his beautiful face. The desire he had to walk up behind Lycan and nuzzle his face into the soft skin of the omega's neck, to hear his breath hitch, his heart beat faster ...

Seath stopped himself. There was of course the matter of his fated mate. The one he should be fixated on. Someday, that fated mate—Prince Donovan—would be considered suitable in age and disposition to begin their life together. Donovan's uncle made that call, as Donovan's stand-in parent and as Donovan's King, and Seath had been patient to wait. Would he want to explain to Donovan how he had a tryst with an omega who came to him in the most desperate sort of need? Of course he did not. What kind of mate would he be then?

Perhaps this was all a sign that he should push Greene more about his betrothal. In wolf years, he was young, but it was now near the time the mating should be completed.

Despite his resolve, Seath was happy when he arrived at midday, ready for a Holding when the sun would be at its highest.

The closer he was, the more his body wanted to hum with contentment. Even in the large room, he could smell Lycan. A

sweet smell, like lemons, rosemary and sea salt. That must be Lycan's scent, or at least part of it. It was heady and caught Seath right in the gut.

Lycan gave him a smile, clearly still exhausted from the events of the night before, oblivious to Seath's struggle.

"Alpha," he said, sleepily. His nose wrinkled like he was smelling something, trying to place it.

"His wolf-sense is coming back, just not all at once," Luke cautioned, handing some orange juice to Lycan.

Seath nodded, wondering how he smelled to Lycan. Was it this wonderful? This strange play of enticing and comforting at the same time?

"And how do you feel?" Seath asked.

"Better. I like the sun." Lycan gave a little smile and Seath returned it. "Feel like I can't get warm enough."

"Wolves run hotter than you have been," Luke said, "could be your body getting back in-touch with its wolf."

"So there's a chance I could... I could shift?" Lycan asked, almost at a whisper.

"We think so. But, just like the wolf senses, it may come in parts. In waves. In starts and stops," Luke warned.

Lycan smiled nervously. "Thank you all for this—for any piece I get back."

"It's what we do," Seath said, trying to avoid the grateful gaze in Lycan's eyes if he was going to get through the



Holding.

Seath shifted, a massive wolf standing where he had been, amber eyes and a warm grey coat, thick and lush, and then curled next to Lycan's body.

His wolf almost purred when Lycan's skin rubbed his fur, and so damn much of it, as Lycan was only in briefs, his skin left to the healing sun. He snuggled in, letting his wolf get as close as it wanted to the omega, which was as close as one could get, wrapping even his tail around the smaller man.

Seath could pick up something that smelled sweet and sexy. Like adventure and home all at once. It was there, feelings tied into the citrus-herb scent of Lycan.

Deep inside, something new stirred in Seath, winds twisting the storm in his gut that was picking up strength.

## CHAPTER TEN

## So Very Wrong

**D**espite the touch-therapy in the porch with Seath, Lycan did not feel well all day. It was strange, because laying with Seath, in his wolf form, had been an incredible experience. He felt peaceful and safe next to the furry bulk of the Pack Legate, somehow even safer than when he was in his own rooms behind a locked and warded door. While he knew that Alphas could be gentle, they weren't all like the man who had kept him in silver, somehow, knowing didn't seem to matter. He still felt a bit uncomfortable around them, unless he was with or around Seath.

And being around Seath was secretly one of his favorite things. He liked how the big Alpha moved, how he carried himself, how a small half-smile formed when he was happy about something. How his anger was always directed, always had purpose when it showed up. Never had he seen Seath get mad in a general sort of way, it was always intentional and responsive. Lycan remembered the feel of anger differently. A free-floating sort of thing that was always a hazard, a trap to

be wary of, and that could shift to fill any occupied space, whether related to the source of the anger or not. That was as far as he could get though, before the memory became too sharp and the thoughts too slippery to hold.

Lycan tried to shake off his strange feelings. But, he felt off today and assumed it was a combination of new scents and smells and also a combination of the strange new feeling he carried. A feeling that his mind was full of flower buds, little memories and ideas waiting to open for the sun.

And Lycan was the sun, or he felt like it. A burning warmth in his core that only got worse throughout the day. Lycan was hot, despite feeling cold all night, and somewhat uncomfortable no matter what he did. There was a strange, empty sort of desperation inside him.

The next morning, there was no mistake what was wrong with him when he woke up shaking, the heat of his skin now burning, and a need pulsing low in his gut.

Lycan stumbled out of bed, then realized he had made quite a proper nest in his little room. His first thought was to go to the Enforcers who stood guard in the hallways of the Pack House. Enforcers were always ready to help, to assist.

But, most of them were Alphas, and he didn't know what happened in this pack when omegas went into heat.

He knew the heat for what it was, but in his brain, there was no memory of it. So much of what had happened to him before he arrived at Seath's Pack had been taken from his memories or locked down, but he still could feel those memories there.

He knew the thoughts were in his brain, and if it would hurt to get to them.

This was different. His only memories were of others in heat, not himself. Had he never had one?

Lycan grabbed his phone and called Van. Van would know what to do. He was mated, so surely he knew all about heats. Plus, they lived in the Pack House, close to Lycan.

“What’s wrong, sweetheart?” Van’s voice filled the phone and Lycan could breathe.

“Better get to him, honey, he needs you.” That was Puck’s sleepy voice in the background.

Lycan whimpered. If an Alpha could sense his predicament over the phone ....

“Shushhh,” Van said, his voice low and soothing. Lycan must have whimpered out loud. He heard the rustle of clothes, and then what sounded like a sleepy kiss.

“I’m coming down the hall now, almost to you.”

“Sorry to upset Puck.”

“He’s not upset. He’s just worried about you. That’s what Alpha’s do when unbonded omegas go into heat. I’m going to grab a few things and meet you at your rooms.”

“Van?” The question was too high-pitched and sounded on the edge of frantic. “What happens here with omegas and ...”

“Nothing you don’t want to. Never worry about that.”

Luke met Van in the hall where it split between the medical wing and the residential section for singles.

“What’s going on with Lycan?” Luke asked, still rubbing his eyes awake.

Van stopped short. “You know?”

“I know something is up, the threshold practically dumped me out of my own bed.” The clear scent of omega heat crept down the hall and Luke’s eyes went wide. “Oh.”

They both watched as an Enforcer rounded the corner and walked down the hallway, but instead of acting like an Alpha who scented an omega in heat, the Enforcer nodded at Luke and Trav.

“I’ll stand a post at this end of the hallway,” the Enforcer said, walking by. “Do you need anything? Does the omega?” Normally Enforcers were not in this side of the Pack House, and while helpful, that was usually upon request.

Van blinked. It wasn’t that Enforcers weren’t kind, they were. But, usually it was a more distant sort of kindness. He had never heard one ask about an omega’s heat before. Usually, an Alpha would respond to an omega’s heat by removing themselves from the situation. If the omega was bonded, then the pack’s Alphas would often stand guard, watching and protecting until the omega’s Alpha arrived. It wasn’t that omegas couldn’t take care of themselves, although that’s how some chose to see it. Instead, it was that omegas in heat were weakened. A strong pack meant protecting those who needed it.

Luke had always seen it as simple biology, the same biology that allowed some omegas to share heat cycles and become heat-mates, but never all the omegas, because that would weaken the strength of the pack to have all omegas in heat at the same time. It would also leave the Pack vulnerable if all the Alphas were in a corresponding rut at the same time, too. An evolutionary remainder that kept the Pack strong.

Luke thanked the Enforcer, and steered Van toward the residences.

“Is that not strange?” Van asked the doctor.

“My wolf is in a strong protection mode right now, I’m thinking all of us Alphas will be until his heat passes.” Luke smiled at Van, but knew what he was feeling was more than that. He wanted to carry Lycan straight to Seath, or to stand guard over him until Seath arrived.

Strange. That shouldn’t have been his reaction. Of course, when Seath claimed his Alpha-Mate, the response of the pack would be similar. To protect. The same would be true if Greene ever bonded again after the loss of his wife many years ago.

Van shivered. “It’s colder in here.”

Luke chuckled. “The threshold likes Lycan. I’m sure it’s adjusting the temperature for his benefit.”

“I’ll make sure he has what he needs, Luke. I hope this doesn’t set him back from healing in some way.”

Luke put a gentle hand on Van. “It won’t. If you sense something he needs, just let me know, but I leave omegas to know what is best here. This could be a good thing, Van.”

“Does it mean he is healing?”

Luke nodded. “My understanding from the coven is that his heats probably didn’t happen when the mind-magic was present. It was part of what was locked away. Between the Wolfsbane and his spellbound mind and nature, that makes sense. The stress on his body alone would have naturally kept them away. The fact his heat has come back so soon could be a sign the coven’s work did even more good than we know.”

When Van headed for Lycan’s rooms with his phone in his hand to call Trav, Luke headed for Seath’s chambers.

The Enforcer let Luke pass to knock on Seath’s chambers although he had already reached out in his mind to warn Seath to wait for him. The Enforcers seemed not on edge, but extra vigilant and Luke knew it was the vulnerability of the omega that was affecting them. Luke was one of Seath’s best friends, though, and he could feel things from the Alpha that others might not pick up on.

*Important things, Luke thought. Maybe.*

Unsurprisingly, Seath was pacing in his room, his head jerking to the door when Luke stepped in, and eyes going dark when the smell from the hall drifted to him.

“Down boy,” Caine said, sliding into the room behind Luke.



“Probably not the right time for that,” Luke mused, getting closer to Seath. He was close in size to the imposing Alpha, not that he thought he would need to restrain his Legate.

Seath continued to pace, looking as wolfish as possible although still in his human form.

“Lycan needs ....”

“Lycan’s needs are being taken care of by Van and Trav.”

Seath growled. “There are too many Alphas in this house while he’s ...”

“There are just as many Alphas in this house when any omega goes into heat. All the Alphas in this house are on guard to protect that Little Wolf,” Caine said. “The only one who looks ready to fuck or fight, is you.”

Seath snarled in response, throwing up his hands in frustration.

“Why didn’t you *tell me*?” Luke demanded. Luke swore he heard Caine chuckle behind him.

“Tell you what?”

“Tell me that he’s your fated mate, Seath.”

“He can’t be.”

“Every Alpha on this side of the house is wanting to care for that Little Wolf, and you are in here pacing with just the slightest hint of his scent—” Caine began, ready to lay out facts, but Luke cut him off.

“Best not to mention that part right now,” Luke said, seeing Seath struggle with the need to go and comfort his omega in the way only an Alpha could.

“Let’s run,” Luke said. “We can talk after you get out of here for a minute.”

So, they ran, long and fast and hard. Seath didn’t shift until he was clear of the Pack House for miles, making sure his wolf stayed in check.

The three of them had Briar join them in the forest, and they stayed in the far Pack lands, well away from the Pack House.

It was a satisfying exhaustion that settled over Seath when he returned to the Pack House very late that night. Serepta had done some work in the corridor to keep the scent of Lycan’s heat contained to his room. While it was done under the principle of safety and comfort, Seath knew Luke had done it for him.

Still wasn’t enough, though.

Seath could still catch the slightest tendril of scent even now, late into the night.

His mind burned with the thought of how he’d held and touched Lycan in the sunroom. Was it coincidental that his touch had ignited Lycan’s heat? Seath’s chest expanded with pride, his wolf delighted at the response of his omega to his Alpha. It was raw and primal.

*Claim. Mine.* Seath’s cock throbbed as he stroked it, his bed already soaked with the remains of previous orgasms. It wasn’t

enough, his hand a poor substitute for his omega, and his cock as hard as it had been at the beginning of the night.

It was wrong to think of another omega while betrothed. To think of the omega this way, intimately. He knew that. Before, Seath had been able to find a willing woman, or think of nameless faceless omegas when he needed release.

He was unable to do that now.

The thought of Lycan's lips so plump and eager for a kiss, the thought of his thighs pressed against him during the Holding, the thought of Lycan furrowing his head, trying to remember even when it hurt him. It all made Seath growl, and he was glad for both the soundproofing and the scent proofing of his chamber.

His hand flew down his rigid cock in fast strokes, pausing when the scent of Lycan, not his heat scent, but the citrus and herbal one, flooded his mind. The memory made his knot begin to swell, something he wasn't aware was even possible to make happen with his own hand.

He wanted Lycan more than he wanted anyone or anything he had ever known. Was that proof Lycan was his fated mate? Had the astrologer read it wrong?

For a while he had watched the omega, let his eyes follow his lean form. Told himself there was no harm in looking. Kept his mind from this exact thing. But, with the scent of him fresh in his nose, he couldn't stop the wanting this time.

And it was so very wrong.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

## That's Why It's Called A Heat

“Van?” Lycan asked, his voice panting in his large room. It sounded wet and heavy. Strained.

“I’m here, doll,” Van said, coming forward with a cold compress. “You are burning up again.”

“Wh-why it’s called heat I guess,” Lycan said hiding under the sheet to cover his distress. He had made a whimper as he moved. His body was taught as a guitar string, his cock rock hard against his abdomen. Everything sensitive.

Lycan had been left blissfully alone that day, tucked away in the nest he had made on his bed of all the pillows he could find and the extra quilts and blankets.

But now, as the heat progressed, being left alone wasn’t so wonderful. Dim memories of omega-play were in his mind, but more as something he knew, not something he experienced. His body wanted that, though. Soft touches. He shivered.

“You didn’t have to come back, Van,” Lycan said. “I can get through it.”

“You need to make sure you don’t dehydrate, Ly. Every Enforcer in this house is on high alert to protect you right now, so someone had to put eyes on you and give a report.”

“Protect me?” Lycan asked, confused. That was not his understanding of Alphas and omegas in heat.

Van smiled a knowing smile. “There are reasons for that, one being they want you to be okay, Lycan, you are a big part of all of us. They worry about you. And the house is worried about you, the entire temperature has dropped ten degrees.”

Lycan nodded, he had scented the same concern from several members of the pack as it drifted through the fog of his desire, and it was nice to be cared about. He loved the feeling. It had barely registered that he was able to pick up on those things better, things like concern that would not have been discernible before the coven. Maybe his wolf was coming back, but his mind was too distracted by the heat to be clear.

“Now, I’m going to go, since I can report that you are in fact alive and hydrated and doing ok. Are you okay?”

“I’m sorry—”

“Stop, sweetie. Before I found Puck, I got the worst heats. I had to be on suppressors just to keep the symptoms at bay, not to keep the heat from coming. I know how it can be. Plus, omegas stick together.” Van’s smile widened. He would call Trav and see if he was up for some omega-play. Something

told him that once Trav scented Lycan, he would feel his own heat coming on just like Van was. He hoped the three of them would be heat-mates, but he didn't want to get too excited just yet. Heat-mates happened naturally.

He hadn't had a heat-mate since he was younger and the thought of having two now sent a thrill down his spine. Trav had played with him some back then, and maybe he would be up for renewing that with Lycan in the picture, too.

"Okay," Lycan nodded. "I think this is my first. Maybe. Or, I don't remember the others, but nothing sharp pulls on my mind when I try to think about them."

Van gave an indulgent smile. "Do you really think it's your first? That's kind of exciting, hon." Van squeezed his hand gently.

"Might as well be?"

"One more thing," Van paused when there was a light knock on the door, and Van opened it and quickly retrieved something. "Here you go," Van said, but Lycan was focused on the shirt in Van's hand.

"Alpha's shirt," Van explained. "Add it to your nest, the scent can help."

Lycan nodded and reached for it immediately, and Van's knowing smile inched up even more. Whatever was going on between Seath and Lycan would work itself out, but he was glad that if this was Lycan's first heat, maybe it could be eased with something as simple as scent.

“See you in the morning, Ly,” Van said as he sashayed out the door.

As soon as Lycan heard the click of the door, he moved as fast as he could to lock it, and climbed into his nest, smothering his face in the shirt.

There was nothing like the smell of Seath. Sandalwood, sun, and vanilla. It flooded his senses and both relaxed the wolf inside and made him impossibly harder and more needy. He stroked himself with the shirt, wanting Seath’s scent on his cock, knowing he could come on the garment and wash it later, no one would have to know.

He would stuff it up his hole, if he could. In response to that thought, he somehow got even slicker.

That morning Trav had explained he left “everything Lycan would need” in the bag by the nest, but when Lycan pulled out the supplies, the dildo had a knot at the base he didn’t understand. He had never seen a dildo like that before, but was too embarrassed to ask Trav when he had returned that night.

Now, smelling Seath’s Alpha musk on the shirt, he felt his slick run down his thighs in an alarming amount, and felt his hole quiver at the thought of that large knot stuck right inside of him.

Lycan moaned. Without the dildo, he had taken care of himself that day, fingers and hands doing the job well enough. He was glad to know he still wanted sex, still wanted to be filled, and could still enjoy it. He had no memories of being abused in that way when he was captured, but there had been



threats. Now, with the coven, he had a fear of something locked down in his memories that would be revealed.

Maybe not, though. Everything he could remember suggested he had been a commodity, something to be sold or traded for his body and his heat. Maybe he had been lucky and the sale hadn't happened yet. Had that been why his heat had been suppressed?

Well, desire wasn't a concern anymore, but it was taking over, making other thoughts difficult as every part of him wanted to go find Seath and present himself to him until Seath eased the need inside him. And that was scary. The desire to offer himself up to an Alpha, and such a strong one, in that way.

He felt silly about his crush on the sexy Pack Legate. Of course the broken, discarded omega would be enamored with his rescuer. The strength of his crush was embarrassing. Seath would probably laugh if Lycan even blushed in his direction. It was known through the pack Seath was betrothed to an omega prince — his fated mate and a human—and never took male omegas to bed. The threshold had brought those conversations to his ear, too.

Lycan was completely unsure what Seath would think if he knew of his crush, but completely sure he would never let his secret be known. The crush was meaningless, but the fact he could crush on someone that way gave him hope that someday the crush would be on someone less borne out of fantasy than the hot-as-hell Legate. Someone who could reciprocate.

Someone more on his level. For now, though, Lycan saw Seath as a safe place to park his newly emerging attraction. A place for him to enjoy Seath's looks and his touches, like when Seath lifted his chin to make Lycan look him in the eye. Or stroked his collarbone during the coven. A completely impossible and harmless crush that would never amount to anything because neither he, or Seath, would ever want it to.

He had healed a lot. And one thing he knew was that if he ever took a man into his body it would be on equal terms. In the best scenario he could fantasize they, his partner and he, would both be completely sober of hormones or coercion, and the heat would come after the clear mutual desire they both had, amplifying the sex for both of them. And it sure wouldn't be a future Pack Alpha, and all that would entail. A crush was one thing. Distanced and fantastical. Safe to wonder about. The desire he had right now didn't seem safe at all and was much, much too real.

He had the odd toy lubed up before he could think about it too much, his hands quick to the task while his mind raced. The big shirt covered him, allowing Lycan to both rub his face in it and stroke it over his cock. He liked the reminder of Seath's imposing size. It didn't scare him, but turned him on instead. Lycan was open and wet, his body begging to be filled, and he made an obscene moan as the toy slid in. Soundproofing, he reminded himself, when his face flamed with the heat and the knowledge of how loud he was being.

It didn't matter. The heat was strong and everyone knew he was in heat. It was part of pack life. But still, something

flashed through him at everyone knowing. What a broken omega he was, layering human emotion over what was a uniquely shifter situation. Shifters shouldn't have second thoughts about such things. Perhaps it was just one more thing wrong with him.

But, his need mounted, so he thought of Alpha and the sunroom, how Seath's large body curled next to his.

Lycan's hand worked the dildo as his mind changed the memory to fantasy. This time it was Seath covering him with that large body, licking wet kisses into his mouth, stroking his cock, and taking him just like this—slow at first, then faster.

His whole body burned with wanting Seath. Lycan wanted to lean into the strength Seath had, his protectiveness, his care. But it was more than that, too. Lycan whimpered, feeling something else, something like the desire to be Seath's.

It didn't matter that he had been someone else's property more or less. That was different. Against his will. This feeling was more akin to wanting to belong to someone. Not just someone. Seath. Seath making him his. That was a new, tender place to go and Lycan just couldn't fully go there yet.

Luckily, the heat's haze clouded his mind, making it impossible to think. Still confused about the knot, his body knew what to do, and when he worked the toy faster in himself, chasing relief, heels dug in the bed, hips flexed in the air, he pushed the knot in with the final measure of the toy, a pleasure rippling through him as it pressed hard against some spot inside him that lit him up. He thought then of being

caught like this on Seath's large cock, a thought that should have been odd, but felt incredibly right as his wolf rose to just below the surface and howled in pleasure as the knot worked against his body drawing shudder after shudder as he breathed in Seath's scent from the shirt.

He left the toy in and the shirt pressed to his face, enjoying the feeling of being full and letting his muscles spasm around it until the next round.

Things were better the next day, although he yearned to be touched. He wanted to be held. Stroked. Kissed. Somehow, it was hard to get all the relief he needed but it was better than nothing. When Trav and Van came by to check on him, he noticed a look pass between them before they joined him in his nest, cuddling close.

He burrowed into them, enjoying the feel of his skin on theirs, and surprised when he could detect a slight scent of arousal. It wasn't like the smell of Seath. That scent was intense and made him think of uncontrollable heat and lust. A claiming kind of need rose in him at that smell.

This was softer, more gentle. A light place for all of his arousal to land. And the need inside him responded in kind, wanting lighter touches.

"Have you been around other omegas when you were in heat, Ly?" Van asked and Lycan shook his head.

"It may be his very first heat. Right, Lycan?" Trav prompted.

Lycan bobbed his head. “No memories. Not even sharp ones.”

Another long look was shared between Trav and Van.

“Do you know about omega-play?” Trav asked.

Lycan’s eyes flew open, mouth forming a surprised oh. “You would do that?”

Van pulled Lycan against him, so that Lycan’s back rested against Van’s chest and Trav was on the other side, facing him. “Just relax. We can help, and it would be our pleasure. We’ve played together before and are quite compatible.”

“But Puck ...” Lycan started to protest when Trav’s hands moved over his skin, and his protest was stopped by a moan. It felt good to be touched.

“Puck will ask me to describe every detail and it will fuel our sex for weeks. I’m going into heat and omega-play is the best place to start what my Alpha will finish.” Van shuddered as he said the words, thought the thoughts, the outline of his cock more prominent as he thought about the few days ahead.

Trav chuckled. “Usually, we will get on the same cycle in small groups in this pack. It makes things easier if an omega is unbonded and makes things intense if the omega is.”

“I don’t think I’m ready for ...” Lycan didn’t know how to explain it. How to differentiate between a dildo in his ass and someone’s dick.

Van laughed, his hands roaming over both Trav and Lycan. Caresses and intimate touching that telegraphed want and also,

tenderness. “Nothing you don’t want. We will set boundaries. With Trav and I, we kiss, use our hands or our mouths, most omegas don’t care for penetration with each other, and Trav and I agree on that. Omega-play is a different kind of intimacy. And if we become heat-mates we can navigate all of that.”

Van smiled. “Nothing beats a big, Alpha dick. A toy gets close, but omegas do nothing for us. Only if you want to, Ly. Whatever we do will help ease the heat. Your body will adjust its needs to omega-play. It will be softer, too.”

Lycan nodded quickly, already responding to the two omegas ready to play in his nest. He had been afraid of the deep need he felt inside, the desire to be claimed in a rough way. Objectively, he could see the appeal, but a big part of him was not ready for that. Not yet. Omega-play with heat-mates would be different. That he could handle.

“It feels amazing.” Lycan said, his words already slurring at the feel of being touched and touching in return. It was a lust-drunk haze, and he dove into the good feelings. “But I think I’m like you both. In terms of preferences, I mean.”

“Just wait.” Van said, his hands feeling better than any massage as they roamed Lycan’s heated body.

To Lycan’s surprise, Trav leaned up and gave Van a sweet kiss. Clearly, they had shared such intimacies before. It was hot, both Trav and Van were beautiful omegas and together they were stunning.

Lycan felt a burst of pride at where he was, between two amazing omegas in a pack that encouraged this kind of omega-

play. Where Alphas didn't seem challenged or attacked by it. It was like a dream.

Van continued to hold Lycan, his chest to Lycan's back, teasing Lycan until his small nipples were elongated and dark with arousal. Trav watched Van and Lycan, while stroking Lycan's inner thigh. Once Lycan's eyes were rolling back in his head and his slick was evident, Trav started stroking Lycan's cock with a firm hand.

Lycan's whole body moved, and he shouted with how good it felt.

Trav chuckled and Van kept working him, making his sensitive body sing. He was going to come, just from the nipple teasing and the occasional stroke to his cock by Trav.

"Won't it feel good?" Van whispered, painting an erotic picture in Lycan's mind. So far away from bad feelings or the fear he couldn't quite remember but that his body still knew. This was soft, safe, omega-play. It was healing him to feel this good under someone else's hands. As healing as the coven's work.

He was having a heat, maybe his first, and it was as gentle as something so intense could be.

Trav leaned up, placing teasing little pulls at Lycan's nipples with his teeth and mouth. Lycan's body sang and his heat raged, a fire stoked by omegas who knew exactly what they were doing.

“Think about when it’s your Alpha,” Van continued. “And a nice hard suck right *there*.” He ran a hand around Lycan’s pec, cupping Lycan with one hand as if in offering, and then pulling in Trav’s head with his other, encouraging the other omega to suck hard.

Lycan’s body jerked, the image and the sensation too much. He loved the feel of Van’s hard dick pressed against his ass. And Trav’s mouth made him flood with need.

“I need something ...”

“Feel empty?”

Lycan nodded furiously.

“Can we use toys on you, honey?”

Lycan nodded again, feeling the knotting dildo pressed against his hole. Fuck, it felt good to be touched, to be helped. Somehow, he knew there was something more, a better touch than even this. Someday, in the future, he might even want that.

The dildo eased into him and Van murmured appreciatively. “So ready, weren’t you? Your Alpha will love how slick you get, Lycan.”

At the same time, a tight sleeve encased his cock. It was some other kind of toy, lubed up and holding him inside like a sleeve. Pleasure stopped swirling and started shooting in all directions of his body. He moaned, body nothing but a throbbing response to sensation.



Van and Trav had a rhythm, using the toys to feed the heat. They touched each other too, making it about all of them, not just Lycan, although he was further into his heat. Pleasure and need drove his hips, his moans, his kisses. He touched everywhere he could. This was fun. Gentle. Wonderful.

And when he came, his whole body shook with pleasure until he was so spent he went to sleep between his two sated heat-mates.

He woke up and had been cleaned up, but he was still holding Seath's shirt close, with the omegas on either side of him. They stayed, the crest of their heats nothing but soft pleasure and warm feelings. On the downhill side from the heat, Lycan could give as good as he got, too.

Van finished with his Alpha in the last intense day, but Lycan and Trav rode theirs out together. When it was time for him to go, they were all closer, bonded by having shared something sacred and intimate.

Lycan thought of those threads in his mind he saw during the coven. Somehow there was a new part of the pattern now. He'd had his heat and it must have its own shape and those threads were linked forever with Van and Trav as his heat-mates. They were part of his pattern, part of the lace of his life.

Lycan could tell his sense of smell and sight were improving. The heat must have had its own healing power. A healing by fire. Healing wasn't an off/on switch, he had been warned. Instead, more of a dimmer where gradually, his wolf would come back to him, or so they hoped.

He could feel his wolf now, as he lay in the last embers of his heat. His wolf was happy. Satisfied.

Lycan's eyes shot open, his gasp loud to his own ears.

*Home.*

His wolf had finally spoken to him. A drowsy, sated, content sort of word.

*Home.*

## CHAPTER TWELVE

## A Confusing Cycle

As Lycan's heat eased, so did Seath's rut. He managed to orgasm himself into a stupor that was somewhat like sleep. If it wasn't for his wolf-healing his cock would certainly be raw, but as it was he indulged the thoughts of his omega in the shower again that morning with nothing but pleasure.

Luke had come to him, asking for his shirt, giving his scent to Lycan to get him through the heat. What was he supposed to do with that image? The one that played in his brain on repeat—the beautiful omega, rubbing his shirt over his cock. Or the other one, Lycan stroking himself with Seath's shirt in his face.

He had, of course, as Pack Legate, given his scent to other omegas. But this was different. It felt different to him and his wolf. Certainly, he had never planted the image of another omega in his mind like this, or been so affected by their heat.

Luke and Caine were both waiting in his office for him, and he followed the smells of breakfast from the library to the smaller table in his office where they all sat.

“Rough night?” Caine asked, running cool eyes over Seath’s appearance. It in fact had been more than just one rough night, and the vampire knew it.

The vamp really was impudent, and even more so when it came to Lycan.

Seath grunted a reply, barely audible but Luke still shot daggers at him.

“Are you still upset with me?” Seath asked, despite being able to smell the tinge of it off of his best friend.

“I just wish you would have *told* me, your fated mate! This isn’t just a big deal for the pack, it’s a big deal for *you*, Seath.”

“He’s not my mate!” Seath roared the words, bouncing and reverberating off the sound wards due to how strong they were. A Pack Alpha asserting his dominance was something to behold, a powerful, earth-shaking thing. He wasn’t that, not yet. But the promise of it was there.

Seath slumped back into his chair, suddenly exhausted from the long nights and exhausted from the endless attempts to understand it in his mind. It was one thing when he questioned his attraction to an attractive omega. Another when he was confronted with something so life-altering as the idea that his fated mate might not be Prince Donovan. He could sense the confusion and worry from both Luke and Caine. He was glad it was just them in the room.

“I can’t deny it,” Seath said weakly, his head in his hands. “He’s my mate. I can scent him, just barely, but my wolf

knows. And as he heals, it will only get stronger.”

“You took the oath for a fated mate when we were just kids, and you always believed, Seath.” Luke smiled kindly. They had each taken the oath to be pledged to their fated mates on the same day. Luke out of what would become a professional curiosity, Seath had always thought, not because his friend truly believed. Or maybe Luke had believed once and then that changed as he aged.

“The oath to my fated mate. Who was later predicted to be Prince Donovan. What kind of Pack Alpha will I be if I can’t even hold the most basic of oaths? One created out of magic at that. And let’s not mention that Lycan doesn’t feel it, does he?” Seath said bitterly. “He has said nothing. Acted in no way to give any indication he feels the same. You ever hear of that? The possibility that he’s my fated mate but I’m not his? The possibility that the fates were wrong when I was younger? Or, they read that Prince Donovan was fated to me, but they didn’t read that I was the same to him?”

“Oh, Alpha,” Luke said, placing a hand on Seath’s shoulder, as it still heaved with his heavy breath.

There was a long pause while the complex bouquet of emotions receded from Seath’s scent, and his breathing under control.

Caine spoke first. “Your promise to Prince Donovan is an old one. And one the royal family does not appear keen to follow through with any time soon. Taured has given nothing

but excuses lately regarding your betrothal. You need to talk to Greene.”

Luke nodded.

“Seath, please listen to me. As your best friend and as the physician for this pack. There are so many things we still don’t know about fated mates magic. Maybe it’s as you say or maybe the Taurens had an astrologer that read it wrong. It *was* Prince Donovan’s uncle who hired the astrologer. Many Taurens were moving away from belief in fated mates. It’s not hard to suppose that perhaps there was incentive to lean into a reading of a fated mate for the prince. The prince does come from a conservative family that would place a premium on those traditions.”

Caine flashed a sharp smile. “Donovan’s country of Taured is divided deeply between the conservative establishment and the progressive movement. A Prince and a Pack Legate, especially of this Pack, has a political context you can’t ignore. Successful, wealthy, prominent. Motivations for any astrologer to make a convenient prediction.”

Seath’s eyebrows rose. “That’s quite the leap of logic.”

“I trust fated mates magic over the prediction of some astrologer, Seath.” Caine replied with an icy tinge.

“I took oaths,” Seath hissed. “Celestially bound, remember? I shouldn’t feel this way about any omega. I shouldn’t be able to.” He took a deep breath, trying to figure out his mind and his body. The parts that spoke to him from his human side and his wolf.

“I know Prince Donovan has no right to loyalty from me right now. As you say, our pledge was an old one that has largely been ignored by Taured in recent years. But,” Seath drew out a ragged breath. “I took another oath. One I believed in. And to be the person I want to be, the Alpha this pack should want me to be, I have to keep that oath. Not to mention the fact that Lycan himself doesn’t acknowledge the bond. It might be different—“ Seath wasn’t sure how, exactly, but there it was, “if Lycan also felt or sensed a bond. But, otherwise, it’s just my hormones gone rogue.”

Luke scoffed. “Come on, Seath. Alphas are not burdened to be some animals subject to base desires and brain chemicals any more than omegas are horny creatures who will present to anyone when in heat. There is a hell of a lot we don’t know about heats and knotting. A lot we don’t know about fated mates. A lot we don’t know about Lycan. Maybe he has never heard of fated mates in his former packs? Maybe he confuses how your scent makes him heal his wolf with the scent mates have for one another —”

“Maybe he has no context for it,” Caine said. The icy tone was sharp, demanding their attention and not minding interrupting. “You are both assuming that as an omega, before he was taken, Little Wolf knew all about our world. I am not so sure.”

“What are you saying, Caine?” Seath asked, on the cusp of understanding his friend, but not quite with him.



“We know a few things, don’t we? We know that Lycan has memories of before he was taken, but those memories seem dim to him and we know that’s not magic at work.” Caine paused, making sure Seath had set his grief aside long enough to listen.

“But,” Caine continued, “I spoke to Trav and Van. They shared omega-play during his heat.” Seath was startled and ... aroused, but not angry. His wolf liked the idea of Lycan being taken care of; his needs would always be foremost.

Alphas didn’t know much about omega-play, but the thought of his omega twisted in the bodies of other omegas did something to him. He felt Caine’s smirk and Luke’s amusement. “He seemed surprised by the idea of the knotting dil—” Caine cut off when Seath snarled.

Caine raised a cool imperial eyebrow when Seath was done. “So, omega-play gets you riled up but the thought of a silicone knot—”

“It’s different and you know it,” Seath said, the snarl still in his voice. “Go ahead, it’s just talking about my *mate* this way ...I ...” He took a deep breath, realizing what he had said. “My wolf wants me to be the one to ease his heats. He’s convinced,” Seath shook his head, “that’s being too gentlemanly about it. My wolf wants him to know no other knot but mine.”

“Understandable, Alpha. Assuming he is your true fated mate, magic too, and I’m sure Luke would agree. I just need you to walk through this logic with me, Seath.” Caine said,

glancing at Luke who seemed to be tracking the logic quite well.

“It would make sense that he hadn’t been in heat when kidnapped,” Luke mused. “His body might do it for safety, or with the amount of mind magic and Wolfsbane, his wolf would be too far away to trigger a heat or his body too stressed. That’s not uncommon in even less stressful situations.”

Seath settled his inner wolf, snarling at the very idea of discussing its mate this way, and got back into his human mind.

“But you said, Caine,” Seath reminded him, “that he had dim memories from before ...”

“There are two omegas that wouldn’t know their fated mates by scent,” Caine said. “A human omega, and a turned shifter omega who hadn’t settled into their wolf.”

“We have assumed this whole time Lycan was a shifter his whole life, but ...” Luke began.

“It would explain many things, Seath. One, the fact he doesn’t react as an original shifter fated mate would to your scent. You respond to him that way. All the Alphas in this house have responded to him as they would to Pack Alpha’s mate in heat—offering protection, not mating. Hell, the house itself recognizes him as Alpha-Mate, just as you do. Just as the omegas do. Two, his body’s needs and how it changed. He didn’t crave knotting during heat when he was human, if he had one, but now, his need has changed. Clearly, he was

surprised by the existence of the knot, which he wouldn't have encountered as a human. Everyone knows a knot won't form for a human. We even discussed this when you and Prince Donovan were betrothed. There's a chance with fated mates, they say, but evidence of human fated mates is rare. Evidence of humans causing a shifter to knot is anecdotal at best."

Seath caught his breath, remembering the knot that formed just thinking about Lycan. He shifted, feeling flushed as the vivid memory replayed in his brain.

"Something to share?" Caine asked, reading his face.

Seath cleared his throat. "I knotted, or well, I formed a knot. Not during intercourse, I didn't seek out a partner, but when ... when I could scent him. Lycan."

Luke ignored the blush across Seath's face. "I'm sorry, did you say you formed a knot with no omega even present?"

"Yeah."

Caine laughed. "After all the concern about never knotting your mate when you thought your mate was a human. Now, here you are, with a wolf for a mate and knotting the wind! Or your fist. Either way, how can you doubt he's your mate now? Clearly not Prince Donovan, despite what the astrologer predicted."

"How long have you suspected Lycan's turned nature? He could be gifted. It also means there are even more places to look for his family." Seath asked, his hope and curiosity both

filling the room, and drowning out his embarrassment from earlier. “I never even considered it.”

Caine shrugged. “Turned shifters aren’t the only ones who had a human existence before they were turned, vampires did too,” he replied with a faint smile. “Human memories are dim and hazy, different, even if you didn’t suffer severe trauma afterward. His sound similar.”

“But, what about his knowledge? The things you have learned from him?” Luke asked. “Surely that wouldn’t have been picked up when he was a captive.”

“When I have taken him places, searching for what is familiar, I did it with the idea in my head he could have been human once. The body knows what’s familiar, without memory. Take for instance, the feel of marble, one of the first things he keyed to as being familiar. He doesn’t need to remember the smell or scent of it, but his body would know if the cool of the stone was comforting, or foreign.”

“Exactly what else have you been observing, Caine?” Seath asked.

“His manners are better than yours, Seath—things someone of nobility or high rank or a rich family would have been taught, like the correct address for a vampire, or something the body would remember. The way he holds a piece of cutlery, for another example. The way he speaks, his ability to write well, the familiarity he has with hierarchy and giving of orders. I would imagine that someone who had gone through what he had and was from a common family would react much

differently to the idea of being in charge of people. Perhaps there is more that can be arranged and observed.”

“Jesus,” Luke said, running a hand over his jaw, “you have been busy with your little science experiment. But, you are right. There are plenty of kingdoms, nobility, that interact with the shifter world, with regularity, or even integrate like our pack has.”

“And plenty who would travel frequently, or have a tutor, causing a young child to pick up a very imprecise accent.” Caine added, still miffed at his inability to determine the root of Lycan’s pronunciation of certain words.

Seath was pacing now. “And all the more reason to take him. Not just his beauty, but his power, or to hurt a noble family, perhaps a rich one if not nobility—which is difficult if you aren’t talking war or a trade embargo. Then, you make him a shifter,” Seath’s head shook. “Maybe, so the family wouldn’t take him back? Is it possible that becoming a wolf wasn’t his idea, either?”

“Lycan remembers very little about being a wolf, he’s running on instinct more than anything,” Luke said. “If he was changed and then held, it would make sense about how much he has learned without all of the spells being unwoven, yet. He may have never even shifted, given the spellbinding and the Wolfsbane. Not unless he had shifted before all that, but if he was turned by his captors, I doubt they ever let him shift. Too much healing would occur.”

Caine came up to Seath, who was staring out the glass wall, a storm was over the beach and Seath's tears were as large as raindrops running down the glass pane.

“Is there anything that *hasn't* been taken from him?” Seath asked, full of pain for his mate. Lycan had truly lost everything. That man in the forest was ready to die, and now Seath had some context as to why. If what Caine suspected was true, Lycan was given very little choice on some major matters in his life.

“You,” Caine said simply. “He's your fated mate, Seath. I do believe that, for whatever reason or how impossible, I think it is true. And if so, he deserves it. Perhaps no one more. He's for you just as much as you are for him. He can't smell it or sense it as much as you can. At least not yet. You are the one who can restore his wolf. You are the one who triggered his heat, don't try to argue that you weren't. Your pack recognizes it just like you do. Like the house does. Threshold magic may not seem impressive, but it is ancient and wise.”

“I won't force this on him,” Seath vowed. “He gets to come to the knowledge of his fated mate the same as I did. I won't have him being told of another choice he doesn't get in this life. You say he deserves this fate, but there are those who would see it as another choice taken from him. I won't have it. He comes to this willingly or not at all.”

“Your wolf will fight that,” Luke warned. “You will.”

“On my Raising Day, I took an oath to the Pack—to do what was in their best interest, and having an Alpha-Mate that

comes willingly to the role is what is best. My wolf will understand.” Seath looked to his two best friends. “I’m not saying it will be easy. I know it won’t, and I will need your help in this. There is the political fall-out as well if I were to now break the bond with Prince Donovan. I can’t do it without both of you there.”

“Always,” Luke agreed.

“You know I will,” Caine said. “For Little Wolf and for you. For the Pack.”

Seath paced and took a long drink of the coffee he had only sipped earlier.

“And the Prince?” Caine asked.

“Greene is back tomorrow and we will talk. I will find a way.”

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN



# Alpha and Legate

*F*orward. Forward. Parry.

The wooden practice sword spun in Lycan's hands, then was knocked out by Briar.

Lycan grinned, taking a classic Krav Maga stance in response to the loss of his weapon. Briar still had her sword, but as had been proven in these exercises, that didn't always matter.

Sweat dripped from his gold hair, darker now from the dampness. So was his shirt, clinging to him, and the shorts he wore, too.

He watched Briar—focused on both her feet and the sword in her hands. His feet were bare, sliding across the training room floor with ease as he waited on the balls of his feet to move.

They grappled, Lycan feeling the pull in his muscles as he moved seamlessly across the floor. Lycan's body knew what to do with a sword in his hand, and what to do when the sword

was gone, but his opponent still carried one. If he pushed himself, he could block out the memories, the pain a reminder for his mind not to wander there. Instead, he leaned into the moment, to how his body knew to be present, and he just *moved*.

Not memories, but knowledge of how to do a thing.

Back and forth they went, down to the mats and back up, across the floor, with soft grunts and the slap of skin as they moved together, evenly matched.

Greene and Seath looked on with the group of others who had gathered. Greene, when he came back to the pack, liked to observe the Pack House first and foremost. He had come alone, not with his usual assistant and bodyguard, signaling a quick stay.

“He is agile. Quick on his feet.”

Seath nodded, watching Lycan move. Maybe he should be focused on Alpha, but Lycan wore simple athletic shorts and a tee shirt that clung to his sweating body. Seath could see every muscle. Every move he made.

Watching, it was clear he could never spar with Lycan. Not openly. He couldn't be that close, smell and touch so much and not let his feelings show.

And not if Lycan smiled at him with the bright smile that hadn't left his face since he and Briar began.

He and Greene had talked at length already, and there wouldn't be much time left for more talking before the

Council called Greene back. But at least Greene knew what Seath had come to know, and Seath felt better having his Alpha completely looped into what was happening.

Greene, to his credit, hadn't declared his thoughts on the subject. He had listened, as Seath had expected him to, but he hadn't said anything—no empty platitudes at least about Seath knowing his own mind or his own wolf. Greene had just listened, asked questions, and then somehow ended the conversation by moving around the Pack House to the gym.

“I don't want to add to your load here, Seath,” Greene started, his bear nature on display in his loping walk as they left the gym and by silent agreement, headed to the hot springs that were an easy walk from the Pack House. Once they cleared the expansive back deck and patio of the Pack House, Greene slipped off his shoes, taking a moment to let his feet hit the dirt of the Pack lands.

They walked like that, swinging shoes until Greene finally worked out what he wanted to say.

“There is no way to cushion it,” he finally decided upon, as they neared the grotto, close enough to hear the echo of the ocean off the stone. They started stripping their clothing for the hot springs.

“Cushion what?” Seath asked, stepping in first and finding a spot on the edge close to the emergence of the water that fed the pool. It always seemed hotter.

Greene sighed. “I have to go back to the Council tomorrow.”

Seath wrinkled his forehead. “You know I love it when you are here, but that’s fine Greene. I think I can manage it.”

Greene chuckled, his broad, muscular form stepping into the hot water. Greene had a wife who had passed and a child that was already part of a different pack, but still looked young. Late thirties by human standards, probably.

He groaned as he eased himself across the pool from Seath. They could both sense the Enforcers around, not willing to let both of the leaders alone. But, they stayed out of even wolf hearing range and let them finish their conversations.

“You do more than manage it, as you well know. I can feel it in the dirt, and in the water. If things weren’t so well cared for here, I would send someone else to the Council.”

“You are the best to represent us, you know that. If I can do this job, and you that one, there is no reason to change on my account. Unless there is something you wish to change, Alpha.”

“No. Nothing like that. Although, before things kicked up at the Council, I had intended for us to talk about all I have been putting on you here. But, I do need to tell you some things that are happening at the Council before I go back.”

“What things?”

Greene sat up a bit. “Stirrings. Rumors. The Fae seem to be a bit ...animated. More and more sightings of them here in the mortal plane. I know I mentioned it before, but it isn’t going away. If anything, concerns are mounting.”

“I’m glad I’m not at the Council if I would have to understand the Fae.”

“We don’t understand them either, of course, even with their own representatives in the room, but they have connections everywhere, and what’s more their Counselor is acting as if everything is fine. No one will ask him what the hell is going on, obviously, afraid of being seen as crossing some boundary with their private business.”

“Is anything going on?”

“As of now, no.” Greene shifted in his seat, stretching in the warm water. “But, I did get word while I was here that they have asked for a meeting with Galt, and then right after that, meetings with two other countries we hadn’t anticipated.”

“Interesting.”

Greene shrugged. “Issues with the Fae affect everyone, even if they themselves don’t realize that sometimes. But, it means more Council time for me, and more interim-Alpha duties for you.”

“I told you that’s not a problem, Greene.” Seath ran his hand through the water. “How bad is it, though? With the Fae?”

“They gave me Teller as a bodyguard full-time,” Greene said with a humph. “Not like before when he was merely on my detail as needed.”

“I can’t imagine what Evan, the world’s most capable assistant, thinks of that.”

Greene laughed out loud. “They seem to get along.”

“And Teller, you trust him?”

“With my life.”

Seath nodded, accepting Greene’s take on the tall, lanky Elf. Teller was blond and fair, with blue eyes that seemed to miss nothing. A sort of competence surrounded Teller, telling Seath that Greene was in good hands.

Greene gave a hum, lowering his shoulders into the warm water, finally relaxing fully as they sat in companionable silence in the springs.

“What about your Little Wolf ? Do you need more time? Or do I make the overture to Taured and acting-King Tremon?”

Seath stilled. “I’m not going to change my mind, Greene. Not about Lycan or about letting him come to the realization on his own about us being mates. But, when the time is right, I would like to come to my mate with as much of my integrity intact as possible.”

Greene flashed a smile. “Fair enough. We’ll figure it out.”

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

# What Little Wolf Knows

**M**in watched as the young omega tended to his duties with a level of precision that most of his age did not dedicate to simple tasks, such as laundry or cleaning vegetables. But, Lycan had been in her kitchens for over six weeks now since right after Greene left the last time.

She kept a sharper eye on Jason, the sleek panther shifter who was the low man in the kitchen until Lycan showed up, than she did on the omega. As an Alpha herself, she knew Jason's type and how his eyes seemed to linger on Lycan.

The fact that Jason didn't notice how the Pack Legate's eyes also lingered, possessively, or how the Pack Legate had begun making more frequent trips to the kitchen was beyond her. Lycan might as well have a bright sign over his head that proclaimed him as Seath's as far as she and most of the Pack were concerned. As far as the threshold was concerned.

The betrothal of the Pack Legate to another be damned. It was all a bunch of nonsense if you asked her. She threw the dough from the bowl into the flour with enough force to puff



up little white clouds. Or maybe all three of them needed to be together. A prince, the omega, and her Pack Alpha to be. Not as if such relationships were unheard of, there were entire countries run by poly couples, no reason for a Pack to be any different.

Min didn't care one way or the other, as long as the smart little omega she had gotten to know got his Alpha. As long as Seath got what he longed for. Min had known Seath a long time, and had never known him to want something. Not until now. Not like this.

Min could sense things in others, revealed in colors and visions when she was around them. Not strong enough to be called a gift, probably, but enough to be at least a minor talent. In the Pack Legate she sensed a deep honor, his aura pulsed a dark burgundy and she often saw a heart and a full moon over his head. In Lycan, she sensed a sharp mind, and attention to detail. His aura was rich gold, and there was a stole or a cape that appeared from time to time, but most often a book.

Those insights came to her in flashes, sometimes in color only. When Seath and Lycan were near each other the colors blended, joining together to make new ones. The colors reached for one another, as clear and plain as the dough in her hands.

The threshold liked Lycan, her hearth liked him, and the Pack Legate needed him. Prince Donovan, who had not even set foot in the Pack lands, could stay across the sea where he belonged, as far as she was concerned. What was he going to

do, anyway? A conservative place like Taured couldn't raise the kind of omega Greene and Seath's progressive pack would need.

But, Jason didn't seem to get it. Any of it. As Pack, he should. Min put that information away as something to bring up with Briar, or perhaps Luke. The Northwest Pack was successful. It was prosperous and self-contained, a sovereign nation and had few rivals and no known enemies. It boasted of port cities and thriving communities with a menagerie of citizens. Witches, elves, shifters, and even their vampire.

Seath was part governor and part CEO. Politician, business man, and leader. He had help, of course, leaders at the local level that saw to the immediate needs of their citizens.

There those who did not like Seath's ways or how much agency Greene gave him, and those that didn't care as long as the prosperity of the Pack continued.

It was inevitable as they saw Greene less and less that Pack members would drop Alpha, the capital A kind, to refer to Seath more and more frequently. But, Alphas didn't just turn over Packs, and Greene was still in his prime. Seath wouldn't truly be Alpha until Greene passed away. Some packs changed leadership violently, but Min could never see that for Seath.

Some believed Seath to be too old-fashioned, others saw him as too progressive. But, everyone had been to the Raising Day and it was impossible to deny that the magic had said Seath was destined to lead. Other Alphas would have taken the Pack in a different direction, or even have been as successful, but

the old magic knew which Alpha would take the pack in the way it needed to go, and that had been Seath and the magic had been clear.

That same magic spoke to Min in the kitchens, the Alpha nature of caring about others showing up in making sure her Pack was fed and fed well. Pack members could always come into the kitchen and find food. Breakfast and lunch were served buffet-style every day for whomever wanted to come to the Pack House, and of course the residents of the Pack House. Special, all-pack feasts were also hosted on important days and holidays. The entire country was invited, but most didn't make the trip to the Pack House, but celebrated in smaller, similar feasts held all over and provided by the Pack. No pack member should go hungry, as her pantry door and hearth were always open.

It was a never ending cycle of planning and cooking and cleaning, all to do so again, and she thrived on the acts of love and service the kitchen embodied each day.

Lycan seemed to get that. Omegas in a home changed the dynamics, as they influenced emotions. The house practically sang in contentment since the day Lycan arrived, and Min could feel it down to the stones on the hearth.

Speaking of, where was he?

Min flopped the dough for dinner rolls on the well-worn wooden table one more time.

She had sent him and Jason to the large storeroom that served as the pantry. No need for locks or such things, the

Threshold magic would either keep out someone with intentions to steal, or not allow someone who had stolen to leave.

But Lycan had been gone too long and as she reached out to the hearth magic, it met her, the home practically pushing her toward the pantry with urgency.

Lycan didn't feel scared, exactly, but he didn't like how Jason was crowding his space. How Jason had been doing all morning. Nothing he could put his finger on, but just the young Alpha, always there, always a bit too close.

“So, how long does it take,” Jason asked, standing in front of Lycan. Lycan's back was to the pantry wall, shelves on either side, hands full of Min's requests, and Jason between him and the door.

“Does what take?”

“For you to go into heat? I hear you just need an Alpha around and boom,” his hands mimicked something exploding, “fireworks.”

Lycan ground his teeth. It was true, in a way. After his first heat, they kept coming. Not every month, as would be normal. Little heats in a cycle that would spin out a large heat every other year. But no, these were random flare-ups that lasted days or hours, like a light heat he would have every month, only they came with a much greater frequency. Almost constant, it seemed. It was easy to guess that others would talk about how odd he was, and Jason confirmed it.

His instinct was to simply say “yes, Alpha,” or it’s equivalent. To be demure and engaging before he could leave the Alpha to his own business.

Except now he couldn’t. His little agreements to Jason all morning weren’t enough, and now he was mentioning *this* and they were in the small closet-like room of the pantry, and between Lycan and the door was Jason.

Jason put a hand on his chest, pushing Lycan back against the shelving. He was not near the stature of Seath, but he was much bigger than Lycan.

“I think I’ll wait.” Jason crossed his arms with a lazy smirk. “Clearly, all you need is someone to get you through it properly. No one else must have known what they were doing or it would have ended.”

Lycan felt cold. The threat was clear from this Alpha, a common enough refrain for any omega of any species. They were made to go into heat, and the heat should be owned by an Alpha. If only he had a “strong” enough Alpha to get through it then the heat would end as it should. The implication was clear. Lycan just hadn’t been with someone man enough to end his heats.

He didn’t know why the strange heats were coming, but it had nothing to do with what Jason was saying. Few people believed that outdated shit anymore, anyway.

“Let me pass, Jason,” Lycan said with more clarity than he actually felt about the situation, “Min will be needing what she sent us for.”

“I don’t think I will.”

Jason moved then, using the small space and his bigger height and weight to try and pin Lycan against the far wall. Cans clattered to the ground as Lycan tried to steady himself.

Lycan moved without thinking, his mind unattached as his arm shot out and he twisted and moved like he was remembering a dance. He blocked a blow, grabbed Jason, and had him on the ground, pinned, before his mind came back online.

“Lycan!” Seath’s voice preceded him by perhaps a second as he burst into the room and Lycan was scooped off of Jason by strong, protective arms. Seath didn’t even let Lycan’s feet touch the floor as he checked him over, looking for harm.

With his new senses, Lycan could smell the worry coming off the bigger man. He put a hand to Seath’s face, cupping it gently, seeing that his teeth had elongated in anger. “I’m fine Alpha, I promise.” There was no fear there, not of Seath. Not even in this state of fury.

Seath nodded, appearing to realize for the first time he was holding Lycan, and carefully set the omega down, but kept one strong arm around him.

“Looks like Little Wolf took care of things just fine, Alpha,” Caine said, his focus cold and exclusively saved for Jason. “This one might need to explain a few things.”

Briar and Luke were in the hallway, exchanging glances. They led Jason out, and Caine followed, moving into the

larger space of the kitchen. Min waited there, with a look of her own that sent Lycan pressing into Seath's side.

Seath scented Lycan, his wolf would not be happy until the man smelled like him. He nuzzled Lycan's neck and tried to keep his body under control. He never had this problem before with anyone, and he had at one time or another probably scented the entire pack, but being that close, his skin to Lycan's, was heaven and his body reacted. He moved to Lycan's wrist, safer, but still a place his scent would linger.

"I didn't mean to ..." Lycan said, but he shifted uncomfortably, already feeling the tell-tale signs of a heat flare starting. "I need to go," he whispered, giving a desperate look to Luke. He wished he weren't so broken. Maybe Jason was right. He couldn't even get through a fight without a heat flaring in response. Fat tears threatened to release.

Not only that, but Seath was holding him, pressing skin to skin, right there, all scent and muscles and intensity. His body flared hot. He had to leave before he did something awful that would get him sent from the Pack, or worse, let Seath know how affected he was by the Legate.

Carefully, he detangled himself from Seath, who watched with a frown. It hurt, almost physically, to leave the exact place he wanted to be, but this flare was raging. Slick would flow next, and he needed to be out of the kitchens before that happened.

"This was not your doing," Caine said. "I'll walk you to your rooms, if you wish."

Once they were gone, Seath turned on Briar. “I need you to take care of Jason. I don’t trust myself with this one.” He breathed through his mouth, willing the threshold that had been so helpful in alerting him to the predicament in the pantry to be kind enough to waft out the scent of Lycan’s heat. He locked down his own corresponding reaction as tightly as he could.

Briar nodded, shuffling Jason off to let the pack law enforcement take care of formal punishment for attacking a pack guest. Seath couldn’t get out of the kitchens fast enough.

Luke and Caine knew where to find Seath once Lycan was put back in his rooms. The constant heat flares were wearing on Lycan, and rest was the only solution. He would be groggy for a few days as the heat burned through him. It had been an ongoing problem since his very first heat. Seath was in a corresponding state, removing himself back to his study.

Seath was pacing in front of his windows, looking over at the beach and the adjoining playground where pack children could be seen playing.

“Lycan is fine. This is a flare and will burn out quickly.” Luke assured him and Seath nodded.

“You have to admit it’s a problem for him,” Seath said.

“Of course it’s a problem, Alpha.” Luke shook his head. “He’s found his fated mate. His body knows this and responds — a natural response I might add. But, the rest of him doesn’t know. Not yet.”



“I’m hurting him.”

“For the love of the goddess, Seath.” Caine lightly pushed Seath so instead of pacing, he sat down. Undoubtedly one of the only people who could get away with that move. “Is no one going to talk about how Little Wolf defended himself adequately?”

“Krav Maga?” Seath blinked at Caine.

“The fighting technique? Is that what that was? Like he does in the gym?” Luke asked, taking a seat.

They had all arrived in the kitchen with enough time to see Lycan pin Jason. The threshold alert having told them of trouble.

“That is what that was. And I don’t mean the stuff they teach down at the yoga studio. Krav Maga is an old technique, developed for hand-to-hand combat, especially to mitigate a size difference or if one party has a weapon and the other does not.” Caine tapped his fingers to his knee. “There are only so many places that would teach that and teach it so well. You mentioned he sparred with Briar, but I didn’t realize he did it so well.”

“A clue for your little investigation?” Seath was eager to know more about his mate.

“A clue,” Caine agreed. “And an opportunity. Perhaps we can also arrange his duties to teach some of the younger kids. It’s a worthy skill and he knew what he was about beyond

what it would take to spar with Briar. A good place for him to grow stronger and be useful. He enjoys the gym.”

Seath’s chest puffed up. That was his mate. His mate put a bigger Alpha on the ground. Lycan was slight, but as his body healed, he had added muscle that was lean and strong.

Lycan hadn’t shifted after the coven, but Seath saw him rub his chest a few times, as if he had felt his wolf. His wolf senses were also restoring. A little bit every day they built back. Not full strength, but better.

The only issue was the heat flares and the resulting exhaustion as the constant heats wore on Lycan’s body. Maybe more work in the gym would be good for him.

Seath tried to calm his thoughts about Lycan, but it was difficult. Everything inside screamed at him to *fix it*.

“We do need to talk about the heats, though.” Luke winced at circling the conversation back. Luke put up a hand in the universal gesture for “I come in peace.” “Hear me out, okay? You are due for a quarter-day trip, are you not, Seath?”

It was Seath’s turn to wince. Quarter-day was an antiquated term from when the Pack Alpha would ride the circuit of his or her lands once a quarter for collecting taxes and dispensing justice. Things didn’t work quite that way anymore. Pack tithes were more automated, and voluntary, and there was a more modern judicial system, but the title remained, even if the frequency did not. Quarter Day now occurred twice a year, once in the spring and once in the fall.

Their pack had grown in size and in land, too. There was a calendar so that in five years the Alpha would visit each town and village, no matter how small or inconsequential. Seath was about a month late, going in Greene's stead this year.

"You want me to leave him?" Seath asked.

"His body needs to reset. It's ...conflicted. So many heats, even small flares, over such a short time. It's past time for his next regular heat. I could give him suppressors."

"No." Seath's voice was strong.

"There's nothing wrong with suppressors, Seath."

"He's had enough meddling with his body and brain, Luke. I won't have it." Seath sighed. "Unless that is what he wants, of course. I'm not going to make decisions for him."

Luke sighed. "He wants to avoid them, for the same reasons, but he would listen to you if ...."

"No, then." Seath's word was final in tone. "If I am not here, you think he won't be struggling with the heats?"

"I think your proximity triggers them."

Seath tried not to puff up at Luke's words, but he couldn't quite hide it. He didn't like that Lycan suffered, but knowing he caused the heats hit at some long ingrained part of him that wanted to own the person the goddess made for him. He wanted to be owned back, just as strongly.

"The way I see it," Luke continued, "is that you take your regular Quarter Day. That would run until just after his next

heat. That gives him two, the one oncoming and the next, time to run their course. You take care of Pack business and be back in time to plan the coven Serepta wants to reconvene around Samhain.”

Seath sighed deeply, connecting to his wolf. His wolf was wary of this idea, not liking the part where he had to leave his mate. But, his wolf also understood doing what was best for his mate. And that, the latter part, would always win over his wolf. Every time. It would be a hard month to be away.

“I need to go to Greene, also.” Something else that was past time.

“We have the portal dust to spare, Seath. It’s time.” Caine agreed.

Resigned, Seath walked over to the desk so he called in Jamie and Briar by using the phone on his desk instead of the mind-link. It was silly, but he needed to keep his wolf in check, and the less wolf he was right now the better. If his wolf had his way, he would be tearing Jason apart right now.

He had not wanted to go to Greene and force the Prince Donovan issue until Lycan acknowledged the connection they shared. But, it no longer mattered. His wolf was too far gone for the omega. He would have been useless as anyone else’s mate and it was starting to show. Taured had spies in the Pack, he knew that. So, if he couldn’t keep himself in check, he was going to need Greene. If he was going to tackle Quarter Day, he might as well visit Zurin as well and check in at the Council.

“How close am I to being ready for Quarter Day?” He asked the owl shifter when Jamie appeared.

“You could leave today, Alpha. We would just need to prepare your personal effects, the business files are ready.”

“Very good, Jamie. I will leave tomorrow morning.”

If Jamie was surprised, he didn't show it, but quickly went to make whatever last minute preparations were necessary.

“I need to leave for Quarter Day, Briar,” Seath said, turning his attention to the Enforcer as she entered the room. “I need you to stay here.”

Briar came to attention, almost startled, her long braid swinging after her. “Legate, I always ...”

“I know, Briar, but I *need* to know that things are secure here. I am leaving you in charge as the Pack's second. Luke and Caine can help as your cabinet. Caine can move between us if there is a secure message.” With vamp speed on land or in the air, Caine could be anywhere, and back, in no time at all. Vampires didn't need portal dust.

“What about your safety, Legate?”

Seath understood Briar's concern. He always traveled with security. And usually that was Briar herself.

“Pick three of your best, those who need the experience, and I will take them.”

“Very good, Alpha,” she said, and then disappeared. Seath watched her leave and then prepared to be away from Lycan.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

# Quarter Day

If it hadn't been for his wolf knowing this was for Lycan's health, he never would have left. Something his wolf reminded him of as he made his way out of the Pack House.

Even knowing how the Pack House protected Lycan, how Lycan protected himself, and how it was for the best, his feet still felt like lead trying to leave the next morning.

He heard from Luke that Lycan's heat had burned hot and then out over the afternoon and into the night as Seath and Jamie had made plans for the Quarter Day rounds. While his wolf lamented not sharing even a false heat with his mate, he knew it was for the best.

Luke had been clear that Lycan was sharing his longer heats in omega-play; which was exactly what Lycan needed as he healed.

Still, when he took his wolf form to reluctantly leave, he could easily sense Lycan down on the beach. He was sitting

alone, knees up and arms draped over them, staring into the morning sun and the glittering water.

He looked no worse for wear from the false heat, other than perhaps a strain around his mouth. A general sense of exhaustion. The loss of some of the weight he had gained since arriving.

Seath was going to miss Lycan. His smile. His earnestness to do well in whatever task he was given. Lycan made the threshold lighter, the Pack House more like home. Normally, Seath felt the entire Pack lands were his home, but now his home seemed rooted to wherever this omega was.

Lycan's arms dropped from his knees as he saw Seath approach, his eyes wide at the sight of the wolf.

"Seath," he breathed, knowing who it was on sight. He remembered the wolf from the Holding, but this was his first up-close brush with Seath's wolf when he was well.

Unable to control his playful side, Seath plopped his head in Lycan's lap and felt the laugh well up in Lycan from his belly out.

"Such a big wolf," Lycan said, running his fingers through Seath's hair. "Handsome wolf."

Seath's wolf preened and scented Lycan more than was probably appropriate, but his wolf loved being next to his mate. The touches and affirmations were even better.

Lycan was more relaxed like this too, plunging his long fingers into Seath's thick fur when he would never do that to



Seath's human hair in that form. They rolled around on the sand, laughing and Seath enjoying the smooth feel of Lycan's hands.

*Have to go*, Seath pushed out, knowing Lycan was already told. It was just a chance thing to do, but it felt right, natural.

"I can hear you!" Lycan gasped, when the words registered in his brain.

*Pack*, Seath replied, pushing his nose against Lycan's forehead. Lycan was getting stronger, and so was his wolf. The Pack had accepted him if the mind-link was there. It was a start to Pack life, if Lycan wanted it.

Lycan tapped his chest. "I can feel my wolf, right here."

Seath nuzzled his nose right into Lycan's chest. He couldn't wait for Lycan to know him as his mate. To know his wolf.

*We will run*, Seath said, making promises on the dreams he had firmly in his mind.

"I hope so," Lycan replied, his arms coming around Seath's neck. "Thank you, Alpha."

Seath couldn't stand it anymore so he playfully wiggled his too big wolf over the smaller man, until Lycan was laughing and pushed into the sand on his back with Seath over him.

Looking down, Seath felt his heart beat strangely. It was hard to leave this omega. Harder than he had thought.

He nudged again at Lycan's chest. Seath knew he shouldn't, but with some of the filters off in his wolf form, he didn't

hesitate. Seath leaned up and licked a warm, wide stripe across Lycan's mating gland at the juncture of neck and shoulder.

He shivered when he tasted his mate there, desire and longing coursing through him so hard he felt himself start to shift back to human form. Seath quickly launched himself off Lycan, barely hanging onto his shift, and took off down the beach toward his first stop.

Seath ran in his wolf form, his usual way of handling Quarter Day obligations. He could get there faster in other ways, but this was a way to check the Pack lands and those cities that came under his protection.

His protective detail ran too, except for a hawk shifter who flew.

He sighed. It was going to be a very long month.

A few weeks into his travels, Seath met with Greene. Surprisingly, Greene took the meeting alone.

"I needed a break from my shadow," Greene joked as they sat at the outside terrace of a restaurant in one of the Pack's port cities. The terrace was situated several stories above the street and below them people bustled by, in a hurry to get from one place to another as the sea stretched out on the other side of the street. "When I am on pack land, I am Alpha, not Councilman. No need for a bodyguard here."

"Do you want to discuss? Or just vent?" Seath said, stretching back in the large chairs that were made to accommodate the frame of a wolf, and an Alpha wolf. The

place was quiet, except for them, and Seath was fairly certain that was because the owners had given them the terrace so they would not be disturbed. Having patrons see the Alpha and the Legate lunching there would be enough, and someone would have a picture somewhere on social media.

Greene flashed a smile. “Oh no. I want to hear how it is going with the mysterious wolf.”

Greene had been beyond understanding of what Seath was going through, but Seath still felt it necessary to explain himself.

“Alpha, I need you to know that this isn’t some infatuation. If it was merely a beautiful omega, I wouldn’t—“

Greene’s hand reached out to comfort him immediately.

“I know that, Seath. There is nothing about him or you or even seeing you together that makes me doubt you.”

“The attraction? The pull? I could ignore that, maybe, if not ignore, learn to live with it. But the scents, the response of his wolf ...”

Greene left his hand, and Seath could feel the comfort from his Alpha.

“You feel his wolf respond?” Greene asked.

“I do. More and more as he heals, too.”

“I understand. Well, in theory, I guess. I never had a—“  
Greene gave a little grimace. “Renee and I were not fated. But we loved. My daughter is fated and I can see how it plays out,

Seath. I can't imagine being gone from him helps things much."

Seath shrugged. "It is hard, that I won't deny. But, it is what is best for him, and it seems that when that's the path I take, the one he needs, then I can handle it."

Greene finally removed his hand, straightening up to take a drink of their after lunch coffee. "We must talk about the agreement with Taured before I go. Tremon must be told by us, first, before word gets to him otherwise. The more the Pack accepts Lycan as the next Alpha-Mate, the more likely that word is to get back to Taured."

Seath raised an eyebrow. "Given how little I have heard from him or Prince Donovan of late, I would be shocked they knew anything about the Northwest Pack."

"You can be sure that Tremon has eyes and ears, Seath. And with the Pack responding to Lycan as the Alpha-Mate, and to you both as fated, it's only a matter of time before that gets back to him."

Seath puffed out a breath.

"It's complicated, Greene. Taured has antiquated views of omegas and shifters. Many aren't sure they believe in fated mates anymore."

"And you were going to change that," Greene sat down his glass. "Look, I know you hate this stuff, but from a political standpoint, the astrologer telling Tremon and his family that

Prince Donovan was fated to you? That's a coup on several fronts for Tremon."

Greene started ticking them off his fingers. "It's in line with the conservative stances Tremon wants, many Taurens see fate as an antiquated notion, but it has a fair amount of marketable nostalgia that plays to his base and doesn't offend the progressives. It removes an omega from succession, delaying any progressive talk in Taured about omegas ever taking the throne and having the ability to rule. It may just kick that can down the road, but with Donovan fated to such a powerful Pack, it makes the Northwest Pack an instant ally to Taured." Greene closed his hand with the last item ticked off.

"With Taured aligned with such a powerful, progressive nation as the Northwest Pack and with the only omega in striking distance of the throne for miles out of play for the seat," Greene shrugged, "there is everything for Tremon to fight for in keeping you to your pledge. It allows Tremon to pay lip service to the majority's call for progressive ideas. Hells, he even *seems* progressive by championing the alliance. At the same time, the fating keeps him bound to his conservative base. They can't claim they believe in fated mates and then not believe in the Pack fated to their Prince just because it has different ideals. It's a complete and utter political win for him to maintain the status quo because it makes him look good with both sides of a very divided country.

"The progressives see him as aligned now with a progressive partner, while he doesn't have to anything in his own country

to actually *be* more progressive. The conservatives see him as bringing back traditional values, and it puts the omegas-in-leadership-roles conversation on ice. He knows it, and he will fight for it. I just want you to be aware.”

“But Taurens only tolerate shifters. That conservative mindset Tremon and his party have can be pretty hateful toward shifter magic. Shifters don’t even stay long there, almost all the ones I know drift in and out of that country and others like nomads,” Seath said.

“On paper, that is true. Politically? It makes people feel for the Prince, makes him sympathetic to be fated to a shifter, and it keeps Tremon from looking like he is getting everything he wants.” Greene sighed, gazing out at the sunny day and the beautiful sea in-front of them.

Seath studied Greene for a moment. “Alpha, it sounds like you are saying the astrologer was staged as some sort of political theatre.”

Green held up a hand. “I’m not. Seriously, Seath, I’m not saying that at all. But, the truth is we don’t know, do we? Politically, it works for Tremon on several levels. We never challenged the fating or asked for our own astrologer. Now that your true mate has shown up, well, I can’t help but question —” Greene rubbed his temples. “Or maybe I’ve been in Zurin too long, and now everything seems like politics.”

“But the bond, the agreement the Pack and Taured made. That’s very real. I took the celestial vows and signed the bond with Taured for his hand.”

“That’s actually just an agreement, Seath. A contract like any other. There was no magic. The fated bonds were enough to hold any accountability. The betrothal was an act between two sovereigns, a show of acknowledgement, not a magical bond. As for the celestial bond you took as a child, that one *is* magical, but it only binds you to your fated mate. If your fated is Lycan, the bond isn’t broken by you following it.” Greene chuckled. “Funny thing is, the celestial bond would be broken if you follow through with the Prince, and he isn’t actually your mate, which may be a legal loophole we can use.”

“So it can be undone, the agreement with Taured?”

“It can.” Greene smiled at Seath. “I have my assistant Evan looking at it right now. It’s one of many projects, but I will have a solution soon. If we could have Lycan restored, it would be best to have you both acknowledging your fating, before we take this to Tremon. It makes a stronger case.”

Seath frowned. “I don’t want this to be one more thing put upon Lycan that he didn’t ask for. He’s had enough of that from his kidnapping. Standing up publicly with the news I am fated to him needs to happen after his wolf is strong enough to recognize me as his mate. I can’t just tell the man he is fated, he needs to trust me. Not after what he has been through.”

“Then we have some time. Not much, but some.”

Seath sighed, able to focus on the other tasks at hand now that he had settled the matter of his mate with his Alpha. It reminded him though, of how glad he was that Greene was at

the Council, and he was taking care of the Pack. It was more politics than he cared for.

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“Little Wolf is doing well,” Caine reported, always including an update on Lycan when he met with Seath. “He has quite the following for his Krav Maga classes.”

It was another nice hotel room in another city as the Quarter Day responsibilities stretched on. He was off his pace, actually, and would likely take longer than the predicted month to return to the Pack House.

“No more false heats?”

“He went into quite the intense heat when you left.” Seath almost blushed at Caine’s words, thinking of his boldness on the beach, but said nothing. That heat was undoubtedly his fault. “But, no, normal after that.”

What Caine didn’t add was how Lycan seemed to drift toward him whenever he returned from these meetings with Seath, and his theory was that Little Wolf’s scent ability was coming back stronger. He didn’t want to give Seath false hope. If Lycan could sense anything about Seath when he returned, that would make itself obvious in its own time.

With the power of Samhain, the coven believed they could unlock the rest of Lycan’s wolf at the next coven. Maybe some of the spellbound memories, but at least his wolf. Perhaps even remove enough of the mental barriers to really see the magic being used. Shifter magic included an ability to heal



even near-fatal wounds when shifted. Spending time in one's alter form could also be beneficial to non-physical issues such as depression or anxiety. Both the coven and Luke were of the mind that if Lycan could shift, his body could do a great deal of self-healing. Maybe his mind as well.

“You seem to be handling things.” Caine leaned back enjoying the view from Seath's rooms. Seath himself seemed exhausted, but Caine guessed that was from working himself to distraction.

“My wolf is settled, hates being away from Lycan, but understands.”

“Only a few more weeks. Any additional news about the threshold barrier breach? I hear the elves were willing to observe it, and the Centaur herd.”

Seath sighed, rubbing at his temples. “It remains intact. However Lycan crossed it without triggering it I do not know. And the coven has little more than that.”

“I have a theory, if you like.”

Seath smiled, a genuine, if tired, one. “Of course, you do.”

“The barrier recognized Lycan as Pack, and let him in.”

“Caine ...I couldn't even smell his blood, he was so spellbound when he arrived.”

Caine laughed. “You wolves and your noses. Have to smell it to believe it. Perhaps boundary magic works differently. Don't you think it's odd that he portaled to outside our boundary? Of

all the places in the world he could go, he lands there. Why? It's one thing if he knew us, quite another that he did not."

"What are you suggesting?"

Caine shrugged an elegant shoulder. "Fated Mates is its own kind of magic, Alpha. Different to that which made me or you or turned Lycan, if my theory holds that he was turned. Different than the Threshold magic that loves him, and different from the omega-magic he carries. That's all."

Seath rubbed his chest. "I miss him. I'm doing the work the pack needs, so it will be a long few weeks, but I'll make it." There was an empty ache inside of him, but when he thought of all that Lycan had suffered, it seemed small in comparison. He would do his job and do it well. He and his wolf needed to be an Alpha that Lycan could be proud of when he learned of their fated nature. There was no real way to get through this with his integrity intact, of course. That ended as soon as he asked Greene about breaking the oath to the fated bonds. But, just maybe, he could try to do it as right as possible.

"I brought you a present, and then I need to go. I promised to be at dinner in the Pack House."

Caine laid a small velvet pouch on the table.

"Portal dust!" Seath exclaimed, opening it. "Where did you find something so rare? I thought there was still a trade embargo with Famir, due to the Fae."

"The dragon I sought out to exchange your emerald had this, and I managed to get it as part of the bargain. Jamie

established Lycan's fund so that he can have his own means, but you can tell him all about it." Caine smiled. "I thought it might ease your wolf, to know you could get to your mate in a matter of seconds, of your own accord, if need be, without digging into the portal dust reserves, or calling upon me."

"My mate." Seath said the words with reverence. He meant them, too. "Thank you, Caine."

On the next leg of his trip he would be in a seaside village of Hanover. Hanover was mostly human in population, but outside of it there was a sacred shrine to the Fated. Seath had already planned a pilgrimage to one of the shrines, as he did every Quarter Day. Fated shrines were everywhere in the Pack lands, but this one was older than most. And now he had something special to offer. Not all the portal dust, but some. The Pack had some in storage, but knowing no more was coming for a while due to the Fae was sobering. Coupled with what it meant to him specifically, it felt right for an offering.

He had gone to the shrine before, always in reverence, always with thankfulness. This time he would be going there to beseech and request. To ask for help with his own fating.

It used to be the case that the Quarter Day travels would happen at least in part by portal dust, but the Fae were unhappy with moves made in other countries, and the dust they made was now a precious commodity. Which normally suited Seath fine. He liked to run his lands in his wolf form, to be connected to the earth in that way. It allowed him to know the needs and sense problems. A field that needed lime to

rebalance the soil, a stream that needed cleaning upriver. That was easy to know when his paws were in the ground.

But, Caine was right. It was easier knowing that he could instantly be at the portaling ground outside the Pack House in a matter of seconds. For the first time since leaving for his Quarter Day duties, his wolf relaxed.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

# Nesting Bunks

Lycan placed some coffee in-front of Jamie, who gave him a tired smile in return.

“Thanks, Ly.” Jamie rubbed his eyes. “The Talla accords and the Fremont Agreement aren’t being very helpful to figuring out this issue.”

Lycan smiled back, rubbing his lower back. His false heats had stopped, thank the goddess, but he could feel a regular one coming on. His energy was languishing behind a deep desire to nest.

Although he had moved to serving duties instead of laundry or vegetable peeling in the kitchens, what he really wanted was to sneak into the laundry and bury his face in anything that smelled like Seath. Not that there was much, but Jamie had sent pieces back and forth, and a new load had arrived just this morning. At any rate, the threshold would send him currents of scent from Seath’s rooms, and that eased the discomfort that preceded a heat.

He didn't understand it. Maybe he was just anxious for the next coven, the one that might reveal his wolf. Lycan had never seen his wolf, he was pretty sure. When he tried to remember, no sharp pulls played on his memory, it was as if it simply wasn't there. Slowly, he had begun to recognize the difference between memories that were locked down and those he simply didn't have. This was one he didn't have.

"Try the Venter Compromise," he suggested as he watered the plants that dotted the study, Alpha's office, and Jamie's space outside Seath's. "It is truly the best documentation of Fae interests on this plane, some might say."

Jamie blinked up at him, looking every bit his snow-owl persona for a moment. Big eyes, white-blond hair. A slow smile spread across his face.

"I heard that mentioned and had forgotten, thank you Lycan."

Lycan smiled, gathered what needed taking back to the kitchens, and left. Jamie stared after him.

Caine and Luke had tasked Jamie with observing things about the new omega in the home. He had taken some Krav Maga classes with Lycan, and found he was a competent instructor, and very knowledgeable. He also knew really random pieces of information, such as the Venter Compromise. It wasn't the first time he had been able to pick up the conversation from something Jamie was working on and offer assistance.

Lycan made his way back to the kitchens, feeling the Threshold magic nudge him. His heat would start soon, and he knew it. A pang shot through him. Seath would be back soon, too.

How silly his crush was, and only getting worse, too. When Seath was leaving all those weeks ago and they were at the beach, Seath had licked his neck ...Lycan felt himself blush and his slick start to make an appearance. Who got so hot about a silly tussle on the beach? He swore a specific place on his neck practically throbbed when he thought of Seath, and goddess, how he had thought of the big, sexy, Alpha.

His kind eyes ...his soft touch ...his ...

His phone buzzed and he smiled, seeing that Van and Trav had both texted him. Lycan's shoulders unbound a bit. Omega-play sounded perfect, and his heat-mates were feeling the same way.

Seath shared a look with Caine as another omega passed them in the main hall of the Pack House. They were just off the portaling grounds outside, Seath unable to wait and run the last stretch home in his wolf form. He didn't bother to pretend that he wasn't looking for Lycan, either. Everyone assumed he was anyway. He had been home long enough to make himself presentable, and that was all he could manage before seeking out his mate after almost six weeks away.

His duties had called him to be delayed, but now, finally, he was home.



Another omega passed him, Luke, and Caine in the hallway as they entered the kitchens.

“I can’t remember the last time there were this many unbonded omegas roaming the Pack House.” Seath observed, feeling also a relaxing in the Threshold magic. Lycan still had a friend there, it seemed.

“It’s Lycan.” Luke said, sipping his drink as they walked. “While you were gone, there was quite a lot of omega-bonding.”

“How did that happen?” Seath sipped his own tea. A restorative blend from Min that Luke had waiting for him when he arrived.

No wonder the house felt and smelled so good. Happy omegas.

Luke shrugged. “Omegas don’t give up their secrets to Alphas, Seath. Not even their doctor.”

A laugh came from the other side of the kitchen as they strolled in. It was Min.

“I imagine they are putting the nesting bunks to good use.” she said. “I won’t tell you any secrets, but your omega has a nurturing heart, and the unbonded omegas feel it.”

Luke nodded in her direction. “It has been good for everyone involved, medically speaking.”

“Really?” Seath admired that. “I knew they could get on the same heat cycle, by being a close community, and heat-mates, but ...”

“A strong omega is good for an omega community, and a strong omega community is good for the pack,” Luke agreed. “Heat cycles make it where pups are birthed near each other in small groups, so there is built-in help in raising them from other parents going through the same experiences. Shared resources and all of that. Even then, there is still a cycle to it. The group dynamics wouldn’t allow the entire pack to be in heat or a rut. That makes things too vulnerable for the pack, so only groups will be on the same cycle. Heats and ruts are not by chance, Seath. And those different cycles have kept the Pack House full of omegas while you have been gone.”

“Go see for yourselves, Alphas,” Min said with a smile, shooing them toward the medical wing of the Pack House.

They chatted a bit more about the auspiciousness of the omegas coming to Lycan. Seath’s heart raced at the thought of seeing his mate again. Even walking in the air that was scented by his presence had his wolf paying attention.

Coming home had felt different this time. Warmer, sweeter. Like the Pack House itself was different.

In the older part of the Pack House, a small hallway in a dark corner housed the nesting bunks. Doors were placed in the wall, higher than normal, and requiring the use of two steps to reach.

The one in use was easy to find, the door closing after an omega as they entered the hallway.

Seath let the smell wrap around him. It was sweet and loving, and just a bit arousing. A den of omegas, and omegas

of his pack. It made his heart race and his head feel a bit light. His pants stretched tight.

Nest bunks were common, as omegas were not comfortable in a bed in the middle of a room like a human might design. They liked close, dark, cool spaces to sleep.

The door in the wall opened into a room of sorts made up entirely of a bed. Upon entering, the omega walked onto a ledge that circled the room, where one could sit, or place shoes or other items. In the middle of the room, down below the ledge was a mattress. It took up the entirety of the tight, dark space below the wooden step. Cloth draped the ceiling, the walls. The only lights were tiny twinkle lights strung behind the dark material giving a comforting glow. Some cultures called them box beds, using an enclosed space to create the nest. But here, in the Northwest Pack, the box bed was more like its own room.

Luke breathed out, seeing all the omegas curled around each other in one place. It was sweet, the scene one of friendship and community, but he could still smell the faint arousal coming off of he and Seath as they admired the scene as any Alpha would.

“Well now,” Seath said, his eyes locked on Lycan’s slender frame in the middle of the nest, shown to them because he sat up, his perfect, upturned nose in the air, undoubtedly the first to notice the presence of Alphas.

Luke noticed that Seath locked down his scent quickly, not something every Alpha could do. He glanced at his friend, but

Seath just gave a barely noticeable shake of his head and shared a *that's private* over the link they had as packmates. As a wolf, he didn't care that everyone knew he was aroused by Lycan. They knew anyway. But, something felt wrong for other omegas, on the verge of heat no less, to be able to determine his arousal when his mate couldn't.

"Alpha, you are returned." Luke could hear the contentment in Lycan's voice, and so could Seath as he and the omega stared at each other for long, unbroken moments. Coming up and sitting on the shelf circling the nest, Lycan was almost eye-level with Luke and Seath as they stood outside the door.

"I am. What do you need, Lycan?" Seath asked, his voice soft and velvety. The world seemed to narrow a bit, only he and the gorgeous omega before him. Lycan had put on more lean muscle in the time he was gone, and his face filled out, his scent stronger. The magic was loosening its hold on his wolf nature little by little, just as the coven had predicted.

"I-I took this from your laundry. Did you come for it?" Lycan offered up a shirt of Seath's, his head ducked and cheeks pink.

Seath reached for Lycan's cheek, stroking it for just a moment. "I did not," his voice became a deep rumble, "did you want my scent in your nest, Little Wolf?"

Luke smiled, because as unbonded omegas, they would all react to Seath's scent or Greene's for comfort, until they found their mate. Still, Lycan reacting to Seath's scent with blushes

and a flirty grin gave him hope for Lycan to realize what he was to Seath.

“Yes, Alpha.”

Seath smiled at Lycan, still transfixed. “I’m glad. You can keep the shirt. But,” Seath reached for Lycan, “perhaps it would be better if I scented you. Then, you can get all the omega snuggles you need.”

“Really?” Lycan asked, bouncing a bit as if too excited to sit still.

It wasn’t strange for Seath to do this, but usually the omega in the middle of the nest would be connected strongly to the Pack Alpha in a way. A brother. A mate. A brother-in-law. A best friend.

Seath didn’t have those, well he did have a best friend, but not an omega one, and so the omega nests were not currently used like they had been and would be in the future. Until his fated mate presented as such and there was a mating, there would be no omega for the center of the nest. Or there should not have been.

But, apparently that didn’t matter as the pack started to act as if Lycan was already taking the Alpha-Mate role. It was funny. He wasn’t yet the Alpha, and Lycan wasn’t even the mate he was betrothed to.

And yet. Here they were. And the threshold gave no shits about any of it, flagrantly accepting Lycan into the Alpha-

Mate role most obviously of all. And the omegas were following.

Luke remembered his birth pack having these omega bonding nights on the regular, with the Alpha-Mate at the center. But, if the omegas were already drawn to Lycan, Lycan carrying the scent of Seath directly would be even more powerful.

“Excuse me, Alpha?”

Seath stepped back and there was Uriel, a pretty blond omega who Luke knew had miscarried more than once, but was desperate for pups. He was bonded, mated for life to an Alpha that worried for Uriel more than Uriel did for himself. Uriel climbed up the steps to the nesting bunk and into Lycan’s arms for a brief hug. He had recovered from his most recent miscarriage next to Lycan during Lycan’s own time in the medical ward, and they had become friends.

Uriel didn’t work in the Pack House though, and so he and Lycan must have worked to keep their friendship going since they had both left the hospital wing.

“Heat’s coming soon,” he heard Uriel tell Lycan.

“Snuggle by me then, Uri. We’re going to get you healthy. I’m just at the end of mine.”

Uri was smart to take his heat with the omegas this go-round. His body wasn’t yet ready to try again for a pup and as his mate was also fated, the urge to keep trying was sometimes overwhelming in the middle of a heat.

Just as he had suggested with Lycan, it was sometimes best for an omega to ride out a heat away from an Alpha.

Once Uri had climbed in the nest, Lycan moved toward Seath.

Lycan molded against Seath's chest as Seath held him close with a strong arm. Skin-to-skin he made sure Lycan carried his scent. He nuzzled the inside of his wrist to trail over Lycan's creamy skin.

Lycan felt so right in his arms, smelled so good it was all he could do not to throw him over his shoulder and take him back to his chambers.

Lycan shivered against him during the scenting, and Seath could feel the omega's own arousal.

This was harder than six weeks away had been. His head was swimming with desires and need, wanting to clutch Lycan close and never let him go.

Luke had to hand it to the Legate, he was smooth in getting his scent on his mate without acting like a mate. He didn't lick Lycan's mating gland or scent the more intimate places he could have. There were no kisses, no rumbles of affection. No doubt Seath's wolf was aching to get his scent on his mate, and Seath had found a way to do it that benefitted both him and Lycan.

Seath was aroused by it, which happened, and given this situation, might not be able to be helped. What Alpha

wouldn't be aroused by a beautiful omega, their mate, at the end of a heat, pressing against him?

Of course, the tent Luke could see in Seath's pants was hidden to the omegas, and while the scent of arousal was there, it was slight, thanks to Seath's ability to lock his own scent down.

Seath had to hold himself back. His wolf roared that a skin-to-skin scenting of Lycan's arms and neck wasn't enough. His cock throbbed, instinct and arousal battling for him to come on Lycan, to rub his release into all of Lycan's scent glands. And then do it again, before sending him back to the omegas. No, not just that. Make sure his release was deeper than the skin, in Lycan's stomach and body so that he smelled of nothing but Seath.

And then, it stopped. Not the need. Not the longing. But as he scented Lycan the desperation stopped. Something clicked for his wolf and slowly in his own mind as well.

Lycan still needed this, likely always would in some way. Soft omega-play. Where it was safe to feel and be aroused. To know what he wanted and ask for it without the hormone haze of Alphas and omegas and heats and fated mates.

It became, not easy, but bearable. A lighter burden to scent the man in his arms and then to set him back in the nesting bunks.

Lycan looked at him and there was something new in his eyes when he did. Some sort of curiosity and vulnerability Seath's muddled brain couldn't puzzle out.



Seath was hardened to steel. No. Not steel. Obsidian or diamonds or some other fucking thing no one had discovered yet. Jesus, that image—Lycan with close to bedroom eyes that were full of curiosity looking back at him while climbing with his long lean limbs into a pile of other omegas.

Omegas were lucky with their omega-play. It would just be him and his hand or a toy to get through this, the way it had been since Lycan came into his life. Alpha's didn't enjoy other partners after they found their mate, where omegas often had heat-mates long into their lives.

He did his duty, scenting his omega, and also the shirt, and handing it back to Lycan who blushed prettily and then climbed back the rest of the way into the nest on shaky legs. Not without a breathy, *thank you Alpha*, that would ring in Seath's ears as he went back to his own den and stroked his now aching cock. He wasn't proud of that, but how he would stop it, he had no idea. As it was, he was barely hanging on.

His omega had been in his arms, in the embers of his heat, and he had to let him go back to the nest. Someday, that wouldn't be the right call. What Lycan would need was him. His rut. His power to ease the need that arose in an omega's heat. Especially when Lycan's eyes had followed him, a small wrinkle of confusion apparent on his brow, a very wolf-like and curious turn of his head.

Someday, Lycan would know what he did.

But that day was not today.

Luke made to close the door after Seath left, leaving his friend to unwind from the scenting and his travels. Luke noted Uri and Lycan in the center of the bed. The unbonded omegas cared more about Seath's scent than Uri, a bonded omega, did. For Uri, it would be about friendship and care. There would be sexual play, of course, he was going into heat, after all. But omega-play wasn't going to put the beautiful omega through another pregnancy and possible miscarriage. The healer in him was anxious to see how Uri fared after the omega nest — if it helped his next pregnancy.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw two omegas share a less than chaste kiss in the dark corner of the nest. He closed the door, wondering if omegas really did have lots of secrets they would never share. Luke imagined that they did, and that many of those secrets were told in the omega nest.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

# The Day Lycan's Wolf Knew

After checking in on Lycan, and vicariously, the omega nest, Seath took to his rooms. Officially, this would be on his schedule as some post-travel time to clean up and rest. He had spent a lot of time in his wolf form. Not only that, but it was late, and he was ready to rest in his own den, his own bed.

Unofficially, Seath did shower off the travel, but he did it to thoughts of his mate. It took a few mind blowing orgasms to tame his wolf. All he could think about now that he was around Lycan again was how he was *his* mate, *his* omega.

*His* heat.

Not this one, but maybe the next? Was that too much to ask for? Lycan was clearly at the end of this cycle, so maybe in the upcoming weeks ...Seath sighed, just happy at the thought of Lycan becoming his.

Of course, as Alpha-Mate, Lycan would share some of his heat in the nesting bunks, too. But surely Greene didn't mean

to stay at the Council forever. They would have time for full heats together without Lycan acting as Alpha-Mate and Seath as Pack Alpha.

Seath had grown up around a pack and people who appreciated the balance of an Alpha and an omega. But, he knew there were people who didn't appreciate the nuance. Those who saw a heat as weakness, something to be conquered, to be taken advantage of.

Seath was pretty sure that was all bullshit, because his wolf wanted nothing but to ease his mate, do whatever Lycan needed.

And that made the waiting bearable. Lycan needed his heats to be easy, to be calmed into soft loving, not to be claimed as Seath wanted to do. And because that was what Lycan needed, that was what Seath wanted to give.

Of course, the thoughts of claiming his mate roared through him the next few days and continued as he made his way to his offices to be briefed by Jamie and put out whatever fires could wait no longer from his return. Their calls and pack-link contact had been constant, but there was something to be said for working in tandem.

So, he locked down his scent, not wanting to offend anyone with the low-level simmer of arousal he couldn't otherwise hide. Thank the goddess for that small gift. And, he avoided Lycan directly, or at least had for the forty-eight hours he had been home.

That all ended now, though.

Lycan had been reassigned to the office area instead of the kitchens with Min. Luke believed Lycan was strong enough now to resist going into heat just due to Seath's proximity. Caine believed he was going to learn even more about Lycan now that he could observe the Little Wolf in an environment where he thrived. Jamie had told him about the times Lycan had been able to help, and Caine seized the opportunity to find out what Lycan knew.

The Threshold had done its part too, swirling Lycan's scent all around his offices.

Seath sighed, sliding the mouse of his computer away from his hands. Greene had moved them toward a paper-less office as much as possible, but today the lines and lines of words on the screen all wanted to blur together. He reached out with his wolf-hearing, hoping for a hint of something from Jamie and Lycan. Just to see how Lycan was doing.

"You can not send that to the Elves, Jamie." Lycan was saying in a low voice.

"You are right," Jamie sighed, "good call on catching the Foxglove in the bouquet. Flower identification isn't something I know." There was a companionable laugh between them. "But, we promised décor to the Elves for their celebrations. Maybe we can just take it out."

"Or," Lycan paused, "we call back the florist and let them know the mistake. They can replace it with something that won't offend the Elves and also know that in the future we can count on them for such items because they now know Elves

and what they like. We can use these bouquets here at the Pack House, or send them to Brightwater.”

Jamie hummed happily. “That’s much more diplomatic. I was so upset I just wanted to yell at them to take the whole lot of flowers back.”

Even though he couldn’t see it, Seath could imagine the little smile on Lycan’s mouth, the shrug he would give Jamie.

“We should probably get one of the wolves to smell them though, after the changes are made. Just to make sure it no longer smells like iron. I wouldn’t trust my nose for that.”

Seath sighed at those last words. Lycan had been so patient, waiting for his healing to begin in earnest. He had done everything that was asked of him to get better, and Seath realized that at some point, between offering his neck for the death bite and preparing for the coven, Lycan had made the decision to live. He hadn’t appreciated that before. But working with Lycan had made Seath realize a whole lot about his mate.

Like the way Lycan always seemed to know when Seath was running low on energy or was simply irritated. Just about the time Seath needed to pace by the windows Lycan would show up with a snack, or to check in with him, or with something Seath needed but hadn’t realized. Often, he would suggest to Caine or Luke that they take a stroll in the beautiful weather to discuss the business at hand. A walk and talk Lycan had called them.

Yesterday, it had been tea when Seath was frustrated over some documents from one of the port cities. One pot and a chat with Lycan and Jamie later, the documents somehow made sense again. The day before that, Lycan had shown up with a book that outlined exactly what Seath needed for how to solve a problem for a group of water sprites in one of the Pack's major lakes. Today, it had been making sure that the Elves who lived in the forest that stretched wide over Pack lands didn't receive flowers for their celebration that smelled like Iron. And that would have been a disaster.

Lycan had then been part of the party that delivered the newly arranged flowers to the Elves, leaving Seath alone and anxious until Lycan returned.

Seath could feel a tug to his consciousness, pulling at him all morning as he tried to go about his daily business of shifting through things he could handle and what needed Greene's input, too. Finally, he gave up fighting it, sliding back instead into his chair and closing his eyes. He fixed his mind on that tug, the nudge, and found that it led to Lycan. He could sense his mate. Where he was and how he was feeling. It was faint, but there.

Luke found him just like that, kicked back in his desk chair, faintly rubbing his chest from where the feeling seemed to emanate, and staring off into space.

"Something wrong, Alpha?" Luke sat his files down, fully in pack-physician mode, coming to the edge of the large desk to put a hand on Seath.



“No.” Seath rubbed his chest. “It’s been easier, these weeks I have been back, even when Lycan has been gone. And I just realized ...I can sense him. He went to deliver arrangements to the Elves, but I can still feel him.”

Luke’s eyes widened. “You mean you can feel a bond?”

Seath nodded. It wasn’t so strong he could pinpoint coordinates, but he could get within scenting distance of Lycan right this minute if he needed to. No more numbness where Lycan was supposed to be, but also more, too. More than just some shifter whose presence he could sense.

He could smell Lycan before, but this was his ability to sense him. No void. No numbness when he reached out. Instead, there was Lycan, a warm, bright light he could seek out. It eased something in his wolf.

“It’s nice, with the waiting, to have something tangible, too.” Seath swallowed. “Before I left, my wolf talked to him.”

Luke’s hand was warm and friendly on Seath’s leg. “It’s getting closer, I can feel it. Talking to his wolf isn’t a small milestone.”

“His wolf is waking. That’s what matters.”

The next morning a light knock came at the door of Seath’s study, and Lycan followed it with a tray of coffee.

Seath gripped the desk as Lycan’s scent moved over him. Every atom in his body moved him to make a mark on Lycan, and his scent wasn’t even restored at one-hundred percent. But, it was time. Almost a month may have flown by of them

working side-by-side, but there was no denying it. It was time for another small monthly heat for his mate, and Seath was overwhelmed by the beginnings of it. The kindling of the fire.

“Alpha?” Lycan’s voice was uncertain, eyes glassy as if he was as overwhelmed as Seath.

Seath tried to breathe, and he swore the scent of Lycan got even stronger, with almost a burning tinge on the outside as if the residual magic that held back Lycan’s wolf, held back his heat, held back his fated mate bond, was burning off in real time.

The door to his study closed of its own accord and Seath cursed the threshold silently. Clearly, the Pack House was trying to kill him by trapping him in his own office with Lycan’s scent. He would fatally smother under his own restraint.

“Alpha?” Lycan whispered, and now there was desire, heavy and thick in the question, and Seath’s Alpha wanted to respond to the curious omega in a million ways that might only frighten Lycan off.

Lycan’s cheeks flushed, his long lashes fluttered as he hungrily looked over Seath’s body, his interest and arousal clear from his body language to his scent.

It was enough to make Seath grip the desk so hard he heard it start to crack.

He was about to give Lycan the day off, send him to Caine, anything to retain his sanity, but Lycan drifted closer, and

Seath found himself ensnared in the inquisitive eyes of his mate. As if Lycan was just now realizing the vastness of desire and wanted Seath to teach him its ways. To help him map it.

“Alpha,” Lycan said again and Seath closed his eyes to the sound of the omega’s voice. Lycan had called him Alpha, everyone did lately, but this ...this was the honorific laced with need and want and very real desire. His cock swelled, ready to knot right then and there, to fuck and keep fucking for the foreseeable future.

Sweat ran down his back at the effort not to move, to not break the moment, and to let Lycan set the pace of what was happening here.

“Do you always smell like this, Alpha?” Lycan asked, moving around the desk as if his feet were deciding for him, carrying him to his mate. Seath stayed put, not wanting to scare the omega with the hard pole tenting his pants.

He also didn’t dare breathe. His scent hadn’t changed, but the idea that Lycan scented him for something more made his head spin. He almost refused to entertain the possibility that this was the day he had been waiting for.

The day Lycan’s wolf knew.

“What do I smell like, little thing?” Seath asked; his voice too deep, too rough.

“I don’t know the words.” Lycan spoke lazily, as if he was intoxicated.

Seath stood, partially because he didn't want to keep resisting the pull to have Lycan in his lap, and partially because Lycan kept swaying a bit.

There was no holding back his arousal, so he dropped his efforts to lock his scent down, and moved closer. Lycan looked up at him — a beautiful sight of a beautiful omega. Sun kissed curls of dark blond, big green eyes, and a flush of arousal across his cheeks. Full lips parted and pupils blown. He seemed to breathe in Seath's full scent from the air in gulping lungfuls, as if it gave him sustenance.

Seath could take no more waiting, and he reached out a finger, touching the skin at the corner of Lycan's neck and shoulder, where the mating bite would be.

Lycan drew in a sharp breath at the touch, and the smell of his slick filled the room as Seath let down any last defenses of his scent. It unfurled around its target, letting Lycan sense what Seath had been hiding. Seath's chest rumbled in appreciation, almost calm. This was his territory now. Time to claim what he had been waiting for.

“My wolf ...” Lycan's words were breathy and his neck bared to Seath instantly as the Alpha's fingers pressed gently on the mark. There was a whimper, not of injury but of need.

Seath could smell the slick and the arousal, and his chest puffed. Spellbinding meant nothing to the magic of fated mates. Lycan's scent was clear now, fully accessible, too. No more burning tinge of the latent magic that had bound him.

It confirmed for Seath and his wolf what he already knew. This was his fated mate.

Lycan was his.

There were only two things that kept Seath from taking Lycan right there on the rug of his office. One, was that he had been so patient for this day, and that patience had translated into control. Two, was that no matter what someone might say about an omega in Lycan's state—lust drunk on hormones and need, ready for anything Seath wanted—Seath's Alpha and his wolf wanted nothing more than to give his mate what his mate needed. And a rough claiming on the hard floor so Seath could beat his chest was not that. So, no matter how much a primal part of him saw the option of claiming his omega now, it was already discounted before the thought was fully formed.

“What does your wolf want, Lycan?” Seath asked, his voice low and Alpha-rough, compelling an answer and an honest one.

They were so close, Seath could see Lycan's body vibrating.

“Wants you, mate,” Lycan answered, his body tight, face flushed and voice thick with desire.

But, *mate*. Finally, to hear that word out of Lycan's mouth.

Seath came closer, watching the dreamy look on Lycan's face become desperate. Scenting the air, Seath could tell, even without the bulge at the front of Lycan's pants, that his omega's body was ready for him. He knew Lycan's lean thighs would be wet with slick by now.

Seath walked behind Lycan, slowly circling, and Lycan whimpered softly, not touching Seath, but clearly reacting to Seath being behind him. Seath could see the control it took for Lycan to not present himself, ass out, to Seath's roaming gaze.

Seath didn't think his Alpha or his wolf could get any cockier than they were right then; he could take on the armies of the world, capture the sun, if his omega wanted it. Seath brushed against Lycan. Explosive shocks rocked through him at the contact, but he could smell Lycan's slick and come, and he knew his mate was leaking for him and it drove all of his primal senses.

Lycan still bared his neck to Seath, and the Alpha ran his mouth down it, eliciting a moan from Lycan that made Seath's cock jerk in response. The little omega was very sensitive there, right at the place where his mark would go and Seath wondered if he could make his mate come just from teasing him.

Seath liked the idea of the first time his mate found pleasure with him being from the place of his mark. Untouched in any other way. It would be a gentle enough beginning for what would come later.

Now that he knew Lycan saw him for what he was, *his mate*, he wanted to knock the edge off of the oppressive desire, so he could be content to wait for the pleasure that would follow once he got Lycan to their room.

But they both needed something *now*.

Still standing behind Lycan, he pulled Lycan tight against his chest, making sure the omega felt his hardness and its length and girth. He kissed and sucked hard on the place his mark would go, getting a proper taste of his mate. Seath was instantly rewarded by Lycan shuddering under him, panting a low moan.

Lycan tasted perfect. It was sexy and soft and fuck, Seath didn't think he could get enough, and that thought led to one of how often he was going to want to taste his mate, let his lips drift along Lycan's skin. How often he was going to want to mark that skin up, leave his sigil over Lycan in love bites and bruises.

"Alpha, I can't ...." Lycan panted, body tight and ass rubbing against Seath's cock, although Lycan likely didn't realize he was. Lycan was too busy trying to hold back his orgasm, hold back from touching himself.

Seath laughed against Lycan's neck, making sure the breath caught across the remains of his kisses on Lycan's skin.

"You *can*. Because you know that orgasm is mine, don't you?" Seath nipped at Lycan's neck. Another moan and Seath could feel Lycan clench his hole, even through the fabric. "You are mine. Your pleasure is mine to give you."

Seath began kissing harder, licking, nipping and sucking on Lycan's neck, causing the omega to pant and whimper and rub against him with the most delicious sounds Seath had ever heard.

He was glad of the soundproofing for the walls because no one else was going to get to hear his omega like this. He also knew that all the shifters would leave the area; they would all know the Pack Legate was claiming the next Alpha-Mate of the pack.



## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

## Lycan Claims Seath, Too

“Alpha, please,” Lycan finally begged, his voice strained and hard, but knowing that just like Seath had said, his orgasm belonged to his Alpha and no matter how close he was, he couldn’t come until Seath told him to. He was plastered to Seath’s front, held there by Seath’s strong arms.

The orgasm building and building in him was the beginning of a heat, a heat Seath had caused. He had been causing all of them, Lycan realized. It was his heat, and Lycan’s body knew that. Seath could push and push but Lycan wouldn’t go over until Seath allowed it.

“I want to see you,” Seath said, moving his hands from where he had rested them on the omega’s slim hips to help him stay upright, to undo Lycan’s pants.

Lycan nodded, his body ready to present itself to his mate. And he moaned as Seath’s hands undid his pants, as they slid down his hips. Then he was exposed to his Alpha and he wanted more than the cool air to be caressing him there.

“I want to see what’s mine,” Seath said, taking a long lick down Lycan’s neck. He pulled Lycan back against his throbbing cock, and reached around the omega’s hips to cup Lycan’s heavy sac, pulling an even more erotic moan from his mate. Lycan was full and ready for him and Seath had never felt anything as good in his life.

Seath couldn’t wait to play and see how far he could push the little omega. Seath’s other hand went to Lycan’s hard cock, not to stroke it, but to the base, stimulating him and also helping to hold back the imminent orgasm. Even the best trained submissive couldn’t hold the edge like a fated omega mate, or an Alpha for that matter. Seath would be able to go for hours to give his omega what he needed during intense heats. Those came only every two years or so, but even the small monthly heats could take all the Alpha stamina he had.

Lycan was nothing but moans now, incoherent, proof of his reduction to nothing but need. Seath wanted him to come, but hadn’t allowed it yet, and the juxtaposition of that left a needy omega in its wake. If Seath hadn’t been so taken by his show of dominance and mating over his Little Wolf, he would have been deep in him, responding to the desperate desire of the omega in heat.

*His mate.*

*His omega.*

*His heat.*

But, this was better. Seath could wait for the sweet surrender Lycan’s body would soon give him. Knowing he drove his

mate to release with nothing but his mouth on his mating gland after all this wait seemed justified.

Seath looked over Lycan's shoulder, curving his small mate against his body in a move his wolf loved, all to present Lycan's heavy balls and long, leaking cock for his own inspection, rolling the balls slightly to hear Lycan moan and beg, as Seath felt more slick release. Still, Lycan canted his hips upwards, presenting himself for the inspection his Alpha wanted.

Seath kissed hard behind Lycan's ear, moving back to the mating gland, harder than he had before on Lycan's shoulder, and didn't tease and stop this time, but kept insistent nips and licks and hard kisses, feeling the answering throb in Lycan's cock in his hand.

Lycan's hands reached behind, clutching Seath to him as hard as he could.

"Give me what's mine," Seath demanded, when he could tell his omega was almost wrung out from being so close to the edge, "come for me."

He continued the stimulation on the omega at that sensitive spot and also held the base of Lycan's cock. Seath wanted to feel his mate's pleasure and he also wanted to push him, his Alpha triumphant that Lycan had come not only untouched, but through his restraint on his cock as well. But, when the first spurt of his release came, Seath stroked Lycan's hard cock, teasing out all of it and making Lycan shudder and moan and whimper as wanton as anything Seath had ever heard. The

Alpha could tell his omega was giving him everything, but he reveled in how responsive this lover was going to be, knowing they were both a long way from sated.

As Lycan continued to release against Seath's hand, panting and sweating, shaking with the power of it, Seath felt his own body respond.

His omega had put him into the rut. Seath felt the same surge of power he had before, and he felt the need to bury himself in his lover, to shower him with pleasure. If anyone tried to stop him, he wasn't so sure he could be responsible for his actions.

Seath managed to get Lycan back to their room, it was *theirs* now, their den. He had the small omega clutched against him as they made their way through the silent halls, only bothering to get Lycan's jeans back up and over his hips.

Lycan giggled against Seath's skin. "Taking me to bed, Alpha?" He whispered, causing Seath to groan.

"Is that what you want, omega? To be in my bed?" Seath rumbled, throwing Lycan over his shoulder. He growled, able to smell his mate even better in that position.

"I do. I was hoping that was where we were heading."

Then, they were through the door and Lycan was on his bed, splayed out for him. The first time, Seath would come in his mate, there was no other option because coming inside him would clearly mark his scent on Lycan in the most forceful

way. It was something Seath had never done, waiting for this moment, and this omega.

It would take many rounds of lovemaking before either would be satisfied, and during that time, Seath would come on Lycan, rub his scent directly into the omega's skin, into the mark he would put on his neck. Fated mates had mingled smells, telling everyone who they belonged to.

Seath looked down at the slim body of his beautiful mate, to find Lycan's eyes open and following him, wide and still full of wonder and lust.

"Do you like what you see, Little Wolf?" Seath asked, enjoying Lycan's eyes on him, looking at him like that.

"I do," he nodded furiously. "You are my mate."

"I am," Seath agreed, ghosting the words over Lycan's lips before claiming Lycan's mouth in a kiss. Lycan arched into it, allowing Seath's tongue inside, and forming exactly to what Seath wanted, just as much as Seath formed to what Lycan wanted, too. Lycan tasted wonderful, the perfect flavor and the perfect amount of pressure of lips to lips.

Seath could have kissed his mate forever, but Lycan's hands started to roam, mapping Seath's skin.

"How? I don't ...."

"Your wolf needed to recognize me as your fated mate, little thing. I've been very patiently waiting for you."

"You knew?"

“I knew,” Seath said, taking another kiss. It was like a drug, full of warmth and hazy, floating feelings. “But, I wanted you to know. This is still a choice ...to be mates or not. We don’t have to—”

Lycan’s slim arms wrapped around his neck pulling Seath down for more kisses.

“I want you, Alpha. If you will have me. And then, after, maybe you can tell me what you knew but didn’t share before.”

Seath grinned down at Lycan, who was so beautiful stretched on his bed with flushed cheeks and ruffled hair. Not to mention the imperious eyebrow that raised during his last comment.

“I’ll tell you everything, Little Wolf. I’m not going to be much for words right now,” Seath said, punctuating his meaning with kisses to his omega’s sensitive neck. He was worried that in the haze of his rut, he might not be able to give Lycan the reassurances he needed to hear. Not when he could show him instead.

“Just tell me why you wouldn’t tell me,” Lycan whispered, his brow furrowed. “Is it because of how weak I was when I arrived?”

Seath cut him off with a growl and a kiss.

“You are the strongest wolf I know, Lycan. But I wanted you to know it for yourself. I didn’t want you to feel like you were without choices, love. You could tell me right now to go, and I

would. You are my mate. Fated. Mine. But I will never leave you without choices, Lycan.”

Lycan shoved his hands into Seath’s hair, wrapping arms and legs around any part of the big Alpha he could. Seath would do it, despite how it would hurt him if he did. He would do what Lycan needed.

“I might not have my memories. But, I know my own mind, maybe more than most for having done the work against the spellbinding all these months. And I know I want you, Seath.” Sure, he called it a crush, but it had always been something more than that, something deeper. And now that he could feel it, that he could lean into all the feelings he had for the Pack Legate, he wanted nothing more than to be Seath’s. In every way possible.

“Alpha,” Lycan breathed, and the memory of Lycan in his office caused Seath to roll his hips against his mate.

“Do you know what’s about to happen, omega? I’m going to be gentle, but you will be mine unless you are not ready. I’m not made for omega-play.”

The smaller body shuddered underneath him, but with a pleased whimper that turned into a breathy *yes, Alpha*.

“I want to make you mine, Lycan. I want to come inside you. Then knot you and stay like that for hours. Are you ready for that?”

Lycan nodded, but Seath grabbed Lycan’s smaller hands in his own and held them to his chest.



“Lycan. I want you to say no if you aren’t ready.”

“I’m ready, Seath.”

Seath finished taking off Lycan’s clothes. Then caught his hands again, pulling at them and impatient to taste himself on his omega’s tongue. His wolf roared, ready for his mate to smell and taste like him.

“You control this, Lycan,” he inhaled a deep breath near Lycan’s skin. “You smell so good, baby,” Seath said, once they were both naked, as his mouth kept being pulled magnetically to that spot on Lycan’s neck. “You will smell like me too, now.”

Seath rolled so Lycan was on top of him. Lycan gave a bit of a shimmy with his hips, as if he was trying to get closer. “Want to smell like you. Everywhere.”

It was Seath’s turn to moan as Lycan moved on top of him, and Lycan’s eyes lit up.

“I like hearing you like that,” Lycan confessed, and Seath’s large hand wrapped around Lycan’s neck to drag him down for more kisses.

“Like hearing what you do to me, do you?” Seath asked, getting a shy sort of smile in return.

Lycan sat back on his heels between Seath’s thighs when they came up for air, and looked over Seath’s large cock. Seath barely breathed, watching the omega lick his lips, and preening a bit under the look of awe his mate was giving his dick.

“I want ...” Lycan breathed. He ran the tip of his finger up Seath’s shaft. “You are so beautiful, Seath.”

Seath put his hands on Lycan’s slender thighs. “You do what you want, Lycan, what feels right.”

“Like this?” the omega looked at him, luminous eyes filled with confusion. He gestured to Seath on his back.

Alphas took, and omegas gave, and this was not that position.

“You are claiming me as much as I am claiming you, mate.”

A slow, dreamy smile drifted over Lycan’s face. And he nodded, scooting up on the larger man. Seath held his cock out, spreading his own precome over it. He then teased a hand down Lycan’s crease, gathering slick and making Lycan moan shamelessly.

Any insecurity Lycan might have had eased into heat as Seath worked his body, making everything feel so good, there was no space for anything else.

Slowly, eyes locked on Seath, Lycan began to take him in his body. He was tight, but Seath’s need to give his mate what he wanted kept his hips still, letting Lycan lead. As it was, Seath’s head fell back at the feel of the perfect heat of his mate over him, and soon, Lycan was fully seated on top of him, his knees not even able to reach the bed on either side of the bigger man.

Lycan moved his hips, and Seath moaned in harmony with Lycan’s whimper.

“No one can hear us, baby. I want those noises.” Seath began to move slightly, hips flexing, pressing up into his mate, causing Lycan to respond.

“Umm hum. Yes. Let’s do that,” Lycan agreed, his mouth falling open in pleasure as he moved his hips on Seath in response. It felt so right, so full, easing an ache that had been there so long, it felt like it lived inside of him. There was relief in the feeling of Seath seated inside his body. Completion.

Seath laughed at how his omega sounded, heat-drunk and Lycan still didn’t have any of Seath’s release in him. He growled, anticipating Lycan’s state when he would make his omega fly.

Seath moved his own hips in response, pushing up into his mate, until Lycan was bouncing obscenely on his dick, his slim hands curling over the dark trail of hair leading from Seath’s navel to where they were joined.

“Going to knot you,” Seath panted, holding Lycan’s ass to him as he sat up, and pulled Lycan’s legs around his waist with his other hand. Seath’s mouth covered his and swallowed his pants and Seath’s knot began to swell.

“Oh yes. More of that.” Lycan begged, before his hips jerked, placing the knot firmly inside him. Seath moved in and out when Lycan moaned again as the still-forming knot sent him into the stratosphere. “Like the toy.”

“It’s no toy, mate.” Lycan could hear the smile on Seath’s words.

“Fuuuuuck,” Lycan’s slender chest heaved with the word, as he rode Seath’s cock in his lap. “That. Yes. More.”

“My knot, soon it will be holding us together.” Sooner than later if that angelic face kept up the cursing and dirty talk.

Lycan’s hands scrambled for purchase all over Seath’s back from the feel of Seath’s large cock stretching him followed by the toe-curling feel of the half-formed knot.

“Can’t get away, little thing. It’s going to hold us together, hold all my release inside you.”

Seath slid out of his mate, turning Lycan across his lap so he could support Lycan’s back with one arm and fold Lycan’s knees over his other elbow. He thrust back in smoothly.

Easily he moved Lycan up and down his cock, making the omega cry out in pleasure as he controlled every stroke.

“It’s too—ohh,” Lycan made small fists against Seath’s shoulders. The moan was raw sex as Seath moved in short strokes, pressing the almost-formed knot against Lycan and fucking him in a way that had Lycan coming with a force that shook his whole body.

Like in the study, Seath waited until the first wave hit to stroke Lycan’s cock, pressing the knot harder into that bundle of nerves his omega needed attention to, allowing it to milk out all Lycan had to give. Seath would accept no more than all of the little omega’s pleasure, pulling it out until his mate had no more to give him.

Seath's other hand rubbed Lycan's release onto his skin as it came.

"Hold on," Seath growled in Lycan's ear, before easing the omega on his back and creating just enough space from his knot to adjust Lycan, and holding a lean thigh so he could move as much as possible, chasing his own release.

Seath's head went back, his roar of orgasm and claiming enough to make his omega come again as the sound echoed off the sound wards. But Seath wasn't done, he bent his head to Lycan's waiting and presenting neck, biting down and rolling both of them into another, sweeter orgasm, releasing wave upon wave of pleasure that shook their bodies.

In the throes of it, Lycan shoved his hands into Seath's hair, getting enough purchase to make his own mark on Seath's waiting neck.

Lycan was ferocious in his bite. Just as he was in the training room. The feeling was indescribable, a euphoric wave of pleasure that made Lycan dizzy as he bit until he tasted the copper tinge of blood on the sweet bouquet of Seath's skin.

Seath's responding roar reverberated off the wards as intense satisfaction raced through his body and his vision blurred golden on the edges. His knot fully formed, and Lycan bit down harder in his pleasure, more release between them as the very last he had to give joined Seath's skin.

It was pure, liquid pleasure. Undiluted by anything else.

When Seath could see clearly, he licked over the mark on Lycan's neck, already ensnared by the beauty of it on his mate. The mark was beautiful, and Seath growled with satisfaction when he was able to come down from the spiraling high to see it fully. Already, a faint gold ring had started to appear.

His wolf roared again with satisfaction. There was no denying it now. Lycan was his. Mating marks took all shapes and sizes, depending on the species involved. But fated mates were always the same, a gold ring imprinted on the neck over the mating gland— almost as a tattoo. No one could question his mating with Lycan now, or why he had been so enamored by the found omega. He had been obsessed with Lycan since he found him in the forest and for good fucking reason.

Humans had adopted the fated mate phenomenon of the gold marks to the ceremony of golden wedding rings. But for those who the Fates themselves had touched, it was always this. Seath would have his own as soon, right where he could already feel fated-mates magic had it forming in a low burn.

Seath nuzzled against the neck of his mate, the wolf in him wanting a chance to claim, too. Then, he again rolled over, so his weight wouldn't crush the omega as they waited for the knot to release.

Lycan snuggled against Seath's broad and hairy chest, equal parts sated and asleep, drifting still on waves of pleasure, his body limp with satisfaction.

Seath laughed as he felt his release drip even around the knot. It was a heady picture, but not one that would get his

knot to recede. Thinking about filling his omega so much Lycan's body couldn't hold it in would only lead to the next round.

It was going to be very hard not to strut like a peacock if he ever left their bed to use his legs.

Lycan sighed and snuggled closer. Seath threaded his fingers through Lycan's and watched his gold mark form on Lycan's creamy skin and felt the comforting weight and scent of his spent omega covering him like a too-small blanket. He covered them with a real blanket as well, wanting Lycan warm and safe as he recovered from the intensity of their love-making.

Lycan slowly came awake, the knot still keeping them together, and he rolled his hips as if he was testing the feel of it in his body.

“How long ...”

“Depends, baby, long enough for you to rest, I would imagine.”

For him, Lycan wiggling on his cock already had him interested in seeing if his omega had another orgasm in him, and the look on Lycan's face when he pressed his hips up and down suggested that having more than one round when knotted was a definite possibility. Having an orgasm on a full knot like this could be overwhelming to some omegas.

But, Seath also could tell that Lycan needed water, food too, just like any heat. Only this time, Seath was seeing him

through the heat, but he reminded himself how many heats his omega had been through in the past months, leaving Lycan always a little tired and depleted.

Heats Seath caused. Heats that now might get on a normal course. He needed to go slow with Lycan. Fated mates or no, Lycan had been through a lot, and was not through it yet. He should still be wooed. Romanced. Not just knotted and seen through his heat.

“Are you okay, Lycan? I know your heats haven’t been easy on you. So many, so intense.”

Lycan shook his head. “This is different. This is ...this is wonderful.”

“I bet Caine left us some food outside the door,” Seath said to his lover, noticing how Lycan looked interested at the mention of food.

“Why Caine?” Lycan asked.

“The shifters will know we are mating, and they will stay away, pull the sentry to the wing, not the hallway. If we had run into another Alpha when we ....” Seath paused, unsure how much Lycan needed to know about his headspace in a rut. “I can be overprotective, apparently, when I’m in a rut. I didn’t want anyone to see you when you were going into a heat. Makes me crazy to think about it.”

Lycan tilted his head back, capturing Seath’s mouth for a kiss.



“It won’t always be like that, the more we are together, it will ease the appetite and the possessiveness.”

Lycan beamed at him, “So Caine could make it through all of that to make sure we don’t starve?” What he didn’t say was how he liked the possessiveness Seath showed. Given his past, and being kept in a way, he wasn’t sure how he should feel about that. But, he would sort his thoughts. Just, not right now.

“Yes,” Seath kissed Lycan lightly, “we aren’t done yet, my omega.”

And that was true. There was a tray of food, and a note, assuring that all was well. And subsequent trays and notes. Seath and Lycan drifted out of real time and in their own bubble of exploring each other’s bodies.

No one bothered them, other than to leave fresh towels and linens, and food at the door.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

## After the Heat

“I changed my mind.” Lycan’s dreamy voice was caught against Seath’s chest, tickling the hair as his lean arms stretched up and stayed draped around Lycan’s neck. “Heats are the best thing ever.”

Seath chuckled, and he agreed, preening a bit at turning something that was a bad experience into a good one for his mate. And he loved the feel of Lycan against him when the Little Wolf draped his arms around his neck and pressed close.

Instead of drained, Lycan appeared energized as his heat melted away.

Lycan moved, and Seath took a moment to rub his hand over Lycan’s stomach. Usually flat, it was slightly rounded with the effects of the heat, even though the heat had now passed.

They had been entangled with each other for two days, and there was still so much Seath wanted to show Lycan in the art of lovemaking. But, the need and desire were so that they almost always ended up with Lycan impaled on his knot.

The next heat might be less desperate, or in between ...

Seath smiled, easing up on an elbow to admire Lycan and kiss him further awake. Maybe sex outside of the heat would be the time for slow-kisses and lovemaking.

Lycan pulled him closer, aligning their bodies to feel Seath against him. Even with the heat gone, the want hadn't eased.

Seath breathed in the scent of Lycan. Now that it was fully present and free from the spellbinding he couldn't get enough. And the layer of his own scent on top was even better.

He hadn't held back his instincts, wanting his scent in his mate's hair and skin. In Lycan's body. Seath wanted to know Lycan carried him in his stomach, on his tongue. He would want that every day, every morning before Lycan left their nest.

Even in the heat of their morning kisses, Seath could tell something was bothering Lycan so he let the omega get up, preferring to stay in bed and admire the view of Lycan moving about their den, while also giving him some space.

Although, it wasn't their den, was it? He hadn't exactly been making plans with Lycan while in bed.

The smell of food wafted through the door, and Lycan went still.

“Everything alright, mate?”

Lycan turned wide eyes to Seath.

“You're the Pack Legate.”

Seath didn't enjoy the distress in Lycan's voice, but Lycan was in his den, wearing his much too big shirt. His wolf was invincible right now, ready to burn down the world if something disturbed his mate. He could ease his mate's stress. And they needed to talk.

"I am, Lycan."

Seath made his way closer, prowling toward his mate, eager to hold him and eager to feed him.

"If I'm your mate, then I'll be the Alpha-Mate someday. Me."

"Of course you are."

Lycan's eyes filled with fear and tears.

"I can't be the Alpha-Mate, Seath."

A cold sharp pain crossed Seath's heart, and for a moment, he wondered if the wound from mere words was mortal.

"You don't want ..." Well, hell, he couldn't say the words.

"What will people think, Seath? I've never even met my wolf. I don't know if I can meet my wolf." Lycan was in full distress now, from scent to actions. "And there are duties, and responsibilities. And—"

Lycan looked at Seath, his scent bitter with heartbreak.

"I don't know how to be good for you, Seath."

Seath took Lycan's face in his hands, and could scent that Lycan relaxed, even a little.

“We are made for each other and that means you will be a perfect Alpha-Mate. That I know. But,” Seath started toward his front door, “you are right, we need to talk.”

Without letting go of Lycan, he found the food that was left to them, and maneuvered it to the low table in front of the couch in his living room.

Lycan was in his lap, a place he found he preferred for his mate, and as Seath fed him they picked through the protein-rich fare.

“I want you to know that I will always take your concerns seriously, Lycan. Always. But, I need you to see this from my perspective.” Lycan nodded, his distress almost gone by being next to Seath. It was the best calming drug in the world, the scent of Seath.

“When I was younger, I took an oath to be betrothed to my fated mate. Do you know the ceremony?”

Lycan did know it. But those were easily identified, thorny memories and he didn’t want to think about them right now or explain where they lived in his brain, so he just nodded, but gestured to his head and the still locked pieces of himself that he couldn’t access.

“I can’t think too hard on it.”

Seath kissed Lycan’s forehead in response. “Ah. I understand. It’s not something every pack, every country even recognizes. Some would have you believe fated mates are a story, a legend. But, I always believed. So, when I was of age,

I completed the ceremony that would bind me to my fated mate. I'm not saying I didn't date others, but everyone knew it wouldn't be serious. Once you do the ceremony, it becomes part of your scent, part of who you are, waiting for your mate to arrive. My parents were fated, and although they aren't with me now, I can remember what it was like to grow up in a house so full of love."

"Your father was the Pack Alpha?" Lycan asked, wiggling to get comfortable.

"No, love. My father was a simple farmer. My omega dad was a school teacher. We don't choose Pack Alphas by something as inconsequential as blood or genetics."

"Oh, I guess that's for humans and monarchs." Lycan mused, and Seath tucked back the assumption Lycan made about succession as something to tell Caine. He would see what the vamp thought of it, since he now fancied himself a detective of Lycan's origins. And, to be fair, the reliance on magic and who was best-suited over other ways such things were done was a unique feature of most shifter governments.

"Or democracies, even," Seath agreed. "I've seen a few that cared about legacy beyond good sense. But, for us, this pack and most shifters, we never assume that parentage means much in leadership. The magic picks the leader based on what is needed for the good of the pack. Old rituals are called upon. Many could be the Pack Alpha. There is a ceremony on what we call the Raising Day, where the next Alpha is chosen. Partly by the people, but guided by the magic."

“Even so,” Seath continued. “I always believed in those old ways, the old magic. And that magic chose you and me for each other, sweetheart. The Fates have had their say. You will make me the Alpha this pack needs, Lycan. The man I need to be. And in turn, I will help you be the Alpha-Mate this pack needs. The man you need to be.”

Lycan stared at his hands for a long time. It was different from what he had been told about Alphas and omegas and their roles. He liked this version much better than the one that prioritized him for things beyond his control. For example, he could remember for some reason that he had been led to believe that omegas should be able to sing well. He could not, but it was one of those qualities people valued in omegas. Like beauty or gentleness. And knowing that somehow wasn't a thorny memory.

“I want that. I want you,” Lycan whispered. “I want—” Lycan tapped his chest, a movement Seath knew meant his wolf was close. “I want to be that for you. I just don't know how.”

Seath nuzzled Lycan at the beautiful mating mark on his neck. “You have me. And I want you to be that for yourself.”

“But ...you are betrothed. Jason told me. Everyone knows it's not me. It's to a human omega. A prince.”

Seath felt even more like finding the panther shifter and giving him a piece of his mind.

“The ceremony I spoke of was guided by magic to who my fated mate would be. My fate was read and I agreed to a sort



of contract with my mate without knowing who that was. The betrothal to Fate is magical. Then, years later, an astrologer told me who the astrologer saw as my fated. The agreement with the person they named was more political in nature, not magical. Do you know Prince Donovan of Taured?”

Lycan searched his mind, but any trace of this prince was on the other side of strong steel walls and the sharpest of the mental barbed wire magic had given him. A sharpness rose when he even tried to think around it, threatening to ruin such a wonderful few days, so he left it alone, as he had been instructed by Luke and the coven.

He gave an exasperated huff, and again gestured to his head. “I can’t get to it.”

It was strange, the way that topic felt in his mind, different from the other sharp memories. But he was safe and in Seath’s arms and that was a worry for another day.

“Well, he was to be my fated, according to the astrologer. But don’t you worry. The binding was an agreement between myself and him. And Donovan has barely been responsive of late. He might want to end the bond, call the astrologer mistaken. There are lots of questions, but I will straighten it all out. The important thing to know is that everything in me,” Seath felt the push of the threshold, almost a kindly slap upside the head, “and outside of me,” he clarified, “says unequivocally that you are my fated mate, baby. Just you.”

Lycan sighed into Seath. It would be easy to question things. To question this feeling, but he just couldn’t when he was

nestled close to Seath like this. It was too right, too close to the core. Lycan knew what it felt like to have false senses, things kept from his knowledge, and this was the opposite of that in every way.

“But ...” Lycan took a deep breath. “I don’t think I have ever even met my wolf, Seath. I meant what I said about that.”

Seath could feel Lycan’s wolf, talk to him.

“Can you feel him?”

“Yes. He’s talked to me. He told me this was home and that you are my mate.”

“Smart wolf.” Seath kissed the mark he had been nuzzling.

“He’s closer to the surface when you are around.”

“Mmmm. He wants to meet me.”

Lycan smiled then, “Oh, yes.” He tapped his chest. “Definitely.”

Seath covered Lycan’s smaller hands in his. “Listen, sweetheart, that’s going to happen. And you can —” Seath paused, then turned Lycan so they were facing, eye-to-eye. “Fated mates isn’t some magic that cures everything between two lovers. I don’t believe that. We have to talk to each other. Be honest and vulnerable. We have to meet the magic halfway.”

“Yes.” Lycan agreed, leaning in to press a soft kiss to Seath’s lips. “Being Alpha-Mate means duties and responsibilities. I need to learn, Seath. Learn what the Pack needs, what skills I

have that can be used for the good of the Pack. I know I am much healthier than I was when I arrived months ago, but I still have a long way to go if I am going to be what you and this Pack need.”

“You *are* what I and this Pack need.” Seath’s voice was firm and commanding. “We have time. Time to sort Donovan. Time for you to learn. Greene is still Alpha of the Northwest Pack and will be for some time more. And if you want to learn, we will teach you. Do you know what I thought when I found you in the woods?”

Lycan cringed. “I can’t imagine.”

“Don’t.” Seath’s voice cracked, the image of the broken man in the woods a difficult one, rendered all the more difficult when he considered now that it was his mate. But, he did remember. And he remembered the omega who bared his neck to an Alpha against whom he would have no chance and demanded the manner of his own death with Death itself waiting in the wings.

“I knew that you were the bravest wolf I would ever meet.”

“What?”

“It’s true. And I stand by it. You might not think you are ready, but I know you are.”

Lycan’s features drew into a fierce determination. “Yes. I can do this.”

“You can.”

Seath let Lycan relax and finish his meal, not wanting to keep his mate from recovering from the heats. Heats were quick and intense, forty-eight hours or so of wanting nothing but needing to be filled by a lover. Tonight, he would take Lycan to the hot springs at the grotto and let the warm water carry away the last of the heat's effects.

"There is another matter." Seath pulled Lycan close. "Where I have to be truthful."

Lycan looked at him expectantly, turning his head in a wolf-like gesture. Seath had been noticing more of those and he hoped he was right in thinking it meant Lycan was in tune with his wolf more and more.

"You are going to have to set boundaries with me, mate. I want to demand you move into my den. I want to tell the world you are my mate. I'm going to move too fast, be too much—"

"Hey." Lycan shifted, so he straddled Seath's lap the best he could. His hips were no match for Seath's larger frame. "Is that what you want? Me in your space?"

"It's already *our* space."

Lycan kissed his nose. "And you already marked me, mate."

Seath's heart thumped to hear Lycan call them mates. He loved the acknowledgement of who they were to one another. He nuzzled Lycan's mark.

"You marked me as well, Lycan, don't forget that. The house responds to you as Alpha-Mate. So does the pack, or at least

parts of it. Even from your first heat.”

“And I smell like you.”

“There will be no hiding it, if that was what you wanted. If that’s what your worries about being Alpha-Mate are about.”

Lycan shook his head. “No. But there will be those who will say I am not worthy.”

“Don’t worry about that.”

Seath pulled his mate closer, kissing him deep until Lycan was glassy-eyed.

“Jesus,” Lycan whispered, “even without the heat.”

Seath laughed into his mouth, loving the feel of his aroused omega pressed against him and knowing it went so much deeper than the desire of a heat.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

# Pack Life Goes On

Jamie bobbed his head like the snowy owl he contained inside. He tried not to get overly excited, but when Seath and Lycan had emerged from their den after Lycan's heat, Jamie had walked into a new configuration to Seath's study and offices.

The Threshold magic of the Pack House had created a room for him, putting Lycan on the front desk. Clearly, the House had thoughts about how things should be running in the Legate's offices now.

For his part, Seath smiled when he saw it, a content sort of smile that only grew as Jamie watched his thumb roam over the gold circle that had formed at Lycan's neck. His Legate was smitten, and Jamie couldn't fault him for it.

After a tour of the newly designed offices, they all got to work and the Fae was the topic of conversation.

"I've had several calls from Greene already, but as far as I can tell, the Fae aren't asking to renegotiate any of our

agreements with them. Have you had any requests?” Seath sat down across from Jamie, all business, and Lycan took the moment that Jamie tapped away on his computer to admire the long lines of his Alpha, and how his mate’s biceps bunched the fabric of his dress shirt.

Seath caught his eye for a hot moment and he returned the smile.

“We will have to give you a crash course in Fae politics, Lycan,” Seath said easily. “Or at least see what you need to know to get you up to speed.”

“It’s like this,” Jamie began to Lycan, while turning the screen for Seath to read what he had pulled up, “months ago, almost a year now, the Fae started renegotiations with everyone they had agreements with. Instead of keeping to their realms, we started seeing them more and more than normal. Everyone did. Humans, shifters, witches — you name it. Not only were they on this plane, they were making it known, too.”

“What agreements does our pack have?” Lycan asked, which got a pleased rumble from Seath when he called it “our pack.”

“Simple ones,” Jamie replied. “Sacred spaces in the Forest, safe passage through the boundary threshold, wards on a touch point, some occasional trade.”

“I wonder why we haven’t been asked to renegotiate. Our agreements are not unique.” Seath mused.

“Wait,” Lycan said. “There is a touch point on Pack land?”



“There is.” Seath smiled, standing up. “We have it well guarded by Fae, witch, and vampire magic. Patrolled by the Centaur herd. No one has ever stumbled on it who didn’t intend to. It is made to deflect anyone who might get close.”

Lycan shivered at the thought of walking through the forest and accidentally ending up in the Seelie or Unseelie courts. Touch points could take you from a simple hike in the forest to another realm without the person even knowing they were walking from one to another. They had to be guarded and were, often by wards and beings themselves. They were known to change location too, and so constant monitoring was required.

Old magic said that brought into another realm had a right of return back from where they came. But some, humans usually, had been known to lose their minds when they went through a touch point and were too bewildered to call upon the rules to return themselves. All they had to do was set the intention to return in their mind, but in a state of panic, the intention often didn’t manifest.

Even knowing the old magic, Lycan still shivered at the thought.

“And no one I have talked to knows why the Seelie are up in arms.” Jamie sat back in his chair. “Even those they have renegotiated with don’t know. I’ve talked to all of them, as has Greene.”

“Fae politics is full of machinations and schemes that only the Fae can unravel.” Seath stood to go to his office. “As

Greene always says, the Fae cannot tell a lie, which is not the same as saying the Fae must tell the truth.”

Jamie and Lycan worked well together and within the week it was clear Lycan’s handy knowledge of laws, and treaties, and the Council were not merely because he was so well-read. The Little Wolf had some first-hand knowledge of these things, some kind of way.

Caine seized upon the knowledge the way he had all the things he found out about Lycan, and had now taken to asking random political questions to gauge what Lycan knew and where he knew it from. Most of his knowledge was a few years old and seemed to be concentrated in the countries to the west.

Currently, Caine had taken Lycan as well as Van and Trav as his companions for tea with the Elves. Seath made a note to have Jamie send an invitation to host the Elves at the Pack House soon, as Lycan visited often, and now they had invited him for tea.

Elves loved omegas, and perhaps especially Lycan, but they would tolerate Seath and Luke for an evening if they got the invitation. Plus, they found Caine fascinating.

“I hear there is an uptick in matings across the Pack,” Luke said, sitting his drink down. Seath was enjoying time with Luke as he waited, somewhat patiently, for Lycan to return. They had just played with the youngest, rowdiest kids on the pack’s playground and then retired to Seath’s study. Alphas were no match for toddler shifters.

It was important what Caine was doing in bringing Lycan along on Pack business, although no major announcements had been made and everyone acted as if they believed Lycan to be the Alpha-Mate. People needed to see his mating mark, to know he was living as the Alpha-Mate to be. At the same time, they had to progress cautiously, allowing Greene to speak to Taured.

The Elves were safe, Seath reminded himself, but he had sent Briar as well. Not only that, but his bond with Lycan had only strengthened. Now, he could sense the emotions and location of his mate.

The connection eased his wolf when his mate was away. This was the longest time apart since they mated, almost three entire days of the Elven version of “tea,” and he was ready to have his mate return.

“There have been increased matings,” Seath confirmed. “Another sign of our pairing, I suppose, but I want to wait for the coven to convene at Samhain before we announce anything official. There are those that will want to know Lycan is restored to truly believe he is my mate. And I am due to hear back from Greene on how he’s dealing with Prince Donovan.” As planned, they had informed Taured of the situation, but that was Greene’s realm to negotiate. He turned to Luke. “Do you really think Lycan will be able to shift after the next coven convenes?”

“I have hope.” Luke relaxed into the couch. As an hour passed, Seath began to roam the study.

“Stop pacing,” Luke chided Seath as the Alpha paced the conference room. “He’s due back any minute.”

Luke snorted at the dark look Seath gave him in response. “The people love him, he’s in no danger when he is out on pack business, Seath. And if something happened, you would know,” Luke reminded him in a very logical voice. He didn’t mention Briar and Caine were also there.

Seath huffed and kept pacing. It was the same assurances he had been given since Lycan had been gone. He didn’t do well without his mate there with him, he was beginning to learn that. Partly due to the Alpha-Omega connection. Partly due to the Pack Alpha intensity of that connection. And part due to the fact that Seath Rawson was an Alpha who needed his omega close.

Suddenly, the tension in his body snapped, and he headed downstairs to meet Lycan, knowing his mate was returned as soon as he entered the Pack House territory and the threshold acknowledged it.

The Enforcers that had gone on this particular campaign knew better than to even try and brief the Alpha until he and Lycan had time to reunite, and so as they came in they simply nodded in deference to the Legate and then headed off to other tasks or to Min’s kitchens.

Suddenly, Seath had his arms full of Lycan—not smelling enough like him, that was for sure, and he pulled the smaller man to him as soon as he entered the Pack House. Crushing

him hard to his chest, while his fingers went to the scent gland under his mating mark and rubbed circles, Seath felt settled.

Another Alpha came into the foyer, and Seath had to hold back a growl. His omega didn't smell like him nearly enough to want another Alpha around.

“Easy, mate,” Lycan whispered into the very base of Seath's neck. “I missed you too.”

He turned his head up to Seath for a kiss, which was not even close to chaste.

“I think we will get you all some refreshment from your travel, and then, barring anything urgent, perhaps a debrief in a few hours time?” Luke suggested, his scent and tone amused, but from afar, as he waited in the hall.

Seath's large hand held Lycan's face close to his body and his neck, the idea of anyone seeing the flush of arousal in Lycan's face or the dilation of his pupils one he could not tolerate. No one saw his omega like this. This scent, in all its heady, dazing glory, was the scent of his omega wanting him. And it was just for them. A private thing others couldn't pick up that existed only between mates.

Seath's grip on his mate tightened as the need to make that scent overwhelming on his mate grew. He needed to come on Lycan's face, get his come in his mate's belly, to rub it in him, to make Lycan nurse his cock. He needed to ....

With a curt nod to Luke, Seath turned and practically carried Lycan to his bed on the other side of the building. It was only

when Lycan was naked beneath him, looking over his own naked body with nothing but want and need that Seath could breathe again.

Thoughts about Fae politics and Elven festivals and covens stayed far from his mind.

He had kissed Lycan hard and nipped at his lips until they were swollen, the same with his neck, and the new bites of claiming already formed to cover those that had faded too much for Seath's liking.

Scent wasn't enough, anyone needed to look at his mate and know he was well-loved. Satisfied, yet still wanting more. From him. *Only* him.

Lycan's pretty eyes looked up at Seath with such need that Seath growled, flipping the omega over, and burying his face in his ass. Lycan called out with pleasure as Seath didn't hesitate to eat his ass with abandon—this wasn't teasing for a lover's sake, this was a claiming, a reuniting.

Seath licked straight over Lycan's sensitive hole, causing his slick to increase and his cock to leak. Seath sucked on the puckered skin, letting the slick coat his tongue, making it flow. But, it was the *sounds*, Lycan's needy sounds that drove him higher. Drove him to lick, to spear his tongue into Lycan's body, knowing his scent was all over his mate.

Lycan's first orgasm ripped through him, fueled by nothing but Seath working over his ass with his tongue and the slightest pressure of his hand to his cock. The pleasure caught him off-guard, causing him to clench furiously.

“Your hole wants to be filled, mate,” Seath said, flipping Lycan once again to his back as he still moaned his pleasure.

“Yes,” Lycan said, sealing his lips over Seath’s. “By you, Alpha.”

“I’m going to make you come until you can’t anymore,” Seath promised, and Lycan nodded, face flushed with pleasure. Seath pulled Lycan to the side of the bed, gently until Lycan’s head hung off the side and stood over his mate’s head. Lycan moaned at the position, his head aligned to suck off his Alpha, his body on display for what the Alpha wanted. He was hard again when Seath dropped his heavy balls on Lycan’s mouth, the musky scent sending waves of need through Lycan.

Lycan drew in one ball and then the other, suckling at the mouthful, as his Alpha looked over his body and murmured his appreciation, making sure there were no other marks on his omega except his. Of course Lycan hadn’t been injured. He would know. And, there wasn’t even a scrape on him. None other than the ones he was placing there. But, he wanted to know Lycan was safe and he wanted his marks to shine.

The scent of Elves was wood and earth and was easily detected. Seath had almost removed it from his mate, but he liked the earthy undertones with his own scent.

Seath pulled back and touched the tip of his cock to Lycan’s mouth, his pink tongue darted out to collect the moisture there. Lycan’s cock jerked, and his thighs glistened with slick over the bruising bites Seath had left earlier.

Seath watched his mate's body, watched him take his cock, and moved his hands to play at the body stretched before him and at his mercy. He stroked Lycan's balls, his cock, but not with anything that would get his mate off again. Just build him up and wreck him.

Lycan took his Alpha's cock again and again as Seath worked it in his mouth, feeling his knot form, he pushed in and it locked in Lycan's mouth causing a low groan from his lover. It was sexy to see Lycan like this, but he had to be careful with the air play. His knot wouldn't last as long or form as large with only the heat and ministrations of Lycan's mouth, but it was heaven, just the same.

Seath moved his hands to Lycan's chest. It was smooth, with well formed muscles that defined his pecs, his nipples dusky and pointed. Seath pulled and played with the sensitive nubs until he thrust hard against the knot, and came down Lycan's throat. Lycan's hips bucked and he came again, untouched, and Seath growled because this time Lycan's release smelled more like him.

While the knot relaxed, not taking as long when the knot was in the mouth due to the differences in stimulation, Seath played with Lycan's sensitive body, taking the come from Lycan's abs and mixing it with the slick on his thighs to play with his hole. Lycan put his knees up, canting his hips to Seath so that he was leaning over Lycan's body to stretch him and prepare him for what would come next, coaxing his dick back to a steel hardness in the process.



Lycan could get hard as many times as his Alpha needed him to, come as many times as Seath wanted, and Seath felt the need to keep Lycan hard at all times and might just do that for the next few days. Some Alpha's wanted to cage their male omega mates, keeping them from getting hard as some matter of control. Seath wanted the opposite. He wanted Lycan needy for him and ready. He wanted not to control Lycan's responses, but to force more of them. Drown him in pleasure.

A day for every day Lycan was gone, he decided, lust filling him at the thought of keeping Lycan on an endless loop of orgasms for hours.

His partially-softened cock finally slipped from Lycan's mouth and he stepped back, joining Lycan on the bed, positioning his omega on top of him. Seath kissed him hard, loving how Lycan smelled so much like his cock. They were under the blankets, keeping Lycan warm and close.

Seath sucked on the sensitive marked scent gland and Lycan squirmed, his eyes showing he was on another plane of pleasure, and Seath chuckled. He needed no time to recover for more sex, but he needed Lycan begging for it, loud and clear in his desire for his mate. The kissing was a wonderful way to allow his release to settle in his mate, and sure enough, Lycan's squirming turned to rubbing and kissing turned desperate as even his scent relaxed under the spell of Seath's come inside him.

"Easy, little thing," Seath murmured, kissing hard at Lycan's neck, which caused Lycan to arch his back and rub himself on

Seath, a movement Seath stopped with a large hand on Lycan's ass, kneading into the sensitive flesh there in circles.

Lycan whimpered, "Need you Alpha."

Seath rubbed where he had dug his hands into Lycan's flesh, "Not yet," he said, nipping at Lycan's neck. "Right now you just *want*, but I'll make you need it."

Lycan whimpered again, the needy sound full of sex and promises, causing Seath to growl in return. Raising his hips, bringing up Lycan's ass in his lap, he brought his hand down on it.

He felt the liquid rush from Lycan's hole and cock, and Lycan moaned in a way Seath had never heard before. He didn't know he could get harder than he was, but when Lycan had given that moan, he had managed. And he had felt his knot pulse like it would form.

"More," Lycan begged. "Mark me, Seath. I want to see the imprint of your hand on my ass."

Goddess be damned, Lycan was perfect. Seath rubbed Lycan's ass again, Lycan pushing up and out the best he could to meet Seath's hand, almost begging for it, or presenting in a way while on Seath's lap. Seath spanked his omega again, and again was met with the same sensations.

"This okay for you, Lycan?" Seath asked, wanting Lycan to confirm that his head was in the same place his body was for the light spankings. They hadn't talked about such things

before. The spanking had been a reaction to how Lycan was moving, how he was acting, but Seath still needed to check in.

Small hands clutched at him. “So okay, Seath.” Lycan shuddered. “I feel like I’m flying. Don’t stop. Please.”

“I want you to come from this, right on me, little thing,” Seath said, planting one hand on Lycan’s hips where he straddled Seath, knees flung wide. Seeing his omega own his pleasure so absolutely almost undid him.

Lycan whimpered, his chest falling to Seath’s, hips tilting his ass out for whatever his Alpha wanted to do with the knowledge of how he would react to Seath’s hand on him.

Seath rubbed Lycan’s ass, then spanked him again, tighter in time now, and his omega whimpered and moaned beautifully on top of him. He could smell Lycan’s arousal and desire, his need to come evident in how he strained, how he sounded, and writhed on Seath. All of Seath’s Alpha instincts were aroused by the sensations and sight of his needy little omega, come-drunk from two orgasms, and about to have a third at the stinging hand of his Alpha. A hand he had begged for.

Seath rubbed over Lycan’s ass, where with each pass before the spanking, he had been opening Lycan’s spread hips. Now, when Seath rubbed out the sting, he could also rub over Lycan’s soaked hole, allowing the slick to rub into the stinging flesh. He could tease the rim with his fingertips. Lycan moaned again, a long needy moan that almost made Seath’s knot fully form, while Lycan’s hips jerked, wanting to impale his hole on those fingers. Seath made two more light spansks,

his knot partially filling at the needy little omega's reaction. Then, Seath brought his hand down, harder this time, right across Lycan's hole. Instead of lifting his hand, he stroked, teasing strokes over the soaked and wanting skin.

The omega moaned an indecent sound that popped Seath's knot fully. Lycan was coming hard across his chest and Seath slipped two fingers into Lycan before he rode it out, finding his prostate and watching Lycan come again as he rubbed and pressed upon the gland, milking it.

"Mine," Seath said, as if there was any doubt.

"Yours," Lycan slurred, thrusting against his fingers.

Seath's knot went down, although he didn't know how, as aroused as he was, but he could wait no longer, and neither could his omega. Hell, he hadn't even known a knot could form fully without being inside his mate.

Lycan's cock was still steel hard even after that last orgasm. Maybe Seath's knot knew it had to give way for him to get in his mate where he belonged.

"N-Need," moan "Alpha," moan, "N-need your k-knot," Lycan panted, a long keening whimper coming from him when Seath removed his fingers, and Lycan instantly scrambled off Seath and on to hands and knees, presenting his reddened ass.

Seath got behind his mate and pushed in deep and hard, able to still feel the aftershock clenches of Lycan's body. That was why the knot went down, then. So he could enter his mate and give Lycan what he needed.

Lycan was too far gone to stop any sounds now, and Seath reveled in them.

Lycan pushed back, welcoming Seath into his body.

“Going to fuck you hard,” Seath warned, his hips snapping in a fierce rhythm.

Lycan nodded, and the need in his eyes conveyed so much more to Seath than the need of an omega for release, it was Lycan’s need to see his mate satisfied, and his body responded to Seath to do just that.

Lycan was flush against the bed, as Seath pushed in deep and long, ready to come again, knowing it would drain him of the crushing desire for long enough to do ...whatever it was he needed to do beyond the doors to his bedroom. He knew he had duties, something he had to accomplish, but right now, this was the only thing for which he could give any focus.

Lycan’s body tried to grab him, pull him in, and clench hard around him as his knot formed again, this time properly in his mate’s body. Moving against it, Seath brought himself up and slammed back down, the bed thumping hard against the wall with his force. He came, glorious and long, buried deep in his mate and satisfying all Alpha needs of marking, pleasure, and knot.

Lycan came too, his moans greater than his release by far, with only a thick and small release left to be coaxed from his body, the orgasm lasting far longer than the physical evidence.

Seath pulled Lycan down with him as he waited for his knot to release, wondering if he could get one more of those obscene moans from his little omega before his knot went down, or if Lycan was now so far gone on the heavy doses of concentrated come he had given him.

When they were settled on their sides, Lycan shifted his hips, trying to keep the knot and the connection as long as possible with Seath.

It was almost an hour later when Seath finally slipped out of his mate. Before that, Lycan had been asleep, but when Seath had whispered how much he wanted to smell himself on Lycan's come, the little omega thrust his hips back where Seath's knot locked them together, his own slick enough lube for Seath to coat his cock. He came with the same needy moan for his Alpha that he had given Seath all afternoon. Seath had taken the release, not much more than the last one Lycan had given, and rubbed the smell of Seath-marked Lycan all over Lycan's scent gland and hair.

That had been about fifteen minutes ago, and Lycan laid breathing deep and content in their bed, smelling of sated omega and of him, and Seath felt better about the world. So good, in fact, that he didn't bother to shower, just cleaning himself up, knowing he smelled pungently of mated Alpha and that was exactly how he liked it.

When he arrived at the conference room, Caine snickered out loud, and Luke at least had the decorum to stifle his humor and only smelled amused and pleased.

“I take it, the future Alpha-Mate will not be joining us,” Caine said dryly.

Seath smiled wickedly. “He is resting.”

Although he had asked the kitchen to send some food and hydration to their room, he wasn’t sure if Lycan would be awake for it before he returned. He couldn’t let his omega get depleted, because he wasn’t anywhere near finished, and he knew his insatiable mate wasn’t either.

His chest puffed even bigger, knowing there was no heat involved in today’s mating. This was just he and his mate—Seath and Lycan.

“Anything you can tell me before the Enforcers get here?” Seath asked, taking the moment to hydrate himself. He could Alpha his pack and recover for his omega at the same time.

“Apparently we will have Elves at the Samhain coven.” Caine smiled. He had been crucial in cultivating the Elves as more than neutral entities living in the Pack lands but to actual allies. “I told you they like Lycan.”

“It’s even better than that, Alpha,” Briar added, thrusting a leaf-wrapped document into Seath’s hands. “The Elves pledge their magic in the coven-circle. They want to help.”

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE



# The Samhain Coven Grows

**S**eath pulled Lycan close, and Lycan snuggled into the comforting feel and scent of his mate.

There was a time Lycan knew he would never feel safe again. Not after being taken. Not after ...all the things he couldn't remember. And some that he could, not as memories, those were still locked down. But, there were things his body knew. A dark sloshing oil slick in his gut when he was confronted with them.

He hadn't wanted to live, that feeling he did remember. He couldn't remember the moments, but he remembered the feelings of hopelessness. There was a time, an unremembered one, but yet still one he could feel, when he wanted to just not be. Not anymore. Maybe even before he had been taken there had been a time that he wanted to push pause on his whole life. He wasn't sure that made sense, but that was the feeling of it. That there was a time he would have just stepped out of himself if he could.

Lycan remembered the feeling of running. Of trying to get free. Not the mechanics of it, exactly, those were things he couldn't access in his spellbound mind, but he could remember wanting to leave. And, there was a part of him that had come to terms with wanting to leave so he could die on his own terms.

Now, he was warm, sated, so full of good feelings. He felt secure with his trip to the Elves, and here, in his den and his nest, next to his mate. Lycan felt protected, but more than that he felt a certain sense of security that came with having a place to belong and belonging in it.

He had done a good job with the Elves, even securing their help with the coven without trying. Lycan had also worked to make Seath's den their nest. And to give Seath what he needed.

There was the Threshold magic, which made his whole body feel like it was singing.

And there was the feeling of Seath. The large, sexy man who kept him warm and safe.

Seath was his own kind of magic. The most wonderful kind.

Seath's large hand spanned his back, pulling him tight and adjusting the blankets around them. Lycan loved a cool room and the contrasting warmth of his Alpha.

"What do you need, Lycan?" Seath asked, his voice rumbling through his chest as he did, and he adjusted them, so

that Lycan was on his back, his sexy, burly Alpha hovering over him.

A little giggle escaped. And Seath raised an eyebrow, scent happy and amused. His eyes, usually filled with questions, danced in an amber glow, reminding Lycan of the flicks of flame of a fire.

“What more could I want, Seath? Even if I tried to imagine — what more could I want than this?”

Seath could think of a few things, like his family, for one. Without those memories of who he was, Lycan didn't have it all. Somewhere, there were people worried about Lycan, and Seath knew it. He wasn't as obsessed as Caine with figuring it out, but he was determined that Lycan would have answers. And justice.

It was possible, of course, that someone who took or hurt Lycan was someone Seath knew, or sat with on the Council, or traded with. And that could not stand.

Seath would find out who was responsible, and they would pay far more than what they would feel was a fair bargain. He would be the Alpha of the strongest pack in the world one day, and he would burn whoever was responsible to the ground.

As a start.

“Tell me about the Elves.”

Lycan smiled and recounted his last few days of being a guest in the forest with the Elves. Seath loved listening to his mate recount what he did — from what he ate, to elvish

customs, to making friends with Enid, the matriarch of the clan that lived within the Pack lands.

“I could feel my wolf, Seath. Maybe it was the forest, or you know, *Elves*. He talked to me some, my wolf I mean, and I think he is getting healthier.”

“He is,” Seath agreed, his own wolf sensing the same thing.

They were sitting against the headboard now, and Lycan passed Seath some tea from where it was waiting on a tray beside the bed. He had no clue what time it was. Between the sex and the resting from travel, his internal clock was off, but if he had to guess he would say it was about midway through the night. Lycan smiled, loving the thought of talking with his lover and then snuggling back down for a few more hours of sleep.

The future Alpha-Mate looked shyly over his cup. “Is it normally like that, when it’s not a heat? Sex, I mean.”

Seath let the tea settle. They had sex plenty outside of Lycan’s heats, but yeah, the reunification of the afternoon had been something else.

“It can be. You know, fated mate magic is about the relationship — it doesn’t always mean that two people fall in love with one another. Love isn’t ever guaranteed. Lust, certainly. And companionship. But not love.”

Lycan’s heart kicked up. Falling in love. Was that what they were doing? His mind spun. Was that what he was feeling or was it the fated mate magic? His wolf senses had just come

back to him, and the sensations were overwhelming. And when he was with Seath, sometimes he seemed driven by instinct.

“Hey,” Seath’s warm hand cupped Lycan’s cheek. “What are you thinking?”

“Do you think we could be? A love match, I mean?”

Seath’s eyes softened even more. “I think we are well matched, sweetheart. The Fates were generous. And I hope for love.”

“You are a worthy Alpha, Seath,” Lycan said with a kiss to Seath’s nose.

Seath shrugged. “Sometimes. I am too old-fashioned in some ways.”

“Appreciating the old ways and being old-fashioned aren’t the same thing.”

“I always believed in the old stories. Fated Mates, moon magic, and all the rest. Not sure if that makes me old-fashioned or nostalgic or something else.”

Lycan smiled, placing the cups back on the tray and turning off the lamp so they could snuggle back in their nest.

“You like the Fae, though. I would guess that most Pack Alphas wouldn’t. They are a bit temperamental.”

Seath sighed happily, pulling Lycan closer. “The Fae have their own agendas, so as long as the Pack doesn’t get caught up in their schemes, I do like them. They just have collateral

damage sometimes, because their focus is never this realm. Whatever their reasons are or motivations, it's not something we would ever know."

Lycan hummed, burrowing closer and letting the scent of his Alpha lure him back toward sleep.

"The Fae also smell wonderful and have a wicked sense of humor," Seath continued, stroking Lycan's hair as they settled and Lycan gave a little a laugh in response. "If you just treat them as friends, you can also find yourself with extraordinarily good luck for a few days after meeting with them."

"Have you?"

"On occasion—" Seath paused, and Lycan could see his gaze drift off in the dark of their nest. Someone from the pack was talking to him through their link, and it must either be private or important or both, or the cell phone on the table would light up, too.

Seath blew out a deep breath, finally relaxing into the nest with Lycan.

"Well, little one, looks like you will get to know the Fae yourself. Jamie just told me they plan to be at the coven."

"Three days!" Min sounded shocked, but Caine, who had plopped himself in a manner that should have been inelegantly on her counter, shot her a smile.

Seath had waited until the morning to convey the news to everyone, and Min appeared affronted by the very idea of Fae on such short notice.

“I can source whatever you need. Happy to be of service,” Caine said the words without any humor, making sure Min knew he meant them.

Min gave his knee a pat of thanks. “That’s kind, Caine, thank you.” Most vamps wouldn’t offer their speed for the service of what was essentially a grocery run, but Caine was Pack.

“I’m sure most packs don’t get the three-day warning,” Lycan said quietly, but still able to be heard over Briar’s grumbles about security.

Seath’s chest puffed out, as it did whenever Lycan sent a compliment his way. Words, or an appreciative look he had caught a few times made him want to strut or preen. He loved the bubbly feeling his mate’s affection gave him. Lycan’s words hadn’t even mentioned him, but the implication was clear. It was due to Seath having a solid connection to the Fae that gave them warning.

Min huffed. “Invite themselves and then will be the pickiest guests you have ever seen, mark my words.”

Seath rubbed his temples. “It is for one brief day, and one night only. Let us remember that, please. They have been here before. The only thing that is changing is we will host them overnight. While the Fae can be finicky, they are not going to take offense unless something appears to be a direct insult, so let’s avoid that.”

Caine smiled all the way to the study with Luke and Seath while the others dispersed to their morning duties.

“Little Wolf is intriguing even to the Fae,” Caine commented as they sat down.

“Do you think they will contribute to the magic or just observe?” Seath asked.

“I think they will do what they want to do,” Caine said plainly.

“This just became complicated.” Seath growled out the words with a bite.

“How?” Luke asked.

“Elves don’t care much for gossip. But, the Fae knowing about our situation before we have everything worked out with Taured? I’m not sure I’m comfortable with that.”

Luke gave Seath a sympathetic look. “Your mating has made the whole Pack stronger. That is without doubt.”

“But ...the Fae.”

Caine sighed. “The Fae will know if you are being honest or not, so you might as well just own the truth of it. They might even be helpful. Didn’t ever occur to you they might know something about Lycan? They have eyes everywhere.”

As much as Seath liked the Fae, he wasn’t so sure *helpful* was a way he would describe them. If he was being honest, in the hands of the fickle Fae was the last place he would want to put his mate.

Later that morning, Seath pulled Lycan back to their den, and they shared a long, slow lovemaking that still had them



both buzzing.

“I have to portal to Greene, but I will be back,” Seath promised, “back by dinner.”

Lycan wrapped his body around Seath, wanting to envelop himself in the feel of warmth and safety. “I know.”

Seath’s hand carded through Lycan’s hair, and he buried his face into Lycan’s neck at the mating mark.

“I want you with me, mate. But, until we unravel all your mysteries, you shouldn’t. I can’t hide you from the Fae or the world, either, so best to take care of this now. But, go see the Elves as much as you want. They keep to their own.”

Lycan sighed, his hands dancing over Seath’s skin.

“You are right. Being seen could be dangerous.”

Seath pulled back long enough to give Lycan a sweet kiss. “I promise you, we will figure all this out, love.”

Lycan nodded, once again overwhelmed by the safety his Alpha provided. “I will work on preparing for the Fae, you go speak to Greene so he knows what is going on.”

“Shower first?” Seath asked, absently rubbing Lycan’s belly satisfied that there was enough of him in Lycan that his scent would last the afternoon.

Portaling was no joke. It didn’t make Seath’s stomach roll, but it did make his head spin a bit.

You couldn’t deny the ease of simply moving oneself from one place to another on a whim. But used too often, it could

cause some illness — headaches, and disorientation. Not to mention that portal dust was now a precious commodity, thanks to the continuing Fae embargo.

So, the pack still used it sparingly. Portal dust was gone when used, but never got old. The pack stores were not vast, but they were comfortable.

Greene was waiting for Seath when he emerged from the portaling grounds outside the heavily warded city-state of Zurin. They greeted each other as they always did, big hugs and scenting. Pack Alpha to Legate, and Legate carrying the scent of home to his Alpha.

They went to Greene's condo in Zurin on a high-speed train, situated to give riders a view of the neutral country where the Council sat. It was an island that boasted large mountains and beaches, similar to the lands of the Northwest Pack. The city and the country were one and the same.

The city-state was one of the largest in the world. Behind wards woven of every magic of creatures known to this realm and beyond and Threshold magic bound to keep the peace and secrets of the city. They sat down to lunch speaking freely about pack business.

It didn't take long for the conversation to take care of the few routine items and get to the Fae and Lycan.

“You can handle the Fae at this coven, Seath. I don't have to be there. In fact, best if I am not, as they are not pleased with the Council right now.”

“I don’t suppose you have any insights as to the source of their displeasure?”

Greene leaned his large frame back in the chair.

“I do not. They are prickly with trading partners more than those they have other relationships with. For what reason or what end, your guess is as good as mine. Some say they are renegotiating contracts simply to get inside the borders of some countries. I have heard many say the renegotiation felt more as an afterthought. Maybe they are looking for something—that’s a theory. Some say they are using the contract negotiations as a foot in the door of different realms to poke around. What I can tell you is they are going to the holders of the contracts. No one is being summoned to the Seelie or Unseelie realm.”

“A sacred object?”

Greene shrugged his broad shoulders. “Could be, that’s one theory anyway.”

“Do you think it is safe to allow them at the coven? I’ve never had a reason to fear the Fae, but it’s my mate we are talking about at the mercy of the coven circle. While I appreciate their magic being contributed to the group, I still wonder about their motivations.”

“Who are they sending?”

Seath rattled off the names.

“They are curious about your Little Wolf. I don’t sense any harm from them. But whatever brings them will be more to their own agenda, not for Lycan.”

“Do you think they might know something about who Lycan is? His family?” Seath couldn’t keep the hope out of his voice.

“If they do, remember the Fae give nothing without a bargain, Seath. Make sure it is one you can live with.”

Seath nodded. “Any news on someone missing a wolf?”

Greene grimaced. “None.” Greene rubbed his face. “I know this is close to the coven meeting, but we have to finish this business with Tremon and Prince Donovan. I don’t want the Fae to think we are hiding anything, and in a way, we are.”

Seath sighed, ice settling in his stomach. Tremon wasn’t the type to let something go, especially a betrothal. But Tremon was Prince Donovan’s uncle and had been the one with whom the negotiations between the mates had been handled after the death of the Prince’s parents. He was the one Greene had been reaching out to about the current situation, and he had been long to reply.

“You were fated to the Prince according to their astrologer, Seath. You know how those Taurens are. They worry about how it all looks, what kind of insult is being leveled at them for you to back out of the marriage arrangement.”

“Few even believe in fated mates, Alpha. Some would even say they don’t support them because it takes away free will. This Prince has not bothered to come and meet me or know me, and our foretelling was an old one. I was what, sixteen when that prediction was made? It seems in poor taste to throw a fit now. I would assume getting out of the betrothal is exactly what Prince Donovan may want. My understanding is that

some Taurens saw his marriage to a shifter as shameful and that he never believed in the fating at all.”

Greene raised an eyebrow, impressed with Seath’s knowledge. He also noted that Seath had been fine to wait for Donovan before Lycan showed up. Greene had wondered about that, why the Legate hadn’t been more interested in bringing his fated to him as fast as possible.

And now, Seath was bending over backwards to know the details of his situation. A complete about-turn. Perhaps he did leave a bit of the research to Jamie and now Lycan as well, but on the matter of his mate, he trusted no one but himself to find the truth and set things right.

“Perhaps,” Greene took a drink of his wine, “but what Tremon wants is what will drive this meeting. I’m sure the Prince is an admirable man, but Tremon is leading Taured now that his sister and the King are dead. He wants to come to Lupine or the Pack House for the meeting, and that means he can control the narrative back home however he likes.”

Seath rubbed his head. Lycan was his, and that was what mattered. But he wanted it all. He wanted Lycan to be known as the Alpha-Mate in name, not just in instinct. And no, he didn’t want to hurt the unknown prince he had spent years praying to the Goddess for and worrying about.

“Let’s get through the coven, and then we can focus on that.”

“They want it sooner rather than later.” Greene reached for some papers on his table, and his tablet. “In a month. Tremon is keen to resolve the broken promise.”

Seath sighed. A coven with Elves and the Fae and then the matter of Tremon.

At least no one in the Pack could argue boredom.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

# The Samhain Coven

**T**here were more people in the room this time, but the stone was just as cold and pulsed just the same.

Lycan tried not to shiver as he lay on the stone, the full moon casting its light on him from the opening in the rock above.

Seath's strong hand was on his shoulder, and he drew a lazy thumb over the mating mark, calming Lycan instantly.

Lycan loved being touched by his Alpha. Usually, touch led to other things, but not here, of course, so the comfort of Seath's warm hand was all Lycan needed to ground himself.

In a way, the touches leading to sex were easier than this. Lycan understood sex with Seath—it was instinct and following his body, something his body remembered from ... well, from somewhere. But it was up there, in his mind with the Krav Maga and swordplay stances. He knew how to listen to his body. But this, having someone be there for him, lend him strength both literally and metaphorically was something new. Something different than even *before*.



Lycan's mind spiraled for a moment. Maybe he didn't want to know too much about *before*. Now that he was here, now that there was the chance to know ... maybe he should just stay ignorant of the whole thing.

Seath looked down at him with concern, sensing something. Lycan felt a small smile even then. Seath could feel him on a level Lycan couldn't even grasp.

Maybe *before* didn't matter if *now* gave him Seath.

He reached up and took Seath's hand, squeezing it lightly and Seath brushed a kiss across his head that calmed his racing mind.

Enid, an Elf from the forest Lycan now knew well, hovered to his left, and Serepta to the right. The circle was bigger this time, seven in the inner and thirteen in the outer circle of the stone table. Elves, witches, and Caine made up the full coven.

The Fae visitors had arrived at the cavern, exactly on time, but without fanfare. Lycan had taken care of their arrangements for the night, making sure no iron was in their rooms to disturb them and had buckets of clover, lavender, and ferns added to their rooms for their comfort. He, Jamie, and Min had perfected a menu to their tastes, including refreshments in their rooms upon arrival, after the ceremony, and for their journey home.

Mirelle, the leader of the Fae had thanked him for their accommodations and hoped he would come to breakfast with them the next morning with Seath. Other than that, the Fae seemed content as spectators and to understand the lack of

demands that the Pack Leadership could currently handle for the sake of hospitality. They had demanded no audience other than the breakfast the next day.

There was no more ceremony to start the coven than last time, despite how many more people were in the room. But Serepta did clear her throat to command attention when they were assembled. From the edges of the cavern, the Fae simply looked on. They presented themselves as young and ethereal, although Lycan knew they could shape-shift if they wanted. Seath had invited them to engage as they would like, and for now, that was as spectators.

“This work must be gentle.” Serepta’s voice carried across the rock cavern. “We know the threads that bind his wolf, his alter, his other half. We have found his senses but must restore the beast in order to restore his memories. That is the work we do today.”

Her voice turned cold, and a shiver raced up Seath’s spine as she spoke.

“Do not stray from the task. Lycan’s mind is full of spellbinding. Fascinating work to some of us, but dangerous for poking around. We come for the wolf and to restore the two parts of this man. We can observe these weaves, but do not let the spellbinding take you from the task. This is delicate work. Later, we can come for the rest.”

A murmur of agreement passed through the coven and Lycan felt the air pull together, a finality to bind the group, the same

as if an agreement had been signed on paper. Whatever role the Fae took today, they were in agreement to the terms.

“Seath, you may offer your touch, but you cannot send him your energy during this coven. He will get weak. Magic will exact a price in a physical toll. Can you watch him pay the price without interfering? Sit by and let it happen? Know your mind, because if you can not, I will remove you from this chamber—fated mark or not.”

It would be difficult. Seath knew that from the first coven, and then, he hadn't known Lycan as his mate. But, he nodded and murmured his agreement, reminding himself and his wolf that it was the price he paid to be there.

“Know yourself, future Alpha,” Mirelle, one of the Fae, warned from the outside of the circle, “understand what is saving him and what is not in this work.”

Seath swallowed hard. “Future Alpha or not, this is your work, and I will follow the coven's guide.” That was a hard thing to say, a hard submission to make, but that was the way of courage sometimes.

Bravery could be easily seen in the knight coming to the rescue against impossible odds, and how very much Seath wanted to be Lycan's knight, wanted to fix everything for his mate and set it to rights. But today bravery meant being able to stand down and let someone else be the knight Lycan needed. Someone far better suited than he for this work.

Enid searched his face for a moment with an Elf-like carefulness, and then her eyes shifted to Serepta with a nod

and the air once again caught the binding promise. A faint burning smell passed Seath's nose, as if he had signed a contract, or an oath, by fire.

He shivered, and Serepta gave him a look that put him in his place.

“Let us begin.”

Lycan stared at the moon high in the rock dome of the cavern, as he felt people delve into his mind. He didn't know how to describe the feeling. Maybe it was a bit like dough Min threw down on the table to knead. Only the dough was his mind, and the coven the kneading hands and fingers pushing and pulling it in various directions.

Images would flash over his brain, too quick to catch.

Dark shadows and shapes flicked endlessly across his mind's eye. Last time he saw the intricate lace of his mind, this time that image faded as pulls were made against the threads of that fabric. Images came to him instead.

A few he caught. Staring at the moon from a ...balcony, perhaps? When he tried to focus, the razor wire of his thoughts cut deep, and he felt a collective gasp of the coven. That had hurt badly and his body sagged into the stone from the feeling.

Not the balcony, then, he would avoid that, but he had caught a few things from the fleeting image. That the moon was close, suggesting ...a tower maybe? Something high, at least. And the moon had glimmered as well, so water

somewhere—that thought was cut swiftly by pain great enough to seize his body and make him sweat in the cool air.

The coven shifted, murmuring amongst themselves and Serepta called a break. It felt like minutes to Lycan, but when he blinked back into himself, he could see the light from the top of the cavern had changed as if it had been hours.

“You now know what you are up against, coven.” Serepta flicked her hand and water appeared on the back table of the stone room, along with a sweet-smelling punch. “Hydrate and shake it out, and then we continue.”

“Are you alright, love?” Seath scooped Lycan into his arms, cradling him in his warmth until Lycan was as buried into Seath’s neck and strong arms as he could get.

“Just hold me.”

“Do not go toward the sharp memories or away,” Enid cautioned, as she moved from her place beside the stone altar toward the refreshments. “Attempt neutrality.”

Lycan nodded against Seath’s neck.

Serepta called them back to task, and they once again assembled, Lycan still warm from his holding with Seath, but that warmth quickly seeped down into the stone.

By now the moon was past the opening of the rock chamber, so Lycan tried to watch the play of light as the flicker of images flashed again on his brain. There was fire in the cavern that made shadows, but it was too far from him for warmth.

A soft poke and Lycan felt his wolf start to stir. Prowling. His wolf felt less caged, it wanted to be out, and Lycan couldn't blame him. They wanted to meet, to merge.

Lycan was so caught up in trying to get to know the other part of him in his chest, that he quit paying so much attention to the images in his mind's eye.

But, they showed him dim pictures of being turned. The bite but not its giver. The transformation. But no wolf.

As long as he didn't try and look deeper into the images, he was fine, and his mind didn't ring in pain.

He was a turned shifter; Caine would be pleased to know he was right.

The exhaustion was there, though. The pure need for this to end crawling over him as pressure and time started to wear.

Seath's hand stilled on his shoulder and moved to interlace their fingers when Lycan's hand found Seath's.

Something strummed deep in his chest and he felt electricity flow through his veins.

*Mate.*

The voice was clear as glass. From inside him. The same voice that had told him this Pack was home.

Seath's lips did not move, but another voice was equally as clear.

*Mate.* Seath's wolf responded. *I want to see you.*

Lycan took a deep breath. He had felt Seath at times, or felt his wolf respond to Seath. But this was different.

Lycan could feel the restlessness of his wolf, practically prancing to join Seath. It felt as if he was butting his nose against Lycan's sternum. Ripples of fur came in waves across his skin.

"Let him see your wolf, Legate. Call to him in kind." Serepta's voice barely crawled into his consciousness.

In a blink, Seath shifted to his large wolf. He was massive, easily as tall as the altar, with a grey coat and those amber eyes Lycan loved. Keen ears were up and alert and Seath's nose started poking at Lycan's chest, as if he was looking for Lycan's wolf buried there.

*Come run with me. Shift for me.*

Serepta moved to be closer as well. "Call to him, Seath. As mates. As his Alpha."

Seath could feel the wolf in Lycan, and in his shifted form it was hard to contain himself. He wanted to meet the wolf.

Seath licked Lycan's face first, telling him it would be okay.

Digging into his instincts, to the same place that got him through the Raising Day and the day he proved himself Legate, Seath spoke to the wolf under the surface of his mate's human form.

*Shift.*

Lycan gasped, shaking, and in a moment, instead of Lycan on the table, there was a white wolf, pure as the Arctic, with luminous blue-green eyes.

Seath's large grey wolf preened for his mate, unable to stop looking at the gorgeous wolf in front of him.

The white wolf rose, uncertain, and then leaped down from the table with a stumble. Next to Seath, the white wolf was small. Wrapping around his mate, Seath kept the Little Wolf as close as he could while the wolf found his legs. Seath scented him, and they chased each other around a bit, up and down from the table, each playful in these alter forms where some of the human concerns seemed less important for a while.

Lycan tired easily though, and Seath could feel it. Although the wolf didn't want to, Seath nudged Lycan back to the table. Lycan jumped up and laid down, eyes focused on Seath who leaned his head on the table at Lycan's shoulder.

Chest heaving from the exertions, Lycan stared at Seath.

*Pack. Mate.*

*Mate.* Lycan answered, surprising himself at how easy it was.

Lycan felt the stone under him, different in his altered form. He nuzzled Seath, enjoying how free it was in this form to show affection for the one he was falling for by the day. He laid there a while, the pulse of the rock under him, Seath's patient gaze on him as he took in the feel of his shifted form,



of his senses enhanced even further than they had been in his human form, even after being restored.

*Shift back now, mate. We can run tomorrow.*

Lycan lifted his nose, smelling the scent of earth and sea outside the stone cavern. He wanted that. He wanted the moon on his fur and Seath by his side. He wanted to dig his paws into the dirt and run until he was exhausted. Then he wanted to lay wrapped up in Seath's wolf under the moon. His wolf yearned to be strong enough for more time in this form.

And not just that. He wanted the Pack too. A run in a forest full of wolves. To lay in a pile of his family.

His wants came easily in this form. Things he yearned for as a man, but often couldn't find a way to express. It was all there, somehow putting a name to those feelings and making sense of something that had been confusing before.

*You will have it, love. All of it.*

Smiles didn't happen in this form, but he moved his head, nose to nose with Seath, appreciating his Alpha's support.

There was something different about this, too. His wolf didn't have a before. There was just now.

Lycan laid his head back to the stone, knowing that he was too weak yet for all his longings, but soon.

*Shift.*

Lycan obeyed his Alpha, transforming into his human form by simply leaning into the command. In a ripple of fur to skin,

he was back on the stone as he had begun the coven.

His body sagged, exhausted and worn. Shifting healed something in his mind, that was true. But, his body was still a bit weak. Enough to matter. Eating well and resting had been good for him. So had the physical efforts in the gym. But he had also endured difficult heats and a fated mating. None of that was easy on a body still recovering from the sort of trauma he came from.

Seath shifted too, hand back on Lycan's shoulder.

“We will break the circle now.” Serepta murmured some words in the witch language and the air of the room changed once again.

Seath set Lycan on his feet, but stayed behind him, a hand on his hip to keep him upright as Lycan thanked everyone with a tear-streaked face.

“You have given me a great gift.” Lycan said, drinking the draught Serepta insisted he have when the coven dispersed to all but Caine, Serepta, Enid, and Seath.

The rest were off to catalog and discuss the magic that had transpired in the coven, and to settle the Fae in the Pack House for the night. Seath would have to join them in the morning, to make sure they were given the proper amount of time due to their kind.

“We are righting a wrong. A terrible injustice was done to you, Lycan. And I am pledged to change it.” Serepta said, her

eyes bright but the strain of the work showed around her eyes and mouth.

Enid nodded her agreement. “The Elves will give our help as needed, Serepta. This must be corrected.”

“And I thank you both. But, I need to see him to our den before he collapses,” Seath took the empty cup from Lycan, and pulled him even closer. “See Jamie for anything you need. I will never forget the help you gave today.”

Serepta nodded, and he could tell she had learned more while in Lycan’s mind and was ready to record her findings or discuss them with the other coven members. Whatever that was, it would need to wait for another day.

Their den was cool when Seath carried Lycan into it. He wasn’t completely out of it, but he was exhausted. The threshold had brought in the scents of lavender from the garden, and Seath made sure to thank it, getting a quick, warm press of air in return.

The ceiling above their nest was made in part of overlapping panels, folded together to form a ceiling like any other. But, when he cranked the lever at the wall, the panels opened on well-oiled hinges, exposing their bed to the night sky.

Seath cranked it now, after he had tucked Lycan into their nest, making sure the ceiling was adjusted to let in the moonlight as Serepta had suggested. They were bathed in it as Seath kissed his mate and Lycan melted against him in return, practically purring as his wolf nature stayed near the surface.

Seath chuckled, amazed at the beauty of Lycan's wolf. He was still entranced, man and beast, by the man in his arms. It might still take time, connecting wolf and man together, but Lycan already felt stronger, more whole, and Seath wanted to protect that.

Wolf dreams took over in Lycan's mind as he drifted to sleep in Seath's arms. He was running in the moonlight, the strong, large wolf next to him playful and protective as they crashed through the forest.

He woke with a start and sighed happily at the comfort of Seath's deep breathing, almost snoring. The moonlight continued to shine on their nest and Lycan nuzzled closer, letting the pull of the moonlight put him to sleep.

When he woke for the morning, he had shifted into his wolf form, and so had Seath. Seath nuzzled him and Lycan's instincts had him on his back, neck and stomach bared to Seath. Seath huffed a wolfy chuckle and ran his nose down Lycan's belly and back up, before scenting his neck.

Maybe that was why Seath loved the mating mark so well. Not just as a combination between Lycan and Seath, but also as the juncture of man and beast. The gold mark not only signified their connection, but also the connection of each of them to their own magical selves.

Seath and Lycan tussled on the bed, disturbing the nesting blankets with a scatter of feet and good-natured nips at each other. Seath loved his mate in his wolf form, and the shift would help him recover from last night, too.

Finally, Seath could stand it no longer, and needed Lycan's lips on his, so he shifted and Lycan followed. Lycan's shift was already faster, already less draining.

And there he was, the beautiful wolf turned into a man of long, lean muscle. Seath breathed him in, taking a long deep kiss of his mate. He licked into Lycan's mouth, waiting for his mate to squirm under him.

The scents of mate and nest assaulted Lycan, creating a fire in his gut and an ache to be filled. It was different from his heat, but no less potent. He felt his body catch fire with his arousal. Bolder than he had been, he took Seath's large hand and placed it over his aching cock, using his smaller hand on top of it to move Seath's to the friction he needed.

Seath groaned into the kisses as he let Lycan lead the pace. With his strength, Seath had Lycan on his hands and knees in a second, never moving his hand from Lycan's cock as he pressed his chest to Lycan's back.

Lycan gave a needy moan that made Seath shiver. Hand on his mate's cock, Seath stroked, kissing down Lycan's back until he reached the top of his ass.

They were both naked, having slept that way, so nothing stood in the way of Seath's mouth continuing its journey down to Lycan's entrance.

Lycan's slick was sweet and flowing.

"Going into heat soon, mate," Seath murmured, letting his teeth sink into the flesh of Lycan's round ass cheeks.

Lycan spread his knees wider, all but presenting himself.

Seath stroked him a few times, enough that he could watch Lycan's entrance flutter, see the flow of slick.

Then, he could stand it no more and he dove in, his mouth covering his lover's entrance as he sucked hard, drawing out slick and moans as he mouthed his lover in the filthiest of kisses.

Lycan shook with the force of it, his body wanting to shove back onto Seath's face for more, and at the same time, to shove forward into Seath's hand for more of the long strokes to his cock.

His body moved between both, almost in a frenzy of what his body wanted. It was glorious for Seath to watch his mate take the pleasure as he was, but his own need mounted, so he doubled down with harder strokes and deeper licks until Lycan's body shook as he called out Seath's name before releasing into Seath's hand.

Seath took the release and slicked his cock, watching as Lycan flipped to his back, eyes glued to Seath's hand.

“Want more, Little Wolf?” Seath asked, leaning over to give him a filthy kiss that promised more pleasure was to come. Seath dropped his head to Lycan's chest, pulling gently on each tight nipple until Lycan's pants became whimpers and his dick was back to and leaking.

Seath chuckled as Lycan squirmed, and slowly entered the wet heat of his lover, his large hand caressing Lycan's hip as

he arched off the bed. With gentle pressure, Seath guided Lycan down his cock.

When Lycan's body had taken all of him, Seath rested back on his heels, Lycan's ass spread against his thighs, legs over his hips. He loved this feeling, his lover impaled on his cock, needy despite earlier pleasure, always wanting more.

Seath ran a hand down the flat planes of Lycan's stomach resting under Lycan's dick and notching his thumb and index finger at the base. With gentle pressure of his palm, Seath moved Lycan's body to meet the deep rolls of his hips. He didn't move fast, but he moved deep, owning Lycan's entire body in every wave of movement.

Lycan gasped, calling for Seath as his body rocked against his mate's cock. Seath kept the same pace, drawing out need and pleasure for them both. Lycan fisted the sheets, moving his own body to match his lover's.

The peak of release rolled over both of them, as deep as Seath's thrusts, and lifting Lycan's back off the bed completely as he shook with pleasure. Fingers and toes curled as Seath filled him deep. Even as he came Lycan begged for more.

Seath's knot locked hard, pushing one wave of pleasure in to the next. He bent down and tried to kiss Lycan's open mouth, but it was occupied with screaming his pleasure.

Seath moaned as slick and release dripped around his cock, the sensation as his knot pressed into the throbbing heat of his lover making his eyes roll back.

They stayed locked like that, hitting waves of pleasure as they came, and riding them out with moans and trembling limbs.

They both drifted off in the half-sleep of lovers.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

# Anticipating a Visit from Taured

Greene looked at Seath across the room. They were in Greene's bigger office, and it had a slight staleness to the air, proof of the lack of use. For some reason the threshold didn't blow it away, and every once and a while, Seath would capture a twisted smile on Greene's face when he too caught that it was still there.

"Even the Pack House wants to tell me things today," Greene said when he noticed Seath watching him.

"What things?"

Greene sighed and sat at the large table in his office. Instead of an office outside the library of the pack, as Seath had, this was a large room filled with a library section, a conference table, and Greene's desk.

"We will get to that, but first I want to hear about the Fae."

Seath leaned back in his chair. "Well, anti-climatic maybe." That had been his take, also shared by Luke and Caine.

"How so?"

“They came to the coven, as I said, and Serepta said they did lend their energy to the room, but not directly. We held a breakfast for them the next day, and they had almost no questions for Lycan, which surprised me. I tried to get out of them if they knew who he was or anything useful, and they just wanted to talk about the touch point.”

Greene gave a thoughtful rumble. “What did they say about the contract?”

“Nothing. They didn’t even want to see it. That one reads more like a Treaty, but they didn’t even bring it up. They just thanked us for breakfast, for the hospitality, then asked to go by the touch point on their way out.”

“That’s it?”

Seath smiled. “Well, the flowers around the Pack House about tripled in size and number of blooms after they left.”

Greene sighed. “Well, I’m sorry you didn’t get more information, Seath. But, we can only assume they got whatever it was they came for.”

“Or we will soon find out that they didn’t. Although ...” Seath paused. “I don’t feel the other shoe is about to drop or what have you. Whatever business they have, it feels done. At least for now.”

Greene nodded, telling him he did well, and then they shifted the topic to other items until they had been at it for hours.

“We need to talk, Seath. Alpha to Legate.”

Seath frowned. “Alright. But I thought you returned for Tremon.”

Greene rubbed his head. “I did. I would never leave you to face whatever this is alone. His visit is in two weeks and as Pack Alpha, I need to be here. I’m insulation between you as the subject of his wrath, and you as leader of the Pack.”

“You are Alpha.” Seath’s neck moved easily to bare to Greene.

“Seath ...” The large bear shifter looked out the window for a moment and Seath had to remember how old Greene actually was. He looked mid-thirties or forties, but the long lives of shifters meant he was much older. There was something different about him though. A lightness maybe.

“Do you remember Renee?”

Seath started. “I do, barely. I was a cub, but I remember what she looked like.”

“I know I don’t talk about her. We were not fated, more of a political match than anything. Still, I had hope it would turn to love.”

“Did it?” Seath asked, curious at the turn the conversation had taken. Greene never spoke to him about Renee, and since he had been gone to the Council, they rarely had talks like that at all.

“She passed before we could know. We were lucky to have Celine.”

Seath nodded. The Alpha's daughter was in the pack of her mate now.

“You have a different path, Seath. I see it just being here for a few days.”

Seath frowned. “I don't understand.”

“You have a fated mate. An omega that has already changed the feel of the Pack and for the better.”

Seath nodded. “But our Pack always thrived under you.”

Greene poured himself more coffee. “Financially, yes. And maybe that is what we needed at the time. We are rich beyond even my wildest dreams. We are prosperous, mostly thanks to business ventures that are somewhat self-perpetuating. And I contented myself for a long time that it was enough. I ignored the numbers of unbonded omegas that were increasing in our pack. The number of male omegas. The lack of fated mates. But, that must be the focus now, and that is what you are good at, Seath.”

He stood with his coffee, pacing the large windows as Seath often did.

“I told myself that the prosperity of the pack was more important.”

Seath watched his Alpha carefully. Swirls of a faint breeze came to blow out the remaining stale scent.

“What are you saying, Greene?”

“I am being asked to lead, Seath. At The Council.”

“Why? How?”

Greene set his shoulders. “The Fae may have breezed in and out of here for the coven, but elsewhere unrest lies deep. No one knows what is afoot.” He shrugged. “It is a rift, that is exposing more rifts. And rifts are exposing cracks among all. All species. All kinds. The Council will need to step up.”

“You have done a fine job of balancing Council and Pack.”

Greene gave a little laugh, deep and full of his bear nature.

“I haven’t balanced at all. I didn’t need to. I have a perfectly capable Legate who is stepping in and being Alpha to this Pack. Even the threshold wants to put me in my place.”

“Greene ...”

“I’m grateful for you, Seath. Never once while I have been with the Council have I wondered how things were going here. Never once have I feared a coup. The other Council members can hardly believe it.”

“This is your Pack, Alpha.”

Greene walked over to the table and sat down, his eyes intent and focused into Seath’s.

“And we know Pack Leadership changes only after a death. But, after this business with Tremon, I would like to turn the Pack over to you. No death. No coup. No ancient throwback to fights to the death for leadership.”

Seath stopped, absolutely frozen in place by Greene’s words.

“What?”

“I have been home six times in the past calendar year, Seath. Do you realize how often we both turn when someone says Alpha?”

Seath’s mind raced, trying to square the dates. Had it really only been six times? He could feel the frown pulling at his face. People did call him Alpha, but that was like a muscle, a response. They didn’t mean it. Not in that way.

“I know I could rely on you, Seath. And the Pack is thriving in the absence of its Alpha. What does that tell you?”

Seath blinked. “What do you think it means?”

“I think we can do something different here. No bloody fight for power, no waiting until the death of the Alpha. A change in leadership, peaceably handled. We can give the world something it hasn’t seen before, but I’ll be damned if I am going to wait around here to die when this is the right move now.”

A sharp breath pulled into Seath’s lungs. “I would never have fought you for leadership, Greene. That’s not the way of our pack. It’s not my way.”

Greene’s smile turned indulgent. “I know that. But other Packs, Seath. You should see what happens. The fighting. The battles for power. Our pack is unique. You are ready for this. I am still Pack. I can move to CFO, if you would like. But it needs you at its head and Lycan at its heart.”

Seath’s head lifted at the knock at the door, and Evan, Greene’s magical assistant came in with a tray of fresh coffee.

Teller, the Elf bodyguard, opened the door for him.

Something passed on the air, but all of them had their scents locked down in some way.

Seath had learned from Lycan to look beyond his nose, and wouldn't Caine be proud of that. He noted the look Greene had for Teller and Evan, the way his eyes pulled to them, and the way they both stood close to each other, regarding Greene in a silent checking-in.

Well, maybe it was more than the Council causing Greene to make these decisions. Seath watched as Greene caught himself watching Evan and Teller and saw as the Alpha shut down whatever he was feeling. The threshold practically sighed along with the two, who looked at each other in a knowing way when Greene withdrew his attention from them.

So, maybe not?

“Anything else you require, Councilman?” Evan asked, and Seath could swear there was a bit of sass to the tone. In the short time they had been there, neither Teller or Evan had called Greene Alpha. He wasn't their Pack Alpha, of course, but as an honorific, it could still be used. They hadn't used it, only “Councilman” and Seath couldn't help but wonder if there was some meaning to the word choices.

Greene looked flushed. “No, thank you, Evan. Teller.”

The two shared another look but said no more as they left. For a moment, Seath wondered if the witch and the Elf were



lovers. There was something unspoken there that suggested intimacy.

Seath watched as Greene's hands trembled slightly. "I am being pulled toward The Council in many ways, Seath. I have consulted with every consultant I know, and this is the right move. I know you are ready. The only question is *if* you are. When you are, the coven can do the ceremony and Pack Alpha will pass to you."

Seath let out a breath. "I wasn't expecting this."

A quick grin flashed over Greene's face. "Neither was I." His eyes strayed to the door that had just closed. "In so many ways."

They paused in a comfortable silence for a moment, each refreshing their coffee and considering the weight of the words that had just passed between them.

"Perhaps it was unfair for me to start with that line of talking. We have to think about the upcoming visit from Tremon and his people. All this Pack-talk can wait until after that."

"I don't know what there is to say. The astrologer was wrong. Prince Donovan is not meant for me, Alpha. Lycan is."

"And all the evidence supports that. Just look at the Pack. I'm behind you on this, Seath."

"I will not apologize. Not for Lycan. That's my hard limit. I will make reparations, if I have to, but I would remind

everyone that it was Tremon's astrologer who predicted us as fated."

"Tremon is refusing to make demands until after we meet. So, we will prepare for all the eventualities, and see which one it is that appears."

Seath ran with Lycan, spending every moment they could spare together. Luke and the coven were in agreement that the best thing would be for Lycan to spend a lot of time in his wolf form, and he did. Within a week, his shifts came easily. For his part, Seath remained in awe of the beauty of his mate.

"You are worried." Lycan accused him one evening as they finally relaxed in their nest together. Seath breathed in Lycan's scent, the last traces of his heat had left that morning. Lycan's heats were regular now, and he still began them in the omega-nests, just as the Alpha-Mate would. When he came to Seath, he was ready for what his Alpha had to give.

"Tremon Jokull is a known wizard, love. He's angry, and rightfully so, that the prince's betrothal is now in question."

"Tell me about him." Lycan moved, one leg coming over Seath's, causing Seath's breath to hitch at the intimate contact.

"I really know very little. Tremon is the prince's uncle. He stepped in when the prince's parents, the Queen and King, were killed. The Queen was Tremon's sister. Due to the unrest when that happened, we never met or started any courtship. There was no need. I was helping here when Greene was at the Council, and the prince was figuring out lines of succession and how to lead from his place in the line for the throne."

“What was the plan? You are Pack Legate and he’s a Prince.” Lycan’s head hammered hard at this talk. He knew now how to stay away from memories, but some things he had found still hurt to hear about, like a warning it could jog a memory. This talk was dangerously close to having his stomach rolling, but ever since his wolf had come, since the last coven, he had been much better at controlling how he reacted even to the sharp memories. He couldn’t get to them, but the pain of them was lesser when he stumbled upon them. Luke and Caine believed it to be the fast-healing powers of his wolf.

Seath pulled Lycan closer, adjusting so his mate was comfortable in his arms. “Donovan is not first in line for the throne. He has older siblings. Notably, an older brother and sister who would rule before he does. They are a monarchy, going by blood to rule and not strength or dominance. And in Taured, omegas don’t rule at all. Or haven’t. It is a point of political contention.”

“What about magic?”

Seath ran his hand over Lycan’s lean shoulder. “They believe the magic is in the bloodline and that is enough to lead.”

Lycan sighed, enjoying the feel of Seath’s hands on him. He was worried, more so than Seath, about the upcoming visit. His head hurt when he thought of Donovan or Tremon. In a way, it scared him. So close to those locked away memories it seemed. Maybe they had been locked away for a reason and a good one. But he didn’t want to tell anyone, didn’t want to

appear afraid of the man who had been pledged to Seath originally.

He was falling for Seath so deeply that if ...if Seath looked at Donovan and changed his mind ...Lycan tried to breathe but it was hard. The idea of Seath loving another was too great for him to contemplate for long. Something told him that if his wolf-healing had not been restored these thoughts would be even more difficult to have.

But the truth remained. Seath had been swayed away, quickly, from Donovan. Maybe that was fate. But if it wasn't ...Lycan's head pounded and not from locked down memories this time. Seath was a good man, a good Alpha, and Lycan felt what they had surpassed everything he had ever felt.

The feelings were strong, clear. As clear as the mating mark on his neck. He had nothing to worry about.

And then his head got involved.

It wanted to worry about things like how quickly they fell together, how quickly Seath had left the mate foretold to him. How he himself was still putting pieces of himself together and maybe had been easily swayed.

As Seath drifted off, Lycan pressed the gold shimmer of his mating mark. There was no doubt that was the mark of a fated mate. Would Tremon and Donovan come to challenge the mating? Or simply demand some sort of reparation. Lycan shivered, leaning into Seath, who ghosted a kiss on his lips, before turning him, spooning his back to Seath's warm front.

Lycan drifted then, Seath's larger body protecting him in their nest.

Seath had a dream, and not one he enjoyed. In his dream, a young man stood before him. Beautiful face and omega-perfect body.

But not Lycan.

In the dream, Seath could not move. The omega could, wrapping himself around Seath. It felt as if he was being touched with far more than two hands as the beautiful omega began to dance for him.

He was transfixed as he watched the omega move, and as the omega looked at him as if only Seath could fulfill the fantasies in his head. Heat pounded in Seath's veins, although he had gone to bed as sated by his talented mate as one could be. Right off a heat, no less, and all that had entailed for the past few days.

But this burned differently. The scent of the omega was there too, encouraging and enticing. Telling his cock to fill, telling him to breed the omega that wanted to seduce him.

Seath's body couldn't react, didn't want to. It knew its mate and this beautiful, sexy omega was not he. He could see the challenge light in the eyes of the omega, who danced closer, pressing body and scent against Seath.

When he still did not react, the omega became two.

Seath was rooted to the spot as the omegas — twins and identical in every way touched and kissed. Sharing intimacies

Seath thought were most likely too intense for the softness of most omega-play.

It was a fantasy image. Twin heat-mates. One popular in porn.

Still, he could see the scene for what it was. His body might not be hard and interested, but it made him want his mate. To feel Lycan's perfect body underneath him.

It was sexy, but it arose a need in him not for the omegas as they danced but for his mate.

Lycan's scent came into his nose, filling his senses and he woke up, face pressed into Lycan's hair. His hand was on Lycan's mating mark, stroking it as Lycan practically purred against him.

The scent of Lycan's arousal washed over him, and the strange dream flew from his mind. He had Lycan pinned down on their bed, and when the scent of his mate hit him, his cock filled at a speed that made his head spin.

He had the need for his omega to beg him, to call out for his need to be filled by his Alpha.

Lycan arched his back, and Seath growled his desire into Lycan's skin.

Rolling over, Lycan came with him, putting his Alpha on his back and kissing him until Seath was dizzy with it.

Seath wasn't sure what he needed from his mate after the dream, but Lycan knew. He slid down, peppering kisses and touches all over Seath, and settling between his thighs. Seath's

cock jumped as he watched Lycan back on his heels, dwarfed in size by Seath's legs. Lycan's hands moved over Seath's thighs, spreading them wider and Lycan bent over, sucking Seath down until he choked. Seath's hips bucked at the sounds of Lycan gagging on his cock.

He ran his hands through Lycan's hair and pushed up, using his mate's mouth. Lycan moaned, the distinct smell of slick making Seath's knot want to form already. Lycan released him long enough to kiss the bulge of Seath's knot, sucking hard on it and running his hand down the shaft.

Lycan took him in his mouth again, looking up at Seath with tear-stained cheeks from the effort. Seath's hips jerked up, and he took a mental image of Lycan's lips spread indecently wide around his shaft.

Fuck he was aroused now, and a mouth was not what he wanted. Sensing his needs, Lycan popped off his cock as loudly as possible and moved to straddle him. In a flash, Lycan was sinking slowly down his cock. When he was fully seated, Seath steadied his hips.

"Stay there." Seath sat up and felt Lycan shiver as Seath's cock moved inside him with the effort. Keeping Lycan still and full of him, he teased Lycan's nipples, sucking hard. Lycan wanted to move, to squirm, to ride Seath's cock, but Seath kept him still.

Seath moved to the other one, sucking and nipping. Lycan's mouth was open in pleasure, needy sounds falling from his lips

as Seath continued. Seath's other hand began tugging on the nipple not being assaulted by his mouth.

Lycan's slick flowed as did precome from his cock, and Seath pushed up, deeper into his mate.

Then Seath started moving, and Lycan began to beg his Alpha for release. He chanted how he wanted Seath's come. In his hole, in his face, rubbed into his skin.

Seath grabbed Lycan to him, his strength allowing him to take Lycan in his arms and walk on his knees to the top of the bed. He pressed Lycan's back to the headboard, and sat the omega's ass on his thighs, never slipping out of his body.

Lycan's legs were pressed against Seath's chest as Seath bent him almost in half and turned him into an open hole, pounding deep into his body.

Lycan practically bounced off of Seath's thighs as Seath took his pleasure.

"I love you, mate." Seath breathed.

"Love ...you...." Lycan moaned as he came all over both of them, untouched with pleasure racing across his face and down his body.

Seath couldn't handle anything past that. He thrust deep into the still quivering body of the man he knew fate had made for him and came apart.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

# Tremon Visits the Northwest Pack

“**T**remon and his people are settled at Brightwater House, Alpha.” Jamie hovered at the desk after giving his report, and Briar came in after. Brightwater was an older home that had been lovingly restored and was now perfect to house guests. It was a bed and breakfast owned by the Pack and due to its history and location near both the vast forest and the sea it was almost always booked. But, Jamie had worked his magic, and it was now holding the entirety of Tremon, Donovan, and their contingent.

“Security sweep is complete with no problems.” Briar paused and Seath looked up.

“But?”

Briar frowned. “Most of the group have their personal shields locked down, as expected. Difficult to get a read for anything. We should still be vigilant.”

Seath rose to put a hand on her shoulder.

“Briar, if there is a problem, I know you will handle it. I trust in that.”

Briar nodded sharply. “I don’t trust them, sir. And I have nothing to base that on.”

Seath nodded. “You have your instincts, and that’s good enough for me. I agree that housing them out at Brightwater was wise. They are settled and tomorrow we will see what all of this is about.”

“Will you go there today?” Lycan asked. Seath nodded, although it was strange for Lycan to ask. Now that he worked with Seath in the office, he knew Seath’s calendar even more than a spouse would.

There was something raw and fearful in Lycan’s eyes, and Seath did not like it. He would have a talk in private with his mate before he made a formal greeting this evening to their guests.

Lycan, of course, had his own matters to attend to, so Seath found himself with Luke and Caine before he could get Lycan alone.

“What is bothering you? Is it this meeting?” Caine asked. The vamp would be going, he insisted on being able to judge Tremon in person.

“Lycan is acting ...strange. I can smell fear, and I can see it.”

“You can’t blame him. You rescue him, he becomes the Alpha-Mate, and now here is your former intended?” Caine surmised.

“You think he questions us? I told him I love him.”

“That’s wonderful, Seath.” Luke smiled, but it made Seath realize he had only told Lycan in the middle of sex, and maybe that made it mean less in a way. He frowned.

Caine put his hand on Seath. “I think Lycan worries you will take one look at the prince and change your mind.”

“My mind and my heart know who they belong to.”

Seath’s head snapped up, seeing Lycan come in at the end of that statement. Good. Better he know about Seath’s feelings. Caine and Luke slipped out, letting them have the moment and the room.

“Do you worry about this, Lycan?”

Lycan’s hands fisted then released. “He’s very stunning. I looked him up, and I saw him when he arrived, and the astrologer said—“

“I do not need an astrologer to tell me what I know, mate. I don’t need that gold mark on your neck or how we respond to each other, but if you need evidence, there it is.”

Lycan’s head hung a bit, as if he was upset at himself, and Seath couldn’t have that either. Seath tilted Lycan’s head up, capturing his mate’s mouth in a sweet kiss.

“I meant it when I said I love you, Lycan. I. Love. You.” He pressed his forehead against his mate’s. “We have so much to still uncover about each other, but I’m falling for you, Little Wolf. You are my mate. By fate. By choice. This is just housekeeping to set right.”

Lycan shook his head but smiled just the same, smelling pleased but conflicted.

“I’m falling for you too, Seath. And it’s a lot. I don’t even know—”

“I know,” Seath sighed into a soft press of his lips to Lycan. “You are still finding yourself. But please know my feelings are deep, mate. And very real, the timing be damned.”

Lycan wrapped his arms around Seath’s neck. “Okay.”

Seath nuzzled Lycan’s neck at the mating mark. “I smell like you, and you know that. And that’s how I’m going over there for this first meeting.”

Lycan sighed into Seath’s neck, hating how he needed reassurance, but craving it just the same.

“I trust you Seath, it’s just ...” Lycan trailed off, searching for the words he couldn’t find easily. “This whole thing, Taured, Donovan, it...” he didn’t know how to describe it. It hurt, to be honest. It tugged his mind and hurt his body. It drained him like nothing else did, making spots swim before his eyes if he thought too long or too hard about it. Thankfully, he could shift and heal from those effects. But, this morning had been difficult, as if the mind-magic wanted to weigh him down, to pull him through sand. Nothing good would come of worrying Seath, though.

No, Seath had enough on his mind without Lycan’s fear and his physical barriers. So, Lycan forced a smile.

“I trust you, Seath. But, thank you for understanding how difficult this is for me. I’m going to go spend some time with my wolf. If not, I’m about to rub myself all over you so you smell very pungently like a mated Alpha.”

Seath smiled, smelling content with that answer.

“Go. I’ll come to bed as soon as I can.” He kissed his mate deeply. “You can make me smell like you all you want tonight.”

Greene, Seath and Caine, along with Briar and Teller, made their way over to Brightwater in the pack vehicles, despite how close it was to the Pack House.

The old home had a very large downstairs area, and that was used to make the introductions of the small group Seath and Greene had intentionally put together. The contingent from Taured was much bigger and Seath had hoped it would put Tremon at ease for them to arrive outnumbered.

Tremon kept them waiting, of course, and then strode into the room with far too many guards, managing not to signal his fear, but a certain distrust of the Northwest Pack.

Greene and Seath were announced, and then Tremon and Donovan. As Greene and Tremon walked over to chairs and couches that had been placed in the large drawing room for their informal meeting that night, Seath noticed Donovan for the first time.

He was beautiful, that was no doubt. Slim and pretty, but he never spoke, never looked up, hardly. If anything, Prince

Donovan seemed cowed or simply shy, perhaps. It was hard to tell.

There was something familiar about him, but Seath didn't want to stare, lest it be taken quite the wrong way by the people in the room. He could be Lycan's cousin, with the similar coloring and look. One thing for sure was the complete lack of draw to the man. The complete lack of spark for anything.

The opposite of his beautiful, smart, capable mate waiting for him at home.

Greene's low rumble finally got them down to business, after pleasantries that Tremon barely acknowledged. Greene made sure that everyone had tea, and dessert, although the group would have already been fed when they arrived. This was no state dinner, of course, but it was prime fare, nicely done and plentiful, since Tremon seemed to have mostly brought his soldiers. Or at least people who looked to be big men and women with big appetites.

"Yes, well, the arrangements are suitable," Tremon said waspishly. "As well as could be expected here."

"If there is anything—"

Tremon shook his hair, not blond but not quite brown, either, staring down a long nose.

"Anything? We should not be here except for a union of Seath and Donovan. We all know that to be the case. I won't plead our case to you, but that is the long and short of it. These

comforts you offer fall short because we should not be here in the first place.”

Teller stepped closer to Greene, and Seath could see an almost imperceptible shake of Greene’s head to the bodyguard.

“I know this situation is not ideal. But it is what it is, Tremon. The mating mark has been made and has held. There is no denying that. For whatever reason, the betrothal was not well taken from the beginning.”

Tremon’s gaze became hard, dark eyes glittering dangerously in his face and Seath could smell the burning tinge of magic, as if Tremon was trying to reach for it. He couldn’t, of course, not with the threshold wards over the house.

“I will agree to no such conclusions. You violated a sacred oath, as did your Legate. And you intend to do so without consequence. It will not stand.”

“And what about the prince?” Seath interjected. As it was, the man still had not seemed moved.

Tremon’s focus changed. His precise, daggered look to Seath morphed to almost a glazed look at Donovan.

“You have no right to speak to the prince or of him, shifter,” Tremon spit out.

Greene sighed, knowing any further offer of hospitality would be met similarly. He gestured to Seath, and they stood to go. They had done their duty, had met with Tremon and offered the best they could in the situation.



Seath's gaze landed back on the prince. Something was off about the man, but he couldn't place it. Maybe something about his features, but his mind couldn't place what it was, exactly.

"I appreciate your travels and the effort to do so, please let the Brightwater staff know if anything can be done to make your stay more comfortable."

With that, Greene stood to leave, and Seath followed. Caine unfolded himself from the armchair he had settled in, and walked in step with Seath.

On the way out, Donovan's gaze didn't even drift to him. But, the light shifted in the room as the threshold let in a bit more of the evening glow from outside and cast a strange shadow across Donovan's face. Seath almost stumbled, unable to put his finger on what he saw in Donovan's face, but still being taken aback by it.

"Are you okay?" Caine asked as they eased out the door to Brightwater.

"I had a strange dream last night, and Donovan was in it."

Caine raised an eyebrow, but Seath shrugged. The dream had been odd, but the omega dancing for him in the dream was nothing like the detached prince he had just met. Although, they had looked the same.

"Did you detect anything?" Seath asked once they were back in the SUV, headed to the Pack House.

Caine's mouth went into a tight line. "I have some theories. For a short meeting, that was most enlightening."

"Do tell?"

Caine gave a sharp shake to his head. "I will need to follow up on something, as soon as we get back."

And he did. As soon as they exited at the Pack House, Caine disappeared with vamp speed. Seath and Greene conferred for a few moments, but it was clear Tremon was waiting to discuss things formally, and so all they had really accomplished was being good hosts.

Seath sighed as he walked to his rooms, happy to have Lycan's arms to fall into.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

## The Pack House Has a Say

**B**y the next morning, Caine had made it back from whatever errand had taken him away the night before and he and Luke flanked Seath as they watched the procession of Tremon and his entourage make their way to the Pack House.

The Council representatives had arrived first that morning, and breakfast had been the sort of stuffy, political affair Seath hated. He had only been able to think of how much better, and easier, it would be when Lycan could be there with him. He was much better at those things than Seath. But it wouldn't be appropriate today, given the context of the meeting and why the three Councilors were here in the first place to show-off Lycan in his rightful place on Seath's right. So that seat had remained empty for the entire meal as no other solution seemed wise.

Greene, of course, stood at the head of the receiving line in the foyer. This time as Alpha of the pack, and the three Council members next to Seath. They would hear the issues

Tremon had and come to a consensus, a ruling of what should be done due to the broken bond between the two countries that were both members of The Council.

Seath shifted his weight. The threshold was tense, but the worry rolling off his mate was too much for him to handle without wanting to offer comfort. A move he shouldn't make. Lycan stood to the side, by Van and Trav, overseen by a protective Puck. Even Teller, who seemed focused at all times on Greene, had placed himself strategically in-front of Lycan, as well. Caine, of course, was there, fangs ready for anyone who looked at the Little Wolf sideways.

Seath gave the cheetah Alpha Puck a nod of appreciation. He liked that Puck was so close to Lycan — just in case. And Puck nodded solemnly in return. He took his protection of his friend and the Alpha-Mate seriously. Van and Trav were close to Lycan, and Puck was a good Alpha, looking out for everyone he cared about, and that included the heat-mates of his omega.

From the scents in the air, the tension, it seemed, was getting to everyone.

Up the drive came Tremon and his people. In long flowing robes and official dress, he looked part military captain and part warlock. The rest of his people were dressed smart in the clothing that would easily be found in the well to do of any Council nation.

The wide front doors of the Pack House were open, with Greene and Teller on the portico, and everyone else visible just

inside the grand foyer.

Tremon did not stop to regard the Pack House. Instead, he marched straight for the door.

At the top step, Tremon's advance was halted, as if he had been slapped in the face. He smoothed his clothes in an attempt to recover from whatever had set him back on his heels.

"What is the meaning of this, Greene?" Tremon spat, color high on his cheeks as he remained on the top step and no farther, at a sort of standoff with the Pack that remained scattered across the top of the portico and the inside of the Pack House.

Greene stepped forward and pushed against the air. It didn't budge, as if there was some invisible barrier there instead.

"Let our guests in." Greene's Alpha voice made everyone want to obey, but of course, there was nothing they could do to effectuate the order.

"I don't believe that Threshold magic obeys an Alpha voice." Caine smoothly slid over to Greene. He stayed a deferential step behind and saw Tremon's judging gaze. In return he sent a predatory smile that made Tremon swallow hard.

With Greene's nod to proceed, Caine stepped forward and also pushed against the air, although he let his fingers rake across it, as if he was inspecting the grain in a piece of wood.

“It appears the Threshold magic does not trust you, Tremon.” Caine dropped his hands. “Any reason that would be?”

The flush on Tremon’s face grew deeper in color as the three Council members whispered among themselves.

“What is the meaning of this! I demand—”

A thunderous crack cut through the air, not booming, but loud.

Mirelle appeared beside Tremon. Lycan didn’t laugh, but almost. The Fae representative from the last coven met his gaze and nodded, and he nodded back. Where Caine preferred to make his entrances unannounced apparently the Fae liked to be recognized when they entered the space.

Tremon started, and almost took an obvious step back from the Fae.

“Threshold magic is old magic. Certainly, it has its own mind.” Mirelle reached out a hand, as if she was stroking the invisible entity that was playing games this morning. Petting its head like a cat.

“We are here to settle the matter of the Pack Legate’s denial of his fated bond to the prince, not play parlor tricks.” Tremon had drawn to his full height, features flashing dangerously. “I do hope the Council is taking into account the rudeness that has been shown to my people today. I demand we be heard.”

“Surely even Taured knows that Threshold magic has its own mind. No one is trying to stop you from bringing your

claim,” Caine uttered the words coldly.

Before Greene or Tremon could comment, Mirelle laughed.

“If that is the issue, then your complaint shall be heard, Tremon.” She clapped her hands, and the sound was much louder than it should have been.

A whooshing sound came on the heels of the clap, throwing everyone off balance for a moment, and then they found themselves in a beautiful autumn glen.

It was carved out of the forest as if made for the purpose of housing them, and Caine was sure that was exactly what was intended. The trees of the old forest made a circle. Overhead, branches intertwined to a canopy only a Master Gardener could achieve. Below, the ground was mossy but not wet, solid, but not dusty. It was a room of sorts, created from the forest itself.

Seath had moved to Lycan’s side, standing between the omega and Tremon. Mirelle, who smelled amused, stood in the middle between the Pack and Tremon’s people.

“Will this not suit better?” Mirelle asked as the Council members murmured at the strange turn of events.

Tremon watched warily as Mirelle smiled, and the Prince looked bored.

“Where are we?” Lycan asked Van, but Caine too had drifted close to him and heard.

Seath started to shake his head, but Caine paused him with a hand to his arm.



“You are now in the Seelie Court, Lycan.” Caine strode forward, back to Greene’s side. *I would caution you there are rules here. Do not eat or drink of anything. Take nothing with you.*

Caine sent the warning over the pack link, but Mirelle laughed.

“The vamp is right, Little Wolf. We have come to crash the party, or at least, move it to a more convenient location.” Mirelle’s smile was dazzling. White teeth flashed against ebony skin and a dewy complexion that gave the appearance of youth, although her blue eyes held the wisdom of age.

Caine knew she could hear the link, and he smirked. Seath caught Caine’s eye and nodded his thanks at the vamp, for not only giving them the information, but also letting them know about the link being overheard. Always cool, always crafty, Seath trusted Caine in these situations.

“You have no jurisdiction here!” Tremon said, eyes blazing, and anger stoked to the point he all but roared. “This has nothing to do with the Fae.”

“We believe that it does.” A commanding voice called out over them all. They all turned as the Seelie Queen herself strode into the glen. She appeared a bit older than Mirelle, her face still unmarked by lines or wrinkles, with honeyed hair that looked as if it had been braided with gold. “Are you not gathered for the pursuit of justice? To see what cannot be seen? Did you not demand a place to be heard for your grievances, Tremon?”

“Queen Titania...” Tremon started, paused, then seemed to collect himself. “I demand recompense for what this Pack has done to the Prince.” Tremon straightened to his full height, what appeared to be his tell in a stressful situation. “If you can set such justice, then I do not care where it is given, but there is no reason to bother the Seelie Court. Both our nations answer to the Council.”

The Queen smiled. “No bother. Our realm can aid, though, in seeing what wants to be hid den, if that suits you. Consider it neutral territory, the same that is so often provided to us in your realm. It is not my justice to give, of course, but the Council’s.” She gestured at the Council members who appeared a bit shaken at the announcement but also seemed dedicated to not showing their discomfort. It could be the effects of whatever sent them here. It was almost as bad as portal dust, but portal dust didn’t work between realms.

The Council stammered their apologies, apparently remembering they were to be in charge here, controlling what occurred. With wary looks barely concealed, they moved to where a typical Council hearing set up — three chairs and a curved table in front of them on a dais—had risen from the ground at the front of the clearing.

“Of course, this accommodation is well-met, Queen.” The Council member looked over at the group. “Your kindness will not be forgotten. We will be honored to hear the case in the Seelie realm.”

Before long, the Council seemed back in charge, ready to move the matter along, and suddenly seemed ready to do so, or perhaps they were just ready to take leave of the Seelie Court. Time did move differently here, and somewhere, an invisible clock was ticking.

“King Tremon and Prince Donovan.” The lead Councilor called. “What do you demand for the broken mating? Let us hear your proposal of terms to begin.”

Seath felt his spine straighten. This is what Tremon refused to discuss the night before.

Tremon frowned, his hand resting on the head of the Prince. “What is the price of such a thing? If the Pack Legate no longer wants his fated mate, we cannot force him, but the lack of bond will harm the Prince. That is well known, of course. Fated mate bonds want to be completed. Not only that, but he must now reintegrate into Taured. We had not planned for that, assuming he would be part of the Northwest Pack. There are secession plans to consider, as well as his own health from the unformed bond.”

Greene’s eyes went to Seath with a warning, and Seath remained quiet.

“We all know the fated mate bond can be painful if not completed. However, we would welcome Prince Donovan into the pack if that would help. He could remain close to Seath, if he wanted.” Greene offered.

Everyone could feel the tension roll off Seath, although he tried to hide it. He was against this idea of Donovan as his

fated mate persisting. Instead, he wanted to set the record straight. But he understood Greene's words, that's why he was the representative to the Council. He hadn't actually agreed with Donovan as a fated mate in his words to the Council, and for an opening volley it was a solid one.

Not that Tremon could take the offer. Tremon couldn't possibly be thinking to send a rejected omega to live in the pack of the very Alpha who rejected him? It was almost unheard of. Cruel. Insulting. An offer that must be refused, put on Tremon so artfully by Greene to show the petty underbelly of the whole business.

Seath smiled.

"Oh," Mirelle stated, not staying out of it although the Council was in charge now, or was trying to be. They were in the Seelie Court, of course, and the Fae had decided to meddle. "Do you have something to add, Pack Legate?"

Seath could feel the pull of the Seelie realm, wanting him to expel the truth. A sort of compulsion that ran in his veins. There was no room to hide in the Seelie Court, which might explain how the Fae got to be so artful in twisting words to both state the truth and hide it at the same time. He ground his molars until he was sure he was in control of himself.

"It was not intentional that I mated with Lycan. It was inevitable. Unstoppable. I will make sure Donovan does not suffer needlessly, which I think would include being sent to live in my Pack. He is welcome, of course, but not at the

expense of what is best for him. Everyone here knows of the pull of a fated mate...”

“A pull you don’t seem to have.” Tremon’s voice was icy, full of contempt.

“He,” Seath’s hand shot out so quickly it almost seemed of its own accord, pointing accusingly at Donovan “is not my fated mate!”

A hush echoed from those words and Seath stood his ground. He had not intended to be so direct in saying Donovan was not his fated mate, as much as he had intended to simply imply it. Damn the Seelie Court.

Tremon strode forward, a nasty smile playing on his lips. “So, it’s true. You aren’t simply denying him, you are denying the entire fated connection? The prediction of the astrologer?”

“Lycan is my fated mate.”

“So sure aren’t you? And yet my understanding is that this omega has been spellbound. Influenced by magic.”

Seath eyed Tremon wearily as the tall witch began to pace the clearing and Seath had the feeling he just handed Tremon exactly what he wanted.

“This omega,” Tremon said, not even bothering to act as if he was talking to Seath anymore. His strategy was apparent now. Instead of attacking Seath and thus the Northwest Pack, he would go after Lycan. “He came here with no scent, no memory. He is an unknown outcast. Using his omega charms he has seduced you, Seath, and you have allowed it.”

“That is not—”

“You agree you have no idea who he truly is. Where he truly is from. You have convened the most unusual covens to help him. Full of Elves and witches. A Vampire. And yet, he remains unknown, even to himself. Or so he says. Who is to say that the same magic that has spellbound him hasn’t also made you believe he’s your mate? Two covens and the magic remains. Do you deny the magic that binds him is strong?”

Seath took a breath, trying not to shift, not to tear Tremon limb from limb.

“The magic that holds him is dark and well-crafted. Anyone at the coven can speak to that.” Greene spoke, allowing Seath to collect himself.

“So, you agree. You haven’t rid him of the magic. He could be magically making you mate him. He played a helpless omega, and you fell for it. Prince Donovan should not suffer for your foolishness,” Tremon said.

“Do you deny the mark?” Seath’s voice boomed like the Pack Alpha he wasn’t yet, but would be.

“I deny its magical source,” Tremon said calmly. “Fated mate magic could be manipulated, just like any other. And you are a pack that heavily relies upon magic.” He paused, dark eyes gleaming with fury. “Or perhaps it’s just a tattoo.”

“Tremon—“ Seath’s voice was part growl, and even as he saw the delight in Tremon’s eyes at his reaction, Seath could not help himself. He looked to the Prince who was somehow

keeping his face unreadable, as if he wasn't quite following the conversation.

He didn't dare look at Lycan. Even in the muted realm of the Seelie Court, he could feel Lycan's distress. And why wouldn't he be distressed? Tremon was laying forth Lycan's every fear like presents under the tree at the Winter Solstice.

"I think we must get to the bottom of this before we go any farther, don't you, Councilors?" Queen Titania asked, breaking the tension between Seath and Tremon.

A tall, wiry Councilor in the middle nodded at the Fae. "That would be appropriate in order to determine what should be done here. It appears the fated bond itself is at issue. Are you making a proposal of how to accomplish that task? My understanding is that two covens have been called already and the omega remains partially spellbound."

The Councilor to the left, a rounder stern-faced man said, "Let's call the astrologer who predicted the match. That's the source of the bond that is said to be broken. I say we start from the beginning to sort out this business."

The other two murmured their agreement. And Mirelle smiled. "I volunteer to summon him to the realm, Councilors."

As she whisked off to do just that, Seath took a breath. He dropped back from where he was standing with Greene at the head of the group, and walked up to Lycan, taking the omega's smaller hand in his. He scented his mate, feeling his heart slow at having him near. He murmured assurances and love, and

Lycan murmured them back, but neither kissed like they wanted, merely stood close.

Donovan stood to the side, still apparently unaffected by the proceedings, but in close reach of a large Alpha who appeared to either be his helper or his keeper in some way. He seemed content just to watch his life play out.

Lycan, on the other hand, was beside himself. He understood the accusations Tremon was making, but he had no plan on what to do.

They were all quiet, subdued. No doubt that eyes and ears were everywhere in the Seelie realm.

The air popped and Mirelle was returned, with an old man in tow.

“Ah,” the third Councilor said, “it appears our witness has arrived.” Relief flashed on all of their faces, clearly happy to have things move along a plan they understood.

The old man looked over the group, an ancient sort of stillness to his countenance.

“Who calls me to the Seelie Court?” The man asked.

“The Council does.” The tall, female Councilor nodded to the group. “Jacob the Younger, that is you, is it not?”

“It is.”

“And can you tell us your occupation?”

“I am an astrologer. A mage of the tenth order.”

“And do you predict fated mates?”



For the first time, the old man's face twitched with a reaction. "Predict, no. I do not *predict*."

"We don't have time to parse words. Speak plainly. What do you do then?" The shorter Councilor asked, flipping his hand in irritation.

"Fated Mates magic is a singular sort. I have the ability to see it, to interpret it and to help those who are fated to find one another. The Fates speak to me."

"And do people seek your services? For this interpretation you speak of?" The Councilor was on a roll now, having clearly decided to take over asking the questions to Jacob the Younger.

"Yes. It is my life's work."

"Did you predict, er, *interpret* the fated mate of Prince Donovan of Taured?"

"I did."

"And did you interpret the fate of Seath Rawson of the Northwest Pack?"

"I did."

"And what was the result of that interpretation? Or those interpretations?"

"It was an unusual pairing — a human and a future Pack Alpha. I remember it well. They were fated together, of course."

A murmur went through Tremon's people, but Donovan still remained impassive.

Lycan's gut slammed tight. He wasn't meant for Seath. There it was, plain as day in the words of someone who could read the magic much better than he. What was this madness, then? This pull to Seath that he could not let go? Was he doing exactly what Tremon accused him of and tricking Seath, even unintentionally, with the spellbinding he still carried?

Even with his dim memories and those still locked down, Lycan knew Seath was the best thing that ever happened to him. This was where he was supposed to be. His home. His Alpha.

Anguish washed through him, sharper than any barbs on any memory. He was going to lose Seath, too, when all of this was over. His stomach lurched. If he had to choose between the mind-pain and this, he would take the mind-pain.

Tremon's sickly smile spread. "So, Seath Rawson and Prince Donovan are fated mates?"

"Yes."

The smile grew.

"Can you see the magic, here in the Seelie realm?" Caine asked, after checking with Greene that he may speak.

"I don't see the magic the way a witch would, vampire," Jacob said. "But if you are asking if I could reinterpret—"

"Is that something that happens?" Tremon asked. "Does fate change?"

“It does not.”

“But,” Caine persisted, “you could reinterpret, here in the Seelie realm?”

“I could. What is the meaning of this?”

“These people require proof,” Tremon said, “of what we all know to be true. That the fate of these two has not changed.”

Jacob again frowned quickly, but Caine caught it.

“I can tell you nothing has changed. The interpretation of the magic is the same that Prince Donovan and Seath Rawson are fated. There are no re-interpretations of the Fates.”

“So,” Caine asked, “there is fated mate magic between these two.” He gestured between the still impassive Donovan and a pacing Seath.

Jacob’s head gave a barely perceptible jerk. “As I told you, I cannot see magic between two people. I can only interpret the Fates.”

Caine nodded, moving closer to the Councilors. “So you are saying that you know Prince Donovan and Seath Rawson are fated, but you could not pick those people out of a crowd? In fact, you wouldn’t even know if Prince Donovan and Seath Rawson were right in front of you?”

“Correct. That is not how my magic works, vampire.”

Caine drew back, with a smile almost as quick and fleeting as Jacob’s had been.

Seath frowned, wondering what Caine was about and how to calm his mate, who seemed on the edge of panic.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

## To See What Cannot Be Seen

“As enlightening as that was,” Tremon’s words were cold and dark, both angry and dismissive of Caine’s questioning, “it only proves my point. There is a fated connection being denied here.” Something even darker crossed his face as he turned to the Councilors. “You asked me what I wanted from the Council, and it was, admittedly, hard to quantify. But, let me be clear of my complaint against this pack and this omega himself. Reparations for the fated bonding is one thing, but if the Council truly wanted to set things right, they would use the power of the Seelie realm to remove the false bond between Seath and this omega.”

Seath and Lycan shared a look of terror, Lycan turning pale at the suggestion. They stepped close to each other, Seath no longer standing to the side, but gathering Lycan close as the omega trembled, watching his world fall apart.

“What do you possibly mean, Tremon?” Greene asked.

Tremon turned toward Titania. “I mean what I say. This omega has obviously caused a false bond by his strange

spellbinding. I demand that the false bond be removed. That will solve the problem much better than letting this farce continue at the Prince's expense."

Caine strode forward, something commanding in his presence. "The Seelie Realm allows us to see what cannot be seen, is that not the truth of it? Would a coven in this realm not be able to undo the spellbinding left? With Lycan's mind restored, any false bond would fall away. We can solve two problems this day in the same stroke."

Titania moved to Lycan, giving Seath a look as she placed her hand on Lycan's head. "I can see the weaves, and the spelled knots in his mind. This is knotting magic and we could remove it here."

Seath's teeth were elongated, and he didn't bother to try and stop them. "No. You will kill him. We had to take precautions to do this in steps. Serepta, you..." He gestured helplessly at the witch who had been part of the receiving party, and thus part of the group now at the Seelie Court. She strode forward at Seath's command, face set in determined lines.

Titania herself cut him off with an apologetic look at Serepta. "It will not kill him. It will be difficult for him, but shouldn't be fatal. The witch can disagree if she would like."

Serepta looked at Seath. "It would not be fatal, Seath. Hard, yes. But not fatal."

Tremon came closer, and the hate radiating from his eyes was enough to turn Lycan's stomach as the man got closer, accusing finger directed at Lycan's sternum.

“This little omega. So quick to turn Seath’s head, weren’t you? Spellbound from his own origins,” Tremon sneered. “He’s been magicked down to his very bones and no one wants to consider that the same magic that obfuscated his scent and locked down his memory could also lead an Alpha to believe in a false fated mate? No one wants to believe that could be true or that this omega did it on purpose. You could just confess, omega.”

Seath stepped in front of Lycan. “Enough, Tremon.”

“And you,” Tremon didn’t stop, rounding next on Seath. “Letting yourself be drawn into the designs of an omega by thinking with your dick! Binding yourself to an omega whose origins you don’t know.”

“I know everything about Lycan I need to. You will not break our bond. I forbid it.”

A dangerous, dark light shone in Tremon’s eyes. “Is that so?” He rounded back on the Councilors. “Well, you heard it, did you not? You heard with your own ears how taken this Alpha has become due to magic. I demand we take action now and concur with the vamp. Let us remove those last cuffs to the omega’s spellbinding and see for ourselves his true nature. If the bond remains, then we will know it is true.”

The Councilor who had been a spokesperson for the group looked to each of them. “It does appear that we must get to the bottom of this now that the accusations have been made.”

Tension hummed off of Seath, and he pulled Lycan even closer, rubbing gently over Lycan’s mating mark. Seath was



trying to find the words to say, the thing that would turn the tide from this group harming Lycan in any way.

“If I may?” Mirelle who had been conveniently on the sidelines of the group, stepped forward. “We are in the Seelie realm. We can see here what cannot otherwise be seen. Especially the knots that may bind.”

“This is knot magic?” Caine asked, pale face shining in the strange light of the Seelie world. “Are you sure?”

Mirelle turned to him, face serious for a Fae, something that chilled Seath to the bone. “I glimpsed it at the last coven, vampire. Nine knots. Each bound with various magic. Not the same as the weaves your covens have already undone. Those nine are the anchors to the rest.”

“Caine.” Seath’s voice came as a warning, and he pulled Lycan against him. “Explain, please.”

“Knotting magic is ancient, Seath. Akin to hearth magic. When the knots are made, magic is woven in, enchantments from various gods spoken over the binding. That is what has spellbound Lycan, at the root. What holds his memories.”

Mirelle nodded. “Your witches know this, do you not, Serepta?”

The witch strode forward. “It is true. We have been researching a Girgordian knot solution. The coven could undo the tight weaves, but the knots are another situation entirely.”

Seath clutched Lycan tighter to him. “Girgordian? As in, which thread can you cut? We are talking about his mind,

Serepta.”

“And thus, why we have been stalled, Legate.”

Tremon had the dignity not to shrug, but still the action was implied in his stance. “A worthy sacrifice to understand the magic binding him. Can you not think of others? Of the greater good, Seath? I would have thought that was within your scope of becoming a Pack Alpha.”

Seath felt his teeth attempt to elongate further, as well as his claws, his wolf having a very clear idea of how to handle Tremon.

“If you don’t think he is up to it,” Tremon grabbed Donovan and gave what was an elegant shove forward. “Let’s begin with Donovan.”

“Donovan?” Seath asked, looking at the young man it was easy to pass over.

Tremon nodded. “In a gesture of compromise, I agree to have Donovan subjected to the same. Let’s check his mind for any spellbinding, first, if that is more acceptable to you. I’m perfectly fine with it.”

Donovan stood before them, and Lycan tensed as Seath focused his gaze on the young man. He was beautiful, of that there was no doubt. But he was also hard to focus on. Every time Seath tried, he couldn’t. Seath’s mind spun at the odd sensation.

“This is no simple thing you ask the Prince to undertake. He’s human.” Serepta hissed at Tremon, appalled by his

casualness. “To put a human through the coven for no reason is callous at best.”

Tremon’s eyes were blazing with anger. “He’s an omega, is he not? Are we not constantly told of their ability to withstand pain? A tolerance for handling such things well beyond mere Alphas? Let us be done with this. Delve his mind to prove there is nothing there and let’s move on to the one with something to hide. I will not have it be said that I did not attempt to be fair this day. The Prince can also be subject to the same as the omega.”

Mirelle stepped next to Serepta, and Seath could see the tension leave the witch. “As you wish, Tremon.”

Mirelle snapped her fingers and in the clearing a wooden table appeared. It was oblong in shape, reminding Seath and Lycan of the altar of stone the coven had used. It was smooth on the top, worn that way by years of use, as a butcher’s block would be, or the counter in the Pack House kitchens where Min tended her dough.

Lycan tried not to think of such things as butcher’s blocks right then.

“Our coven will be of the Fae. The vampire and the witch can join,” her eyes danced across the group. “And the Elf,” she added, gesturing at Teller. The Elf’s face was impassive, but he made no move from his protective stance around Greene. Only his eyes slid to Evan and they shared a long look.

Mirelle addressed The Council members. “You will be able to see what we see.”

Lycan's hand was cold in Seath's, but Seath used his larger one to put circulation back into it by rubbing circles into Lycan's skin. Greene noticed the small comforts they continued to give each other as the Council continued, and gave Seath's shoulder a reassuring squeeze.

For their part, the Council looked on with fascination as Donovan was placed on the altar, still impassive.

With as little ceremony as had been used for Lycan's coven, Fae appeared from the forest and merged around the altar. Caine moved to join, as did Serepta.

In Lycan's mind, a vision appeared, and a small gasp of the onlookers told him they saw it too.

The pulsing magic, the knots and weaves, Lycan could see them, but only fleetingly, as if covered in a gossamer cloud, the pattern obfuscated by some sort of mental slime. He saw the strain on Serepta's face, and knew she was likely working hard to make sure even the non-magic users could see.

"Knots upon knots." Mirelle said. "He isn't spellbound, but there is some magic playing on his mind. We can start with the cloud, what looks like a shimmer over it all to you. It must be removed."

Although their hands only moved slightly, Lycan could see the strands being pulled and moved. Greene and Seath had their eyes fixed on Donovan, though. The omega looked pale against the slab of tree. He whimpered in pain, head lolling from one side to the other.

“You are hurting him.” Seath growled the words. While Lycan might have been taken aback by Seath’s protective tone regarding another omega, the pain Donovan was obviously feeling trumped those thoughts.

Mirelle had a deep frown. “He’s not responding to the Seelie magic that should protect him. This is strange magic—“

Suddenly Donovan took in a rush of air, back arching off the bed in a sound of agony, before collapsing.

The picture in his mind flickered, the vision turning off like a television set and Lycan could feel the absence of life in Donovan.

Seath turned to Mirelle. “What happened?” He knew better than to believe what his eyes told him in the Seelie realm.

“The prince is dead.” Tremon said the words flatly, coldly. “And killed in the Seelie realm at that. It might be better for me that he’s gone, except now we must deal with this business.”

The floor of the Council chamber moved. Leaves and vines erupted from the earth, circled each other in what looked to be a fast-moving whirlpool. Then, they wrapped themselves around the body of Donovan, carrying it off the altar and on to the ground, where it remained in a cage of vines.

“This is the Seelie realm, and the Seelie realm will take care of its guests,” Mirelle stated.

Tremon turned to The Council. “I withdraw my original complaint and I wish to lay a new one. Recompense for the

murder of Prince Donovan and for the broken bond. The blame for both obviously rest at the feet of the NorthWest Pack.”

The Councilors gasped, eyes moving from the man in the cage of vines to Tremon’s new volley of accusations.

Tremon moved to grab Lycan, but Seath was quick to pull Lycan even closer, until the ground grew more vines, like ropes, that crawled over his feet, wrapped his ankles, and locked him in place. He went still, knowing the vines of the Seelie realm moved tighter the more one fought them. The vines were clearly sent for him and him alone, leaving Tremon free to grab Lycan.

“You don’t touch him,” Seath snarled, but Tremon only raised an imperious eyebrow.

Reaching out to where Lycan stood, staring at Seath intertwined in the vines, Tremon easily pulled Lycan away and pushed him toward the altar.

“He’s next.”

Lycan turned from the push back into Seath’s arms, which came around him with all the strength and love he had come to associate with his mate. It silenced Seath’s verbal protests.

“Seath,” Lycan said, his lips ghosting close to Seath’s, “whatever happens, I thank you for saving me that day. I may not know who I am, but I do know that I love you.”

Seath closed his eyes to the image burned in his mind of a too-thin Lycan on the ground in the woods, baring his neck to

the death-bite as Death looked on.

Seath pressed his mouth to Lycan's, the kiss salty with their tears. "I love you, Lycan. If you ever wondered if it was a love match as well as a fated one—don't."

"Council, perhaps we should pause to consider further action," Greene suggested.

Tremon looked ready to turn things physical as his icy glare hit Seath, but it was Mirelle who spoke.

"We cannot pause."

Seath tried not to be affronted. He would say to anyone else that he considered Mirelle an ally. But she was Fae and they were dealing with a surprising turn of events. He hadn't expected her to intervene, but was still disappointed that she didn't.

He felt helpless and terrified and Lycan was motioned toward the same slab that Donovan had been on. But, Lycan was at his core the spellbound omega he had found in the woods running for his life. And while he didn't have to bare his neck this time, he still squared his shoulders with the same sort of courageous surrender, kissed Seath as if it may be their last, and turned toward the slab.

"Seelie magic requires balance, counselors. These two men, Donovan and Lycan, are obviously connected by fate or magic or both. For the sake of the Prince," she gestured to the vine-wrapped man, "we must continue. There must be balance between the two," Mirelle said.

The vines cut into Seath because he could not relax, could not hold himself loose as he watched Lycan in the center of the table, and the coven reconvened.

Was Donovan even alive? Would his fate become that of Lycan, as well? But then, Seath noticed, Death wasn't here. They hadn't made an appearance, even with Donovan on the ground.

His heart ached, and a cool breeze let him know there were tears on his cheeks. That was his mate. His love. And in his time of need, all the Alpha power in the world didn't matter.

He couldn't help Lycan.

The now familiar picture formed in Seath's mind as the witches worked. The threads of Lycan's memories burned like bright metallic strands. Unlike the tightly woven plaits that had been woven with darker threads, these strands were knotted tight.

Serepta gave a little gasp and then a hum. "Nine knots each."

"What does that mean?" Tremon snapped.

"The wolf is spellbound, no doubt there. Magic knotted into his memories, as the witches said. We cannot cut through in a Gregorian fashion, but we have to untangle, instead. This is not the same as Donovan. That was shielding magic of his own mind. Something he placed on himself that grew. This magic has been laid upon the wolf and not by his own hand."

Caine looked to Seath. "This will not be easy. But, here, and with the Seelie magic we can see what we could not before."



“Nor without its share of pain, which I am sure he can and is willing to suffer.” Tremon added, almost sounding bored.

The vines tightened further.

“Seath,” Greene warned, and he tried to relax.

Caine dropped to his knee in-front of the Seelie Queen, who had remained silent as she observed the proceedings. Caine’s actions had her coming to action.

“Don’t bow to me, Caine,” the Queen demurred with a smile Seath couldn’t read. “I might start to think you mean it.”

Caine gave her a smile and then straightened to perform an elaborate bow and kissing of her hand. “You can see the unseen, truly.”

“We are here to resolve an issue, are we not?”

The image of the weaves of magic in Lycan’s mind once again came forth to Seath and the others in attendance.

“I ask your opinion of it, that is all, your grace.” Caine said easily, and the Queen twitched a smile. “And perhaps your guiding hand in this important work.”

“Old magic, knotting magic. This is hearth magic, turned dark,” the Queen mused, her eyes unfocused as she seemed to look beyond the picture displayed for her in her mind. She moved close enough to the table to lay a gentle hand on Lycan, and the picture changed, as if someone had moved forward a slide and then zoomed far in.

What they all could see was a large weave with nine knots. And into those nine knots were the strands woven throughout. This was the anchor point.

“I can undo this, but,” Titania’s gaze found Seath and she flicked away the vines, “he will need to recover, after. Can you take care of him?”

“Yes.” Seath nodded.

The Queen then focused back on Lycan. “We should begin. Your time in this realm is almost up.”

The coven drew close, and the Queen seemed to pause. She linked into the power of the witches, and Caine.

“Follow my lead.”

It was still and quiet. No scents for Seath to catch, no sounds in the woods. The entire realm was keyed to its Queen, and its Queen was deep in thought and magic.

“By knot of one, the spell’s undone.” Titania’s voice seemed otherworldly, the words formed as if on a foreign tongue and translated.

The coven followed, repeating the rhyme.

“By knot of two, it endeth true.”

Seath watched with the rest as the tight tension on the strand that anchored the nine knots began to relax. The first knot was slowly unbinding. Then the second.

“By knot of three, thus it no longer be.” Lycan gave a bit of a sigh, a whimper as if he was running a marathon. But the third

knot loosened and the earlier knots began to give way, too.

Seath longed to reach for Lycan, to lend him his Alpha strength. But, Lycan was the lone wolf in the woods. The strongest wolf he knew.

Greene leaned into Seath's side, perhaps fortifying him with his own magic.

Seath walked forward a bit, and no one stopped him. The vines allowed it. He slipped through the ring of people and reached out to Lycan, and heard his mate take in a sharp breath at the touch of Seath's hand to Lycan's ankle.

"No influence here, Seath," Caine warned. And Seath nodded, stepping back with leaden feet. He didn't trust himself not to lend energy to his mate in this work.

"By knot of four, 'tis weakened more."

"By knot of five, no longer may it thrive." A shiver wracked through Lycan's body, as if it was possessed of its own means. He was pale now, sweat flowing from his brow and a low moan escaped him.

"To the end now," Titania cautioned. "No half-measures. It cannot snap back into place, we must keep unraveling."

Her breaths came labored, as did her speech. She wasn't sweating, but the work the coven was doing was deep into the magic and intense. At the halfway point, fatigue was evident on all.

"By knot of six, the end we fix."

Lycan's mouth moved, but no sound came out. His breathing was heavy and staggered as he worked to draw in a breath. A slow trickle of blood began to flow from his nose.

“By knot of seven, the Moon of heaven.”

A ripple then, across the surface of his skin. Lycan's wolf responding to the invocation of the moon.

“By knot of eight, the body of fate.”

A pause pulled through the group, and they seemed to move as one entity, racing to a conclusion.

“By knot of nine, the spell *unbind*.”

A whoosh of breath left Lycan and Seath could see the anchor knots fall away, and then the knots tied to that string, and the next, and the next. It was a domino effect of untangled knots flowing throughout the pattern they could see.

It was too much mind magic and Seath almost panicked, dark spots threatening his vision that was swimming before him as it was. The vines fell away, allowing him closer to Lycan, but then Caine's hand was in his, pressing Seath's hand to Lycan's rising and falling chest.

“Now you give him your energy,” Caine said, as Lycan screamed out in agony, clutching his head.

Seath grabbed for Lycan, holding him close as could be and lending him all the strength he had. He felt it pulse and flow out of him, Lycan's depleted state soaking it up like a sponge. The mating mark seemed dull along with the rest of Lycan's skin, and Seath rubbed it with one hand, while his other was

anchored in Lycan's hair, and his strong arms kept the omega pressed to him.

Lycan was cold, his mind a jumble of flashes and images. His breaths were still labored and heavy.

Then, the picture faded, and Seath could no longer see the maze of magic in Lycan's head. The omega leaned his head heavily against Seath's chest, exhausted to his core.

The Queen stood, staring at Lycan as if she were contemplating a puzzle and he was the odd piece that did not fit.

Her face went from impassive, to almost compassionate, to hard as stone.

“Well, tell us. Who are you, wolf?”

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

# Awakenings

**L**ycan felt the force of the Seelie realm on him at the Queen's demand.

He was weak, and a bit disoriented. In pain.

But, his mind felt lighter, open in a way it hadn't. And on it rested the demand of the sovereign of the realm.

He moved to sit shakily on the edge of the wooden slab, detangling Seath from him so he could and so that Seath didn't give him all of his energy.

He searched for Caine, and his pleading eyes, found the vamp already coming toward him. "I'm taking too much from him," Lycan whispered.

"I've got you, Little Wolf, and Seath too." Caine put a hand on Seath's neck for a brief moment, and then Caine sat on the other side of Lycan, helping to keep him upright.

Even in those seconds, the demand pressed against his chest as if to force out either his answer or the last of his air.

“What is the meaning of this!” Tremon was staring at Lycan with a look of sheer disbelief. He gaped, eyes wide and anger quickly following the disbelief. “What Seelie magic is this!”

“Your name!” The Queen demanded, voice louder and pressure greater on Lycan’s chest.

“Donovan La Pierre.”

The Queen huffed, turning as regally as she could, but eyes scanning each of the members of their party with a calculating coldness.

“What is the meaning of this? I ask again.” Tremon was staring at Lycan in the same disbelief. As if he had seen a ghost.

And perhaps he had. Lycan looked the same to Seath, but also not entirely the same. He watched as a sort of glamor fell off, it was as if every feature he had been attracted to was enhanced. The full lips became more so. The sharp cheekbones, the soft, shiny luster of hair—all of it was dialed up by matters of degree. Where before Lycan had been gorgeous, he now was stunning in his beauty.

Tremon looked in horror, as if some glamor had fallen away, too, in his eyes.

But he wasn’t Lycan, was he? He had given his name as Donovan La Pierre.

And that was the name of the Taured Prince.

That was the name of Seath’s fated mate.



The Queen was doing her sweep of the crowd, coming closer and closer to the spot where Donovan—the first Donovan—had been captured by the Seelie realm.

The entirety of focus was there now. The entirety of focus of the entire realm, it seemed, as everyone realized that if Lycan was truly Prince Donovan, that fact didn't account for the man in the cage of vines. That man was now a mystery.

Only Seath seemed to be able to focus elsewhere, on his mate.

“Reveal yourself, Morgan,” the Queen said with authority, her eyes ablaze.

Seath moved over, standing in front of Lycan—Donovan. Morgan was the Unseelie Prince, and if that was the Morgan Titania was calling out, the goddess only knew what would happen with him in the Seelie Court.

He could sense the danger in the air and saw Greene and others move to more defensive postures. Teller already had Greene behind him. But, no one gave them any consideration. The attention of the entire realm was following Titania as if this was the true business of the day.

The leaves and vines of the Seelie realm that were housing the man in what Seath had thought of as a cage, but that now looked more like a cocoon, fell away, but the man standing there looked much different than before. Gone was the regal blond who could have been Lycan's cousin. Instead, there was an even taller man with pale skin and dark hair. He was

beautiful in a cold beauty sort of way, and had an almost pixie-like ethereal nature.

Clearly Fae. Clearly dangerous. And, not as clearly at first, but obvious on a closer look, not nearly as powerful as one would think.

Seath could often feel the power resting in another, and this man had the feel of a depleted battery.

The striking man stood to his full height, stepping past the vines that had held him and his clothes of darkest black settling back around him.

“So that’s where you have been hiding. A King in Princeling clothing.” Titania’s voice was hard, the words a jest. Morgan was a prince, due to the throne but not yet ascended. The words seemed mocking somehow.

“One skin is as good as another, is it not? This one was more attractive than most.” Morgan was too cultured for a leer, but Seath felt it just the same. Aimed at Lycan—Donovan. He shifted his feet closer to a battle stance. No shifter would be a challenge for the Fae, but it might give Lycan — *Donovan* the time to escape.

“Your games do not get played in the Seelie Court, Morgan.”

He smiled then—a beautiful and horrible thing—and Seath and Greene shared a look. Was Lycan somehow involved in the unsettled nature of the Fae as of late? Was this some sort of insight they were being given into the true nature of what was going on?

“Bold of you to assume they aren’t already played here. You well know my games are being played everywhere, Titania.”

A cold breeze blew in, one Seath would feel as fall turned to winter: warm at first, then fading to a bitter cold, warning of winter’s imminent arrival. The cold increased, becoming icy enough Seath could see everyone take a breath to brace themselves.

And then Morgan was gone. As if the cold wind had taken him out of the Seelie realm. The wind picked up, Seath blinked, and in that moment the breeze appeared to bear him away.

Greene watched as Titania’s hands wanted to clench but she did not. Morgan had been granted access in, and that meant he had access out of the Seelie realm—a rule not even Titania’s powers could change.

For their part, the Councilors seemed to be watching warily at what was going on, unsure if they wanted this front-row seat to Seelie politics. Greene stepped up, worried the Queen’s wrath would find its way to them quickly. Whatever the tension in the Fae, it had something to do with this. Not them, really, but whatever had Morgan assuming other identities. As always, the human realm and the realm of shifters were nothing more than collateral damage to the larger schemes of the Fae.

Titania appeared to find her resolve, her face returning to a passive stillness. “I am glad you found yourself again, Little Wolf.” She nodded in Lycan—*Donovan’s*—direction.

The omega nodded back, looking lost and found and several things in between. Donovan was pale. Disoriented. Shaking. It reminded Seath of someone who was going into a delayed shock.

“I am sure you will have much to talk about, and recover from.” She turned to the Councilors. “For what the opinion of the Seelie Queen is worth, if this gathering was to determine if the Northwest Pack owed anything to Taured for the broken bond, I would have to argue that is now a moot point, is it not?”

The Councilors looked one to another, so Greene once again stepped up.

“I agree, your majesty. It appears Lycan is the true Prince Donovan. Therefore, no bond was broken. No murder perpetrated by this pack. The Prince and Seath are mated, just as pledged and just as was foretold.”

“The greater issue may be the appropriating of likeness, but I think that is the Prince’s story to tell and his to ask for compensation.” The Queen inclined her head to Donovan.

Donovan nodded, trying to rise on shaking legs. But, Seath caught him, sweeping him up into his arms and keeping him close.

“When he is ready, perhaps?” Seath asked, his eyes barely able to move from watching his mate.

“Of course. There are threads left undone by what was revealed today, but the business at hand is concluded.

However,” the Queen turned on Tremon as fast as a snake. “I trust that what was unseen has been seen here. Including your lack of involvement or knowledge in Morgan’s deception.”

Tremon began nodding furiously.

“But if,” the Queen’s face distorted from something beautiful to something ethereal and heavy and deadly, not unlike the UnSeelie Prince had done, “I were to find out differently, you might want to remember there is no realm I cannot enter. Not even a grain of sand under which I cannot search. I located Morgan, despite his best efforts, and you might want to reflect on that. If you rendered aid to his scheme, I would be forced to see that as an act of aggression against the Seelie Court.”

A silence filled the glen, even as her face returned to its previous beautiful countenance. Greene and Seath shared a look, careful not to project their thoughts.

The Councilor in the middle seemed to find her voice. “Of course. We dismiss any claims remaining against the Northwest Pack and leave it to the parties to settle the rest.”

Settle the rest. Seath’s mind spun with what that could mean. But for now, it had to mean getting his mate home to heal. Lycan’s—Donovan’s—mind may have been cleared of the spellbinding, but he could sense Donovan’s exhaustion. All the memories he had been protected from, those would be back now too. It was enough to challenge anyone. Seath wondered if they hadn’t been in the Seelie Court, if it would have killed Donovan to go through what he had so quickly.

“The Seelie realm revealed many things that could be seen in no other way,” Caine said to Titania, coming forward as the Councilors began disappearing back to the mortal world. “I know the Fae frown upon gratitude, but —“

Titania reached out and in a rare showing, gave Caine a squeeze. “Perhaps this time the gratitude should be mutual. I had no idea about your wolf, Seath. Greene.” She nodded to each of them. “I suspected one of them was Morgan in hiding. I did not know which one and so I could not show my hand.”

“Will Donovan be okay, going into our realm?” Caine asked.

She looked at Caine with an intensity Greene was glad wasn’t turned on to him. “I have shielded the effects as well as I can. His mate can help heal him, but it will take time. Donovan will have a story to tell, when he is ready. I would very much like to hear it.”

“Then you will. When he is ready.”

## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

# Mated to a Prince After All

Seath knew that taking his mate to their den was what was expected once they returned to the Pack House, but that ancient pull, the intuition that he knew to let guide him, called otherwise. He let Caine know where he was going, and pulled his mate into his arms, using the portal dust to get them to the hot springs in the forest below the Pack House. The stone grotto reflected the ocean's gentle roar, but this was a freshwater-fed spring. It was said to have healing properties. Seath didn't know about that. In the moonlight, it looked like it could, some sort of mystical place where magic lived as much as a man did.

"I should tell you all I know." Donovan's voice was soft, stilted, edged with pain as it drifted up from where Seath carried him.

Seath shook his head. "No, not now, mate."

His mate blinked up at him, confusion swirling in eyes that already held hurt and had since the Seelie Queen untangled his magic. She had given the instructions for a draught, and Min



had made it before they came to the springs. Seath was wary of even a recipe that came from the Seelie Court, but Caine had said it was not the same as food or drink itself. It had helped, now Donovan only looked like he needed a year or so of rest, rather than a decade.

“You are exhausted. Let me take care of you.” Seath carefully began separating Donovan from his clothing.

“I’m not going to break, Seath.”

Seath pressed a sweet kiss to his mouth. “No? Well, maybe I want to take my time. I ...” he let the swell of emotion that took over his voice, rising in his throat, settle back down before beginning again. “I didn’t know what was happening in the Seelie Court, and there was so little protection I could give you ....”

His hands mapped unblemished skin, looking for injury. The scars at his mate’s wrists gave a faint silvery white glow in the moonlight, almost healed but maybe never completely. There were no new scars, no external injuries.

“I’m just tired. Not hurt.” His voice was tired, but amused at Seath’s inspection. “My brain has whiplash, if that is possible.”

“Come here then.” Seath drew them both into the warm pool. “What do you want me to call you, love?”

A low moan of appreciation for the hot water escaped as the smaller man turned to sit on Seath’s lap. “Mate,” he said. “Lover.” He nestled his head against Seath’s chest, sighing

again as the Alpha's muscular arms encircled him. "Donovan," he whispered.

Seath used his big hands to tilt up Donovan's face to his. He had never seen anything as gorgeous as this man. Never. If he studied it, he could see the noble slope of the nose. The fine features of fine breeding. Even more beautiful than the man he had fallen for now that the last bit of glamour over him was gone.

But Donovan hadn't come to him fine-boned and delicate like china. Donovan had come to him strong. The strongest wolf Seath knew.

Now that strong wolf curled in the water on his lap, the water lapping at him and almost moving his body in its effort, because he had gone so pliant in Seath's arms.

"Does this mean it doesn't matter? Who I am?"

Seath kissed Donovan's head. "No, mate. I loved you anyway. Fated mate, or not, , doesn't matter. It was always just you. It may matter in other ways, but not this one."

They stayed there, in the warm water, holding each other, until Lycan's breathing evened out and the draught took hold.

Seath couldn't just portal into his den at the Pack House with the portal dust. Too many wards to allow that. So, he called on Caine, and wrapped up Donovan in the soft muslin sheets kept by the hot spring.

Caine whisked them straight to their den—his vamp speed close to portal dust, and waited as Seath tucked an already

asleep Donovan into his nest. Caine could feel Seath's thoughts racing and knew his friend would need a moment to sort his mind before he could sleep.

Caine had helped himself to the brandy Seath kept in the kitchen and took a long drink when Seath came into the room. Caine silently regarded Seath over the glass.

“Mated a prince, after all, did you?” Was all he said.

Seath laughed. Despite everything, the fear, the uncertainty, the utter insanity of merely being in the Seelie Court at all—here was Caine making him laugh.

He rubbed his face. “It does make certain things make sense, I suppose.”

Caine nodded. He had posed the theory of nobility, with his detective skills at play. Somehow, Caine made the smugness of not reminding Seath how right he was even more telling than if he had.

“Can't say even I saw that coming. Prince Donovan impersonated by the Unseelie Prince. To what end, do you think? And what of Donovan? Has he said anything about what happened?”

“He's too tired for that now. He needs rest. When he is ready, I'll let you and Luke know. As for the politics of the Fae?” Seath shook his head, “I would hate to guess. Something is afoot, but we all knew that. Unless Donovan knows something to share ...”

Caine smiled. It was a rare one. Not designed to flash his fangs, but a warm one for his friend.

“I knew joining this pack would be entertaining.” The vampire’s cold hand gave Seath a quick squeeze on the shoulder. “Go to your mate. I’ll be ready when you call.”

And that’s exactly what Seath did, curling tight against Donovan, who sighed the breath of a deep sleep long overdue and snuggled right back into Seath. Seath ran his nose along the mating mark on Donovan’s neck, unable to be so close and not scent his mate.

There was a part of him that wanted to claim Donovan all over again. To make him smell of him like he had that first night. Full of his release and sated, and . . .

Seath’s body calmed him. That wasn’t what Donovan needed right now. It might be what he needed soon, though, and Seath would deliver.

Explanations came in the morning with Min’s pastries. Donovan was not comfortable keeping things from his mate, or his Pack Alpha and the Legate. Or his friends. Too long he had been cloaked in secrecy, and he wanted no more of it.

It was comforting when he woke up to feel like the same person as he had before he knew who he truly was. Seath had given him some time to himself that morning, perhaps feeling Donovan’s need to sort his thoughts. But, he had wanted to wear the same things and have the same morning routine. In a way, nothing had changed except for knowing his own life’s story.

He wasn't treated any differently either. He had guessed that might happen. His own memories were now full of times he had been treated differently due to his royal status.

But last night, as bone weary as he was after the Seelie Court and all that transpired, Seath had given him a great gift. Not just the moonlight, the care and tender attention.

Those things made his stomach fill with butterflies and his heart soar.

But the greatest gift Seath had given him was of it all not mattering.

Maybe it would matter now—once the unknown of Donovan's past became something real. But as Seath's gentle eyes followed him across the room there was a softness there.

He settled next to Seath on the couch of Seath's study. It was easily Seath's favorite place in the Pack House, and Donovan's as well. Seath's scent and essence filled the space, giving a sense of comfort. Not only that, but seeing Luke and Caine in their usual spots made this seem less like a big reveal and more of just Pack business being sorted.

Donovan smiled as Van and Trav came in, too. His friends, not just Seath's and Seath gave his hand a small squeeze.

There were hugs, of course, the story of the unexpected trip to the Seelie Court one they were all discussing across the Pack.

Donovan took a steadying breath. Some of this he would have to tell the coven and Serepta, no doubt. Other pieces

would be carried around and people would have opinions about the Legate's omega.

Greene was not there, Donovan noted. And he squeezed Seath's hand back. More like Pack-Alpha, or soon-to-be.

"First of all, I should say thank you." Donovan smiled, wanting to clear his throat, but not. He had been taught to talk when there were difficult times, difficult truths. And he had been taught to do so with his back straight and his voice clear.

"I want you to hear that from me," he continued, eyes meeting those of everyone in the room. "The me you know, in case the me I am about to tell you about is different to you in any way that matters.

"It is true. I am Prince Donovan of Taured. My memories were restored at the Seelie Court. As that is a place where the unseen becomes seen and where truth is known, Serepta and Caine both were there and agree this is the truth of who I am."

Donovan made sure to continue the eye contact.

"I was a spoiled prince, and that's not something I can hide. The youngest of three, and a male omega. Everyone here knows Taured. You know our customs, what we believe. You might know an omega hasn't ever taken the throne there, although there is a claim to omegas being treated equally to Alphas."

In Donovan's mind's eye he could see the rolling hills. Olive trees and vineyards of his childhood. He could smell the scents of a salty sea and feel warm sun on the stone casement of his

window where he overlooked a world that was both his, and also never meant for him.

“I was not happy with my lot in life, but I accepted it. I was not content to be fragile, and demanded to be taught like my brother and sister. To defend myself, to do the things a boy does to gain muscle and strength and become a man.”

He held up his arm, flexing his thin muscle with a goofy smile. “It worked, marginally. There were, of course, those who disapproved of such antics from a male omega. But, the tide was changing, and I was trained along with my brother and sister, even as the lone omega.”

His eyes unfocused as the group laughed at his joke. He focused on what had happened that led him here.

“My parents died when I was young, putting my brother in charge. He was too young to rule, so my uncle stepped in. My uncle is not a bad man. But, he had no children, and did not want to be the handler of a teenage-king. But he did it. His views on omegas were more traditional than those of my parents. He wanted me prepared for my fated mate, not living my own life until the time came.

“It was—is—a point of great pride in Taured, for some, that I had a fated mate. I think Tremon was happier about the pairing and the prediction than he was about me even being gone. So, he hired someone to help me learn the ways of the NorthWest Pack. An omega-tutor.

“I hated her. Hated the idea that my future was not my own. The duties of the crown weighed heavily once my parents

died, and the idea of my life being chosen for me by some old seer and the stars was not something I wanted to accept.

“My brothers also were quick to talk about me being paired with a shifter, which was seen also as something below us. Despite the fact that as omega-mate to the Northwest Pack, I would have greater luxuries, greater freedom, than in Taured.”

Donovan felt the sting in his eyes. He had been incredibly foolish. The privilege of the young, to know everything and have the world so clear, only to live a little longer and know how wrong he was.

“You can call it the selfishness of the young, the hurt of a spoiled child who now had to grow up — but any way you look at it ...well, the burden rests on me.” Donovan kept talking but in his mind, he was back in Taured, meeting Lisette for the first time. He let his mind reminisce and his words follow for the group.

He told them how Lisette had come to tutor him and earned his trust. He told her things he had never told a soul. How he resented the jealousy of his other siblings who did not have a fated mate. How he resented the choices given to his Alpha siblings.

He had believed, naively, that telling someone, confiding in them would make the burden easier to bear.

It had not.

Instead, that dark seed of discontent grew and grew. He could hear whispers when he walked the halls. Whispers when



he slept, or more often when he didn't sleep because those same whispers had kept him up.

Inside, the dark swirl of hurt from losing his parents transformed into something dark and bitter.

Finally, it was time to make plans to meet his fated mate. He had heard the name, but refused to look him up, refused to see a picture of Seath Rawson. A child-like refusal to open his eyes and face reality.

And then, an idea had sprung forth.

Lisette had told him, two years into their student and tutor relationship, that there was a way to get rid of the fated bond.

“She what?” Seath said, gasping at the words. He didn't mean to interrupt, but breaking the bond was not a slight thing. Not at all. It had huge repercussions to try and as far as he knew, it could not be done.

Donovan cracked then, reaching for his mate's hand. His regal bearing didn't shift, but he drew in a deep breath of air, as if keeping his emotions in check.

“At the time, I wanted out of it. I was obsessed with the idea once it took hold. Lisette told me I would lose myself in this mating. Become nothing but the reactions to the whim of my mate. It was like something reached into my mind and refocused everything to that idea and how awful it would be, how I had to get out of it. I barely thought any thoughts other than those about how I could get out of the bond.”

Caine leaned forward, gathering each word Donovan spoke like apples from the harvest. “Did Lisette give you anything? A token? Something you would wear, perhaps?”

Donovan nodded. “A necklace with a pendant of Saint Solestecia. The patron saint of omegas in the dominant, conservative religion of Taured. I treasured it. I wore it in protest of the jewels and trappings of a prince. It was proof of my desire not to follow the path I was forced upon.” Donovan gave a little laugh, “Proof of an adolescent temper-tantrum, more like. What you must think of me.”

Seath was about to speak, but it was Caine who did.

“I think you were bewitched.”

Donovan shook his head, “Trust me, the ideas were my own. Let’s get into the second act before you are so sure of my virtue.”

Caine nodded for him to continue.

“This dark seed grew. Each day almost. It consumed my thoughts, weighed me down where it was all I could think about.” Donovan took a steadying breath.

“Lisette told me that my shifter mate would not want me if I was already shifted. That it would help to break the bond because my mate would want to be the one to turn me. According to her, that added to the control my Alpha could have over me. She even suggested it could break the fated bonds themselves if someone else did it. She said fated mates

was more a magical disease, one that could be cured by shifter healing.”

Seath clutched at Donovan’s hand, shaking his head. “It would not have mattered. Human. Shifter. This realm. The next. I would find you.”

“I know that now, mate.” His smaller fingers laced through Seath’s, anchoring him to the Earth. “And I am glad of the shift. I am glad to know my wolf.” Donovan paused. “So, that was the plan. I would take the bite. Someone Lisette knew would give me the bite, and Lisette would take care of me in hiding during the time it took for the bite to take hold and to recover from the change. Once done, I could shift and flee the city with people she knew. I would be free of the bond, free of the obligation I didn’t want. I could easily evade guards or others who wouldn’t know what I looked like in my shifted form. I could go live elsewhere as a wealthy young man as we had been secreting away money for months. No one from Taured would be looking for a shifter. It was the perfect cover.”

“What actually happened?” Caine prompted.

“The recovery from the bite was long and painful. I was left alone. No Lisette, no one else. When I awoke, the money was long gone. I never remember meeting my wolf after the bite, because when I came to after, I was with a caravan of people. I was chained in silver, drugged, unable to move. The life Lisette had promised me became a different one. One of constant moving. I belonged to the people. Lisette had taken

what money I had put aside for leaving Taured and had also been paid handsomely for me. And Lisette was right. No one was looking for a shifter prince. In the laws of the countries where we traveled, shifters were property. I was spellbound from the moment I can remember knowing what was going on around me. That made me an easy prisoner.

“Soon after I awoke I realized there was something wrong with my memories, with my mind and with my wolf. Now, I can remember thinking the problem with the wolf was because of the silver and the drugs.”

Caine leaned forward, a strange look in his eyes, as if he would like to find those responsible and tear them limb from limb. Seath himself was pacing, his wolf close to the surface. He had detangled himself from Donovan so he could shake out the pent-up energy he had.

“Do you remember the magic? When they spellbound you?” Caine’s focus was intense on Donovan and Seath had the distinct impression that Caine’s determination and focus on finding out who Donovan truly was would soon be transformed to tracking down this Lisette. Seath felt a chill at that. There was a good chance that whomever Lisette was, was also connected with the very dangerous Unseelie Prince, Morgan.

“Vaguely. That’s all still very shadowy. But it started from the beginning, in bursts. When I recovered from the bite, my memories of myself were already gone. I had no idea who I

was other than a shifter in a caravan of nomads that were traveling through the continent.”

Seath growled low, needing some outlet for the instincts that told him to burn the world to the ground for Donovan. To find who did this and extract the most severe and painful punishment he could. He didn't want the Council's form of justice here. No, he wanted something dirtier. Something more painful than justice. Something he did with his own hands.

Luke had been quiet, but he spoke now. “Normal recovery from a bite to turn a human is not long, but it can be painful. To have that drawn out over time I imagine was excruciating, and to not be able to see your wolf after.”

Donovan nodded, rubbing his chest as he did when he thought of his wolf.

“It's fine now, though, Luke. We are good.”

Luke nodded. “All the same, I would recommend that you spend some time in your wolf form — every day—keep the bond vibrant. Spend time shifted with your mate, too.”

Seath stopped pacing long enough to pull Donovan close, his thumb rubbing absently over the mating mark on the Prince's neck. “No worries there Luke; we will.”

“Things are about to get crazy around here,” Luke reminded them. “The Alpha ceremony will happen in a week, and I think the first guests are to arrive in days. Make time for yourselves. You will be Pack Alpha and Alpha-Mate in a matter of days.”

## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

# Alpha-Mate

**P**ack-Alpha magic was as ancient as hearth magic. And, as such, was full of ceremony, tradition, and meaning, but was not the long, time-consuming rite the modern world seemed to like.

But it was a novelty to the world. One that had captured a slice of the world's attention, and attention beyond the realms.

Good for the Pack to put their best foot forward and have the ceremony in a glen that echoed the ocean, but was lush with the forest.

It was not every day that a perfectly capable, young Alpha such as Greene turned over power to another. In fact, in some countries that sat on the Council it was seen as both an honor and a curse. An honor because of the high status and influence in decisions on a global scale. A curse because things at home could suffer at times with a leader stretched too thin.

Rare was a Councilor also the leader at home. Rare and short-lived. Rare also were the ones like Greene, who could

see his pack flourish under a different Alpha and know it was for the best.

He was rare that way, a large bear shifter with a heart of gold. He had been a mentor and a big-brother figure to Seath. And Seath would have been fine, content even, to remain the on-the-ground second in command to him as Greene served the Council.

But standing with Greene in the clearing of the forest they used for such ceremonies, with his feet in the very dirt of his pack, the scents of both the forest and the sea in his nose, it felt right.

The magic felt right. The things that made him a shifter, the things that made him a man were in harmony. The same familiar feel of the magic that had reached out on his Raising Day, and before that, during the Alpha trials when he proved himself the next Alpha, reached out again. It was comfortable, like a favorite sweater or meal you enjoyed as a child, or book you had read several times throughout your life but always managed to hold a new meaning in its pages, no matter your age when you read them.

The oath rod was a sacred object, kept by Serepta for their pack, and with it he pledged the oath of an Alpha. To provide. To protect. To listen.

Greene released his same pledge; by transforming it now to counsel, to protect, and to guide.

After the oath, when they embraced, Seath could feel the oath. Light as a feather, but heavy as a rock with



responsibility. It was a burden he was happy to shoulder.

It didn't pass his notice how Greene's assistant and bodyguard stood close, as close as shifters would, and radiated the same concern toward the former Pack-Alpha. Those two were in sync, especially where Greene was concerned.

Seath had seen it for himself at the Seelie Court. There was no doubt the bodyguard Teller would have protected Greene at all costs. Not that Evan was any less fierce. He was built more like Donovan. But Seath knew how fierce Donovan was, and knew in his own way, Evan would be the same.

Especially where Greene was concerned.

It was Evan who took a sharp breath, causing Teller to instantly put himself in-front of Greene and Evan both with a graceful pivot and a sweep of his arm, that alerted Seath to the pull of the threshold. They weren't in the Pack House, but still lingering in the clearing. Now, due to the full Pack Alpha ceremony, he could feel a second threshold, the threshold of the Pack lands.

And it had just let in the Fae.

The Seelie Queen herself came gliding into the ceremony, walking into the clearing with Mirelle in tow as if they were all simply awaiting her entrance. It was perfectly timed, with her arrival just balanced to after the ceremony but before anyone would leave.

The Pack members in attendance gave little gasps of acknowledgment and understanding as she strode forward. In

typical Fae fashion, she managed to fascinate them, and then also cause them to quickly move on. By the time she reached Seath and Greene, the low level voices of other conversations buzzed around the clearing, as if she had magicked them all to almost forgetting her once she made her entrance.

“We have much to discuss, Alphas. Perhaps we can have a moment as the refreshments are being prepared?”

There was such a moment. A time for Seath and Greene to talk casually in the study, prior to the feast Min was preparing. The feasting was not a formal affair, not some event where Seath and Greene would be on display, but more of an endless bounty overseen by Min that would last from this early hour until the full moon tonight. Pack members would wander in and out as the mood struck, with tables strategically placed for people to sit, enjoy the food and the company. Seath and Greene would also be available in their study or milling about as people came to visit and celebrate.

The Pack House was always open, of course, but today an endless stream of people would come to eat at the Alpha's table and then run with the Alpha under the full moon that night.

So, as people wandered into the Pack House for the events, Seath, Greene, Donovan, Teller, and Evan hosted the Seelie Queen in the formal study of the Alpha.

The house had changed a few things, of course, and now what had been Greene's study was rearranged to reflect a larger version of what had been Seath's. Seath put his arm

around Donovan, pulling him closer. Donovan had watched on during the Pack Alpha ceremony, never straying too far from Seath's side. Seath was sure when this business with the Seelie Queen was over, what he would find was that his former study was now transformed into one perfect for the Alpha-Mate.

Instead of sad or nostalgic about the differences, Greene smelled ...*comforted* by the change.

"Now, can we get to business?" The Seelie Queen asked when all of her needs had been attended to. She sat poised at the edge of a large wingback chair, as if it were her throne.

"And what business would that be?" Greene asked, wanting to take the lead in the event this meeting somehow created some sort of rift. Better the Seelie eye fall on him and the Council rather than to Seath and the pack.

Titania set her hands primly in her lap and Mirelle sighed softly.

"The matter of why the Unseelie Prince wanted influence on the NorthWest Pack."

An unease ran through the room, and Seath wished for a moment that Caine was there just so he could say something like "do we know he does" or otherwise smoothly ask for an explanation of such a statement.

Donovan recounted for the Queen what his memories had revealed.

"Let me explain my concerns." Titania said. "Morgan chose to be Prince Donovan, and had been for some time. While I

am sure there are secrets to learn in Taured, and I am looking into that, he did take the identity of the omega son of a king. One who would never be privy to the deepest secrets of Taured, but who was mated — by fate— to the Legate of an influential Pack. It seems to me that by impersonating Donovan, Morgan was seeking knowledge about you, Seath, and your people.”

Seath felt cold for the first time that day. The eyes of the Unseelie Court on him was not something he would have ever asked for. Greene made a low noise of displeasure, causing both Evan and Teller to move closer to him. Teller reached out and placed a hand on Greene’s shoulder, and Evan tried to hide the smile he had at the gesture.

“Then you add the kidnapping of the real Donovan. This mysterious and so far untraceable Lisette. Not to mention the magic used to spellbind him, I think that Morgan had designs on this pack and we must figure out why.”

“But he didn’t pursue it,” Seath finally found his words. “The betrothal I mean. If he had wanted to know about us, why not lean into the mating bond before the real Donovan ever arrived?”

Titania tilted her head. “It also appears that things might not have gone as planned in Taured. His glamour perhaps was not as good as he wanted?” She shook her head quickly, as if having an argument with herself. “I couldn’t see through it and it was enough to convince his own uncle, so that can’t be it. I have many questions, Seath. But no answers. And I do not

come to you, Greene, as Council business, but whatever Morgan is scheming will affect us all, eventually. I would rather head it off here than make Seelie and Unseelie business agenda points on the Council.”

Seath nodded, because she had a point. For once, she sounded rational and keyed into what was happening in this realm. And that was it, the thing that had been nagging at Seath. The Seelie and Unseelie courts operated in different realms, with different priorities than the human plane.

“I don’t understand, if I am being completely honest. All the realms, but ours seems like the least amount of concern for someone like Prince Morgan.” Seath mused, concerned about Unseelie eyes on his pack, singled out in this realm.

“It’s true,” Titania said, again sounding rational in a way that she rarely did. “You must understand, we look to the plane of humans as neutral territory. Much of what is considered magic is muted here, if not neutralized completely. It is where many conversations, treaties, and other such business occurs for us for those reasons. To be looking to affect this plane is both nonsensical and concerning for those reasons.”

Caine made a low noise, almost a purr, but looked off, eyes glazed, as if he was thinking of something far beyond the matters at hand. Seath noted for the first time that he had slipped in the room in the way he often did, without alerting anyone to his presence.

Donovan was a bit jarred to have the entire dimension in which he existed more or less compared to an efficient office

boardroom or Zurin, where the Council sat. Seath's pack was influential, though. Large and successful. Boasting coastal trade towns, portals, touch points and other entries to additional dimensions. Was it strategic, then, in a way of almost military strategy, to attempt to influence this pack?

Before his thoughts could go too far, Seath's hand landed warm and sure on the base of his neck. He felt himself pulled tight to his mate, the energy of his Alpha running through him.

He and Seath both grew quiet, continuing to listen, of course, to the musings of those around them. But, they drew as close as they could to each other, Seath entwining his fingers with Donovan's.

"Well," Titania smiled, smoothing her skirts. "I appreciate being heard on this important day. We will need to communicate as we see what Morgan intends."

"Of course," Seath said, "you are always welcome."

"To keep such an invitation, best I do not overstay it, then," Titania said, standing with a smile. "I did come for one last thing, if you don't mind, mates."

Seath and Donovan had stood with her, as had the others.

"Fated mates are unique and special because the magic is beyond shifter magic. It is old, ancient magic. The magic of another realm that found its way here in bits and pieces. It molded itself to this world—finding compatible souls and kindred spirits. In some ways, it is the purest magic that exists in the human realm. It will guide you both, in your relationship

together. But, I also wish to give you a blessing. A blessing of the Fae.”

Seath and Donovan looked at each other, feeling the magic strum inside them. The same magic that Titania had just been speaking of.

And, as if a switch had been thrown, Titania lost the human-like, rational side that had shown since she arrived in the glen. Instead, she seemed more Fae, her eyes taking on the other-worldly look they often had.

The threshold sang as it felt her magic in the room.

“You will have children of this mating,” she said, her voice no longer of the human cadence. “And it is to them I bless. A spell to guide. To guard. To direct their paths. They will be protected, in this realm and beyond.”

Seath and Donovan felt a spark crinkle between them, like small-scale electricity shot through their skin.

Donovan spoke first, as Seath’s head was too full of the thought of a child with his mate.

“Your generosity will not go unremembered,” Donovan said. It wasn’t the outright gratitude that Seelies were known to abhor, but instead the traditional way to receive such gifts by the Fae. Thank the goddess those memories had returned and he knew what to do.

“I will see you soon, Mates.”

As she said it, she gave a nod to the others in the room, and left with Mirelle in her wake. The threshold reverberated with

the Queen's amusement as she left, clearly wanting to be seen by the pack members who were downstairs, wandering in and out of the feasting so she could be admired on her way out.

"I believe we will take the moment for some rest ourselves," Seath mused, pulling Donovan close. Between the ceremony and then Titania, the need to scent his mate in the most intimate of ways was close to consuming him.

Caine smiled and Greene carefully avoided the two sets of eyes that watched him closely.

But, Seath and Donovan didn't see, too wrapped up in one another as they left the room.

Seath growled as he moved inside Donovan, watching his mate's chest expand and contract with heaved breaths. Cheeks flushed, Donovan looked beyond beautiful under Seath's hands as they mapped every inch of skin. He had his mate right at the brink, panting and begging beautifully. His knot was an ache building and ready to push into Donovan to light him up and hold them together.

But he pulled out, causing Donovan to give a needy wail that threatened Seath's resolve.

"Ready again, little one?" Seath asked, pinning his mate's hips so just the tip of his cock remained inside the hot, writhing, body. The pants came faster as Donovan nodded.

"Ready ...yes ...now...please," Donovan managed, body trying all it could to arch up and get the fullness he craved.



“We better make sure you are ready,” Seath mused, slowly kissing Donovan’s neck, making sure to pause over the gold mating mark. He had already rubbed his release into the mark from the first round.

Donovan whimpered and Seath growled again. He paused, keeping his tip in, making Donovan miss the fullness of him, and then he scooped up Donovan’s hands in his free one, easily pinning him to the bed at hip and wrists.

Seath bent his head, sucking one tight nub of Donovan’s smooth chest in an unapologetic deep tug.

Donovan’s whole body trembled in response, and so Seath assaulted the other side, and then both one after the other in quick pulls of his mouth and tongue.

Donovan trembled beneath him, begging in earnest now about how he needed Seath, needed more. Needed to be fucked, taken.

How he needed it now.

Seath could listen to him beg for hours. He loved it, loved Donovan. But, he too could only hold on so long.

Moving up, he captured Donovan’s lips in a sloppy kiss. Donovan was too needy to do anything but return it as earnestly as he could.

Seath broke away, turning them.

Donovan’s eyes flew open when he found himself on top of his Alpha, but Seath grabbed the omega’s hips, his big hands grabbing a bit of ass cheek, and then driving inside.

Donovan wasted no time, riding his Alpha with all his pent-up need. He bounced on Seath until the knot responded to the needs of the omega, and became too big for bouncing. Donovan moved his hips then, a slow grind that made Seath's eyes roll back in his head. His little mate was going to give as good as he got it seemed.

Seath's eyes snapped open when he sensed Donovan's hands moving, and they were, Donovan's small hands drifting over his own shaft, collecting what was leaking, and then between them mixing with slick.

Donovan pressed the mix of precome and slick into Seath's own mating mark, the scent making Seath's hips buck up of their own accord.

A satisfied ripple crossed Donovan's face.

"There, Alpha." He tried to widen his legs, sprawled as his knees were across Seath. "Fuck me there."

Seath wrapped a hand around a lean thigh, going where Donovan led.

"More."

Seath used his massive hands on Donovan's ass to tilt him forward, allowing Donovan to ride him as he wanted, but giving Seath the ability to once again suck on the sensitive nubs that were as hard and flushed as the cock trapped between them.

Donovan shook and shivered, fingers digging into Seath's arms where he was holding on.

Incoherent little whimpers and pleas fell from Donovan's mouth as the assault continued, but his hips moved wildly, relishing the feel of Seath's hand gripping his ass as he rode his mate's dick.

Donovan's face tilted up, strained and shaking as his body began to convulse, and he screamed Seath's name as pleasure flowed from every part that could. His orgasm exploded as Seath was deep inside him, but Seath didn't stop his sucking, and wrapped a hand around Donovan's shaft as his knot pushed another orgasm out of Donovan immediately after the first. This one rolled into the one proceeding it—a snowball effect of pleasure drowning him as Seath milked his cock and the knot stimulated his prostate over and over.

Seath lost himself too, hands leaving finger-bruises on Donovan's ass as he wanted his mate even closer than the knot allowed.

He unloaded into his mate, pleasure taking over.

Donovan was slumped against his chest by the time he could blink himself into thinking clearly.

Seath rolled them to the side, the knot hard in his mate. The move caused Donovan's mouth to go slack, and even though his eyes didn't open, he came again on a long, low moan, with only the slightest amount of come left to dribble the result of the orgasm.

It would be like that for the rest of the night, Seath assumed. Orgasms on repeat, as their mating triggered Lycan's heat and his own rut.

Good thing they had made their appearances downstairs already.

The Pack would see their mating as a success. Perhaps toward the end, Donovan would want some omega-play to ease the last of it and to share the mating with the pack in the way that omegas could. He was Pack Alpha now, and claiming his omega was unstoppable.

Seath chuckled at his body for stirring at the thoughts of Donovan and his heat-mates. Tucking Donovan's face to his chest as he absently played with Donovan's sensitive nipples, causing another moan. Seath didn't stop, but moved his hips so that his knot pressed and ground in Donovan right where his mate liked it the most as he continued rubbing and pulling until Donovan spasmed again, his ass milking the knot in blind orgasmic pleasure.

The Alpha in Seath roared its strength; he truly felt, for the first time that day, as the Pack Alpha.

He thought of his seed, in Donovan's belly and in his ass. If he had been shifted, he would have flicked his tail. Full and sated, smelling of him. The easy way a well-fucked omega carried himself. That's what he wanted for his mate.

# Epilogue

## EPILOGUE

Greene groaned. Wards and barriers were amazing things. Marvels of magic, really. But so too were the powers of the Pack Alpha. Even if he no longer was, he could practically feel the mating in the threshold and how it vibrated with the happiness of the pack. Of the hearth magic.

He chuckled to himself, ignoring the arousal stirring. Teller and Evan were close, always close, and even with the suppressants and moderate ability to lock down his own scent, they would know and that mattered.

Why it should matter to them what he, ten years older than Teller and fifteen older than Evan, was feeling was something he didn't like to dwell upon too long.

“Greene?”

He groaned again, internally this time. Teller was at the door, as was, of course, Evan.

“Can I help you?”

Teller moved gracefully, smoothly and not bothered by the low tones of his voice.

“We just wanted to check in on you before we retired for the night.”

Ah, that “we” used in such a way that let Greene guess if they were retiring for the night together. Not that it was his business, of course, it was not. Not even close.

But that didn’t keep the flashes of Teller and Evan together out of his mind. Even the gentle ones, flashes of Teller’s long willowy body with miles of muscle, wrapped around the much smaller Evan. Evan was shorter, smaller. Adorable. His nose was upturned in the cutest way, and his skin was a creamy field for a constellation of moles Greene could imagine the rangy, muscular Teller mapping with kisses as they held each other close.

An Elf bodyguard and a witch assistant, and whatever they got up to together was no business of Greene’s. He was a widowed bear shifter who was much too old for either of them and didn’t have the sexual resume to consider two men at once. Even if they never smelled like sex and were either not intimate or just very good at hiding the evidence.

But he did consider them. Far too much, in fact.

“Greene?” Teller and Evan were in the room now, closer. Greene could discern their scents of slight concern. That was another thing, their scents were always twinned together somehow. Not like a couple or mates — Greene didn’t even know if they were that and not just best friends. No, this was

different. He could scent them individually, Evan smelled of down and cotton. Teller smelled of leather, but only slightly, as if it was wrapped in vanilla.

But the scents often came to him as one, and it never failed to arouse him. With the addition of the thrum he knew in the threshold ward, he needed them to go before he embarrassed himself with the tent in his pants showing.

“I’m sorry, what is it?”

Teller and Evan shared a look, one he couldn’t read.

“Just a last check in, Greene,” Evan soothed, pouring tea from a tray Greene had not even noticed he was carrying. “I thought you might like some tea to help you sleep before we travel back tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow, of course.”

“We could stay longer, if you would like.” Teller said, and Greene felt double teamed as he often did with his bodyguard and his assistant. They were worried about him, it appeared.

“No need.” Greene had made his peace with the change from Pack Alpha to Councilor. It felt right. He missed the Pack lands, and would need to come back and run here from time to time, but no, it was time to move on.

“We must get back,” he told them, watching Teller’s grey eyes and Evan’s blue ones follow his moves closely. “This matter with the Fae is far from resolved.”

“What will need to be done?”

“I don’t know. But we will head back home tomorrow as planned and go from there.”

Home. That word felt right. Not for here. Not for the Pack House or the Northwest Pack in general. But for a big city and politics of all damned things.

“Goodnight then, Greene,” Teller said, and Evan stepped close to him. Closer than friends? Greene didn’t know and shouldn’t care.

“Goodnight.”

Teller nodded, his gaze dropping on Greene and Evan in equal beats, before moving Evan toward the door.

“In the morning, then.”

Greene lowered himself to the edge of the bed with his tea.

Yes, in the morning.

Surely, whatever game Prince Morgan and the Fae were playing in the human realm could wait until then.



# Acknowledge-ments

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*Family Mann, Book 4.5, A Bear Valley Holiday Novella,  
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