



THE
BRIGHTEST
BONDS

3

MAY DAWSON

THE BRIGHTEST BONDS

THE DARKEST MARK

BOOK THREE



MAY DAWSON

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A Note From May

Also by May Dawson

PROLOGUE



25 YEARS AGO

She was pregnant, and she was scared.

There's plenty of reason to be afraid in any pregnancy, but she had more than her fair share of fear.

“Don't think I'm going to let you go too easily,” Aodhan purred. “I do love you, Grace, in my own way. I traveled from another world for the chance to be with you.”

He brushed a strand of hair off her neck. She had tied her hair up, exposing the long, graceful curve of her throat. He liked her to wear her hair that way. She had wanted to please him, once, and now she didn't want to anymore.

And yet, she still found herself carefully tying up her hair every morning. Waiting for him. Even now that she was supposed to marry another man.

A man in another pack, a man who would take her away from here. She would always be unable to resist Aodhan's enchantment. But if he couldn't find her... She could be free.

She knew he enchanted her, but that didn't make it any easier to resist.

“And now you're going to have my child,” he said, cupping his hand gently under her stomach.

Well, she would never be entirely free. She was carrying the monster's child.

And he had whispered words to her, that were supposed to be an enchantment for the baby's health, but bound her instead. Those words meant she would never harm her child.

But, she told herself, that didn't mean she had to love the child. It didn't even mean she had to protect the child. He had just bound her so that she

couldn't do anything to the pregnancy, or to the infant when it was born.

“You'll take good care of my little one, won't you?” He asked.

“I'll make sure she has everything she needs,” she said, even as she promised herself that she would reclaim a little bit of her body, of her mind. Everything she needs. But never her mother's love.

“I'll be back for her, someday,” he told her. He studied her, the angles of his face so beautiful that it almost hypnotized her. She had been drawn to him like a moth to a flame once you first saw him. “You can keep a secret, can't you, Grace? You have no one to tell.”

“I'll keep your secrets,” she promised. Now that she didn't love him anymore but was just bound to him, she wanted to know all his secrets. She wanted to know if there was a way to fight him instead of just running.

Because he might not love her, but he loved possessing pretty things. And he was determined to keep her, to come back to her sometimes.

“This baby,” he went on, “will pay a debt for me. You see, I have another daughter. A Fae daughter. Little more than a baby herself now, but I got into some trouble a while back with the queen of our Kingdom. Well, with her men.”

He read her surprise. He smiled slightly. “I know, I billed myself as a Fae king. It was a bit of an exaggeration. I'm merely a rich man. Which in your world, is as good as being a king.”

“but I had to get away from the queen,” he said. “I had to leave our isle and go to an entirely new place. So, I had to pay someone off to smuggle me. And that someone will take my real daughter's life force as their collateral, once she comes of age.”

He went on, “All I need is someone to fill that role. A child. She doesn't have to be Fae. A half fae child's life will do just as well.”

He cupped her cheek. “So you see, Grace, we won't be done with each other for a long time.”

His smile had once melted her heart. Now, the way he smiled at her made panic scratch at her chest.

CHAPTER 1



*A*melia

TELL ME WHO I AM.

Those words were arrows straight to my heart.

I put my hand in Brennan's, ready to go anywhere with him. If I could save him... if I could bring Dylan's father home to him... if I could bring the lost King brother home to his siblings... Images of that homecoming flashed through my mind, accompanied with a roar of emotion so loud it drowned out sense.

"I'll tell you everything," I promised him. "But we don't need to leave. They'll be so happy to see you—"

Just then, a wolf tore out of the forest. He landed in front of me, between me and Brennan. The enormous black wolf snarled at Brennan, a fearsome sound that just made Brennan look amused.

Brennan raised the gun with a shrug. "If you're trying to tell me that I have to go through you to get the girl, I'm happy to do that. Again."

Stone. The hulking figure in front of me was Stone, and he was crouched to spring.

The emotion had roared so loudly it drowned out my sense. I saw that now, looking between Brennan and Stone.

Brennan's finger tightened on the trigger and Stone's muscles tightened, on the verge of springing for his brother's throat.

"Stop!" I cried out, jumping between the two of them. Brennan swore and

lowered the gun, just slightly, throwing a look in my general direction that suggested I was a huge disappointment. Stone snarled wildly.

“Shift back!” I shouted at Stone. I turned to Brennan and raised the gun I still gripped from killing Nathan. “Put your gun away. Right now.”

Brennan let out a hard little laugh. “You’re not going to shoot me, Amelia. I might’ve believed you five minutes ago, but now.” He shook his head. “I’m apparently your long-lost lover. And this dickhead? He’s been nothing but an asshole. You’re really going to shoot me to protect him?”

I held the gun on him, willing my hands not to shake. “Stone may be an asshole, but he’s my asshole. And he’s your brother. Neither of you are killing each other.”

“My brother?” For a second, I could’ve sworn I heard a note of emotion in Brennan’s voice. Then he scoffed. “I don’t remember him. And given how he’s been acting, I don’t care to.”

“Amelia.” Stone’s voice was a deep rumble. “Get out of the way. The rogue—”

“Is your brother,” I filled in, since I knew he wouldn’t have fully understood what we were saying when he was a wolf.

For a second, Stone was frozen.

“No,” he managed.

“I don’t have time for this,” Brennan sounded cold. “His pack is converging on us now. Amelia, he needs to get out of our way, or he goes down.”

“He can come with us.” I turned to Stone desperately. I needed to protect both of them. If I could stall Brennan, then we could stay on King territory where we were safe. Stone would never hurt Brennan...but I wasn’t sure the reverse was true. “You can keep me safe, right? That’s what you need. And you can help Brennan remember.”

Brennan let out a laugh. “Sure. The more the merrier.”

Stone looked warily at Brennan.

“Tick tock.” Brennan still held his gun on Stone. He didn’t seem to feel anything at all about the gun I had trained on him; he was perfectly relaxed. “Make a decision, little brother.”

Stone frowned. “How do you remember—”

“You’re obviously the little brother,” Brennan said dismissively. As if they weren’t both six-foot-too-much and built for killing.

Stone hesitated.

Brennan raised the gun toward him. “Fuck this. You’ll forgive me, Amelia.”

“I won’t.” I eased the tension off the trigger, ready to shoot if Brennan made a move.

Brennan leapt, moving so blindingly fast I didn’t have time to react. The gun went off in my hand, the piercing sound rocketing into my eardrums and the smell of gunpowder filling my senses. The bullet discharged harmlessly over the trees. If the King pack hadn’t already been coming, they would be coming now.

I twisted on Brennan, who grabbed my arm and dragged me close. I let out a gasp as he pulled me against the hard length of his body. His arm circled my throat instantly, his big bicep pressed against the curve of my cheek, his forearm a hard edge against my skin.

Shadows emerged from the forest around us. They had unearthly, beautiful faces and deadly pale skin. Vampires.

Stone shifted as he leapt toward Brennan. In midair, his body rippled, his muscles shifting and growing as he transformed into the wolf. But he was too late.

Brennan yanked me out of the way with supernatural speed as a golden-haired female vampire threw a golden ball toward Stone. She cast it toward him dismissively, and it unfurled in the air, little tendrils spreading out until it formed a glittering net that seemed to glow with magic. Stone snarled at it as he leapt to attack, but as soon as the net touched him, his mouth and eyes closed.

Stone slammed into the ground. Fear seized through me and I tried to leap toward him, but I couldn’t move.

“Is he all right?” I struggled against Brennan’s arm, though he held me implacably, no matter how much my fingernails scrabbled against his forearm.

He let out a soft huff of laughter at my concern. “He’s just taking a nice nap.”

Brennan pulled me with him. “Caroline. Throw me a blade please.”

“What are you doing?” My voice came out a desperate rasp. How could I protect Stone from these monsters?

“Do you want to kill him or should I?” Brennan was still pulling me with him, and my feet slipped across the wet leaves.

I had to shift. As a wolf, I’d have a chance to fight back. Brennan’s

powerful bicep squeezed against the side of my throat, cutting off the blood flow to my brain. The world started to fade dark around the edges.

“If you don’t kill him, the gunshot will wear off.” Brennan said into my ear. “You have to kill him or he’ll come back. I told them it was a terrible idea, but they turned him into a vampire. Do you want to do it or should I?”

Nathan. He was talking about Nathan. Relief flooded me.

“Don’t give her anything pointy,” the blonde vampire disagreed. “She’s going to stab you.”

“Amelia would never.” The voice in my ear was low and wicked. “She thinks she loves me.”

“Which is obviously insane,” I snapped back.

Brennan had let up—slightly—on my throat, and the world was bright again. “I agree. Now, are you going to finish him, sweetheart?”

The blonde vampire threw him the sword, and he caught it with supernatural ease.

Nathan’s towering, muscular body lay at my feet now, his clothes soaked with blood—his own, for once—and his face was slack, his eyes staring into the distance.

He would kill Dylan and I if he ever had the chance.

“Yes.” My voice came out cold and it didn’t sound like me. But I felt more like myself than I ever had. I had to be the one to end Nathan, to know he would never come after me again.

Brennan pushed the hilt of a sword into my hand, his fingers overlapping mine, controlling me so I couldn’t turn on him. “One good swipe to decapitate him. Don’t embarrass me in front of the vampires.”

“Oh, fuck off.” I was not in the mood.

Brennan’s arm slid away from my throat, and together we yanked back the sword, then drove it down into Nathan’s throat. His skin, his throat, gave way like butter until the sword slammed into his spinal cord and stuck; blood splattered us both, raining across my face. Brennan wrestled the sword from me and, still gripping me, raised it high above his head for a second strike. This time, the gleaming white bone revealed amidst the shattered flesh broke completely.

“Be a love and take the sword back, Caroline.” He tossed it toward her. “I’ve got my arms full.”

She wiped it down.

I swallowed hard, felt the swallow push against his arm. I could barely

breathe as I raised my hand to try to scrub Nathan's blood off my face. "Am I going with you willingly or is this a kidnapping?"

"I guess that depends on whether or not you scream." His whisper was a breath against my throat. "But some things are inevitable. You and I will be together. The only question is how many bodies fall along the way."

"Your sweet talk sucks."

"Come with me willingly," he gritted into my ear. "You already decided you can fix me. Don't back out now for the sake of a few vampires."

"Is this an ambush?" Vampires versus wolves would result in... death. So much death.

"Not yet. If you stop fighting me, we can get out of here without any bloodshed."

My plan had been to keep delaying us. Suddenly that didn't seem like such a great idea.

"You don't need Stone then," I begged Brennan. My heart ached seeing Stone lying on the ground. "Leave him here."

"No. You told me he's my brother. I have questions." Brennan's voice dropped menacingly. "Like why no one ever came for me."

"We don't need him," one of the vampires said, looking down at him. "What are we going to do with another wolf? This one is no use to us."

"Look what happened with the last one," another vampire pointed out. "More wolves are trouble."

"He's of use to me," Brennan said. "Bring him."

He dragged me with him toward the forest.

Nathan's body seemed like nothing but broken flesh now. Whatever soul he'd had, if there was one, had fled.

Brennan stepped on him—purposefully going out of his way to do it—which meant he dragged me over Nathan. I stepped on his back as I walked away.

I would never think about him again.

At least, I promised myself I would do my best to never think about him again.

No matter how much I healed, perhaps Nathan would always haunt me.

CHAPTER 2



S_{haw}

WHEN WE REACHED the clearing there was no one there but a body.

It was Nathan Longroad's body. I turned him over and looked at his face. His jaw was frozen open, his eyes wide with terror. He looked surprised.

It would've been a good day, seeing him dead.

Except Amelia was missing.

"Where's Stone?" Cole asked suddenly. "He should've beaten us here but —"

"He was here." I breathed in deeply, teasing out his scent. Then I realized it wasn't his scent, but the Rogue's. No—it was Stone too. He'd been here.

I looked back down at the body. Nathan had been brutally tortured. Amelia obviously wouldn't have tortured Nathan, no matter how much he deserved it. But the rogue was a wild card.

"The rogue has Amelia," I said quietly. "He must have taken this as his opportunity to take her."

"And Stone?"

"Tracking them. Or dead. He wouldn't let the rogue take Amelia without putting up a fight." My voice came out staccato. "Does he have Dylan with him too? Where's Dylan?"

The words all came out flat, but my need to find Dylan was desperate.

Teresa came running in. "We found him! We found Dylan!"

"Where?" I demanded.

“In his bed. He was hurt, but not badly.” Teresa met my eyes, and although she sounded as controlled as ever, there was something wild about her gaze. “I know it sounds crazy, but he said a wolf attacked the men hurting him and then carried him home.”

“One of our guys?” I asked, even though I was already sure Dylan hadn’t been rescued by one of our men. It just didn’t make sense to think that he had been rescued by...

“The rogue,” Teresa said. She crossed her arms over her chest, looking as if she were holding herself together. “I think it was the rogue. His scent was all over his room. Do you think...”

She stopped herself.

“What were you going to say, Tee?” I demanded.

“She was going to say the Rogue was Brennan, but she realizes it sounds crazy.” Liam said quietly. “So let me say it.”

“No.” I shook my head. “Brennan is dead, and if he weren’t... he wouldn’t play stupid games.”

“I said the Rogue was Brennan. Not that he is Brennan,” Liam said, which might have been profound, but I couldn’t make any fucking sense of anything at the moment.

Except that Amelia and Stone were gone.

“Let’s find Amelia,” I said. “Bring her home to her son.”

There was nothing that mattered more to me than seeing Amelia hug her son again, seeing the relief and joy that would sweep over them both to be united. Adrenaline pumped through my body with no purpose yet. I couldn’t rest until they were together and safe.

“You heard Shaw,” Cole raised his voice, turning to the other shifters. “Let’s get to work picking up the trail.”

I had a feeling that would not be easy with the Rogue.

“With Stone gone,” Cole said to me quietly when it was just the two of us and everyone else was spreading out through the forest. “We’ll need someone to take the lead.”

“You can just keep doing what you’re doing.”

Cole shook his head. “Come on, the pack’s alpha may have been kidnapped. When the pack realizes Stone is gone, they’ll lose it. We need to have a plan.”

“And the plan can be that you continue to execute Stone’s orders until we get him back.”

“Shaw.” Cole leveled me with a look. That look didn’t seem to fit with suggesting I should be the alpha.

Shifters were all around the clearing, many of them having shifted to wolves, roaming around to pick up the trail. Too many of them looked lost, and it made my stomach tighten with anxiety. I looked around for my last brother standing.

He wasn’t.

Liam was crouched next to Nathan’s bloodied body, a distraught look on his face. Karissa stood beside him. She rested her hand on his shoulder comfortingly, though the look on her face suggested she was telling him to just be glad Nathan was dead. Finally.

I’d thought Nathan’s death would be more climactic. I’d wanted to see it.

Karissa met my gaze and nodded. She coaxed Liam until he was up and moving, grabbing his arm and pretending to need him for support even as she guided him toward Cole and me. It was a very Karissa move.

“What is it?” Karissa asked.

“Do you think Amelia killed him?” Liam broke in.

Karissa and I both looked at him, perplexed. Cole took a step back, out of the tight little circle we’d formed, as if he didn’t feel like he was supposed to be a part of our group. I grabbed his shoulder to keep him from backing further away.

Stone might not have realized how desperately he needed Cole, but I was keenly aware.

“I hope she did,” Karissa said fiercely, already glaring at Liam as if she were prepared to be annoyed by his pacifism.

“I don’t know. I assumed the Rogue was the one who put those dozen holes in him,” I said impatiently. “Wouldn’t you be the one who knows?”

With Liam, I was never sure when I was being asked rhetorical questions. Sometimes he knew and he still wanted to know what I thought.

And I was always wrong.

“I think Amelia killed him,” he said. “I think she’s free.”

“Except she’s not, because she’s been kidnapped by the Rogue.” Karissa looked as if she were on the verge of panic.

“Unless she went with him willingly.” Liam seemed to be listening for something, though the woods were full of the noise of wolves, hunting for the scent, howling to each other.

Disbelief fell over me like a suffocating blanket. “Why would she do

that?”

Liam looked at me as if I were slow-witted. “To fix him.”

If Amelia had done that, I... I shook my head, my mind blown.

“What did you want, Shaw?” Karissa glanced at Liam, as if he were holding her back from leaving. “I’d like to join the hunt.”

“We need someone to take the lead and step in as alpha while Stone is gone,” Cole said. “Liam or Shaw are the only reasonable choices.”

“There’s nothing reasonable about either Liam or me,” I corrected. “What about Karissa? She’s always been queen bee.”

We’d been calling her that since she was little. Brennan teased her with it gently, but the rest of us had usually genuinely been mad—and then afterward, had usually genuinely been punched or pinched.

Judging from the look she gave me now, she was as impressed now as she’d been at five. “I’ve always tried to keep you idiots from hurting yourselves or others. And you’ve never listened. The pack will listen to me about as well as you have.”

“But you’re—”

“A woman,” Karissa interrupted. “And yes, we need to address the pack’s patriarchal bullshit at some point, but maybe not in the midst of a crisis when we need to focus on rescuing Amelia and Stone? No, this is on one of you two.”

Liam raised his hands. “Remember, I’m crazy.”

“No, you’re not,” I snapped. “You’re neurodivergent and mentally ill and smarter than any of us, and we don’t acknowledge any of that, but it doesn’t change the fact you’d make a hell of an alpha.”

Liam stared at me. Before he could say anything, I added, “And I’m not just saying that because I don’t want the job.”

Liam’s shoulders relaxed slightly. Then he shocked me by saying, “Yes, you are.”

“No, the pack had always had its head up its own ass when it comes to anyone being different. But you can’t hide anymore, Liam.”

“Because we see you,” Karissa said, shocking me by agreeing with me.

“We see your value. And that won’t change.” Cole clapped his hand onto Liam’s back. “Even if...when...you wolf out. We know you now.”

There was a sudden sheen in Liam’s eyes. My stomach dropped. We’d pressed him too far.

Then he said, “Thank you. That... means a lot to me. But I can’t focus on

leading the pack right now, and I would have to give that all my attention, because people are not easy for me. I need to focus on getting into Brennan's mind."

Karissa nodded, resting her hand on his shoulder sympathetically even though she had to reach; he was so much taller than she was. "Then I guess it's Shaw."

"Don't sound so enthused."

"You don't sound enthused!" she pointed out.

"I'm not sure the pack will follow me."

"Teresa and I will make sure they do," Cole said grimly. "Or they'll regret it."

The thought of being alpha made me sick. Especially when Stone should be here, filling the forest with his presence, pissing me off with his orders, leading the hunt to bring Amelia back.

But I couldn't back down from my duty, even one I'd gleefully avoided all my life. The pack needed leadership. Amelia needed the pack.

I gave them all a curt nod.

Then I turned toward the hunt, drawing breath to give orders.

We'd bring Amelia home.

CHAPTER 3



*A*melia

THEY THREW STONE, still wrapped in the net, into the back of the truck that was waiting for us.

“Was the net for me?” I demanded as Brennan dragged me into the waiting car.

“Yes,” he said. He didn’t have to say that he felt he could keep me under control without the net.

“What do the vampires want?”

“It doesn’t matter.” He brushed his fingers through my hair. “What matters for you is what I want.”

“You saw Dylan?”

He let out a hard, bitter laugh. “I don’t see anyone, Amelia. Except for when I’m a wolf.”

I wanted to tell him Dylan was his son. Then I realized, given how Brennan had already reacted to the discovery Stone was his brother, that Brennan might double back to kidnap Dylan.

And I wanted my son safe on King territory. I’d prefer to stay on King territory too, but at least if Dylan were safe, I could bear anything that happened to me.

We pulled into a dark underground parking garage under a mansion. When the door closed behind us, it was pitch black inside, blocking out even the light from the stars.

Brennan threw me over his shoulder. I struggled for him to put me down, and he put a steadying hand on my ass—his hand was warm and wide and sent a spark of heat through my body. “Be good,” he hissed. “I’m trying to keep you two safe.”

I didn’t have a grasp on this situation with the vampires at all. I went still and let Brennan carry me through the dark house. He navigated it with ease, though to me it felt as if we were in the pitch black. It didn’t matter for him.

Then I heard someone’s breath nearby, and I realized we weren’t alone in this dark house. I tensed, clutching at his t-shirt as I dangled over his back. I felt so helpless.

“Where’s Stone?” I whispered. My breathing was shaky, giving me away.

“He’ll be in the tower with you. You’re safe, Amelia. Relax.”

“I’m in a house full of vampires.”

“You’re a guest.”

“Until I’m lunch.”

“Do you always talk this much when you’re scared?” he demanded. “Also, they don’t eat lunch. They sleep during the day.” There was a pause, and then he added, “You would be dinner.”

“Are you trying to be comforting?”

“No,” he said bluntly. “You should be scared. I hope being scared will keep you from doing anything stupid.”

“I’m not scared.”

“No. You’re not stupid,” he said confidently. “Since you’re not stupid, of course you’re scared. It’s the only logical reaction.”

We went up and up and up a twisting series of stairs, until we emerged into light. A living room. A fire glowed from the fireplace, and two soft lamps cast a golden glow across the sofa, soft padded chairs, bookshelves, and low coffee table. Several large, expensive looking pieces of art—far too big for the small room—hung on the walls, and cobwebs gathered in the corners of the ceiling.

Brennan set me down and I rushed to the windows. The light of the room was reflected back to us and blocked the view, showing me only Brennan standing there with his cold, expressionless mask glinting in the reflection.

When I pressed my face to the cool glass, I could not see the gates to the mansion far away, and far beneath us. An expanse of greenery and trees spread around the house, and I frowned. The windows had been tinted in the car, so dark it had been hard to see, and Brennan had tried to distract me from

our route. But I could have sworn, from the way the car slowed and stopped over and over, that we were driving city streets.

“There’s no escape,” Brennan said. “It’ll make it easier on all of us if you don’t try, Amelia.”

“It would make things easier on all of us if you didn’t kidnap me,” I said in exasperation. “You and your brothers have a lot in common!”

He stared down at me. With his mask, I had no hope of reading his expression. Then he cupped my face in one hand, his touch surprisingly gentle. “You’re sure I was in love with you?”

The past tense burned, even though I should understand. He didn’t remember. “Yes.”

“I can see why.”

With those words, which I felt could use a lot of expounding, he released me and walked away. He threw himself into a plush chair. “Stone will be moved into a room upstairs. He’s still wrapped in the net, but you’ll be able to release him. If you choose.”

“How does the net work?”

“Magic.”

“So how will I know to release him?”

“The magic will recognize you.”

“Because it knows me somehow?” I was so confused.

“Because you’re Fae.” He snapped his fingers impatiently, as my heart stuttered and fell into my stomach. “Answer my questions, Amelia. That’s why you’re here. You’re supposed to help me remember.”

“I’m Fae?”

“Well. Half-Fae. Enough to have some magic.”

I stared at him, and he sighed. “You must have known. Everyone loves you—”

“Everyone does not love me,” I cut him off.

“Everyone thinks you’re beautiful. Close enough.”

“Not at all.” I couldn’t sit down, I paced the room. He leaned back in his chair, one arm draped over the plush back, looking as if he owned the world. I needed to focus on what happened. “What do the vampires want? Why are you working with them?”

He rose and headed to the brass bar cart in the corner of the room. “You might need a drink first.”

“Brennan.”

He ignored me, pouring two glasses. “You should enjoy the liquor. They only buy the good stuff. And they age it well because, as you can imagine, they have time at their disposal—being immortal until someone corrects that state.”

The image of Nathan’s body flashed through my mind, though I felt nothing at the recollection. “Brennan.”

“You can say that name all you want.” His muscles flexed under his shirt as he mixed the drinks. “It doesn’t mean anything to me.”

“What do you call yourself, then?”

He shook his head. “Nevermind.”

“You won’t even tell me your new name?”

“I don’t have a name.” He turned around and offered me both a glass and a smile. The smile looked strange and eerie under the metal mask “If you wish, you can call me sir.”

I rejected both the glass and the smile. “I don’t think I will.”

He shrugged one shoulder. “Fine with me.” He took a sip of his drink, then held the other out to me more insistently. “It’s good. You should have some. They want me to breed with you.”

I stared at him, sure I hadn’t heard those words correctly. “They want you to breed with me?”

“The vampires can’t have babies of their own. They’re technically dead. Which is problematic for pregnancy.” He sounded awfully relaxed. Meanwhile, my heart was pounding. My head spun. “Amelia. Are you going to pass out? I told you to take the drink.”

“A drink won’t help,” I snapped. “Why do the vampires want me?”

“Well, because they want hybrid little wolf-vampire babies. Not just any mortal can carry one of those.” He took another sip. “You could feel honored, if you wanted to see it that way. It’s a testament to your strength.”

“You’re crazy,” I said, then tried to think, frantically. “But you want to remember. That’s why you took Stone. You wanted us here for reasons that have nothing to do with the...vampire plan.” I could not use the word breeding.

“Of course I want to remember,” he said. “As far as I know, my life began five years ago.”

If I were the only one who carried the memories of my moments with Brennan... a pit opened up in my stomach at the sense of loss. There was always some fresh loss when it came to losing Brennan. “My life ended five

years ago.”

He chuckled. “Are you always melodramatic?”

He was lucky I hadn’t taken the drink. I might have thrown the glass at his head.

“I was there when you died!”

Although I couldn’t see most of his face, when he took a step toward me, his head tilting, he seemed curious. “And you were sad?”

“My feelings went beyond sad.” I gritted out the words, but he might as well know.

“How did it feel?”

“Like I was burning alive.” The words were raw, honest, wrung from my chest.

His lips quirked. “So, yes. You are always melodramatic.”

“And you’re always an unfeeling asshole?”

“Yes,” he agreed. “So tell me about this night that I died. It didn’t seem to take, did it?” He glanced down at his muscular, well-built body.

“You and I ran away together. You left your pack for me, and I... escaped mine. I ran away.”

“Who were you running from?”

“Nathan.” When his posture didn’t change, as if he didn’t recognize the name, I added, “The man you tortured today?”

“Ah, yes, him. I didn’t get his name. Just a lot of screaming and begging. ‘Oh, don’t torture me, I’ll give you anything you want’, ‘please stop stabbing me, please please’, etcetera etcetera. The usual.”

He sounded cheerful about the whole thing.

It didn’t really bother me, to be honest. Not when it came to Nathan.

“If you didn’t remember that he killed you and terrified me, why did you torture him?”

“He tried to take that little boy of yours.”

God, the need to tell him that little boy was his pressed at my chest, but I didn’t dare tell him yet. I didn’t have much currency trapped in his tower, with god knows how many vampires doing...whatever vampires did... below us. I needed to save what power I could gain from that revelation.

“And you cared because...?”

He shrugged one shoulder again. The movement was classic Brennan, and it sent an ache through my heart. It was so strange to know him when he didn’t know me. He didn’t even know himself.

“I thought you wouldn’t like losing him very much,” he said.

“I don’t like you threatening to kill Stone, either, but that didn’t stop you.”

“He was going to slow us down.” He caught my chin with his fingers and looked down at me. All I could see was the blue eyes behind that mask. Brennan’s eyes. So deep and blue I could drown in them. “And you were trying to slow us down, weren’t you? So that his pack could capture me?”

I licked my lips. “I didn’t want you to be captured. I wanted you and your brothers and sister to know each other again. To be...”

I trailed off, because it seemed ridiculous to ask for.

His fingers squeezed, just slightly. “To be what?”

“Family.” I grabbed his wrist and yanked his arm away. “I don’t like being manhandled. It reminds me of how Nathan treated me.”

“From what you said, I manhandled you first,” he said mildly.

“You didn’t. You were kind and gentle.”

The mask did not hide his yawn. “If you don’t play silly games with me, Amelia, I won’t have any reason to manhandle you.”

“Asshole. Even Stone is more empathetic than you are.”

He rested his hand over his heart. “I am devastated by your disapproval. Start your story at the beginning, Amelia.”

I paced away and leaned against the window, as close to freedom as I could be. But Brennan needed to hear our story, no matter how much it hurt my heart to repeat it to this man who seemed so uncaring. “You and I met at a bonfire. We were both pretending to be human for the night.”

“Really? To better understand them?”

“To dream of a life where we were free to choose our own destiny.”

“Wild,” he said flatly. “Yes, who would want supernatural powers when they could have taxes, depression, two weeks of vacation per year and bodies that tear so easily?”

“That’s not all. They can do anything—they aren’t bound by their packs. They don’t have a thousand rules. They aren’t captive to--”

“Everyone is captive. Everyone has a thousand rules.” He scoffed. “I don’t want to talk about humans. They’re irrelevant. Tell me about how we met.”

“Back then, you were charming. Give me your arm.”

He held both arms toward me without hesitation. I pulled his shirt sleeve up, revealing his corded forearm, which was tattooed. “Why did you get

tattoos when you can't see them?"

He didn't answer me. Still, as I rubbed my thumb across the ink, looking for the tiniest scar, his body tensed.

As if my touch on his skin meant something to him.

"Here," I said quietly. I caught his other hand in mine; he resisted for a second, then gave in. I guided his fingers with mine, to press his finger to the little burn scar. "The scar's so small, I guess you can't feel it."

"I have a lot of scars."

"The fire popped and you jumped to protect me." I smiled at the memory. "Very gallant, though unnecessary. And the spark burned through your sleeve, and I tried to tend the wound."

We were standing very close together. I was keenly aware of my hands on his.

"You seem quite intent on tending wounds," he said. "How have you done with your own?"

I released his arm. "Do you want to hear this story or not?"

"I do. Go on." He sank once again into the chair and picked up both our drinks.

"After that, my friend told you where I worked and arranged for us to meet again."

"I stalked you?" The idea seemed to amuse him. How emotionally well-adjusted.

"I didn't call it that at the time. You following me in the woods... that was stalking." But part of him must remember me, love me, still. It was the only thing that explained his obsession.

At least, it was the only explanation I wanted.

"You taught me how to ride a motorcycle," I told him.

"How did that go?"

"You didn't let me kill us both," I said. "And you bought a cottage for the two of us where we could be together. The one that you kept going back to."

Please remember, please remember.

Some part of him must remember.

It felt like some part of me remembered too, because I was different with him. Bolder. Snarkier. Despite our terrifying conditions.

Which made me think... I was more the person I used to be when he was around.

"It sounds like I spoiled you." His lips twisted. "I wouldn't expect the

same this go-round.”

“I don’t expect much from you. You didn’t remember your name? What have they called you?”

He hadn’t even told me his name. He’d only told me he wasn’t Brennan.

He rose from the chair, too abruptly, as if he were bothered by the question. Or the cottage. Or both. “The cottage. Why did it burn down? Seems a bit heavily metaphorical.”

“Nathan made me burn it down.”

“Ah.”

Brennan had marked me there. My fingertips rested over the mark. He couldn’t see it, and he wouldn’t care if he did. No matter that I had been tortured a half-dozen times for that mark, and I had still been grateful to forever wear his love.

He headed for the door.

“Where are you going?”

I was keenly attuned to men’s emotions, and his seemed to be reeling, no matter how cool and unaffected he acted.

He turned back at the door. “The cottage was being rebuilt.”

“Stone,” I said. “He wanted me to have a safe place to go.”

“But it seems like you would be safest on King territory.” Then he added, “From everyone but me.”

He was such a smug bastard.

“That was the cottage where I felt safe,” I said. “That was the place where I was happiest. With you.”

The words hung there, raw and aching, in the air. All at the same time, I regretted them and I was proud I’d admitted the truth.

He walked out without looking back, as if nothing I said mattered.

Or as if it mattered too much.

But perhaps that was just my wishful thinking as I paced my new cage.

CHAPTER 4



*B*rennan

THE TOWER APARTMENTS consisted of four rooms on four floors, stacked on top of each other: a bedroom—where Stone was now resting ever so contentedly—a spacious bathroom and walk-in closet, a small kitchen/dining room, and the living room where Amelia and I had talked.

Before I stormed off.

The entrance to those four floors was under lock and key--both to keep Amelia and Stone captive, and to keep them safe. Right underneath those four rooms was another, my office.

There were a dozen cameras spread between those four floors, not that I could see anything. But the audio came in clearly.

From the sounds of it, Amelia was pacing.

And cursing me under her breath.

Caroline let herself into the room. "Hey, creep."

"I don't call you names."

She patted one of the televisions. "There's nothing normal about this."

"There's nothing normal about your breeding program, either."

"Is it really a program when it's just you?" There was only one chair in my office--for a reason--but Caroline did not take the hint. She perched on the edge of the desk. It brought us close enough together that it was hard not to inhale the faint scent of death she carried under her floral perfume. The vampires were beautiful, and they charmed mortals; I always wondered how

humans didn't notice the danger signs until it was too late.

"Who is she to you, anyway?"

"The woman who's going to carry my child?"

"It's not just that. Adrienne might not realize it, but we couldn't exactly make you do anything if you weren't willing. You desire her."

"She's beautiful."

"You're blind."

"Still. I know."

She let out a laugh. "Fine, Wolf. Keep your secrets."

"How come you all never gave me a name?"

"Isn't Wolf a name? I guarantee you a hundred people named their baby Wolf last year." She paused thoughtfully. "And a dozen of them were celebrities."

I would never understand why now-immortal Caroline kept up with the Kardashians, but mine was not to reason why.

"Why did you come up?" The moonlight was starting to ebb as morning came, so she couldn't stay up here long. I could feel the moonlight fading, and with it some of my energy.

"To visit you. And to mock you a little. I've never seen you... care. About anything. Even your own life. But suddenly, you're... alive."

"I'm surrounded by melodrama, that's what I am."

"I just thought you might want to talk about her."

"No. But I do want to talk about the Fae king who wanders in here every now and then, because that is one weird situation. What does he want?"

"That's above my paygrade. That's an Adrienne problem."

"You stick your nose into everyone's business. You can't tell me you haven't thoroughly examined the Fae."

She scoffed. "Well, of course I want to tell you everything I know when you're mean to me."

"You like it."

"I don't know," she said. "I only worry about where my next sip of blood is coming from. Oh, and you. I've been worrying about you since you came to in..." She raised a finger to point upstairs.

They had carried me up there in the hope that moonlight would help me heal.

The reminder that she worried about me made me think I needed to establish boundaries--for the hundredth time. Vampires don't understand

boundaries. For instance, that anyone might like to keep their blood to themselves.

"His magic can't be free."

She sighed dramatically. "I'll do some digging."

"Be careful."

"You do love me, Wolf."

"You've been a good friend," I said cautiously.

She let out a trill of a laugh. "Of course."

She patted my shoulder as she rose. "And yet you're so eager to go back to the wolves. I can tell... these people are from your past, aren't they?"

"Yes."

"I won't tell."

I scoffed. It wasn't as if they mattered to me. She was almost to the door as I worried vampire games--and vampire jealousy--could one day cost Amelia. "I do want to know my... kind. But I'll never forget what you've done for me."

"What the vampire queen did for you," she corrected. "I couldn't have made the call to turn a wolf alone. Adrienne chose to save you."

"Yes. But she had her reasons. You've been my... best friend."

"It's a pretty small pool," she said softly. "You've made my life more interesting, Wolf."

Then she turned back in the doorway. "Did she tell you your real name?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

I hesitated, feeling for some reason as if I shouldn't tell her, shouldn't give the vampires that power over me. But that desire was ridiculous. We weren't in a fairy tale.

"I just want to be Wolf a little while longer."

"All right. I just want you to be Wolf too."

I could hear Amelia pacing. She sounded frantic.

I probably wouldn't make that any better.

The sound of her breath came from the speakers. Her footsteps echoed above me.

I rose abruptly and went out, but I made sure Caroline had left before I unlocked the door to the tower.

* * *

Stone

I READ once that if you know you're dreaming, you can control your dreams. You can fly or track down your childhood bullies and actually get an apology, whichever seems more miraculous to you.

I knew that I was dreaming, and it was not helping.

I was lost in the forest, deep in the forest, where gray mists hung low above the ground and the branches felt oppressive overhead. I was always comfortable in the woods, but now every tree was the exact same tree, and there was no way out. I might as well be in a labyrinth. The moon and stars were hidden behind clouds, so I couldn't use them to navigate.

I stopped and raked my hands through my hair. Surely I would wake up eventually. But what if I had to find my way out to wake up? I knew that one of the last things that happened to me before I fell unconscious was... the Rogue.

I couldn't believe that he was Brennan.

For one thing, Brennan was not an asshole.

“Stone?”

It was Liam's voice, in the far distance. I shouted back, “Liam!”

The sound faded. I didn't hear him call again. I turned in circles, trying to catch any scent, but I was alone here. There had only been the voice. If I started moving in any direction, I could be moving further away from him instead of closer.

“Stone!”

The voice seemed nearer, and it made me startle. I wasn't used to startling like that, or the way my stomach launched, my heart racing.

I hadn't heard that voice in years.

My father's voice.

If I could control this dream, then I wouldn't shape it into a nightmare. Would I?

My father stepped from behind one of those faceless trees.

Apparently yes, I would choose a nightmare.

He was enormous, the way I remembered him from my childhood, even though I'd been an inch taller than he was when he died. And yet, this man in my dream stood head-and-shoulders above me. His dark hair was gray at the temples, but he looked so much like me. His icy blue eyes swept over me.

“Where’s your brother?” His voice was the deep growl, edged with anger, that had defined my childhood.

“I don’t know. I’m trying to find my way out.”

“You lost him? Is there anything you don’t fuck up?”

“Quite a bit, actually.”

“Are you being a smartass?”

That was a question that once would’ve stiffened my spine and made my heart race, but this was my dream. My chance to tell the asshole off when he couldn’t hurt anyone in my family.

“No. I’m a good alpha—not perfect, but a hell of a lot better than you. I’m a good—” I got stuck on mate.

I’d never hurt Amelia like my father had hurt my mother.

But I certainly hadn’t been a good mate.

She’d saved me anyway.

“Hello.” His voice was dismissive. I looked up to find him right in front of me, snapping his fingers in my face. “You won’t be alpha if you can’t get out of your own head.”

That was probably true, though not in the way he meant it. What was happening to the pack without me? Was I sealed in here with my imagination of my father?

I turned toward the forest and cupped one hand around my mouth. “Liam!”

“What are you doing?” My father let out a laugh. “You lost Brennan. How are you going to get him back?”

“I don’t know. I thought he was dead. I’m still... not convinced he’s really there.” Jesus Christ, I was talking to my creepy imaginary ghost-dad now. Maybe Karissa was right. Maybe I needed to stop recruiting witches and instead hire a pack therapist.

“Because you’re a dumbass.”

I didn’t bother to answer him. I didn’t use that word—I’d heard it enough growing up that it was on my mental banned-words list, even though I otherwise embraced profanity like a warm fucking hug—but I had been stupid. In so many ways.

“How are you going to get him back?” he demanded.

“Repeating the same question isn’t going to change the fact that I don’t know.”

Even if that masked man really was Brennan.... He was different. He had

fought me in the forest, he had tried to take Amelia. My brother, with the laughing blue eyes, who was easygoing and kind-hearted, who always carried a band-aid in his pocket in case someone needed one, was dead.

Even if there was a version of Brennan who was still alive.

I told myself that knowing that meant I wouldn't have to mourn him again, and yet... somehow grief felt fresh, tight in my chest.

Did I recognize him?

Did I just refuse to admit it because he didn't recognize me?

"I'm still talking to you!" He barked, leaning in too close. Flecks of spit rained across my face.

I'd forgotten what that was like. As a kid, I hadn't dared wipe his spittle away, but now I let my disgust show as I wiped my sleeve over my face. "I still don't care."

Pain exploded in the back of my head, and I landed hard on my knees on the forest floor. I rolled out of the way of the next blow, already planting my feet to roll up and tackle my attacker.

But somehow, the dream I'd fucking conjured was faster than me. He was already grabbing my collar, yanking me up to slam my back against the nearest tree. Blue eyes, just like mine, blazed.

I was getting my ass kicked in my own dream.

Definitely going to look into that therapist.

"Shouldn't matter, should it?" he mocked me. "You're always in your own world. Surely you don't feel pain like the rest of us. You're barely even here."

That was what my father had said to Liam far too often when we were kids.

Oh, shit.

"I've never been a big fan of the part of myself that reminds me of Liam," I said, pretty conversationally, given my toes were hanging a foot above the ground. "Probably because, while I spent my childhood trying to protect him, I also spent my childhood trying to win you over."

"What are you going on about now?"

"Just coming to terms with the asshole I've been and why I probably invited you into my brain."

"You didn't invite me. This is my own territory."

I laughed. "No, it's not. Yeah, I can't ever get rid of you entirely. But you're the smallest piece of me now. The size of a cockroach."

The sky seemed lighter now.

“It’s not great having a cockroach around,” I admitted. “But still, the cockroach isn’t in charge.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?”

The trees were thinning out. I could see the edges of the forest.

“Were you embarrassed by Liam?” I demanded. “Or were you scared of him because deep down, you knew he was always better than you, more powerful?”

“Shut up.” He tried to shake me, but his grip was loosening.

The bark scraped against my back. I looked into my father’s furious face for the last time, “And so am I.”

My feet hit the ground. I staggered. When I looked up, through the shifting canopy of branches I could catch a glimpse of the little dipper constellation, then track it across the sky to the north star.

If I kept following the north star, I’d make my way somewhere.

“Stone!”

A feminine voice.

Jesus Christ, what was it now? My mother, come to address a lifetime I’d spent failing to protect her so epically that she was glad to surrender to cancer?

“If this is a Christmas Carol situation, I’m over it all-fucking-ready,” I called back. “I learned my lesson. I’m going to be different now.”

“Stone, please!”

It was Amelia’s voice.

I took off toward her on a run.

Then I burst out of the trees and out of the dream, coming to in a wild burst of air into my lungs, sitting up. I caught a glimpse of Amelia’s shocked face as she sat back on her heels.

She threw herself forward, hugging me hard. “Oh, Stone. I was so afraid you wouldn’t wake up.”

I wrapped my arms around her. My body ached and my feet had fallen asleep—there were threads of soft, sticky golden thread glittering all around us—but nothing could’ve stopped me from gathering Amelia into my lap.

“It’s alright,” I told her. Her face was so beautiful, especially now when she looked so tender, her soft lips parted slightly. All I wanted to do was kiss those sweet pink lips. “I’m awake. I’m here...wherever here is.”

I shook off the dream I’ve just had. For now.

I didn't believe in ghosts, but sometimes it felt like I was haunted.

"We're in the vampires' castle," she said. "Or, house, I guess. I mean we're in the U.S., it's not a castle. But there's a tower. Look."

She took my hand and drew me to my feet. Pins and needles stabbed through my feet and legs as I unfolded myself, but she was holding my hand, pulling me with her, and I let her drag me to the window.

We stood overlooking a deep green lawn and beyond that, forest.

"How long did it take them to transport us here?"

"An hour or two."

"So we're in neutral territory. Not far from home."

She nodded. "Is it neutral territory if it has vampires?"

"How the hell did any of us not know?" I asked, but it was rhetorical. "Don't worry. There won't be vampires here for long."

"Stone." She was still holding my hand, and now she gripped me more tightly to keep me from walking away. "You need to be patient."

"With the vampires that kidnapped us?"

"I wanted to come."

Those words dropped like rocks between us, opening up a gulf even though we were holding hands. I understood why she felt she had to come, but I was still furious. "For Brennan's sake."

"He'll remember me, I'm sure he will."

"And if he doesn't... we're both going to be eaten?"

She hesitated. There was something she wasn't telling me.

"Amelia—"

"Just try to talk to him," she said in a rush. "Try to be kind. He loves us deep down, I know it—"

"He almost killed me. More than once."

"He'll remember you! Help him. Please." She turned luminous blue eyes up toward me. "And be patient. We can play captive to the vampires for a little while... we'll escape when we're ready."

"So... we're just pretending to be captives. Just playing along with the vampires who think they have us locked in the tower."

"If you're going to be a dick, you can go back to sleep."

I gave in. "I'll play nice with the Rogue. I don't know if he's really Brennan."

"Why? He has the same build. He has the same tattoos, although more of them now. He has the same scars."

I felt a twinge at the thought of her examining his body. But then, she had loved him before she loved any of the rest of us. He was her first choice.

“Any clues why he’s partnered with the vampires?” That was a safer topic. And highly pertinent at the moment.

“I think they saved him.”

“Did they?”

She looked away out the window.

“You have a theory, don’t you?” I asked.

“Maybe. I don’t want to talk about it yet.”

“You and I don’t have much to do besides talk to each other right now.”

“I don’t think that’s the only thing,” she disagreed. “I spent too long worrying about you, Stone.”

She rested her hands lightly on my shoulders and tilted her face up to kiss my jaw. It was a soft, tender kiss.

“Here?” I asked, my hands skimming over her hips, my cock already hard. “When we don’t know what’s coming next?”

“That’s exactly why,” she said. “If things do go awry and I get bitten by a vampire, I want you to have fucked me one last time.”

I gave her a skeptical look.

She put her hands on my chest and gave me a shove. She couldn’t have moved me, of course—not without a softening blow and a leg sweep and a lot of luck—but I let her push me down onto the bed. She straddled me in one quick smooth movement.

I reached for her, eager to rip off her clothes, and she gripped my hands in hers. “You are not allowed to tear my clothing. I don’t know when I’m going to get more.”

“That’s fine,” I told her. “Stay naked for me.”

She grinned. “You say that until we have to deal with the vampires, and then you won’t appreciate it if I have nothing to wear but a smile.”

I let out a growl--she was absolutely right--and let her plant my wrists to either side of my head.

“Watch instead of ripping,” she said, rising up onto her knees as she pulled her dress off. With her straddling my lap, I had an amazing view of her body as she pulled off her clothes, then her bra. Her breasts, her perfect pink nipples, made me even harder, but I stayed still. I’d play her little game. Apparently, we were playing a lot of games now.

It was nice to watch her take control.

She shimmied her panties down her thighs, then tossed them across the room. Then she crooked a finger at me. "Sit up."

"Yes, ma'am." I drawled.

She let out a laugh as I rolled up into a sitting position. "I like this side of you."

"It won't last very long, you know."

"Then I'll enjoy it while it does." She pulled my shirt over my head, taking her time, her hands caressing my abs, my chest.

Then she moved to my belt, unbuckling it and drawing off my pants. She moved with the pants, kissing her way down my inner thigh, then my calf. My cock jutted up, beaded with precum, as she moved back up my thigh, still tracing a line with her mouth. But she avoided my cock, leaning forward to offer me her mouth.

I'd always take that too. I kissed her, raised one hand to grip her perfect breast. Its weight felt so right against my palm.

Her hand closed over mine and pulled it down, between her legs. She moved my hand to her pussy and held it there, my fingers teasing against her wet heat. "Like this," she murmured.

"I like this too," I said, stroking her clit with my thumb. She gasped, rocking over my hand, and then wrenched away to sit on her heels.

She wrapped her hand around me. I was already so hard that I thought my cock might burst and I had to put my hand over hers. "Easy now," I growled at her.

She smiled at me. "Oh, Stone. Nothing's ever easy between the two of us, is it?"

She leaned down, so her breasts swung back and forth in a way I found mesmerizing. Her gaze was locked on mine as her tongue flicked out and swiped away that bead of precum. Her eyes danced with mischief as her tongue teased around my cock, but she never took me inside her warm, wet mouth.

"You're right," I gritted. "Nothing is ever easy, but it's worth it."

She was going to be the death of me, but at least I would die happy.

I grabbed her hips and dragged her toward me. She struggled for a second until she realized how I was positioning her. I placed her so she was still straddling me, but now her head pointed towards my knees.

And I could look into the most perfect pink, slick-damp pussy I'd ever seen.

"Now you can suck me," I told her. "If you want to."

"You know I do," she teased.

I cupped her ass, tracing the shape of it with my hands. Her ass was so perfect, and I slid my fingers along her seam, teasing against her other hole. She let out a soft gasp, a warm breath onto my cock that filled me with satisfaction. I settled one hand against her warm pussy, my thumb beginning to work against her clit.

She enveloped my cock with her mouth. I almost shattered right there, watching her ass bob in front of me with the motion as she worked up and down my shaft.

Her hand gripped the base of my cock and I clenched my teeth against the sheer pleasure of her mouth.

I nearly came when she started to lick in long strokes against my balls, taking them into her mouth and sucking, and then moving back up to the tip of my cock, swirling her tongue around the head.

"You're going to be swallowing my cum before you know it if you keep that up," I warned her.

"Not yet," she mumbled around a mouthful of cock, as best she could.

My orgasm built, tension in my balls and the base of my spine. In the interest of distracting her, I licked along that perfect pussy, my thumb still working her clit. She let out a moan that I felt through my cock.

In retaliation, I grabbed her hip with one hand, my fingers pressing into her ass, so I could keep her still as my tongue thrust into her greedily.

I wanted all of her.

Every hole.

She rocked over me, rubbing her pussy across my face. My fingers dug into the lush curve of her ass as I held her there, still teasing her clit with my other fingers. She spasmed around my tongue, just once. So she was close.

So was I. Feeling her spasm had pushed me over the edge. Looking at her, god she was so fucking perfect, in every way.

"Swallow me now," I told her.

She made a few more long sweeping strokes of her tongue along my dick as she worked her mouth up and down me. She was going deep enough now that she gagged sometimes, but she kept going anyway, it didn't seem to bother her.

I shattered.

I couldn't have stopped it if I wanted to, and right then I didn't.

My cum shot into her mouth and she swallowed, with a pleased little groan. She kept going, until I was spent, until there was nothing left. My hips bucked and jerked as I emptied into her. All the passion that flowed through me went straight to my mouth, as I desperately worked her clit, my tongue thrusting inside her. Her thighs began to shake, and I had an up-close and personal view of her pussy beginning to spasm.

She came hard on my face, her body trembling and squeezing around my tongue. But most of all, she called out, “Stone!”

Hearing my name on her lips was even better than coming.

CHAPTER 5



Wolf

I STROKED myself as I listened to them, the sound of her breathing, his groans of pleasure. I raced my hand up and down my cock, pretending it was her warm mouth taking me. Amelia's hands, running across my thighs, cupping my ass to rock me toward her insistently. Her tongue, sliding around my dick as she groaned for me. The sweet scent of her arousal as her hand worked between her thighs while I fucked her perfect face.

Then she called his name.

Stone. Cum jetted out of my cock just then, but I barely felt any pleasure. My dick went soft.

Now I just had a mess to clean up.

I wanted her to say my fucking name.

Whatever that was.

I'd just finished tidying up when I heard the faintest sound.

It was almost impossible to hear the vampires' feet. They were so quiet coming up the stairs. One of their supernatural powers was certainly sneakiness.

But I heard them, scented them, felt them. It wasn't just Caroline this time. There were four of them coming up the stairs.

One vampire is trouble. Four vampires is a slaughter.

I didn't want them to discover the door locked, but I had to get ahead of them to talk to Amelia and Stone. Perhaps Stone could be persuaded not to

act stupid for fifteen minutes. I did not brim with hope after a few brief encounters with the man.

I unlocked the door and slid the key into my pocket. And then I climbed the stairs.

They weren't in the living room or the kitchen. Luckily, they had taken a break from fucking to clean up. And they were just coming out, dressed in the same slightly stale clothes, but smelling of soap. My nostrils flared. That King scent was too strong this close to Stone. He smelled like me, but wrong. Smokey. Like he'd been set on fire before we met. Or maybe that was just my jealous fantasy.

"Hey," Stone said before I could say anything. He shifted his weight, and I could sense his concern. "How are you doing?"

"I'm fine, but you probably won't be if you don't get your head on straight in the next... oh, minute." My nostrils flared, breathing in the faint scent of the vampires as it reached us. I could hear a faint sound as if he were doing the same. Did he look like me? Or rather, did he look like I was supposed to look?

"Vampires," Amelia said softly. "What do they want?"

"One, you're in their house. So it's probably best not to ask what they want in that rude way."

"I didn't invite myself into their house."

"The vampire queen will want to speak with you. Try not to piss the vampire queen off. Especially you, Stone. The vampires need Amelia. We don't need you."

Stone shifted as if he were gearing up for a fight. That had been the wrong thing to say. "What do you need Amelia for?"

"If you get through the next fifteen minutes without your throat being slashed open, I'll explain everything."

I wasn't going to do any such thing. But maybe the offer would help them grasp the gravity of the situation and motivate them to be polite for once.

I had the feeling other shifters were not very polite. Meanwhile, vampires were all about courtesy. When they weren't eating people.

"What do I call the vampire queen? Should we curtsy or bow or something?"

God, Amelia was always so cute. "No, that's not necessary. Unless you want to see if the queen can still laugh after two hundred years. Just... be polite. And don't talk too much. Wait until she speaks to you to address her.

Answer her question, don't try to lie, and try to refrain from being abrasive.”

I cast that last advice meaningfully in Stone's direction.

No matter what I said, I didn't know what I would do if the vampires attacked Stone. He should be nothing to me, really, but he did have some kind of connection to my past. And he obviously meant the world to Amelia. The bastard.

The man I used to be might have cared for him. It was hard to imagine being Stone's brother. It was hard to imagine Stone as a child.

I would bet we were both little assholes back then.

Adrienne swept in, accompanied by Caroline—who had most likely invited herself along—and Adrienne's two favorite guards slash lovers, Etienne and Caleb.

There was the softest give of Amelia's breath, so quiet only Stone and I could have heard it. I'd been told Adrienne practically glowed with supernatural light. I'd been told she was stunningly beautiful.

But even though I had never seen either of them, I doubted Adrienne could hold a candle to Amelia. At least, not for me. My fingers twitched, aching to skim over Amelia's face, to feel the contours. To see if she looked like she had in my dreams. I wondered if she was right and I remembered her, somewhere deep in my subconscious.

Though it didn't seem likely I had much of a subconscious, given the way my brain was shattered and then put back together by vampires. My mind was not in the best shape.

“Welcome to my home,” Adrienne said graciously. “How do you like the accommodations?”

“They're lovely,” Amelia said, with a smile in her voice. I silently willed her and Stone not to say that they would like it better without a lock. I understood how they felt, but I didn't want them to make things worse.

I was already feeling very tense about this situation.

Adrienne had her attention focused on Stone. I could feel it. Her presence was overwhelming. “And you? Have you forgiven the slightly abrasive nature of our invitation?”

“I appreciate your hospitality,” Stone managed. He didn't sound anything like sincere, but he was doing better than I expected.

“Lovely,” Adrienne said. “I just wanted to lay eyes on you before everyone else. My right, as a queen. I've always been curious.”

“Before anyone else?” I asked cautiously.

“Yes, dearest Wolf.” She said to me, and I winced internally. Amelia and Stone had heard her use my name and hopefully wouldn’t even realize that was what they called me. “Everyone is eager to meet her, to see her, to know she is real. Amelia is our hope of experiencing a normal part of life, something most of us left far behind long ago and yearned for. We lived on, while our children aged and crumbled to ash. We all miss the voices and laughter of children, the light they bring into a jaded world.”

“Although they literally won’t live in the light.” I murmured.

I could feel Stone looking at me as if to say I was being hypocritical. But I knew just how far I could push Adrienne. The vampires found me amusing. I was a novelty.

Plus, they still needed my dick until Amelia was pregnant. I was safe.

“The light they bring is metaphorical,” Adrienne said. “Though you know that. You’re just being difficult.”

“Forgive me, Adrienne.”

“You know I love you,” she said. “And I love my people, who need some new hope, some life-giving distraction. I don’t want them to soak in darkness and turn violent and depraved.”

She was about a millennia too late, but it was a laudable goal.

“So, the people will want to meet their gift. Because Amelia’s presence is a gift. We as a people have always loved ceremony. Most of us come from old school ways.”

“Wolves love ceremony too,” Amelia said, warmth radiating from her. At first I wanted to groan that she was speaking when I had asked her not to, but I could practically feel the way Adrienne brightened.

“And do you like balls and dances?” Adrienne asked.

“Very much. Especially when there’s food.”

Adrienne let out her trilling laugh. “Well, there won’t be food for us. We will keep that confined to other rooms, away from you. But I will make sure that there is something for you. Some treats to make the night more delightful.”

“Thank you for being so thoughtful,” Amelia said. “I look forward to it. I’m sure it will be lovely.”

“When is this lovely, lovely event?” I gritted.

“Two nights from now. We have some vampires working faraway, and I want to give them the opportunity to travel. To pay homage to their queen and to express their appreciation and to view this beautiful face.” There was a

faint rustle of clothing. In my mind's eye, which had been trained to sketch a picture from the faintest sounds and feelings of movement, I would bet that Adrienne had just put her hand under Amelia's chin so she could better examine her face.

Adrienne took a step back. "You two will make beautiful children."

"Thank you," Amelia said.

Stone was blessedly silent.

Caroline brushed her fingers against my forearm as she demurely followed the queen out of the room. It was her version of a wink for me, since I couldn't see her expression. I knew she would have plenty to say later, but she kept it to herself in front of the queen and her guards.

As soon as they were gone, Stone exploded on me. "Amelia as a gift? Beautiful children? What the fuck is going on?"

Amelia cringed so hard I could feel it. She was so desperate for Stone and me to be at peace. I wanted to make her happy, if I could, but I didn't think Stone and I were ever going to like each other.

Carefully, she said, "The vampires want me to bear a baby for them."

"What?" Stone turned on me. "You're a monster."

"The monster with the literal key to your escape, so I would choose my next words carefully if I were you."

"Are you going to help us escape?" Amelia asked in a rush. "You said you would explain everything to us now."

Those were both lies.

"How could you do this?" Stone demanded. "To use her like that... the mother of your child..."

"Hopefully," I said.

"She's your mate!"

"Is that so?" Adrienne stepped back into the room. My heart sank. She was so damn silent, and her scent had already been in the room. She must have signaled the others to go on down the stairs while she lingered to eavesdrop. "So you are attached to her?"

"In a way," I gritted. Because I didn't dare lie to her. "But obviously I don't remember her, so my feelings are... faint."

From the sound, Amelia clasped her hands in front of her body then, as if she were trying to hold herself together.

"And who is he? You said he would be useful. He means something to you too."

“He’s my brother. Or so they claim.”

There was fraught silence, and I could’ve sworn she was studying Stone, even before she asked curiously, “You have a handsome brother. Did you look like him? Before you fell like Humpty Dumpty and cracked into a dozen pieces?”

God, she was being insufferable today. A little show for Stone and Amelia? I didn’t understand her sometimes, but then she had two hundred years of experience of manipulating people and vampires alike. “I don’t know.”

“Do you know?” She wasn’t speaking directly to me now, her voice aimed in a different direction. She was speaking to Stone. “Did he look like you?”

“Yes.” Stone’s voice was raw. The emotion startled me. “We look very much alike.”

“Well, perhaps not anymore.” Adrienne said. “Though I’ve still found our Wolf quite attractive. It’s the confidence. The swagger, as I think the young call it these days. His casual capacity for violence and tendency toward pithy one liners, too. He has made our lives more interesting.”

“He didn’t recognize me.” I hadn’t meant to blurt that out, but it must have been on my mind. And even knowing Adrienne this long, her power to persuade and make people open up to her still affected me, just slightly. “Even in my wolf form.”

Stone swallowed. “I thought you were dead for a long time. It was hard enough coming to terms with it to begin with. I used to think, maybe there was some way you had escaped... because we didn’t find your body... but then you never came home.” He stopped abruptly, as if he were trying to wrench the words back into his chest.

Adrienne was trying to draw us out into conversation, but this was not a conversation we needed to have with the vampire queen. We all fell into silence, as if we realized that, and though she tried to draw us out, there were simple one-word answers from all of us.

“This is all very interesting,” Adrienne said finally. “I look forward to getting to know you two much better. My life has been enriched by knowing one wolf. Perhaps it will be even more enjoyable with three.”

Then she turned to me, resting her hand on my forearm. Her long nails bit just slightly into my skin. “I did hear you say something about escape. Which leads me to question if your loyalty is as complete to me as it should be.”

“I have no intention of letting them escape.”

“You were just playing with them.” Her tone was conspiratorial, as if we were good friends, but the two of them could hear her clearly.

My jaw tightened. “I wouldn’t put it that way.”

“I guess you did learn some things from us, since we are always playing with our food. So it won’t be a problem? Keeping your brother and your mate captive?”

“It won’t be a problem.”

“And breeding her? Will it be better because she is your mate, or worse?”

“A mate is nothing to me,” I said. “I’m more vampire than wolf now. And he doesn’t mean anything to me. I don’t remember him.”

Even in my human form I could sense their distress... not just from Amelia, but from Stone. But I didn’t have time to worry about that.

Instead, I followed Adrienne out of their beautiful cage. This time, I guaranteed she was far away from them.

And I left them, shattered but safe, behind me.

CHAPTER 6



Liam

ALL THAT NIGHT, I couldn't make contact with either Amelia or Stone. Hopefully, Amelia was just awake. The other possibility was too much to bear.

I got close to Stone in his dreams, but I couldn't actually reach him. I wasn't sure what was going on. When I entered his dream, I entered a forest. I called for him, and once I heard him call for me, but I was never able to find him.

But I kept trying. In the early hours of the morning, I finally felt the sweet brush of Amelia's mind against mine.

Walking into her dreams was always like walking into a beloved grandparent's home long after childhood has faded. The most commonplace things have a sweet familiarity. Beauty is everywhere.

"Amelia," I called to her.

And then she was there, turning between the trees to greet me. She hadn't been there a moment before, but when I glanced back she was there. When she saw me, a smile lit her face. "I was looking for you."

I rushed to meet her. "I was looking for you too."

She met me halfway, throwing her arms around my neck. Her soft body pressed against mine, and her scent enveloped me. For a second, all that was wrong faded. All we could do was hug, so tightly that I accidentally lifted her off the ground.

I had been so worried about her. I couldn't find words.

At least, I couldn't find any words that weren't crazy. But that was not exactly unusual for me.

"Where are you? Are you and Stone safe?" I asked when she pulled away, just slightly.

"We're with Brennan and his new vampire friends."

The ground fell out from under my feet. Since we were in a dream, the next thing I knew I was literally falling, and Amelia was falling with me. She grabbed my hands, and somehow pulled me back onto solid ground.

The two of us stood on a ledge, overlooking a majestic waterfall. Fragrant pink and red and white flowers dripped from the trees, and occasional petals drifted past us from the trees, caught on the breeze before they fell into the water. This had been one of her favorite places when we were young.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I should have found a gentler way to lead into the vampire news."

"Brennan?" I asked. "Vampires?"

I wasn't even sure where to begin.

"Yes," she said softly. "You know how the rogue always smelled familiar? It's because he is familiar. He's King pack. He's Brennan."

"I thought so. But why?" That was the question that burned in my mind. Why had we gone through all of this?

"He doesn't remember us. Nathan did shoot him that night. He almost died, or he did die, and the vampires brought him back somehow. He hasn't told me his whole story yet. I don't think he wants to. But I've put that much together."

"So that's why he smelled wrong. Because he has vampire blood."

"Yes," she said.

"So he stalked you and kidnapped you because some part of him remembers that you're his mate?"

She hesitated before she admitted, "It's worse than that."

"It's worse than that." I repeated. "You're being held captive by a vampire, and there's worse news. Let's get it over with, Amelia."

"Actually, it's a whole lot of vampires."

"What does he want from you?"

Amelia hesitated. "The vampires want him to have another child with me. One who is... theirs."

I immediately bristled, picturing Amelia's love for Dylan. The vampires'

stealing her baby would destroy her. It was followed, a heartbeat later, by the image of Amelia pregnant—with my baby. With my brother's baby. It didn't matter which of us. The baby would be ours. "We're not going to let that happen."

"I hope I can bring him back to me. Make him wake up. He loved me, and some part of him still does. His obsession is terrible, but I think it's rooted in the love that we felt for each other. I just have to get through to him..."

"If anyone can reach him, I'm sure that you can. But if you have to choose between his life and yours, Amelia..."

She hesitated, and I knew that what I was asking from her was painful.

Then she nodded. "I'll do anything to help him. But in the end, I'm coming home to Dylan... and I'm coming home to you."

Her words warmed my heart. "Does that mean you don't want to be rescued yet, then?"

"Not yet. You can tell he's a King brother, though. He just had to kidnap me."

I tried to smile at her joke, though nothing made me want to laugh at the moment. I wouldn't rest easy until Amelia was back with us. And until Brennan came back to us... Or was dead.

I had thought Brennan was dead for so long. The only thing worse than losing him to death would be losing him to his own worst impulses. I'd rather see him dead than if he turned into someone we couldn't recognize anymore, so different from the brother I adored.

"I'm going to go find him," I said. "I'll try to go into his mind too, if he's sleeping. And I'll try to show him what I can, to make him remember."

"Thank you for trying," she said. "I'm glad I can see you at least. I worry about you all, you know."

"I don't think you need to worry about us. You're the one in trouble right now."

"Oh, I know you guys. You are always in trouble."

I let out a laugh and kissed her. While we were kissing, and I thought of how I needed to find the others as soon as I could to show them that Amelia was alright, a thought struck me. "I wonder if I can bring the others into your dream."

"Do you really think that you could do that?" Her voice was full of wonder. It touched my heart. There was something that struck me with awe

about having Amelia admire me. No one else admired me—but no one else mattered.

“I think it’s worth trying. I’ll be right back. Don’t go anywhere.”

She smiled back at me. “I literally can’t go anywhere. I am captive in a vampire tower.”

“Sounds kind of romantic, actually.”

“It might be if I had clean clothes and more food than stale Oreos forgotten in a cabinet. I don’t think it occurs to vampires to feed their captives, and Brennan is a little bit...” She shook her head. “I think maybe he eats when he’s the wolf? He doesn’t seem to think about mere mortal concerns like a nice breakfast.”

“That doesn’t sound like Brennan. He was always so thoughtful and kind.”

“Liam... you have to understand. He’s not the same Brennan.”

“I’m sure. But none of us are the same anymore.”

“That’s true,” she admitted.

“And yet, as much as it can be hard to believe at times... we are worth as much as when we were... undamaged.”

She slipped her arms around my waist and laid her head on my shoulder, or rather, on my chest since she was so much shorter, and the gesture surprised me. “How do you always say just the right thing?”

I hesitated for a second, then folded her in my arms, stroking her hair. “Usually, I’m pretty sure I say the crazy thing.”

“Well... when the things you’re saying are full of hope, and giving people the benefit of the doubt, maybe they are the crazy things. But I love that you say them.”

Looking down at her, I wanted to tell her that I loved her so much. But the timing seemed so odd.

“I’ll go find the others,” I promised her, and then I kissed her one more time.

It was hard to pull myself away to go into their dreams, but I did. I found Cole, whose dreams were restless and thin. He almost woke up when I tried to walk into his dream, and I tried to help him think calming thoughts. Unfortunately, my calming thoughts were usually about marshmallows.

And so, into the middle of his violent and bloody dreams, a storm of marshmallows began to fall on us like a blizzard.

Even in his own dreams, Cole was stoic and silent. He stared up at the

marshmallows falling from the sky, then asked, “What the fuck is this?”

“Your dreams aren’t usually this weird?” I asked him with a smile.
“Sorry. That’s my fault. But I needed to talk to you.”

Cole looked shocked. “Are you really here? Or am I just dreaming about you?”

“I’m really here.”

“You walked into my dream.”

“Yes. I walked into Amelia’s first, and I thought you would want to see her.”

“She’s alright?”

“She’s alright. And I wanted to try to take you to see her for yourself. To see if I could bring you guys into the dreamscape.”

Cole brushed off the marshmallows that had fallen into his hair and said, “Let’s go.”

When he saw Amelia, he grabbed her, his hands threading into her hair, and kissed her hard. I smiled at the two of them.

It turned out being able to slip into other people’s dreams wasn’t a gift just for me. It could be a gift for other people too. And that meant so much more.

Then I went hunting for my brother. For a long time, I searched back and forth through the dream forest without any way to reach him. The woods seemed vast and empty.

What would Brennan have kept? He had lost the memories of us. But he had to have kept something. Muscle memory, perhaps. Would his body remember running with us? Training with us?

Fleeing with us?

The memories of my childhood fear always pressed in on with me with a rising sense of shame. My stomach clutched like it had back then. My brothers all despised the way they felt when they remembered.

I suspect every one of us still harbors a piece of us that is forever an anxious child.

Brennan should be no different.

Boyish voices rose in the distance. I turned to see four dark-haired little boys running barefoot through the woods. The five King siblings all looked so alike. My mother had lined us up on the farmhouse steps each year to take photos of us all, one on the porch, one on the lawn, and one on the three steps in between. As if she’d been proud of having her stair-stepped babies.

I followed the boys into Brennan's dreams.

His sleep was dark and shadowed. He tossed and turned, barely settling enough for me to stay in his mind. Something tormented him. When his dreams rose up around us, I expected them to be of his murder or of the things he had seen with the vampires.

Over and over, he kept replaying one moment.

"A mate is nothing to me."

He hadn't been able to see her face, but he kept imagining Amelia's face, carved with pain. It twisted my heart too. Why had Brennan been so foolish?

And yet... in his darkness there was hope for us. He was so broken and sad about harming Amelia.

He felt the same as the old Brennan.

* * *

Brennan

I COULDN'T STOP REPLAYING what I had said to Amelia. Or the way it had felt. I had wanted to protect her, because if the vampires thought that I cared about her, they also would think that I might help her escape. Especially after Adrienne overheard our conversation.

So, I had said the ugliest things in order to protect her.

At least now Stone could rage about my plans and maybe he'd get his rage out of his system and be reasonable.

My dreams slowly shifted, becoming calmer. Clouds formed in the sky above, soft and fluffy.

Slowly, I found myself in the forest, which had always been a place of peace for me.

The forest softened from nondescript trees, every one of them the same, to a familiar forest. Home. Four boys ran past me, calling to each other. They looked so carefree and happy, barefoot and ruddy cheeked. They were all black haired and blue eyed, and my heart seized as I considered that this might be a fragment of reality. Something buried in my shattered subconscious.

A voice called in the distance, deep and angry. "Brennan! Shaw! Stone!"

The boys all stopped and looked at each other in horror.

“Well, he didn’t call you,” one said to another. “So you must not be in trouble.”

“He just wants to pretend that I don’t exist.”

“Well, we’re glad that you do.” The tallest of the boys said.

I didn’t like the dream. Maybe there was value in it, maybe there was truth hidden in it, but I felt the trapped, claustrophobic sense of being in a nightmare.

And then, I realized I was not alone in my dreams, as I always was.

Someone else was here. But I couldn’t quite see him. His presence touched me like a shadow, the way we always know that we’re being watched with some sixth sense even if we can’t see the watcher.

I turned, searching for him. My pulse quickened. A threat. Who was here?

Then I was jolting awake.

The dream had left me deeply unsettled. I found myself unwilling to lay back down and I could fall asleep again, less than excited about what memories might play for me next. If they were even my memories at all. Part of me resisted the idea.

Instead, I went to find Amelia.

CHAPTER 7



*B*rennan

EVERYTHING WAS quiet in the apartment. Amelia and Stone must be asleep. Yet the desire to see her was so strong that it drove me out of my logical mind. I found myself unlocking the door to the tower and slipping inside, into the dark, quiet space.

Were those dreams I had real? Those four boys... Were they my brothers?

I needed to see her. That thought, stronger than sense, drove me up the stairs. It wasn't until I reached her bedroom door that I realized my behavior was psychotic. Amelia would not appreciate finding me standing over her.

But I couldn't resist.

Especially not when I was so close to her already. I could practically feel her on the other side of the door. I pushed open the door and went in. I couldn't see them, so I reached out and felt one hand lightly across the bed, sweeping over the curve of limbs in the blanket.

It shouldn't have been a surprise.

But Stone and Amelia were tangled together, her leg thrown casually across his legs, her head nestled into his shoulder. Contentment radiated from them both.

The sudden flash of jealousy was so intense that it made me want to kill him. Stone was so peaceful right now.

She gave him that peace. I was sure of it. And I wanted it for myself.

How could she ever love these men and me too? How could she ever love someone with a ruined face? Someone who had done the things I had done? Someone who had become a monster? I would always be part vampire now.

Amelia's breathing changed as she woke. Then she saw me, and I felt the moment sleep and peace fled her as she saw me.

She started to scramble up, before she paused and laid a calming hand on Stone's chest. I didn't think she even realized that she was doing it, but he had started to stir, and then he settled back into sleep under her gentle touch.

His reaction did not do anything for my current homicidal tendencies.

"What is it?" she whispered. "I'll get up. We can talk."

I scoffed. "I don't want to talk."

What else had driven me to wake her? But Amelia didn't ask questions. She slipped out of the bed and stood between Stone and me, and I could sense how fierce she felt, as if she were ready to attack me. Such a cute, tiny thing; that was what I thought, even as jealousy rippled through my muscles like violence.

"Out," she whispered, and her soft, warm palm pressed my forearm. A demand or a plea. She must have guessed at my impulses. She wasn't going to leave me behind in the room with him.

I nodded my agreement and stepped out of the room. I was getting what I wanted, after all; a few private moments with the woman who had once been my mate.

Once we were out on the landing, she led me down the stairs into the kitchen.

"Are you still a terrible cook?" she asked me.

It was such a strange thing for her to ask me, such a little slice of normalcy that left me with a sudden longing to be someone else, someone who made pancakes. Someone who burned them, if that was what she remembered fondly.

"I don't cook."

"So, that's why we're starving." She opened the drawers and cabinets, then said, "Nothing new has magically appeared."

Oh, fuck. The realization she'd been hungry opened a pit in my stomach. "You need food."

"Unless you intend to let us go out and hunt. And even then... I'd rather cook some mac and cheese than tear apart a rabbit."

Most of the time, I subsisted on whatever I could chase down. It gave me

both the chase I needed as a shifter, and the blood I craved as a vampire. I drained my prey, then devoured its flesh. At first, I had been horrified by myself, when I had grown strong enough to leave the vampires and begin to hunt again.

My needs no longer horrified me. We're all animals. Some of us just admit it to ourselves.

"I'll get you food," I said roughly. "I should have thought about it."

"Yes, you need to keep me healthy," she said. "Can't let your breeding stock starve."

I didn't expect to hear her joke about her fate. "So have you come to terms with what the vampires want?"

"Not at all," she said. "For a long time, having another child has been my worst nightmare. It doesn't really seem better now. I was already afraid of bringing a child into this chaotic, cruel world, but now..."

When I imagined the baby being torn from Amelia's arms, and the look of anguish on her face, something hardened in my stomach, a fierce protective throb that would not let anyone hurt Amelia. That wouldn't let anyone hurt our child. But it was nonsensical.

What was the happy ending here? That I sent Amelia back to the King pack? That I went there with her? I had serious doubts that a vampire would be welcome in their midst.

No, the happiest ending imaginable was that Amelia stayed with me. I would convince the vampires to let her raise the baby. Their longing for a child was understandable, I supposed, when they had been bored for so long. I could convince them to be good to Amelia and to the child. Amelia and I could play... husband and wife, father and mother.

The memory of the cries of the little boy when he was being abducted rose in my mind, and suddenly I could understand Amelia's sense that it was a terrible thing to bring a child into this world.

Amelia sat down at the table and held out an Oreo to me. "Cookie?"

"I don't want a cookie."

She pulled her face. "Bring me the ingredients, and I'll make you some cookies that are worth eating."

"I haven't eaten a cookie in as long as I can remember. Literally."

"Maybe that's why you're always in such a foul temper."

"I am not always in a foul temper."

"You were staring down at Stone and I like you are going to tear us to

pieces.”

“Just Stone,” I disagreed.

She did not seem to feel like this correction was a drastic improvement.

“Neither of you need to be jealous,” she said softly. “You two need each other too. You need to get to know your siblings. The way the King family fits together... You’re their missing piece, and I don’t think you realize it, but they’re yours.”

“All I care about is you,” I said gruffly.

“Then you’re going to have to care about them, because they’re my family now too. The family I was born into was terrible, but the King pack brought me into their home and cared about me. They’re my family now, so if you think you love me, they have to be your family too.”

I stared at her. “Love does not enter the equation.”

“It’s the weirdest thing,” she said. “Because you still have Brennan’s mannerisms, and you sound just like him, you still have the sexy voice, you still have this immense vocabulary you got from reading every book in the pack library, you’re still obviously so smart... But then you’re just...not him.”

She sounded so sad. Her words pieced me like an arrow, tearing me to pieces inside.

As if she hadn’t said quite enough, she added, “You don’t have his kindness. I don’t think so, anyway... maybe I’m wrong.”

She was studying me closely, as if she could see inside me.

“You’re not wrong,” I growled. “I’m not that person anymore.”

The aura rising from her was full of pain. Somehow I wanted to fix things and I wanted to make her cry at the same time. I wanted to soothe her and I wanted to know that she hurt, because of me. Because she still loved me, even if I said we couldn’t talk about love.

“You’re my first love,” she said softly. “I’ve always believed that was special.”

“But obviously not your last love.” I couldn’t stop my voice from coming out caustic, betraying too much feeling. I shouldn’t give a fuck about any of them.

“No,” she agreed. “But it’s not better or worse, the way I feel for you and the way I feel for Stone. The way I feel about your other brothers too, it’s different with each of them. But you’re all important to me.”

I snorted. “Good lines, Amelia. But you’re not fooling me. I’m not the

person you loved. It must be painful to look at me, when I'm not him. When I'm ruined."

She was focused on me in a way I couldn't read, maybe a mixture of tenderness and horror, something I'd never felt from a human before. She was quiet for a few long seconds. "Oh, Brennan." It came out almost a sigh, as if I were a puzzle she couldn't begin to understand.

Something about the softness—the pity—enraged me. If she was going to pity me, she might as well do it properly.

I ripped the mask off. Cool air caressed my face, a rare feeling when I wasn't alone, or hunting. I terrified people when they saw my face, and I enjoyed that in the moments when someone needed to be hurt or killed.

She was silent. She didn't gasp. I'd tensed for her reaction, but now I felt even more angry and unhinged when there was none.

"I'm ruined," I repeated. "Don't pretend that you could feel anything for me like you feel for them. Pity is not the same as affection."

"No, it isn't," she agreed. I felt the change in the air as she came toward me, and then her soft hand brushed my shoulder. "But I can't feel pity for you when you're the one making your life miserable."

She brushed her lips against my ruined cheek. I could barely feel the feather soft touch with all the scar tissue. And yet it did something to me. It was such a sweet, innocent gesture.

"You're not ruined because of what happened," she whispered in my ear. "I'm damaged. I wouldn't judge you for being damaged."

She was so soft and tender. It almost undid me.

Her voice hardened. "You're ruined because you're choosing to be a mean bastard."

I yanked back from her so quickly that she stumbled. "You must be brain damaged to talk to me that way, knowing what I could do to you."

"But you won't," she said.

"You are maddening. You foolish, ridiculous girl—"

"You know, you sound just like your brother. You two should get along."

For the second time that day, I stormed off rather than face Amelia any longer.

CHAPTER 8



Liam

MY FAVORITE THING was to be near my family, but not talking to them. From the couch, I could listen to Dylan and Shaw and Cole as they sat on the floor in front of the television like three kids. Shaw and Cole looked huge, one of the big broad shouldered men on either side of the small boy, but he was giggling non-stop as he beat them in MarioKart.

I didn't want to play, but I liked being near them.

"Off to bed," Karissa told Dylan, stepping in front of the television. "No more video games for any of you."

Dylan was already dressed in Ninja Turtle Pajamas, his teeth brushed and bath done in barter for another half hour of video games before sleep.

Shaw and Dylan shared a pouty look as if they might just rebel against Karissa.

"You're all spoiling him," Karissa mouthed at us as Cole turned off the television.

"Especially you," Shaw mouthed back over Dylan's head.

Cole whirled Dylan away before he could complain or Shaw could rebel. As Cole carried Dylan slung over his shoulder, the boy's laughter rang down the stairs.

We knew it wouldn't last. Karissa knit her hands together, a frown crinkling between her brows as she watched them go. Dylan had a hard time sleeping at night with Amelia in another world.

“He’ll be alright,” I said. “He’s strong.”

“He’s a King.” Karissa said lightly.

Shaw scoffed. “Let’s not make too much of that.”

“Do you think Brennan knows?” Karissa asked. “That he has a son?”

I shrugged.

“Having conversations with you two is so satisfying,” Karissa said, before heading upstairs. She and Cole would split the night, being available for Dylan. I was in and out of my dreams, and Shaw was in and out of pack business.

“We’re doing the best we can for him, right?” Shaw asked.

I cut him a look, confused at first, then nodded. “How are Amelia’s people?”

Amelia’s people. Aiden, Lawson, Rose. They had a place in the pack because we loved her.

Shaw shrugged. “Aiden and Lawson are working together in the mechanics’ shop. They seem—”

Our mother’s photo on the piano caught my eye. I wandered toward it, forgetting to listen to Shaw as my mind began to whirl. Where had my powers come from?

“Dad wasn’t Fae at all.” I blurted out. Too late, I realized Shaw was still talking.

Shaw whistled. “Once again, a perfectly good punchline ruined. But okay. We’re changing topics. Dad wasn’t Fae. I assume Mom was part Fae, like Amelia.”

“What if she was Fae-Fae?”

Shaw rubbed his temple with one hand. “Fae-Fae.”

He sounded as if he was teasing me, but then he said, “Sorry, I’ve had a long day dealing with pack bullshit. I’m having a hard time following you.”

“Maybe Mom was really Fae.”

“Then why the hell did she stay here and not go back to her own world?”

I cocked my head to one side, studying the photo of her. “I assume she was trapped.”

“By what?”

“By us.”

“Here’s the thing,” Shaw said. “You’re the only one with any kind of powers. If we were all Fae—”

“You might be devilishly handsome and draw everyone to you with your

charisma?”

Shaw couldn't hide his smile. "People like me, but it's not magic."

"I've heard you talk...a lot. It's magic."

"Call me handsome and then insult me," Shaw muttered. "It's almost like Amelia is still here."

"But why wouldn't she use some kind of magic to make Dad not an asshole?" I muttered. "And once I was being held by the Longroad pack, why wouldn't she help me? Was she..."

My eyes tracked from the photo to the wrought-iron cross that hung above the piano.

I paused, thinking about things that weakened Fae.

Shaw was talking again when I turned and raced for the stairs.

Our parents' room was the largest room at the far end of the hall. When I pushed open the door, it was quiet and dark and smelled faintly of dust and disuse, despite being clean as the rest of the house. We hadn't been allowed in here as kids. I flipped on the lights as I walked in.

Shaw followed me in, looking bemused. "What is it?"

"Dad made this for Mom." I pointed at the elaborate iron sculpture that hung on the wall.

He had worked in the blacksmithing shop before he became alpha. We all had to have a job, I hadn't thought about it much before.

"Typical tightwad Dad," Shaw muttered. "Make her some roses out of scrap metal and never buy them for her."

"Iron, Shaw," I said impatiently. "He hung iron all over the house."

Shaw frowned. "He didn't just hang iron around the house. It's in the walls."

"What do you mean?"

"I was working on the house with Dad when I was a kid," Shaw said. "And we had to take down a wall. All the walls were reinforced with iron. He said it was like constructing a safe house for us."

"Safe from the Fae, maybe," I muttered. "I wonder what it's done to us. What it's done to Amelia. To Dylan."

"Do you think mom had an affair to have you?" Shaw asked. "I'm sorry to just blurt that out, but like I said—"

"You think you don't have powers. But I bet you do. I bet you're half Fae. But you're not as strong as I am, so the iron overwhelms your powers."

Shaw quirked an eyebrow at the not as strong line, but let it go.

“We need to get it out of the walls,” I said.

Shaw glanced at the clock that hung on the opposite side of the room. “It’s almost midnight.”

“We’ll be quiet.” Then I paused, struck by another thought. “We should exhume Mom. Surely we can find out if she was fully Fae or not.”

Shaw stared at me. He always took things in stride, joking no matter how inappropriate, but for once, my brother looked shocked.

Then he said, “Let’s just start by fucking up the drywall, okay? I’m going to get us some tools.”

When he left the room, I went with him. My parents’ room still felt forbidden, and it was too crowded with ghosts.

CHAPTER 9



*A*melia

THE NEXT MORNING, the only sign Brennan had been in the apartment was in the kitchen. A pair of baskets held a loaf of crusty bread, cheese, cured meat, strawberries, chocolate, tea, a jar of milk, and eggs. As I unwrapped each item from the colorful waxed fabric it was wrapped in, inhaling the scent of fresh bread and sweet, fragrant strawberries, my stomach growled.

“Why are the groceries set up like Little Red Riding Hood?” Stone rubbed the fabric between two fingers. “I can’t picture Brennan at a farmer’s market.”

“I don’t know,” I admitted, casting a troubled look at the windows which overlooked the forest. “There’s something very weird about this place, Stone.”

Stone had that look on his face, as if he couldn’t relax until he understood everything. “For now,” I told him, “Let’s just eat breakfast.”

“I’ve got it,” Stone said, grabbing the eggs and moving to the stove.

“I’ll make us breakfast,” I insisted.

He held the eggs up out of my reach, giving me a grin that was more boyish than I’d seen from Stone before. Those eggs were precious to me, but the chance to play with Stone was irresistible. I pressed myself to him, grabbing his collar and pulling him down to kiss me.

Our lips clashed in a slow, tender kiss. I slid my palm up his shoulder, moving for the eggs, and he grabbed me and spun me around, catching me

with his free arm around my waist.

“No,” he murmured in my ear. “I’m onto your tricks.”

“I just want to make you a nice breakfast!”

“Mm, but I already owe you, don’t I? Where does it end, Amelia, if I don’t pay you back... then I’ll owe you for saving my life and breakfast.” His breath tickled my throat in the best way, the scruff of his beard against my skin intoxicating.

“Maybe I want you to owe me,” I said saucily, then spun out and tried to take out his leg with mine.

Stone leapt over my leg sweep, just as I’d expected. But I was already bounding onto the kitchen chair, reaching to grab the eggs from his outstretched arm while he was distracted.

He set the eggs on the table as he whirled and grabbed me around the waist. As he pulled me toward him, I wrapped my legs around his waist.

“I thought you were too hungry to be so mischievous,” he teased me, before his lips met mine again. He kissed me over and over as he carried me toward the counter beside the stove, where he deposited. “Sit there and watch me make you breakfast.”

“Always orders with you,” I said, feeling the cool of the countertop against my thighs, since I was just wearing a t-shirt and panties.

“If I give enough orders, perhaps you’ll eventually develop the good habit of obeying,” he said, though not with a great deal of optimism.

Stone cracked eggs expertly into the pan, and I watched him cook. He was shirtless, and the tattoos that covered his broad shoulders and chest were mine to examine for once.

“What is this?” I asked, running a fingernail over the tattoo above his heart. Five roses, only partially opened—more thorn than flower—twined together. I already had a feeling I knew what it meant.

The faintest shiver ran through Stone’s muscular body at my touch. He moved away, beginning to slice the bread and cheese. “It’s for my siblings.”

“Why aren’t the flowers in bloom?”

“Have you met us?”

I let out a laugh. “I don’t know. I think you are all blooming.”

Stone let out a groan and stuffed a piece of cheese into my mouth. If a man were going to try to shut me up, I might not mind if dairy products would be involved.

After breakfast, Stone and I passed the day by moving the furniture and

training. We found soap and washed our clothes in the sink before hanging them up, and naked training led quickly to an entirely different kind of naked wrestling. Brennan was nowhere to be seen, all day long, as if I had scared him off with my scolding.

As night fell, I found myself worrying about him. I leaned against the windows, looking out over the distant trees. Bats flew over the trees, startling me at first, and when I pulled back, I could've sworn they were far bigger than they should have been, with enormous, outstretched wings and long necks... as if they weren't bats at all. By the time I called for Stone to look, they were gone.

When we went to bed, I was eager to dream. Stone wrapped me in his arms and pressed a kiss to my forehead. "Are you going to dream of my brothers?" His tone was light, but I was sure there was emotion underneath it.

I nodded. "I hope Liam can help me find Brennan. I'm worried about why he didn't come back to us."

Stone let out a soft snort. "You're kinder to my brother than he deserves."

"At least you admit he's your brother now."

"You were kinder to me than I deserved, too," he admitted, before his lips caressed mine in a sweet, tender kiss goodnight.

When I had nestled my head into his shoulder and the lights were off, I whispered, "You've always deserved good things, Stone."

And so had I.

That must be why these men and I had found each other, and it was why we would fight our way to a happy ending.

Perhaps because I was so eager to dream, sleep was elusive. I listened to Stone's soft breathing as he fell into sleep. I felt warm and cozy in his arms no matter where we were. But where was Brennan? Had the vampires hurt him?

Was Brennan loyal to me... in the end, no matter what he said... and what would that cost him?

As I watched the moon move across the sky, the gauzy curtains rustling with the breeze, I fretted Liam would be gone by the time I finally fell asleep. Please, come find me, I begged Liam as sleep settled slowly and heavily over me.

I fell into the dreamworld. Through the forest of my childhood dreams, with its shifting, unearthly landscapes—past the waterfalls, the flowers unfurling toward the moon, the ancient forest full of whispers of movement

and unseen creatures—and into the green lawn in King pack territory.

Of course my dreams would bring me here. This was home, where I was loved, and that was more magical than any dream forest.

“Liam,” I called softly, knowing he would find me in his dreams. Sure enough, he loped out of the woods, bare-chested as if he had just been running as a wolf, his muscular chest fluttering with exertion.

He grabbed me and pulled me close. I breathed in the scent of him, a faintly salty scent from his fresh sweat that I savored as much as the smoky, underlying scent of pack. “I missed you,” he whispered into my ear.

“I missed you too,” I said. “And the others. Dylan.”

I cast a longing look at the house, wishing it were real, that I could go in there and see my son.

“I’m sorry,” Liam said quietly. “Cole’s been watching over him. He’s better with him than any of us. And Karissa... she loves him so much.”

“You’re good uncles. She’s a good aunt.” I was reminding myself as much as appreciating them. Because I wanted to take care of Dylan so badly.

“We’re trying. He needs you.” Liam looked as if he regretted the words as soon as he had said them, but it wasn’t like Liam to lie. “He’s safe, though. And he seems... fine.”

A lump lodged in my throat. There must be so much Liam wasn’t saying. Fine. Fine wasn’t good enough.

“I’ll be coming home,” I promised. “Nothing could keep me away.”

“I know.” He ran his hands over my shoulders, up my throat, then cupped my face. He studied my face as if he were trying to memorize me. “I want to have you all to myself. But I can get Cole. He can tell you more about how Dylan is doing. And... he’ll want to see you as much as I do.”

“Thank you,” I said gratefully.

A few minutes later, the three of us were walking through the woods. The world seemed so plain after glimpsing the dreamworld: plain stalks of pine trees, the leaves clumping beneath the oaks, the moon hidden behind clouds.

“Tell me how everyone is,” I said, because I couldn’t quite bare to ask for details about Dylan yet.

“Rose is continuing to try to win Teresa over,” Cole said.

“I’m sure that’s going well.”

“It is, really,” Cole said, surprising me. “I think Teresa sees a lot of her past self in Rose. Angry kids, you know? They don’t make good choices. But that doesn’t mean they’ve gone too far to be redeemed.”

“Cole had to help Rose with her homework,” Liam put in. “I missed high school math. And so did Shaw, even though he was in class.”

Cole pulled a face, even as Liam added, “Cole’s the smart one.”

“You’re just trying to make it up to me,” Cole said.

“For what?” Liam demanded.

“Giving me a concussion?”

“Oh, you’re proud you trained me so well, don’t lie, it was worth an injury.” Liam said. I wasn’t sure I’d heard him joke before, and my fingers brushed his as we walked. Liam caught my hand, gently, and held it in his.

“How’s Shaw holding up?”

“He hates every minute of being an alpha,” Cole gave me a grin. “Stone would be amused.”

“Karissa caught someone complaining about him.” Liam shivered, and it was hard to tell if he was being dramatic or not. “She was scarier than usual.”

“And what about you?” Cole’s arms slipped around my waist, and I stopped walking and leaned back into him. I was still holding Liam’s hand as Cole’s lips dipped close to my ear. “How are you holding up, Amelia?”

“I’m afraid,” I whispered. “For Brennan. For Stone.”

The only way those words would’ve been pulled out of me was in the dreamworld, surrounded by these two men I trusted so much.

“I am too,” Liam said quietly. “But we’ll find a way, Amelia.”

Slowly, the darkness of the present situation fell away as Cole and Liam caged me, covering my body with kisses. I’d longed for them, and my body came to life, filled with longing for their touch.

I slid my hands under Cole’s t-shirt and roamed the hard edges of his abs with my palms. His taut stomach tensed under my touch as I delved lower, teasing into his jeans.

Behind me, Liam caressed my skin as he teased my shirt up until my breasts were exposed. My nipples beaded in the cool air until they were covered by his warm palms.

As their lips explored every inch of my skin, I surrendered myself to the sensations that rippled through me. Their hands roamed across my curves, igniting a fire inside me that threatened to consume me whole.

I moaned softly as Cole’s lips found mine, his tongue sliding inside my mouth, tasting me as if he’d been starved for weeks. Liam’s hand slid down my stomach, his fingers dipping beneath the waistband of my pants, teasing me with his touch.

I arched my back, silently begging for more, and they didn't disappoint. Cole's hands found their way to my breasts, kneading them gently. Liam's fingers worked faster now, tracing circles around my clit, making me whimper with need.

As I reached my peak, they both slowed down, bringing me back from the edge before starting the process all over again. It was a torturous pleasure, and I loved every second of it.

With another rush of desire, I pressed myself against Liam's hand, needing him to take me over the edge. He gave me just what I wanted, his fingers slowing only long enough for me to reach my bursting peak before his fingers were back at it again, bringing me back with a vengeance until my body was thrumming with a desperate need for them.

I was about to reach my next peak when Cole pressed a hand to my shoulder, stopping me mid-climb. "Patience," he whispered in my ear. "Let's find someplace that will suit us all better."

I protested, but Cole was already sweeping me up to cradle me in his arms. "Can you take us somewhere better, Liam?"

The world blurred and I found myself, still in Cole's arms, standing inside an unfinished bedroom. The walls were framed in, but not yet finished. The only furniture in the room was the bed. Stacks of hardwood flooring to be installed were at one side of the room, and so were rolls of a gorgeous blue-and-gold wallpaper.

"This isn't what I was thinking of, but I suppose it'll do," Liam said.

"Where are we?"

"Your cottage," Cole said, and my heart almost stopped. "Shaw's sure you're coming home. He's had them keep working on it."

"And Cole's helped Dylan pick out the finishing touches," Liam added, ignoring the look Cole flashed him, as if Cole were uncomfortable with any praise. "It's been a distraction. A way to remind Dylan we're all sure you'll come home."

Emotion roared in my ears, threatening to overwhelm me.

Someday, this house that had been my home with Brennan would belong to all of us. Stone had said he was having it built so I could have space from him, but I didn't want space. I wanted Stone here. I wanted Shaw making me breakfast shirtless in the kitchen and kisses with him between sips of my coffee. I wanted Cole, cuddling me on his lap in front of the fire. I wanted Liam, sitting on the front porch with me to watch the moon.

And I still always, always wanted Brennan.

"I love you both, you know," I whispered.

"We know." Liam smiled that guileless smile, even as Cole added, "And we love you."

The easy way they spoke for each other made me smile. I grabbed Cole's belt and pulled him toward me, even as I backed into Liam. I loved being sandwiched between the two of them.

Cole chuckled as he turned me to face him, kissing me fiercely. Then he broke away, his lips trailing down to my neck.

I tilted my head, exposing more skin to his lips. His hands roamed over my body, cupping my breasts and teasing my nipples until they were hard and aching for more. Liam's hands found my thighs, as he pushed them wide, stepping closer, until I could feel the evidence of his desire pressed against my ass.

I moaned as Cole's hands found the waistband of my pants, teasing the skin beneath with his fingers. He slid them lower, pulling them off my hips along with my panties until I stood before him naked.

I turned around, wanting to feel Liam's touch, and he didn't disappoint. His hands roamed over my thighs, leaving a trail of fire in their wake, until he reached my aching folds. He was gentle at first, barely touching me, before sliding a finger inside me.

I moaned as he slid another inside me, filling me with his touch. It felt so good.

The pleasure mixed with an undeniable need to have them both inside me. I needed to feel them, to know I could be with them again before I lost them forever.

"I need you both, so much," I whispered.

"We want you, beautiful," Cole murmured, kissing my neck, even as he slid his fingers deep inside me, filling me.

"Then take me," I whimpered.

My body shuddered as Liam knelt in front of me. He pressed his tongue to my clit and then sucked it into his mouth. His fingers slid inside me, filling me in a whole different way, and I lost myself to the sensations they invoked.

"I need you," I gasped out.

"You'll have us," Cole whispered back. "You always will."

I felt Cole's pants sliding away, followed by Liam's. Their warm, hard bodies pressed against me. I wanted to feel all of them, to have them inside

me and out, filling me and surrounding me. Sex with either of them was amazing, but sex with both of them... my core was tight and aching just thinking about what we could do.

Cole fell back on the bed, leaning back on his hands, his gorgeous cock erect. I knelt on the bed, crawling toward them. Cole grabbed my hips and pulled me to him, even as Liam's hands tightened on my butt. I straddled Cole's thighs, resting my knees on the bed, so he could see everything.

I felt every inch of him, hard and ready for me. Liam positioned himself behind me, his cock pushing at my folds. Cole's fingers were on my hips, guiding me onto Liam, as Liam's hands held me steady.

I took little breaths, trying to keep myself from coming, even as I felt Cole's cock pressing against my core. It felt incredible to be filled from both sides, their cocks pressing against my inner walls.

"Are you ready?" Cole asked, just as I felt Liam's hands gripping my hips.

"Yes," I whimpered, as Liam pressed forward.

I gasped as Liam filled me, his cock sliding deep inside me, even as Cole's slid into me a little bit further. I was so full, and so stretched. I felt like I was about to burst, but I wanted to wait for them to take me together.

This was my dream. I might've been more shy in the real world, but here there were no limits.

"Oh, fuck," I whimpered, as Liam's hands squeezed my hips.

In unison, they began to move, slowly at first, taking turns thrusting inside me. Then, they began to move faster. Liam's hands held my hips steady while Cole pulled me back onto him. I tried to slow them down, to make the moment last, but I could feel the sensation building between my legs, the tightness in my belly. I was so close.

Cole pulled my head back, kissing me deeply, as he thrust deep inside me.

I whimpered into Cole's mouth. He smiled against my lips, even as Liam pulled my chin around to kiss me as well.

Liam's hands slid to my ass, and I felt him pull me even higher. I knew what they wanted. I knew what I wanted.

All of me, and all of them. I wanted to feel their bodies moving as one. I wanted to cum with them.

I rocked back against Liam, feeling his cock moving inside me. With Cole inside me, I felt every bit of Liam's hard shaft sliding between us, rubbing against me.

I reached my hand back and found Liam's balls. I took them in my hand, massaging them gently, as I rocked back against Liam.

He groaned as I did, and Cole's hands tightened on my hips. Liam kissed my shoulder as the three of us moved together.

"Oh, fuck," I moaned. I was so full that each slight movement an intense burst of sensation that tingled down my limbs.

"All the way for me, beautiful," Cole whispered. "I can feel you're so close. Let yourself go."

I rocked back harder against Liam, pushing myself onto Cole's straining cock even as I felt Liam's cock as he came.

"Oh, fuck. I'm coming," I moaned, letting myself go.

I let out a cry that pushed them both over the edge as I spasmed around their cocks.

I collapsed on Cole's chest, feeling him hold me as I felt Liam pulled away.

"I love you both so much," I whispered, kissing Cole. "I don't want to leave you."

"It's okay, baby. We'll be here when you come back," Cole whispered back.

"I need you to help me find Brennan," I whispered, as much as I wanted to stay with him. "I'm worried he's lost or hurt... can you help me find him?"

"I'm sure we can," Liam promised. "We'll find him in his dreams."

"We don't need to do that," Cole said abruptly, his voice urgent.

I looked up to find a shadowy figure standing in the doorway.

His mask gave nothing away.

"You're supposed to be here with us," I told Brennan, knowing it made no sense except in the logic of dreams. I held out an arm to him. "Come with us."

"I don't want any part of this," Brennan said roughly, and I was sure he was jealous.

I tried to get up and go to him.

But as I rose from the bed and tried to reach Brennan, he seemed to be pulled back, away from me, disappearing into the night as the framed-in walls crumbled away.

I turned back, and Liam and Cole reached for me as they fell away. The world around the bed crumbled as my dreams all fell apart, and I was left sitting on it, alone. Then I fell backward.

I woke in my bed, my clit and ass still aching as if I had been well-fucked, my hand between my thighs.

I wished that had been more than a dream.

And I wished that Brennan had stayed.

CHAPTER 10



*A*melia

THE NEXT DAY PASSED QUIETLY. If Stone was nervous about the ball that night, he showed no sign of it. The two of us once again spent the day training as best we could, which gave me a way to distract myself. We raced each other up the stairs while Stone pretended I had a chance of winning. When I collapsed on the landing dramatically, he knelt on the stairs and yanked me toward him, spreading me open like a feast so he could eat me out in that narrow stairwell. My cries echoed through our little tower prison.

As evening fell, Stone and I sat before the fire and I laid my head in his lap, trying not to crumple my hair. I'd styled it for the ball. Stone pulled a book from the shelves and read out loud to me. His voice was deep and warm, and I let my eyes drift shut.

He paused. "Is this book alright?"

"I could listen to you read the phone book, Stone."

He let out a surprised laugh. He was pleased by the compliment, though he only said, "I hope this is better than the phone book."

"It's Hemmingway. It's slightly better."

His hand drifted down my arm absently as he read, distracting me as his rough thumb caressed my skin. I felt content and relaxed, and I had a feeling he did too.

That feeling popped like a bubble as the door opened.

"Aren't you two cozy?" Brennan's voice was sardonic. "I'd think you'd

both be wild to escape... oh, let me guess. You've convinced yourself you're secretly in control here, that you can just slip out of here any time you want..."

Stone was already scrambling up, and I curled to sit up, watching the two of them warily from the floor. They both towered over me whether I stood or not. Tension rippled through the air as they faced each other.

Stone stepped in front of me. "What exactly is going to happen at this ball?"

"Nothing you can stop," Brennan said.

I rose and laid my hand on Stone's forearm. "It's alright. We have to trust him."

Even without seeing his face, I had the feeling Brennan was amused by the idea.

"Yes, you have to trust me. Because what else are you going to do? You can't fight your way out of here. Even if you made it to the gates, you'd never escape."

He sounded so smug, as if he knew something that we didn't. Stone and I exchanged a look, and I tried to tell him with my eyes that I would find an answer from Brennan. They just had to let me keep trying.

"I'll be patient," Stone said. "But I would really like this guy to start being less of a shithead soon."

"Good luck with that," Brennan said pleasantly. "Amelia, I have a gift for you."

I had intended to kiss Stone goodbye—to really kiss Stone goodbye—before I went with Brennan to this vampire ball. But I didn't get the chance, because as soon as I walked out the door, Brennan slammed it shut between Stone and me.

There was a brief flash of magic across the door. I seized the handle and tried to open it. On the other side of the door, I could hear Stone try the same. But neither of us could wrench the door open.

"It's for his own protection," Brennan said. "Being an alpha wolf would not mean much now, with the house full of vampires."

"And what about me?" I demanded.

"Not only are you our bright new hope," he said, sounding mocking, "but you have me with you."

"You're an alpha wolf too."

"No," he disagreed. "I'm something better. A vampire wolf."

I leveled him a look. "Better is highly subjective."

"Amelia," Stone's voice was a raw rumble through the door.

"I'll be alright," I said. "This is what we said we would do..."

We would tolerate Brennan's madness in the hopes that we could bring him back to us. Deep down, he was still the same man I had loved. Part of him was, anyway.

I had to believe that. I had to believe I didn't have to kill Dylan's father to make my way back to Dylan. But time would tell.

Nothing would stop me from getting back to my family.

Stone and I said goodbye. It was painful to feel so much emotion when Brennan was watching us, his posture relaxed as he leaned in the doorway.

Then I made my way through the dimly lit house with Brennan. Outside the windows, gray mist filtered the moonlight, turning the trees purple and washing the whole world with magic. This was the kind of night that I longed to be out running.

"What's this gift?" I asked, turning to Brennan. "Throwing knives, an axe? A bag full of stakes?"

"Don't we feel murderly today," he commented. "I brought you a gown and jewelry and shoes. You needed something to wear."

I had already showered for the ball. I'd styled my hair to curl around my neck like I had so often, hiding both Brennan's mark and Stone's mark.

Now, Brennan drew a dress out of a gown bag. The dress shimmered under the moonlight. Hundreds of beautiful crystals glittered across a cream colored gown.

"That's a wedding gown." My voice came out flat.

"Well, the vampires do love ceremony. And you are going to have my baby. They tend to be an old fashioned people."

I took a step back, and my legs slammed into the couch. Panic crawled up my throat. There couldn't be a bigger mockery of the love I'd shared with Brennan than to marry him now, when he wasn't the man I loved anymore. "I can't marry you."

"From what you've said, you were ready to marry me before," he said in a reasonable tone of voice as if anything he was saying was remotely reasonable.

"But not now. Not like this."

"Exactly now," he said. "Exactly like this. Because Stone is just in the next room, and if you don't put on the dress and act halfway obedient tonight,

he's the one who will suffer. As I believe I've made it clear, we need you."

I stared at him in horror. "That's your brother!"

"And as we've already discussed, I don't remember him," Brennan said. "Honestly, he seems like kind of an asshole. I don't know why you're so fond of him."

"Well, I'm still fond of you, and your behavior is not exactly exemplary."

"Always the one liner. I love that about you, Amelia. Now put on the damned dress before I rip your lover's throat out."

My hands were shaking as I pulled off my clothes, keenly aware of Brennan's focus on me.

"Wait." Brennan gripped my waist and turned me gently around. "I'll zip you."

It was exactly an old mannerism of Brennan's—careful, kind, taking any excuse to touch me. The moment reminded me of another night when he had helped me into a dress like this. We'd been shopping for essential supplies after we ran. I'd seen a beautiful vintage wedding dress, and once he saw me eyeing it, he'd insisted we buy it.

I wondered what had happened to the dress. Had it been abandoned in that hotel room? A slip of slinky, lacy fabric, soaking in the blood from the carpet.

"You look lovely, I'm sure," Brennan said into my ear. "Now lift your hair. I have a necklace for you."

My heart hammered. He couldn't see the marks on my throat, and if he could, who said he would care? That mark that meant so much to me, that had brought me so much pain, might be nothing to him. Imagining his indifference hurt as much as remembering Nathan's rage.

The necklace was a glittering strand that reminded me of a hundred teardrops. It seemed appropriate right now. I'd cried more than a hundred tears for Brennan. I'd cried thousands. But now I didn't have any more time to cry.

I let my thick heavy hair fall over my shoulders again, and arranged the glossy waves carefully.

He offered me his arm. I felt too bitter and angry to even say anything. But he pointed upstairs, raising one finger meaningfully. Toward Stone. That damned mask was implacable. And so, I slid my arm over his powerful forearm.

The movement brought us into close contact. No matter what the others

said about Brennan's scent now, I still loved the musky woodsmoke he carried, and even the new faint note of sweetness like a fresh peach. I wanted to inhale that scent, to tease out all the different notes—we were still wolves, a little bit, in our human form—but I resisted.

I couldn't tell if he felt anything looking at me, smelling me, feeling me against his arm.

Together, the two of us swept into the vampire ball.

I smiled wide. I didn't want them to suspect I was trying to escape. Perhaps it would be better if they thought I was happy to be reunited with Brennan, as much as I hated the thought of them knowing any of our story.

I had plenty of experience smiling in front of crowds no matter how I felt.

Adrienne had kept her promise, and there was a sumptuous feast—laid out for one—under the candlelight chandeliers. The room still felt dimly lit to me, the only light from the candles, but I realized that it was intended as a gift for them to have the candles at all.

Brennan tried to convince me to eat, but I shook my head. Right now. Not when I was noticing how the room was filled with flowers, or how more candles flickered on a simple altar at the front of the room.

"Brennan," I whispered to him.

I searched to meet his eyes behind the mask, but I couldn't seem to see anything but darkness past the slits in the metal. My heart ached. Everything in this house felt like a mockery of the love we had shared. I wanted to tear the gown off my body, and my fingers twisted at the neckline.

"Yes?" His voice was as emotionless as the mask.

"Nothing. It doesn't matter."

"Perhaps not." He touched the side of my face, his thumb tracing gently over my cheekbone. For a second, it was so tender that I expected him to care. Then he said, "Let's get this over with."

Brennan would not separate from my side, to the great distress of the vampires, who wanted me to walk in with a wedding procession to an entire undead orchestra. Caroline, the blond vampire, made an impassioned plea for Kiss Me by Sixpence None the Richer for our wedding song, but was overruled by several annoyed vampires who didn't approve of any song made after 1900. It all would have been hilarious if not for the constant scratching awareness of my own mortality—and Stone's.

I was also apparently supposed to have a pack of bridesmaids. The vampires must be so very bored. I had the feeling they viewed me as a doll as

much as they did a breeding horse, though neither perspective placed me in a position where they care deeply about my emotional well-being.

In the end, since Brennan refused to be separated from me, the vampires gave in. The ten vampires who were supposed to be my bridesmaids pushed him aside, though, to fix my veil and fluff my skirt and smooth my hair.

“In a world when you can wear anything, why would you choose to wear bridesmaids’ gowns?” I asked, though no one was listening to me. Perhaps that was for the best. I didn’t need to piss off the vampires. Even one wearing a very fluffy lime-green number. Perhaps she had been turned in the eighties.

I’d always dreamt of walking down the aisle to meet Brennan. I’d imagined Aiden giving me away, the two of us walking down the aisle behind Rose. But as the music started, my siblings might as well have been in another world.

Instead, the vampires proceeded me down the aisle, their heads held high. Caroline, the blond one, gave my forearm a squeeze and gave me a sympathetic smile. Then she turned and swished down the aisle, dressed in her own long shimmering red gown.

“Shall we?” Brennan offered me his arm.

“Since I don’t have a choice.” I slipped my hand over his corded forearm, feeling his muscles flex through the fine fabric of his suit.

“Ah, reasonable Amelia. I was hoping she’d make an appearance.”

“I always do what I need to survive, no matter how unpleasant.”

His lips set. Oh, he didn’t enjoy that kind of banter. Too bad.

“It’s not much fun for me either,” he whispered. “Now smile.”

“Are you going to fucking smile?” I said through my teeth, even as I beamed around the room at the vampires who were watching us in the dim light of the flickering candles.

“Men don’t have to smile. Women do.”

“I hate you.”

“Mm. How do you think Stone is going to feel when you come back married to me?”

I pulled away from him slightly, and he reeled me in. “Make good choices, Amelia.”

I leaned in toward him, rising onto my tiptoes, and he paused. The vampires let out a little collective noise of satisfaction as I pressed my lips to his cheek.

“I dreamt of marrying you,” I whispered into his ear. “I wish you would

be the man who was worthy of me.”

He didn't react. He just resumed half-escorting, half-dragging me down the aisle.

The despair that had pressed my chest at this farce of a wedding had receded, though. It seemed so painful to marry Brennan like this. It felt like a betrayal of the love we had once shared. But he was different now, and I had to do what it took to survive. To win back Brennan, in the end, if he could be won.

This wedding didn't mean anything.

We reached the end, and Brennan still held my hand in his as we separated to arm's distance. His groomsmen were arrayed behind him, with their perfectly coiffed hair and beautiful faces.

Brennan held out his other hand.

I lay my hands in his, trying to calm my rapid beating heart. His presence was no comfort now.

Then the ceremony began. Thank God there were no traditional marriage vows. I couldn't have born to hear that mockery. Instead, they bound our hands together, speaking words of blessing over us. The blessings were primarily for fertility, but they did speak to our happiness, that we might find joy with each other.

As I stared at the unfeeling mask that glinted under the candlelight, that hope of happiness felt very distant.

Afterward, some of the vampires disappeared up to their own true feast. Though they had said they would keep it far from me, I couldn't escape the coppery scent that rose from some of their clothes as they trickled back in, looking sated and pleased with themselves. My stomach twisted.

As the vampires danced, Brennan held out his hand to me.

“I don't want to dance with you,” I told him.

His strong arms captured me and drew me against his body anyway. Putting his lips down to my ear, he whispered, “Close your eyes and pretend it's the old me.”

“The old you would never have put me in this position,” I said. “The old you would do anything for me.”

“Yes, and look how well that worked out,” he said dryly. “I'd like to think I'm a little wiser now. I might be cruel and jaded as you say, but I'm capable of protecting you.”

“But does that matter,” I whispered, my fingers tangling in his lapels,

“When I don’t know if you will?”

He didn’t answer me, didn’t make any promises. He just ran his hand over my hair and pressed my face to his chest. He was right that when I put my head on his shoulder, I could imagine I was with Brennan again. I closed my eyes, felt my body against his, breathed in his familiar scent... and held back the tears that burned in my eyes.

As the party began to die down, I noticed that the candles were being cleared from the altar. A sense that something bad was coming prickled on my skin.

“What happens next?” I whispered, wanting to push myself into his arms for comfort and wanting to run away from him at the same time.

He seemed to be listening intently. Then his body stiffened against mine.

“What is it?” I whispered to him.

He took my arm in his steely fingers and drew me with him toward Adrienne. She was deep in conversation with another vampire, but she soon turned to us with an indulgent smile across her lips.

“What is it, dear wolf?”

“I thought we discussed that we did not need to have the full ceremony.” Brennan’s voice was tight.

“No, I believe you raised the topic, and I didn’t grant your proposal.” Her tone was bright and she was still smiling, but it had a note of steel. “I realize it is unusual that I refuse to grant you any wish. I do find you so charming, but perhaps I have spoiled you.”

Tension vibrated in Brennan’s body so close to mine. “I understand.”

As soon as we were a few footsteps away from Adrienne, I hissed, “What’s happening?”

“They want us to consummate the wedding. They live long lives, and they do grow so very bored and hedonistic...”

I wrenched my arm away from his. “Here?”

He nodded. His set mouth gave little away, but there was still a prickling of tension on my body, as if we had to do this to survive. “This isn’t anything that the two of us haven’t done. You remember doing it more times than I do.”

“And it was always with love,” I whispered.

His lips curved up in a faint, jaded smile, and I wasn’t sure that he could really understand a word I said when I spoke about love.

Despair settled into my gut.

I would do anything. For Stone. For Brennan. I'd had sex with Brennan in my dreams again, and now I knew those moments had been real. I had longed for him all this time.

But to let him fuck me on the altar in front of a hundred vampires seemed like yet another mockery of that love.

"I hate you," I whispered, as much as I loved him too. "Don't forget that for a moment."

I couldn't see a damn thing behind that mask of his.

* * *

Brennan

I DIDN'T WANT to do this to her.

Even as I pushed her toward the altar, I knew there was no way out. Pissing off Adrienne could easily result in terrible losses. I'd threatened Stone's life freely to get Amelia to cooperate—for once—but Adrienne didn't make empty threats. Adrienne would just make me hold Amelia while she drained him, and I'd feel her body heave against mine as she screamed and screamed.

No. Better to fuck one more time. What was the difference? The dreams I'd had where we'd fucked in the ruins of the cottage were the best dreams of my life, and I'd woken up covered in my own cum and longing for her.

There was the faintest shiver in the air. Fae magic.

I was already keeping a firm hold on Amelia, but now I leaned toward her. "Do you happen to see anyone new in here?"

"What?" she asked, clearly lost.

Her voice had a distraught edge that made my heart bottom out. Fuck.

"Focus," I chided her. "I'm asking you if there's anyone new in the room. I'm blind. You don't have an excuse."

"Fuck off," she told me, which was getting tiresome. Then, a second later, she inhaled sharply. "There's a new man at the back of the room. He's wearing a crown. Is he a vampire king?"

"Worse."

Aodhan was here indeed. The only thing that could make this party even

worse.

The vampires murmured well wishes to us both as we moved toward the altar. Amelia clutched my arm and tried to push away from me all at the same time, as if she couldn't make up her mind if I was her tormentor or her comforter.

I reached the altar with her and wrapped my hands around her hips, boosting her easily onto the edge of the altar. Her knees locked together.

"Relax," I murmured into her ear, brushing her hair back from her shoulders. I ran my lips tenderly along her throat, and despite herself, I felt her give, relaxing against my body. She wanted me as much as I wanted her, our bodies remembering each other no matter how barbed our words. "It's me, Amelia. I'd never hurt you."

"Everything you do hurts me." Her chest heaved with emotion, even as her delicate hands rested lightly on my chest. I wasn't sure if she was tender or pushing me away, and I didn't think she knew either.

One of my groomsmen stepped up, and I slipped my jacket off my shoulders into his waiting hands. "Go," I told him softly then. To her, I promised, "No one can see."

"I guess it's no different than how you claimed me at the cottage." She sounded disdainful.

I paused, my hands braced on the marble on either side of her. "In my dreams? Those were your dreams too?"

"The dreams where I sleepwalked? How did you do that to me?"

I let out a disbelieving scoff. "I didn't do anything to you, Amelia. How would I? I don't remember you."

"You did in my dreams. You told me to come to you."

"Because they were your dreams," I whispered hotly into her ear. My little half-Fae queen must have more magic than she realized. Somehow she had summoned me to meet her. "You chose them. So choose me now."

She shook her head, disbelieving. There was a better place and time to have this conversation than on this damned altar.

She started to say something else, and I could feel the ripple of displeasure among the vampires. They enjoyed some sweet kisses like the one she had laid against my cheek during our walk to the altar, but the time for sweetness had passed. They wanted to watch her scream her pleasure.

I covered her mouth with mine. Her hands reached for my face and I grabbed her wrists, pinning them to either side of her hips against the marble.

I wasn't going to give her the chance to hurt me. But even as she was pushing me away, her feet sliding against my legs, her lips pressed back against mine hungrily.

She was as confused as I was.

She kicked me with one of the high heeled shoes, the heel digging into my calf, and even with immortal healing abilities, that hurt. I gathered her wrists in one hand and she let out a soft huff at the pressure of my grip, then I reached down and wrestled the shoes off her feet and threw them over my shoulder.

"She's struggling," Aodhan pointed out, his voice amused. "And yet... isn't that his mark she wears?"

The Fae always had a plan to fuck with someone's head, and at the moment, that seemed to be.

"And yet, whose is the other mark?"

I froze, and I felt her freeze against me. I didn't need to see to know the temperature had dropped in the room, that vampires were shifting and craning their heads curiously to see us.

"What did you do?" I whispered to Amelia.

"Stone's my mate too," she whispered back, her voice stubborn and insistent. Covering her fear.

"You carry his mark." The desire to fuck him out of her, to remind both of them that I was her first and I was her last, was so powerful the world went dark for a second. All I could think of was her.

"I love him." Her voice curled around the words. It sounded less like a declaration of love for him and more like a declaration of hate for me.

* * *

Liam

I'D MANAGED to get into Nathan's mind when he was awake. Brennan was obviously awake now, and I paced back and forth in the woods as I tried to find my way in. Brennan's mind was more difficult—was far more complicated than Nathan's—but I had to force him to remember. Once he remembered his past life... I was sure we would have him back.

But when I finally slipped into his mind, there was no chance I could force him to remember. His mind was a riot.

“You’re mine,” he whispered into Amelia’s ear, and she twisted as he wrapped his hands around her waist. “Always.”

“You don’t even want me.”

“That’s not true.” He was furious at Stone, a deep intense fury. Jealousy. Pain. Anger.

Grief.

He felt so much.

“I want what’s mine,” he growled into her ear. “I’ll protect what’s mine.”

He was so mixed up—desperate to protect her, afraid of what would happen to her. Keenly aware of Aodhan and Adrienne at the back of the room, whispering together—who were they? His memories flashed through my mind, remembering how Aodhan had hypnotized vampires before. The Fae was more terrifying than the queen herself. Once, Adrienne had punished a rebellious vampire by letting Aodhan take over his mind, and the vampire had sucked from his own wrist, draining himself as he stared blankly, unaware of the crowd around him.

His body and mind were at war with themselves. What was the difference if he took her here? He wanted her. She wanted him. Why did it matter if it was in the cottage or on this altar?

It matters to her. His thoughts and mine intermingled, and I pulled my own mind away before he could infect me.

But it wasn’t going to be enough. I saw that. He didn’t want to hurt her, but he cared most about protecting her no matter what it cost. Brennan had a strange idea of what it meant to protect someone.

It was maddening to watch it and was so unlike him. I wanted him to kiss her and to protect her and to promise her she was safe with him.

“I’ll get you out of here,” he whispered. Even as he said the words, he was at war with himself. He didn’t know why he had just said that.

She froze. I wished I could see her face. He was keen at reading people though, even without his vision. Relief. She felt relief.

Then suddenly, he cupped her face with one hand and lowered his head to hers. He kissed her, long and passionate. She froze at first, then gave in, kissing him back.

Had I done that?

Tell them you won’t do it to her. Not here. But a kiss is as far as you’ll go

in public.

The doors at the back of the room burst open. A human cry, low and desperate. Brennan straightened, pulling Amelia off the altar and behind him protectively. He didn't know what was happening.

"Who is that?" Amelia cried, clinging to his waist.

"Just dinner," one of the vampires said, and the others laughed as two vampires fell on whatever human it was and dragged them out of here.

"You've terrified her," Brennan snapped at them.

"Aodhan can hypnotize her so she forgets it," Adrienne said, as if the offer were a kindness.

"No," Brennan ground out. "Enough memories have been lost. You'll have your child. But that's enough. We're not a show."

For long seconds, tension hung in the air.

Then Adrienne turned to the crowd of vampires watching her. She threw up her hands and laughed. "Wolves! Aren't they adorable?"

The crowd laughed.

Brennan threw Amelia over his shoulder and the vampires cheered or booed, the sense of tension rippling through the air as he carried her resolutely through the room. They hurled flower petals at them both, and Brennan crushed the delicate things under his boots as he strode for the door.

The scent of blood and flowers hung in the air.

CHAPTER 11



*A*melia

“THANK YOU,” I whispered to Brennan as he returned me to my door that night.

His lips turned down at the corners, but he nodded stiffly. “That wasn’t a battle worth fighting. It was just sex.”

“It was worth it to me,” I promised.

“We’ve tested Adrienna’s patience,” he warned. “We’ll have to be more careful now.”

“I’ve been careful—”

He snorted. Sometimes he reminded me so much of Stone that it made me want to slap him. Sometimes he reminded me so much of Stone that I wanted to kiss him.

So I did.

I leaned in to him, wrapping my arms around his neck, and kissed that hard-angled, hard jaw, the bit I could read under his mask. He dipped his head, and our lips were a breath apart. I was the one who closed the distance, brushing my lips against his.

He paused, his hands on my hips. Then he breathed against my lips, “No one can see us now.”

“I’m not kissing you for anyone else,” I whispered, and kissed his jaw again. Even his jaw had a scar, a small one, and I kissed it tenderly. “I’m kissing you because I want to.”

He had frozen. Brennan had seemed fearless and certain earlier. Now he didn't seem so sure of himself.

"Good night, Brennan," I told him quietly. "Thank you."

I could've seen him as a monster for what he almost did. But he had stopped. He had been my old Brennan.

Before he could tell me not to thank him, I took the key out of his hand and slid it into the lock. It wouldn't turn. He pressed his palm to the door, a second too late, and the mark on his palm glowed as the key finally turned.

"Amelia—" he began, but he had already unlocked the door, and we had already said enough to each other tonight. I went in and closed the door behind me.

I needed Stone.

He had already heard me and came down the stairs. He took one look at my face and his own went livid. He reached me in a few quick strides, wrapping me up in his arms.

"Are you okay?" Stone demanded.

"I am now," I promised.

I told him everything, and when I reached the part where we walked up to the altar, he paced the room. "I'm going to kill him. Even if he is my brother."

"He is," I promised. "He stopped it, Stone."

Stone turned to me, relief sweeping over his face. "Good."

He wrapped me in his arms and kissed me, then rested his jaw on top of my head. "I don't know, Amelia. What if you can't get through to him? What if he never remembers?"

"He will. He has to."

"I can't believe I got my brother back from the grave, and he's such a jerk."

I laughed against his shirt, feeling the adrenaline let-down sweep through me. I'd been focused on getting through the worst 'wedding', but now I felt exhausted. Stone must have sensed that, because he scooped me up and carried me into the bedroom.

"Let's get that ridiculous dress off you," he said as he lay me down on the bed, stopping to press a kiss to my lips. "You look beautiful, don't get me wrong, but..."

"That wasn't how I wanted to face Brennan in a wedding gown." The words were raw when I whispered them.

Stone didn't answer, but he gently helped me out of the fabric. Or tried to. Then the zipper stuck, and he tried and tried, then ripped the dress.

That night, I lay with Stone, his hand rubbing gentle circles across my back until he finally fell asleep and his hand stilled. My mind seemed like it would race with thoughts of Brennan forever but eventually I fell into sleep.

In my dreams, I thought Brennan was waiting for me at the end of an aisle through the forest. Then the man at the end turned, and familiar stormy grey eyes met mine.

"Liam!" I called, running toward him.

He wrapped me in his arms. "You're alright? He didn't touch you in front of them?"

"No." I shook my head, feeling relief sweep over me. Then I frowned at understanding dawned. "How did you know...?"

Liam's gaze met mine frankly. "Amelia... I think I might have controlled Brennan. I think I might not just be able to control people's dreams... I think there's a possibility I can control their waking."

I stared up at Liam, trying to process the words. Liam chewed his lower lip, as if he were waiting for my judgment. It took me a second to catch up, and then a second to realize why he looked so anxious.

Liam's strange powers had never exactly been celebrated. This was a new, incredible power, if it were true. One that could help us immensely. But he must worry how others would take it.

"That's incredible," I told him. "Oh, Liam. You'll do such great things as you master that power."

His eyes softened, a sheen in them for a second before he blinked. Then he wrapped me up in his arms so hard he lifted me off my feet. I let out a laugh.

"I've never wanted any kind of powers," he admitted. "First, because they caused me so much pain, and then because I was afraid I might use them to hurt others..."

"Whatever powers you have, you'll still be Liam," I whispered to him. "You're strong. Stronger than anyone has ever seen."

"And so are you," he told me, cupping my cheek tenderly.

When Liam looked down into my eyes with so much love and affection, I felt strong enough for anything.

* * *

BRENNAN STAYED AWAY ALL the next day. But there were clean clothes waiting for us just inside the door. Stone and I trained, then showered together. The cupboards were well-stocked now, so I baked chocolate chip cookies while Stone pan-fried steaks for lunch. It was an unexpectedly cozy moment.

“You know,” I said, as we sat at the little kitchen table eating cookies, “We wouldn’t have had this moment at home. It’s nice to have a little time just the two of us.”

Stone quirked an eyebrow. “Are you really trying to toxic-positivity us into looking on the bright side when we’re captive to vampires?”

“Well,” I admitted, “I like having some time with you. Even if the circumstances aren’t ideal.”

“That’s a surprise to hear.” He held out his arms.

I straddled his lap, resting my hands lightly on his shoulders. “You’ve been different lately.”

“Well. I could be eaten at any time. I don’t want our last interaction to be a moment I was a dickhole.”

I threw back my head and laughed. Stone always surprised me.

His hand cupped the back of my neck. “I do want to be good to you, Amelia. To make you happy. I’m just... not good at that.”

“You make me happy, Stone.”

He kissed me, and the two of us ended up tumbling off the kitchen chairs onto the cold tile floor, which didn’t stop us one bit.

Our laughter echoed throughout the empty house as we intertwined our limbs on the floor. His lips were warm and soft against mine, and his hands wandered along the curves of my body. The coldness of the tiles beneath us only added to the heat building between us.

As he kissed me deeper, his fingers found their way under my shirt, tracing slow circles on my skin. My body arched towards his touch, craving more of his sensation.

Wrapping my legs around his waist, I pulled him closer to me, wanting to feel his body against mine. He groaned as he deepened the kiss, his hands exploring every inch of me.

It didn’t matter we were still in this damned hive with a hundred questions. We lost ourselves in each other, the world around us fading away into a blur.

He kissed down my neck, tugging my shirt off and tossing it to the side.

I tugged at his shirt, pulling it over his head and showing off his chiseled abs. My tongue roamed along his skin, slowly tracing a pattern of kisses down his chest.

When he kneeled down, pulling off my pants, the ache of desire between my thighs was so intense I almost couldn't bare it. I teased my fingers through his dark hair as he knelt in front of me. He undid the clasp on my bra, tossing it onto the floor along with my pants before he gently laid me down on the cool floor.

He lowered himself on top of me, tracing a line of kisses down my neck before he pulled my nipple into his mouth. My body arched towards him, desperate for his touch. His hands cupped my breasts softly, as if he was savoring every second of touching me.

Our tongues intertwined as he slid his hands along my skin, igniting a warmth deep inside of me. I moaned softly, breaking our kiss.

"Mmm," I moaned, closing my eyes as his fingers massaged my clit.

"No," he whispered, "Keep your eyes open. Eyes on me, sweetheart." He ordered. It was his usual stern, authoritative tone, but I didn't mind him bossing me around right now.

My eyes snapped open and met his as his fingers gently slid inside of me. My toes curled at the sensation, my hands grasping at the table legs behind me.

He yanked my underwear off, tossing them across the room. My heart raced as he stared into my eyes.

"I love you," he whispered, putting his hands on my calves and folding my legs back so he was between my thighs. He spread my legs apart, staring down at my sex as if he were ravenous.

"I love you too," I murmured, sliding my fingers down my stomach to toy with my own clit. His eyes lit with need as he watched me stroke through my folds, teasing my throbbing clit. I wanted his cock inside me so badly, but it felt so good to watch him watch me.

He kissed me as he slid deep inside of me, my body arching towards his as he filled me up.

As he thrust into me harder and deeper, the warmth building inside of me turned into an inferno.

I moaned into his mouth, my nails scratching along his back. I could feel my orgasm as it unfolded deep inside of me, my body trembling with ecstasy as it overtook me.

My legs wrapped around him, pulling him close. My nails dug into his back as I clung to him. I wanted every bit of his cock.

Then I gasped as he pulled out. Rude.

My eyes fluttered open as I felt him kneel down beside me. He pulled me into him, pushing me up against the table. I wrapped my legs around him, pulling him closer to me.

He slid deep inside of me again, and I moaned, my hands clasping at his shoulders.

He fucked me harder, plunging deep into me again and again, his body rippling with muscle as he drove into me. My mind raced with pleasure as his thrusting grew deeper and deeper. My nails dug into his skin, my toes curling against the floor.

Together, the two of us plunged over the edge into darkness.

My heart raced as he kissed me, his body still shuddering against mine. We laid there for a moment, and he turned his head to press a soft kiss to the top of my head, squeezing me against him in a hug.

He looked at me as if he were going to say something.

And then we heard the door open into the living room.

We both raced to get dressed.

Stone headed down in front of me, dressed in nothing but his jeans. I followed, peeking around his powerful shoulders on the stairs to try to get a glimpse of who had arrived. Brennan, I hoped. I needed to see Brennan.

Hopefully I could keep Stone and Brennan from killing each other over the wedding debacle.

My heart lifted when I saw Brennan, despite the tension. Stone stopped, his powerful body coiled for motion.

It wasn't just Brennan, who was focused on Stone carefully.

Caroline and two other vampires stood with him.

I felt suddenly deflated. Brennan said, "Adrienne wanted to see you for dinner."

"This is your long lost brother? He is just beautiful," one of the other vampires gushed. She reached out and ran a fingertip along Stone's chiseled muscles.

Stone regarded her as if she were an unfortunately ugly frog. She let out a laugh at his reaction and reached for him again. Stone's chest heaved as if it took everything he had not to splatter vampire around the room—but we both knew that would lead to a fight we couldn't win.

“You should come to dinner with us,” the other vampire agreed.

Brennan slapped the vampire’s hands as she was touching Stone. She pouted at him, giving him a hurt look. I was surprised to see such a protective gesture.

“Touch me again, and I’ll kill you,” Stone growled as the vampires kept pawing at him.

“You don’t need to be difficult,” Brennan told him. He told the vampires, “Leave him alone. You’d break him.”

“He should come tonight,” Caroline said. “If I can’t have you, Brennan, I’ll take your little brother. He’s just as cute as you are.”

“I’m not cute at all.”

“I think you are,” Caroline disagreed. “The mask kind of does something for me.”

“We’re leaving Stone here for safekeeping,” Brennan said. “I’m only bringing Amelia down because Adrienne wishes it.”

“I think you mean because Adrienne orders it,” Caroline corrected, giving him a saucy look.

I hadn’t expected to feel jealousy. But the way the vampires seemed to want both Stone and Brennan sent a spike of hurt rage through my chest. The emotion seemed excessive since Stone seemed disgusted by them and Brennan had a long-suffering playfulness toward the way they tried to touch him and Stone.

I did not like the idea of vampires touching either of my men.

Stone kissed me goodbye—the vampires cheered—and the two of us exchanged a long look. I knew it had to hurt for Stone to constantly see me in these situations. Quietly, he told me, “I have faith in you.”

Stone’s confidence gave me strength, helped me feel more confident in myself.

Brennan sighed. “You know, you could walk out of a room without kissing like you’re going down on the Titanic and muttering platitudes at each other.”

“I never thought I’d see the day when Stone became the nice brother,” I snapped at Brennan.

Brennan didn’t respond. He just cupped the back of my neck with his hand and guided me out of the room. It was a casual expression of ownership that annoyed me, and I yanked away from him. His fingers dug into my skin, pulling my head back to his ear. “Don’t fight me. The two of us are going to

need to work together to get through tonight.”

I looked up at him, studying that blank mask for any hint of the man behind it. Brennan seemed stern and scary, but not in a way that felt directed at me. Maybe we really did need to be a team tonight, and maybe we were capable. When I gave a little nod, he caressed the back of my neck with his palm before his hand fell away.

We understood each other.

We went down to dinner. It was incredibly awkward to be the only one eating, although Brennan filled a plate as well and then picked at it as if he had forgotten how to eat.

“Is it difficult to eat with a mask?” one of the vampires inquired.

“No,” Brennan said abruptly.

The entire time, Adrienne was watching us with open fascination, her chin resting on her fist. She was strikingly beautiful, and I tried to draw her out, getting her to tell me about her life.

She was happy to tell me all about herself. “You young women don’t know how lucky you are. When I was your age, I was being groomed for marriage, laced into corsets and forced to sit with my back against a board to perfect my posture.”

“That’s horrible,” I said, propping my chin on my hand, purposefully mirroring the way she sat so gracefully “But you do have lovely posture.”

“Thank you. You’re also quite lucky to have modern medicine.”

“Is that why you became a vampire? No medicine?”

She nodded. “When I was a young woman, illness struck our village in France. The illness was everywhere. There was nowhere to flee. It was in that year of despair that I met Lucien. His charm was irresistible, his touch electric, and before I knew it, I was entranced. Even in those dark times, I thought I was going to have a happy ending.”

She flashed me a sympathetic look. “Love gives us a foolish sense of optimism.”

“What happened?”

“My house fell sick too. Lucien came into my room as I tossed and turned silently, and he took my hand and told me he could make it all better. I wanted to live, to be with him, to be with my mother and father and sisters... and so when he told me what he was, that I could be like him and grow better, I accepted it.”

There was a rueful tone to her voice, so I dared to ask, “But you regret

it?”

“I don’t regret it now,” she corrected. “At first, it seemed amazing. The pain was unbearable, but when I awoke, the world was suddenly vivid, like I had been blind for years. I was reborn, as a creature of the night—a vampire. I was full of power and health. I ran down the hall, eager to help my family... only to find them all dead in their beds.”

Her beautiful face contorted with pain, all these years later. “I wanted to die then too. Lucien had known... he hadn’t told me.”

“He should have told you,” I said, feeling betrayed on her behalf.

She half-shrugged. “For the next few decades, I traveled with Lucien. Eventually, my grief dulled, though I was never the same innocent girl. We saw revolutions rise and fall, watched the birth of industry, and tasted the blood of poets, warriors, and fools. Yet, as the decades turned into a century, I grew weary of the darkness within us. I wanted to do something. I never had the choice to become a mother. I wasn’t able to care for my family as they lay dying. I wanted...”

“To help someone,” I filled in, trying to make sense of the vampire queen.

She nodded. “Lucien and I parted ways. Eventually, I started my own vampire hive. Like Lucien, I only turned those who had no other choice.”

She rested her hand lightly on Caroline’s shoulder. “Caroline, for instance. Do you want to tell her how you became a vampire?”

Caroline’s lips pursed. “I was a nurse during the Great War.”

“She inhaled phosgene gas while she was helping soldiers at the Western Front. She was quite gallant.” Adrienne looked at Caroline with affection.

Caroline scoffed, but she looked as if the compliment pleased her no matter how she tried to hide it. “I was stupid. Everything and everyone to do with war is quite stupid.”

“There was no escaping that war.” Adrienne closed her eyes as if she were lost in her memories. “I had been working as a nurse as well.”

“A nurse and a recruiter for the hive,” Caroline said drily.

Adrienne shrugged. “It was better than dying, wasn’t it?”

“A million times.” Caroline smiled at her, just faintly. “My lungs were filling with fluid. Phosgene gas takes a long time to kill. At the time, one of the first attacks, we knew little about it. I’d smelled moldy hay and had no idea I’d breathed in something that would kill me. But then, slowly and surely, I was dying in the same makeshift hospital where I had served. And

Adrienne saved me.”

This time, Caroline’s smile was its usual full wattage, wide and irresistible.

“So I suppose it’s no surprise you saved Brennan when he was dying.” I glanced over at Brennan as I said the words, curious how he would respond.

“Brennan?” Caroline asked eagerly. “That’s such a nice name.”

Brennan’s tone and expression were flat. “It means nothing to me.”

Adrienne sighed. “You are an angel to love him, Amelia. We enjoy him, but he is rather... dour, isn’t he?”

“Things have been hard,” I said quietly. I meant for him, but from the flicker of sympathy on her face, she thought I meant it had been hard for me.

That was true too.

“Indeed.”

“What about the others?” I asked, glancing around the table. “How did they join you?”

“Ah, you want to know everyone’s stories? There’s Maria, a gifted pianist I found in Barcelona during the Spanish Civil War; her fingers were damaged in a bombing raid. I gave her eternal life, and in return, she fills our nights with melody. A waste of talent and life was averted when we met. Then there’s Victor, a soldier in World War II, left for dead on the battlefields of Normandy. I offered him a different kind of salvation.”

“And let’s not forget Aisha. I met her during the Nigerian Civil War, a nurse much like I was, but struck with a deadly disease. Ah, their lives were hanging by a thread between this world and the next. Now we are bound by something far deeper than friendship—a shared eternity.”

In the midst of my conversation with Adrienne, I couldn’t help being distracted by the way the vampires were trying to flirt with Brennan. He was curt but not rude, and whenever they touched him, he brushed their hands away as if they were inconsequential, the way one might bat away a fly. They seemed to find it a delightful game, taking every opportunity to try to touch him.

And as much as I tried to focus on Adrienne, I despised every minute of their game.

CHAPTER 12



*B*rennan

AMELIA WAS JEALOUS, and it was delicious.

I hadn't expected to see her so affected. But it only seemed fair. I'd felt thrown off since last night. What had come over me? Why had I made such an impulsive decision? It was a wolfish decision to be honest, and thinking, possessive, not thoughtful and calculating like a vampire. Vampires did not lose sight of the end game.

Adrienne cared about me. But that might endanger Amelia. What if she decided to turn Amelia as part of keeping her here? What if Amelia could never see her son again?

Briefly, I flirted with Caroline. Caroline, who had always before enjoyed any time our friendship turned flirtatious, had a curious, warning note in her voice when she responded. And I could tell Amelia was listening intently and unhappily. I didn't want to see Caroline and Amelia become enemies.

Instead, I had lighthearted conversations with Aisha and Victor and Grant, and I let their hands linger longer than I usually would have before I gripped their wrists and removed them, much to their amusement. We'd been playing the same game for a long time, and somehow it never seemed to tire them.

Amelia made small noises of understanding toward Adrienne. But I could tell she was distracted.

When I reached over and touched her hands beneath the table, I found

them knotted into fists.

I'd only meant to play with her jealousy. I hadn't meant to hurt her.

She half rose at my touch, knocking my hands off her lap.

The movement just gave me the opportunity to catch her around the waist and drag her into my lap.

Adrienne was regarding us both with cool amusement. Grant looked openly disappointed.

"What are you doing?" Amelia demanded.

"Keeping the mother of my child close," I wove my fingers through hers, and although it might have seemed like an affectionate gesture, it was mostly to keep her from slapping me. "After all, you are mine now."

"You've always been mine," she said, though she sounded less than thrilled about it right now. "I've never forgotten you."

"Yes," Adrienne said, sounding delighted. "Tell me everything about who our wolf was before."

The thought of Amelia telling them my story made me feel too vulnerable. I've only heard bits and pieces of it myself so far. I didn't want to hear it all with an audience.

"We met when we were young," Amelia said. "He was different then. Kind. He always had this aura of power and leadership, and everyone looked when he walked into the room, but it wasn't like... now."

Despite her disapproving words, the curve of her ass pressed against my cock was driving me crazy. She adjusted herself, and I had the distinct impression she was actually just wiggling her ass because she knew how much she affected me.

"A sweeter, kinder version of Wolf?"

"Of Wolf?" she repeated. Ah, fuck.

Turnabout was fair play. My hand fell to her thigh. For the next forty minutes, Amelia and I teased each other while trying to carry on a normal polite conversation. My desire for her grew to a fever pitch.

Neither of us could make a scene at the moment. So we waged our little war.

As soon as dinner ended, she was off like a shot. I followed her, staying right behind her. She strode away through the darkness of the house. They had opened the shutters and raised the blinds to let in the night air.

She whirled on me, her tone exasperated. "What's wrong with you?"

"I thought that was great fun."

We argued back and forth, the tension just seeming to rise. When Amelia turned and ran out the doors, I moved to go after her, but Adrienne called to me, “Let the girl go. She can’t go far.”

The thought of Amelia being unattended for a second made me wild.

But I couldn’t exactly walk away from the vampire queen.

“How come she is the only one you’ve ever cared for, Wolf?”

“What do you mean?” My voice was flat. My emotions were not.

“Your only interest is this girl who seems to despise you. But she doesn’t quite despise you, does she?”

“We have history.”

“You have more than history.”

“Does it matter? I don’t know if we have a real future. So what is the point of the past?”

“You have a present,” she chided me, as if I were being ridiculous. “Go to her, Wolf. Make her love you. Make her stay.”

As if I knew how. She already loved me, but I didn’t know how to keep the last smoking embers of that love alive.

CHAPTER 13



*A*melia

STORMING AWAY from Brennan was the perfect opportunity to get the lay of the vampire compound. I hadn't thought I would get very far before he caught me, but then Adrienne had waylaid him—I'd heard her call him just as I reached the doors. It was almost as if the vampire queen was helping me.

Which gave me second thoughts about going outside.

But I needed to see the fence—and what was beyond it—to form an escape plan.

I had no doubt Brennan would come along soon, so how much trouble could I really find myself in?

I slipped out the heavy wooden doors—which were almost too heavy for me to move, a reminder of the supernatural strength of the vampires—and they slammed shut behind me with a resounding thud. I raced across the soft green grass.

Beautiful, structured gardens gave way to looser wildflowers scattered through the grass. The scent of night blooming flowers hung in the air, floral and heady. I raced past them until I came within a few feet of the fence.

The fence towered over me. Black wrought iron stood ten feet tall, twin bars that rose together and split at the top so that one set of bars curled outward and the other curled inward. So, it was intended to keep us in—and to keep others out.

I headed toward the gates. White cobblestones were bright against the

dark grass, leading up toward the gate. But when I looked out, I didn't find a road.

We had come in on the road. I must be at the wrong gate. Unless... I chewed my lower lip, trying to make sense of how our trail had disappeared so utterly, how strange the flowers and the 'bats' last night had appeared.

I began to try to trace my way around the fence, trying to find my way to whatever other gates might exist.

Something cracked in the brush, just on the other side of the fence. I froze, my nostrils flaring as I breathe in the sense. I'd be able to sense danger far better if I shifted.

But I wanted to maintain all my senses so I could give good information to Liam and the others. They'd be able to see what I remembered. They'd be able to find us if we ever needed their help.

As I began to walk along the fence again, I had the distinct sense of something prowling on the other side tracking me.

I came to a stop, and it did too. I took a step forward, and suddenly something launched itself out of the darkness. It slammed into the bars and then began to scramble up them, trying to get over the top to me.

Before I could shift, it let out a cry of pain and fell back. Red eyes seemed to glow out of its fearsome face. A mouthful of jagged teeth seemed to command all my attention.

I stumbled back and collided with a hard chest. Two hands settled on my shoulders, steadying me.

"You seem to get lost easily, Amelia," Brennan growled into my ear. Then he lifted me up and threw me over his shoulder.

"I can walk!"

"Yes, and you always seem to walk yourself into trouble."

I surprised myself by slamming my fist into his lower back.

He surprised me just as much by slapping my ass. His hot, hard hand left tingles across my ass. "Try to look dignified. We're going to be walking past the vampires."

"I can't look dignified." God, I was going to kill him. "I'm upside down."

He shrugged, and I felt the motion through my body. "And who's fault is that? I know what you were up to, Amelia."

"Oh, you do?"

"Of course. Because I would do the same. You were plotting your escape."

He set me down when we reached the door to the tower. “Be good,” he chided me, grabbing the nape of my neck and guiding me ahead of him as the two of us went up the stairs.

Stone was pacing, and he looked relieved the second he saw us. “What happened at dinner?”

“Amelia almost slapped a vampire for touching my leg.” Brennan didn’t hide his amusement.

That was what he considered most pertinent from the evening?

Stone looked skeptical.

“She was jealous,” Brennan added.

“I can believe that,” Stone said, “but Amelia wouldn’t waste time slapping a vampire. She’d definitely go with a closed fist punch.”

“Then after dinner, Amelia picked a fight with me—”

“I wasn’t picking a fight. You were, as usual, being horrible.”

“—so she could storm off and check the perimeter of the compound.”

Stone could not hide his flicker of satisfaction.

“Then she almost got eaten,” Brennan added.

“Amelia...” Stone looked distraught at the thought I’d been in danger. It must be driving him crazy to have to depend on Brennan instead of protecting me.

“I rescued her, and to show her gratitude, she punched me. Is she always like this?” Brennan asked.

“Always,” Stone said.

“None of that was an accurate representation of events.” I was almost distracted by the bonding moment that seemed to pass between the two of them when they were exasperated by me. “But that doesn’t matter right now. What matters is what I saw at the fence.”

“What?” Stone asked.

Brennan’s lips pursed beneath the mask as if he knew he wouldn’t appreciate my revelation.

“I saw a monster. A thing that looked like a mountain lion at first, but it was so... wrong.”

“You’ve got an active imagination,” Brennan said. “You were panicked over a cat.”

I shook my head. “I got to the gate we came through, but there’s no road there.”

Brennan let out a laugh. “There’s more than one gate. What do you think

is happening, Amelia?”

I glared at him, then turned to Stone. “We’re not in our world anymore.”

Stone’s face was unreadable. I couldn’t tell if he believed me or not.

“So where do you think we are?” Brennan sounded mocking.

“I don’t know. But it must be magic.” I looked to Stone.

Stone put together the last piece. “You think we’re in the Fae world.”

Brennan scoffed a laugh. “And you believe her?”

My breath froze in my chest. It sounded crazy, and I didn’t think Stone would believe me.

“I’m pretty sure she’s smarter than either of us.” Stone rested his hands gently on my shoulders. “Definitely smarter than you.”

“I don’t have to be smart,” Brennan said, though I could tell he didn’t see himself as stupid. “I just have to hold the keys. And I do.”

He raised his hand. He had the key in his hand, but there was also that mark on his palm that glowed against the key.

My chest tightened.

If we were ever going to be able to escape... if we couldn’t get Brennan to remember... we would have to figure out that magic.

And we’d also have to figure out a good way to remind the vampires they weren’t entirely immortal.

“We’re in another world,” I said. “Stone, do you believe me?”

Stone looked hesitant, then jerked his head in a nod. “But how?”

The two of us looked at Brennan, who just shrugged. “I’m not entertaining your preposterous ideas.”

He was lying. It was so exasperating to see my Brennan, so different now, standing there and lying to me without a single reservation. I wanted to slap him.

Brennan said to Stone. “Amelia got her chance to stretch her legs. Why don’t we go for a run?”

I looked between them, a sense of horror curdling in my stomach. Brennan had been so jealous already. I’d been convinced he might murder Stone when he found the two of us in bed.

“I’ll go with you,” I said.

“No, you won’t.” Brennan disagreed. His gaze locked with Stone. “I want to spend some quality time with my brother.”

CHAPTER 14



S tone

WHEN I KISSED AMELIA, she clung to my shoulders like she didn't want to let me go.

"I'm sorry," I said into her ear. "If I'd believed you, we wouldn't be in this mess."

She frowned up at me. "You didn't cause this situation, Stone."

If I'd believed she wasn't responsible for Brennan's death, I wouldn't have hurt her. But I also would have been ready for the possibility Brennan was alive. I'd refused to believe Nathan was dead without seeing a body. But I hadn't done the same for my own brother. "I was so consumed by my need for revenge that it blinded me. It made it... hard for me to love you like you deserved to be loved. And not just you. I was a terrible brother."

Brennan sighed as he sagged against the wall, his hands in his pockets. "Do you need to monologue or can we get going?"

"Shut up," Amelia told him not taking those wide blue eyes off mine. "You did some terrible things, Stone, but you weren't a terrible brother. Or alpha. Or..."

Her lips fell to mine the second before she kissed me. It was easier to kiss than to define our relationship.

Although she'd already declared it in front of the pack. We were mates. So she must have some reason for concealing it from Brennan.

I followed Brennan down the stairs, out of the quiet house, and into the

moonlight.

“What was it like when we were brothers?” Brennan asked.

He sounded conversational, so he probably hadn’t meant that gut-punch. When. As if I could ever stop being his brother, no matter what he did.

“Our dad sucked,” I said bluntly. “He was an abusive asshole. But it made us kids... close.”

“There were four of us?”

“And Karissa. Our little sister.” I couldn’t figure out what to say to him, what would bring him back.

“What was our mother like?”

“Sad,” I said. “Beautiful. Kind. But sad.”

“So she just stood there and was sad while our father abused us.”

“She was an alpha’s wife. She couldn’t escape. He would have tracked her down.”

“Hm,” he said quietly. “If I’m right, she could have run to a place he couldn’t reach her.”

“You mean here.”

The two of us were walking across the vast green lawn now. It looked different, here on the ground, with the mists floating toward us from the forest, drifting around the wrought iron gates.

Brennan trailed his fingers across the wrought iron bars that made up the fence, which stood several feet above our heads. “Did you know the Fae can’t tolerate iron? Aodhan can come inside—for a little while—but it weakens him. The Fae animals are burned when they touch it.”

He’d played that game with Amelia, gaslighting her, and I was stunned that he admitted it now. What had prompted his change of heart? “We’re in the Fae world.”

“One of them. Thule.”

“There’s more than one?”

“You won’t find your way home without me. So try to resist the impulse to attempt to kill me—once again—when we run. Not that it has ever worked for you.”

“I don’t understand.” I faced my brother, as much as I could when he was wearing that damned mask. I couldn’t read him. “Are you loyal to the vampires? To Amelia?”

“I’m loyal to myself,” he scoffed. “No offense, Stone, maybe our childhood together was warm and fuzzy, but I just don’t remember you. I feel

something for Amelia... it made me act like a lunatic last night, and not for the first time. But I don't remember her."

"Why'd you try to gaslight Amelia? Trying to convince her we were still in the states?"

"Fun, mostly. See what she would believe."

That was a lie. I had a feeling he had thought he could protect her, and now he thought it was the truth that would protect her. "You should be better to her. You're lucky she loves you."

Brennan laughed. "You shouldn't tell me to be good to her."

"Why's that?"

"Because I have no intentions of sharing her, Stone. So you had better hope I make her hate me, and that you're lucky enough to be able to take me down. But for now..." he clapped my shoulder. "Let's run."

He stepped ahead of me, already shifting.

Memories flashed through my mind. Brennan had been affectionate, but with his brothers that took the form of touching our shoulders or casually slinging an arm around our necks. How many times had he clapped my shoulder, just like that, then raced ahead of me to shift first? Because he was the second-oldest, and he didn't want to be second-best?

Every minute I spent with Brennan hurt.

But I wouldn't give up any of it if we had a chance to bring him back.

* * *

Brennan

I REACHED THE GATE, and drew it open. Stone stopped, and he stood silently, as if he were analyzing me.

"There are monsters out there," he said.

"Scared?" I mocked.

"You might not remember when we were kids, but you sound like one right now." He told me. "I'm not wild about going into another universe that I don't know with a man who would just as soon see me dead."

I shook my head. "Amelia would never forgive me."

She could probably get over being kidnapped. She wasn't exactly a

rookie. But if I let Stone get killed... she would assume the worst.

"Don't you want to get a glimpse of another land?" I asked.

"What do you want? Why did you come out here with me?"

"I wanted to see what you were like. My brother." My voice turned taunting on those last two words. I couldn't say such ridiculous, emotional words without them coming out barbed.

Some emotion pressed on my chest.

Stone still walked out.

I slammed the gate behind us, and it shut with a clang that seemed to resound through the night air, as if all the predators in the forest could hear a dinner bell.

"This is a very interesting place to hunt," I said. "One of the last places we can be hunted too. It's... fun."

Then I shifted. My vision came back to life as I transformed into the wolf, the darkness brightening until the beautiful Fae world bloomed around me.

Stone shifted too.

There he was. The same wolf I'd encountered in the forest who had been so intent on tearing me from limb to limb. The one who had chased Amelia, who had terrified her... my lips curled back in a snarl before I mastered myself.

Stone snarled right back at me.

Emotions were closer to the surface in this form. Our true form, I felt. We only played at being humans.

Stone and I ran.

As we moved through the Fae world, shadows stretched and twisted around us, like dark fingers extending to grab us. The air was thick with the scent of magic and death, and I could feel the energy of the land pulsating through my veins. I was alive and free, no longer bound by the human form that I despised. This was where I belonged.

This was where I could see.

It felt like a weight lifting off my body. Instead of having to analyze and imagine, I could simply... see. Stone paced alongside me, his big paws gobbling up ground, as we raced along. He might've been hesitant to step out of the gates, but now he was curious.

Prey scattered. The white squirrels who shimmered under the moonlight raced up the trees, though we weren't here for squirrels. The heavy pink and red blooms of the Fae forest shook, scattering petals across our fur, as

animals scurried into hiding. Desperate bird calls rose, then faded away as they winged far from us.

But it wasn't only prey in the night.

The tell-tale cold shimmer down my spine meant something was watching us.

Stone felt it too.

We whirled as one.

The monster we faced was a twisted abomination, with limbs that bent in impossible ways and eyes that glowed a sickly green. Its skin was a sickly grey, like the flesh of a rotting corpse, and it dripped with a black, oily substance that smelled like death itself.

Stone bristled beside me, his fur standing on end as he let out a low growl. The monster hissed, baring its rows of sharp teeth, and lunged at us.

We dodged its attack easily, leaping out of the way as it crashed into a nearby tree with a sickening crunch.

I felt free here, felt alive. The magic of the forest seemed to feed me, the moonlight soaked into my soul, and I glanced at Stone, curious if he felt the same way. His blue eyes glowed in the darkness, and his teeth curled back as he growled at the monster. But the way he bared his teeth looked almost like a smile.

The monster leapt at us again and again, each time more ferocious than the last. Stone and I fought back with all the power we had, our jaws snapping and claws tearing into its flesh, but it seemed almost invincible.

I growled at Stone, my eyes locked onto the monster as it circled us, its eyes never leaving us. We needed to work together.

Stone nodded, and we lunged at the monster at the same time, our bodies tangling together as we tore into its flesh.

One of the monster's terrible limbs wrapped around me. Bones creaked as it squeezed me. Stone was still attacking, snapping at its throat, but it kept evading him.

Sharp pain bit through my chest. A rib had cracked. It wouldn't be the last one unless I got free.

But no matter how hard I fought, I couldn't escape the damn thing. Another rib popped, a sharp crack of pain that shot like an electric pulse through my whole body. The whine that escaped my throat was almost lost in the sound of the battle.

But Stone must have heard it.

He leapt toward the limb that held me. With his attention diverted, the monster's claws raked Stone's back. Pain washed across his face even as he kept tearing at the limb, until it broke free.

Then as the monster lashed its claws toward him again, the limb dropped and released me, and Stone sprung toward its face.

I landed hard on the ground, rolled to my paws despite the pain and charged in to help Stone. Together, the two of us brought it down.

The ground rose up to meet me, jarring my broken ribs and sending waves of agony throughout my body. I gritted my teeth and fought through the pain, pushing myself back onto my paws and launching towards the monster.

Stone, who had already wounded it severely, was ready for me when I arrived. We worked in tandem. Stone tore its legs out from underneath it, and I leapt up and grabbed its throat. The pain in my ribs was a savage stab, but all my pain came out in my rage as I tore out its throat.

With a final snarl, the monster fell to the ground. It tried to savage us with its claws but we danced around them, diving in to rip at its body. Finally, twitching and convulsing, it let out a guttural shriek before finally going still.

We stood there panting, our chests heaving as we looked at each other, both of us covered in the monster's blood and gore. And too much of our own.

That had been fun.

God, Stone was bleeding. The blood would bring the other things out of the night, but worst of all, Amelia was going to be most displeased I had let him get hurt.

We left the broken thing behind and bounded toward the castle.

Stone had leapt to help me even when it meant he was exposed. The coppery scent of his blood was sharp in my nose, along with the smoky scent of our pack.

When we were running, it made sense to me that he had risked himself. We had been fighting together.

Then we reached the gate. Stone shifted first, then I followed him a few seconds later, trying to fix the memory of his human form in my mind. It was almost impossible to really remember anything, but I wanted to have a better idea of how wounded he was.

The two of us slipped inside, dressing quickly again in our clothes. Stone moved carefully, then decided not to put his shirt on.

I had glimpsed him in his human form when I was a wolf. Several ugly gashes, partially healed from shifting, bled across his back. One was on his neck, and he was lucky the monster hadn't cut into an artery.

Now, I didn't know why the fuck he had done that, and it bothered me. "What were you thinking?"

Stone let out a short, hard laugh. "When?"

"When you ripped that monster off me."

"Ah," Stone said. "Well, I was thinking Amelia would be pissed if it turned out you were alive, and then I let you get dead. Now she'll be pissed at you. Which should be fun for me to watch."

"I didn't ask you to risk your life for me."

"I know. But I am your brother, after all."

He said the words easily, but they felt like weights. The world always pressed in on me more darkly than it had before when I shifted back, when my vision faded. Stone's words just made me feel more.

"I don't consider you mine." The harsh words grated at my throat as if I had to force them out.

"That doesn't matter. You'll still be my brother until I die."

What a fucking manipulative asshole. I didn't even remember him. I wasn't the same person, and if he wasn't just trying to use the fact we were siblings to control me, if he was genuine... he would realize that eventually.

"That won't take very fucking long, the way you act." I paced ahead of him toward the house.

Goddamn Stone.

CHAPTER 15



*A*melia

WHEN BRENNAN STRODE in the door, I practically pushed him to one side. Then Stone came through the door too, bloody and tired but alive. The two of them hadn't killed each other. Stone crushed me to his side in a tight hug.

"I'm so glad you're okay," I told Stone, my voice muffled by his body as I hugged his hard waist and buried my face in his shoulder.

"What about me?" Brennan asked mockingly. "I can just go die in a corner?"

"If you're going to continue to be a raging asshole and not our old Brennan, then that might be ideal," I snapped back.

Brennan showed no reaction, but I immediately regretted it. I was glad he was alive. It just hurt to constantly see this man I loved, so altered and cold and strange.

"He admitted we're in a different world," Stone told me. "Called Thule."

I start at Brennan, perplexed. "Why wouldn't you just admit that with me?"

"Well, the bond between brothers is just so special. I couldn't resist sharing a secret with my brother," Brennan said, making a mockery of what we both felt.

"I'd hazard a guess that he thought he could protect you better by keeping you ignorant, which has never actually worked for anyone. But then he thought it would be better if we felt we couldn't escape without his help."

Stone glanced toward Brennan. “isn't that right, brother?”

Brennan snorted. “There's no chance of escape for the two of you. There's no hope of rescue. You are in a fae world that they have no idea how to reach, and you have no idea how to escape. The vampires are far more powerful than you, as well as outnumbering you, and the Fae are stronger and outnumber them.”

“And how did you get back and forth?” Amelia demanded. “When you met me in my dreams? Or did the vampire queen send you to meet me then?”

Brennan folded a protective arm over his injured ribs. Blood trickled from a cut in his forehead.

“Back to this. I didn't meet you anywhere. Are you trying to tell me that we both had the same dreams?”

“It was more than dreams. Stone found me in the wreckage of our cabin. I'd been sleepwalking.”

“And she was devastated when she thought that it was a stranger, not you.” Stone’s voice contained his barely concealed fury. “That you had enchanted her somehow.”

“I don't remember her, I certainly wasn't going to bother enchanting her,” Brennan said in a patient tone that suggested we also didn’t deserve that patience.

I pulled a face. “Well, if you weren't responsible for what happened at the cabin, who was? Do you think it was the queen?”

Even as I asked the questions that I had been obsessing over all night, while I paced the house and worried about them, I was pulling Stone with me toward the kitchen.

I’d already laid out a cobbled-together first aid kit from what I found in the tower. I'd had the feeling they would come back injured, if they both came back at all. It was obvious Stone was hurt. I wanted to yell at Brennan about that, but I still didn't really understand what he had wanted from his run with Stone.

I was sure that if I asked, he would say that he'd hoped Stone would be eaten.

But I was sure the truth was more complicated than that. Maybe Brennan had gone out for a run with his brother because deep down, he'd wanted to connect with Stone.

“You’re both hurt,” I said. “Come to the kitchen. Brennan, what trouble did you drag Stone into?”

“Monster,” Brennan said. “There are all kinds of monsters in the forest beyond.”

“You wanted us to see them, so we would see there was nowhere to run without you.”

“You keep implying that I want you to depend on me for your rescue. I don't think you understand, Amelia. I am not going to be helping you escape.” Brennan settled his hand on my hip, a gesture that used to be affectionate, as he stood behind me. “This is your world now. *I* am your world.”

“Sit down and shut up while I tend to his wounds, and then I'll take a look at those ribs you fucked up.” I turned and pushed Brennan into a chair. He winced at the contact of my hands on his ribs, guiding him toward the chair, and it was the only thing that caused him to actually sit and obey.

Stone looked amused. “Now I see why Shaw enjoys watching so much when I'm in trouble and he's still in her good graces.”

“Yes, they stay in my good graces by not being dicks. You should try that too.” I told Stone. Stone was shirtless, and there was so much blood drenched across his powerful shoulders and chest so that I could barely make out his tattoos. Old wounds and new scars like we're cloaked by the damage.

“How much of this blood is yours?” I demanded as I wrung out the warm washcloth that I already had soaking for him and began to cleanse the wounds.

“Enough.”

“It would be fantastic if you two would just talk about your past, maybe open up about your feelings, but I guess tearing some poor monster apart is the best you can do.” I looked at the nasty wound on Stone's shoulder. “Why aren't you two more healed? Why don't you just shift again?”

“This isn't our world. Our magic is duller here.”

I frowned as I threaded a needle. I hadn't expected to need all of the first aid supplies I'd pulled out. “Then why is Adrienne comfortable here? Isn't she nervous about being at the mercy of the Fae?”

“Not as nervous as I think she should be,” Brennan said dryly. “Anyway, this has been fun, but I'm wanted elsewhere in the castle--”

“Don't you dare try to run away,” I told him. “Sit your ass down and watch while I sew him up. You don't get to just get him hurt and then run away.”

“I'm not running away,” Brennan said. “And I can do whatever I want.”

I'm the one with the key.”

But he didn't leave. It was almost as if he wanted us to want him to stay.

“He took a lot of nasty hits. You should look after him,” Stone said.

“He doesn't deserve it,” I said. I straddled Stone's lap, focused intently on the wound in his shoulder that I was sewing up. No matter how intent my focus, I could feel Stone's chest heave, his focus on my face, the intensity of his desire as his cock pressed up against my thigh.

Stone liked being taken care of. Perhaps as much or almost as much as he liked taking care of others and ordering us around.

“I don't need it,” Brennan said crisply. “I don't need anything from you two.”

Stone's gaze met mine, and then he mouthed, “jealous.”

I grinned.

Stone added, “That was worth getting ripped up by a monster.”

Brennan scoffed. “You two are exhausting.”

“Choose your prisoners more carefully next time, then,” I said. “Do you have some kind of magic that could heal you both?”

I didn't think Stone needed magic. Shifters healed quickly, and I would bet that was true even here. I just wanted to fully understand this world and its magic.

“No. The vampires have very little magic, and it's all organic with them. They have some ability to fascinate and hypnotize. But it's nothing like the Fae power. They give us potions that we use to keep our victims in a stupor, and they do have some healing potions, but it's not as if we need them.”

I asked. “It certainly looks as if you need them. I'll tape your ribs.”

“I don't need your help.”

“Perhaps not. But we are a family, despite how hard you try not to be. So we help each. Need it or not.” I straddled his lap in the same easy, confident way I had Stone's.

Brennan's hands went to the arms of the kitchen chair, and he gripped them tightly. No matter how much he tried to hide it, it was obvious he was affected by the close contact between the two of us.

I took a fresh cloth and began to wash the blood off his body so I could see what I was working with. Each movement of the cloth revealed another strip of his hard muscled, tattooed body.

The air felt tense and magnetic around us as I tended his wounds. His chest fluttered underneath my fingertips, as if it was affecting him to have me

care for him.

The gulf between what Brennan said and what he felt was so vast. It was infuriating. I didn't know how to reach him. There were only so many times I could extend myself if he was going to pretend that every time it meant nothing.

"I was thinking about what you said," he said. "About how someone must have been responsible for the way we met."

"In our sleep? Do you think you could have just been the bond between us, pulling us together?"

"Maybe," Brennan said.

I could see his blue eyes clearly from this angle through the slits in the mask. There was a part of me that always melted when I saw his eyes, even though they were fixed on nothing, somewhere over my shoulder. He'd never meet my gaze, then wink, again.

Then Brennan added, "But it's more likely that it was your fault."

I froze, in the midst of wrapping the tape around his broad chest. "Excuse me?"

"You heard me. You're half Fae. We don't know what your powers are."

"I don't have any powers," I shook my head. "Except for a pretty face."

"I'm not sure I believe that. You want to blame me, because you feel embarrassed by how badly you wanted me." Brennan's lips curled up sardonically, as if he were lost in the memory. "You were wanton by the lake. Desperate for my cock."

"I thought I was having sex with my mate." I taped him, a little more roughly than perhaps I needed to, and started to rise off his lap. His hands darted from the arms of the chair for the first time, grabbing my wrists. Stone was on his feet in an instant.

"You *were* having sex with your mate."

I froze, giving Stone a warning look. I was fine. I didn't need him to intervene and to risk having to fix the two of them up all over again. "You can't even tell me what you want from me, Brennan. You make all these noises about how I'm yours. And yet, you're willing to give me over to the vampires."

"I'm not giving you to anyone," Brennan scoffed. "You'll carry my children, yes. No one else's. I'll protect you from them. In time, they'll come to love you. My friends are... complicated... But they're good friends to me, and they'll be good friends of yours."

I stared at him. We were so close, our faces just inches apart, but of course he was wearing that damned mask. “You could at least take the mask off so I can see your face when you're planning to keep me a prisoner for the rest of my life.”

“I know why he wants to keep you prisoner here,” Stone said. “He's found the one place where it doesn't matter that he has to wear a mask or he will frighten children. The one place where it doesn't matter that he's blind, because they spend their lives in the dark anyway. The one place where he can be a vampire and a wolf. So he has to pretend this will work, no matter how much he knows you both don't belong here.”

Brennan's jaw grew tighter and tighter as Stone spoke, and his fingers gripped mine too hard, though I didn't think he was aware he was doing it.

“I don't need you to explain my thinking, Stone. You're barely capable of doing your own.”

“Is it true?” I demanded of Brennan. “This is the only happy ending you can imagine? One where you keep me from the rest of the men I love, from my own son?”

I pulled away from him angrily, getting to my feet.

Brennan released me. “The only happy ending I can imagine?” His voice was disbelieving. “Amelia, this isn't a picture book. There are no happy endings. There's only survival.”

I scoffed. “You'd better hope that I don't have any magical powers. You might not like what I do with them.”

I turned my back on him. Stone rested his hand tightly on my shoulder, giving me a comforting look. At least I wasn't alone. Stone must experience the same frustration and pain that I did, missing Brennan when he was right here with us.

“Well, I think you do.” Brennan's voice was crisp. “I think somehow, you pulled me to you. You made me sleepwalk, and I went through my portal to your world. You summoned me. And you had better figure out how you did that, if you intend to make up your own happy ending.”

Then he went out, slamming the door behind him.

He'd left me with a hundred new questions.

CHAPTER 16



*B*rennan

THE LAST THING I wanted after dealing with Amelia was more contact with other living beings. Humans and their variants-- fae, vampires or otherwise-- are all pains in the ass.

Yet, when I came down the stairs, Caroline was waiting in my office. I groaned when I sensed her.

“That's a worst greeting than usual from you, Wolf,” she said.

I could feel her studying me before she added, “Unless you want Adrienne to return to trying to bed you, you might want to put a shirt on. You're wanted downstairs.”

I snorted, but before I could move to the small wardrobe I kept with clothes in the corner, she put a T-shirt into my hand.

“What happened?” she asked. “You were wounded.”

“I'm always getting wounded.”

“Mm, but you aren't usually getting cared for.” Her fingertips grazed the bandages. I yanked the shirt over my head and pulled it down to my waist, pushing her hand away.

“I didn't want or need to be cared for. I was letting her have her way so I could understand her better.”

“Oh? Do you understand her now?” Caroline's voice had a curious, casual quality. It made me entirely certain she was mocking me.

“She's ridiculous.”

“She does love you,” Caroline agreed.

“Can you go? I can't deal with her and my idiot brother, the vampire queen, and you all at once.”

“Not just us,” Caroline said cheerfully. “Aodhan is on his way.”

“Great.”

“Adrienne wants to see you before he arrives.”

Aodhan was a threat. I couldn't tell how. But I sensed it the same way I sensed danger in the forest.

Adrienne talked about how the Fae and vampires were cousins. I had a feeling that they were actually predators and prey.

“Let's go.”

Dawn was coming, and the house was growing quiet. Adrienne, the most powerful of the vampires, stayed up until everyone else was asleep.

Once, I'd teased her about how she put all her little vampire children to bed. She had smiled at me sadly. That was before I'd understood how desperate she was for a child of her own.

“This is where I leave you,” Caroline said as we reached the elaborately carved doors to Adrienne's sitting room. “I don't want any of your lecture secondhand. I get plenty of my own.”

“Perhaps you should avoid needing a lecture, then,” I teased Caroline.

In the past, Caroline had been obsessed with stealing a little human child of her own. Adrienne had scolded her that this was no place for a child unless it was a vampire child.

Adrienne was given to offering history lessons—almost always unbidden—and once had told us how children used to die of rickets back in the medieval ages when they kept infants from sunshine. They'd been completely avoidable deaths.

Caroline had carefully avoided the subject since. Not because Caroline was convinced—it was almost impossible to get Caroline to give up what she thought was a good idea—but because Caroline hated history lectures.

“You're the one in need of a good scolding,” Caroline teased me back. “Don't ruin things with Amelia.”

“I'm trying,” I said, and I could sense her skepticism. “It's just miserable, Caroline. They are so obviously disappointed with me. I can't remember my past just because they want me to, and they're in agony, and it grates.”

I snapped my mouth shut. I hadn't meant to admit their pain was painful for me too. I hadn't fully realized it until the words were out of my mouth.

“Oh, Wolf.” Caroline said gently. “I’m sure whether you get your memories back or not, they just want you.”

“They want someone I don’t know.”

“Then give them the chance to realize how wonderful you are not.” She squeezed my forearm. “You haven’t batted us all away for five years because there’s anything wrong with us. You’ve pushed us all away because we weren’t them. So don’t push them away now.”

“You’re wrong.”

Caroline let out a soft laugh. “And you’re stubborn. Just think about it. Take some time for it to sink in that I’m right.”

“Wolf,” Adrienne called, her voice muffled by the door.

Caroline gave my arm one last squeeze and moved past me.

I pushed open the door and went in.

The room was quiet except for the faint sound of Adrienne sucking, and a human’s rise and fall of breath. She was just finishing with her snack before sleep. The human smelled vaguely familiar, though he was withered at this point, in the pleasant, glazed state they fell into before they simply...stopped.

She lifted her head. “How are things going with the girl?”

“Do you mean is she happy here? Or have I bred her yet?”

“Those are both intriguing questions,” she said magnanimously.

“Do you care if she’s happy? After all, I’m sure you’ve thought about just keeping her like... him.” I nodded in general direction the human who sagged across her lap, and she smiled, licking blood off her lips.

“I certainly have thought about it, Wolf. But I know it would make you dreadfully unhappy. And as I’ve admitted before, I spoil you.”

“I am your only wolf. Despite your best efforts.”

She pulled the face. “The other one was absolutely frightful.”

“I agree. I told you it was a bad idea.”

“I assumed you were just jealous.” She sighed. “Anyway, Speaking of jealousy. How is it being back with your brother and your mate? Things seem heated between the two of them.”

How did she know that? But there was no point in lying to her. She always seemed to be able to tease out a lie. “He seems to love her, and she seems to love him. Though why she would tolerate him...”

“Do you think he looks like you, before your eyeballs were blown out of your skull?”

My face stayed placid. On the inside, I did not feel placid. What a cruel

question.

The memory of four black haired boys running barefoot slipped through my memory. “I’m told we all looked very alike.”

Was that my own memory? Amelia had powers I couldn’t quite make sense of. Had Amelia summoned me? Had she stolen memories from my brothers and slipped them into my mind—and were they even real memories? I had sensed someone in my mind the other night.

The whole thing made me want to run to another world altogether, to slip through the portal into a new universe. My life felt too ruined to even begin to try to sort the pieces.

But even if I ran, I’d still be the same man. I’d fuck up my new life too.

“Well, I can understand why she loves him then, from that alone. You and your brother are alluring... you don’t even need a face to charm us, Wolf.”

As if to test her theory, I took the mask off and lay it down on the smooth wooden table. I hated to wear the mask. Usually I spent so much time as a wolf, or alone where no one could see my ruined face, that the mask wasn’t on long enough to bother me. But I had worn the mask near constantly the last few days, and it had begun to burn.

“Have you eaten?” She shoved the man off her lap and toward me. He fell onto his knees, though he didn’t seem to notice and just stayed in the pose where he had fallen.

The thought of Amelia, lost to reality, made me sick. “No. I suppose I’ve forgotten.”

“Have you?” she asked. “Or do you just want things to be different? To not need the blood? To not be a monster?”

“I’ve always managed fine with animals when I’m far from home.”

“For a while. But that won’t be enough for a growing wolf’s strength.” Her voice was teasing, but we both knew it was true. I craved more than deer blood. There was something thin about animal blood, and it did not satisfy.

Because of that, I always came home. I could survive in the world for a while. But this was where I fed.

“You don’t want to be a monster. Are you worried you might not be good enough for her?” Her voice took on a self-satisfied, knowing note. “Is there a part of you that worries you’re not good enough for all of them? A part of you that longs to be just a wolf, to run with your brothers in a pack like you used to?”

“I don’t remember being part of a pack.”

“No, of course you don’t. And yet... I’d bet some part of you, buried deep down, longs for them. What was it like for you, when you and your brother shifted into wolves together? Was it special?”

“I almost got him killed, which might have saved me a good deal of trouble.” I could protect Amelia alone. Stone was in a far more precarious position. “I’d like to return him to his pack.”

“So you do care for him.”

“If something happens to him... and in this house, something is very likely to happen to him... We’ll lose Amelia’s willing support. Then she’ll have to be like... him.” I was too aware of the hapless, grinning victim. “I don’t want that.”

“Fine, wolf. That’s very honorable. But... You have to do something for me before I let him go. After all, he’s so very useful for me.”

“What’s that?”

“Breed Amelia. Then you can take your brother home.”

“I will. But... You know that she means something to me. I don’t want to hurt her. to force her.”

“And then I suppose you had better win her over, Wolf.” She touched my wrist sympathetically. “I’m not unfeeling about your dilemma. But it seems to me you’ve done very little to woo the woman. You can’t run entirely on an affection she used to feel, long ago. You need to charm her.”

I scoffed at that.

“Preferably, before any of the vampires get their hands on your brother and do all the wicked things of which they dream.”

“Adrienne...”

She smiled then. “You say my name so sternly, and yet there’s a plea in it too, isn’t there? You know better than to give me orders, Wolf.”

“I’m not trying to give you orders, Adrienne. I’m sorry it sounded as if I was. I just want them both to be safe.”

“Of course I will give my orders to protect them,” she said. “I wouldn’t do that to you, wolf. But I’ll admit vampires are not always entirely obedient. So it would be for the best if you got Amelia pregnant, and removed your brother from the equation. With him gone, iight be Amelia it might be easier than for Amelia to love you, to forget them. But we can makes that happen if we must.”

I knew Aodhan had magic that could take away memories.

There had been a time when I had been hopeful that that was what she had done to me, just so that magic could also cure me.

“I am sympathetic,” Adrienne said, and she stroked my forearm with her wicked nails. Her touch was gentle, but her nails—claws, really—still bit into my skin. “I want you to get what you want... as long as I also get what I want. It goes without saying which I consider more essential. But I would prefer to see you happy than not.”

“I understand.”

It felt as if she gave me a long, almost tender look. “You brought new life into our hive. With your wildness. I am thankful that we have had you, Wolf. And I hope that you will be happy, and so will Amelia, and you two will stay for a long time.”

I didn’t know what to say to that.

“And so,” she said. “I can be patient.”

Relief throbbed through my chest. “Thank you.”

There was a soft tap on the door. “Adrienne, the Fae King is here.”

“Do you want me to leave?”

She shook her head. “No. Stay, please. Aodhan has offered us so much help... I fear what favor he’ll ask next.”

I’d been sent on missions for him before, at Adrienne’s request. I was suspicious that it seemed Aodhan couldn’t venture through to the other worlds, though he claimed he was simply too busy as king.

The thought of leaving Amelia and Stone here while I went on a mission was intolerable, but I wasn’t going to anger Adrienne. I rose to my feet to bow to Aodhan as he entered, and she greeted him as warmly as ever.

“Wolf,” Aodhan greeted me. Then he took his seat, too near me for my taste. I could feel the same magic that bound the house crackling around him, so intense that it raised the hair on my arms.

Adrienne and Aodhan made small talk, while I sat there as involved and helpful as the vases. Perhaps slightly less so, since the vases held the cuttings of night-blooming flowers, their fragrance almost masking the scent of blood and magic.

“Is there some favor we can do for you?” Adrienne finally asked him.

“Ah, no. Not this time.” Aodhan sounded slightly nervous. “I actually have a gift for you.”

“A gift?” Adrienne’s voice was curious.

“I raise hounds,” he explained. “And you had mentioned that you loved

dogs, but of course... live animals are a challenge, since they need the light. But not these. May I summon Seraphina?"

"Oh, Aodhan." Adrienne sounded delighted. "Of course."

Delight didn't seem the right response. I was certain this was some plot of Aodhan's.

Nothing a Fae offers is ever free.

Aodhan seemed to make no noise, and yet a moment later, the door swung open. Because I couldn't see the hounds, hearing them sent a sudden jolt of fear through me. There was a sound of heels clicking across the floor, and paws padding, and the panting breath of a pair of animals. The paws sounded heavy and enormous, and the breathing came from too high. These things must be monstrous.

"They look like the old story of hell hounds, with those red eyes and all those teeth," Adrienne said with a laugh. Was she describing them for my sake? "Oh, they're so perfect for a vampire!"

"They won't hurt you." It was a woman's voice, low and mocking. Seraphina. I'd only met Aodhan's favorite lieutenant in passing, but I distrusted her more than I distrusted the hounds. "Do wolves fear dogs?"

"To be fair, these dogs are rather large, and our wolf is blind." Adrienne touched my arm to soften the words, but the gesture did not appease me. I rarely felt like my lack of sight was a weakness now--I just hated that I could not see Amelia--but right now, it felt like a fatal flaw.

"Adrienne," I said carefully, choosing my words. I didn't want to contradict her wishes in front of guests, but I also had a creeping sense up my spine that Aodhan had offered this gift for a reason. "Are the dogs a good idea? When we also have such... fragile visitors?"

I suspected, from the way Adrienne's voice curled around her words in a low, sexy tone when she spoke to Aodhan, that she thought he desired her.

I was convinced that Aodhan's desires all revolved around power, not love. There was a more cunning reason he offered this gift.

"They are well trained to obey their masters," Aodhan promised. "They will protect you with their lives, Adrienne,

Adrienne turned to Aodhan, her voice taking on a flirtatious tone. "I'm grateful you thought of me. I must ask, how did you raise them for the darkness?"

Aodhan's lips curled into a smile. "Let's just say it took a lot of time and a bit of magic. But it's worth it, to be able to have such loyal companions."

Did they come from hell itself to be comfortable living in the night?

Something about this situation felt off. If I could give Adrienne a good reason, maybe she would listen.

The hounds started growling. The low, menacing sound made my blood run cold. Their claws scratched against the floor, the sound getting closer and closer.

"They don't seem to like your wolf," Seraphina observed, a lilting laugh in her voice.

Good. Perhaps that would give Adrienne a reason not to keep them. Though I couldn't help tensing in my chair, ready to shift and fight these two enormous beasts I couldn't see.

"Just say their names and they'll settle. They're already bonded to you, Adrienne. It was a part of the magic. They'll obey."

"What are their names?"

Aodhan hesitated for a moment before answering, his voice sly. Did Adrienne hear it? "Cerberus and Fenrir."

Cerberus, the three-headed dog who guarded the gates of the underworld, and Fenrir, the monstrous wolf from Norse mythology. I might not understand the details yet, but I was sure of a trap.

Adrienne seemed unfazed by the names, though, and spoke them with a soft, soothing tone. "Cerberus, Fenrir, settle down now. No need to be aggressive."

To my surprise, the growling subsided and the hounds went silent. I could hear their heavy breathing, but they no longer sounded threatening.

Adrienne laughed, delighted by the display of loyalty from the hounds. "Oh, they're so well-trained! You really have outdone yourself, Aodhan. I have missed having pets so much."

I gritted my teeth, as Aodhan answered, "I live to serve, my love."

As Aodhan spoke, a shiver raced down my spine.

Adrienne, however, seemed completely taken with the dogs. She reached out and ran her hand over one of their massive heads, cooing softly. "They're so beautiful," she whispered. "Thank you, Aodhan."

"Seraphina will set up their kennel wherever you wish. We come prepared."

"Thank you. Victor can guide you."

They said goodbye, and then it was just Adrienne and me, as the hounds padded away.

"You don't like my hounds." Her chiding tone was gentle.

"I don't like Aodhan."

She sighed. "Oh, Wolf. You aren't foolish enough to think I trust him, are you?"

I shook my head, even though she couldn't see me. "No, but I don't trust those hounds either."

Adrienne chuckled lightly. "Well, they seem to be trained well enough. I have longed for pets just like I have longed for children."

I couldn't shake off the feeling that there was more to Aodhan's gift than just offering two loyal dogs. "Adrienne, I know you trust your instincts, but please be careful around Aodhan and his minions."

"I always am," she replied lightly. "But sometimes, I do like to take risks. It makes life more exciting, don't you think?"

I didn't reply. I couldn't explain to her the fear that had gripped me when the hounds had growled in my direction. I felt very little fear, and yet...

Of course, my mate was upstairs.

"I think our Fae king has a crush on me." She sounded amused. "Anyway, I'll keep the dogs away from you and those you love."

I didn't entirely appreciate having Amelia and Stone described as those I love, but I wouldn't argue. "Thank you."

She rose from her chair. "No need to thank me. But do you eat something. I don't want you starving to death before you can bring me my baby. And then clean up after yourself."

"I will."

She ruffled my hair with her hand as she walked away.

The man who still knelt on the ground, his breathing soft and shallow, as if he were sleepwalking himself.

Adrienne called back over her shoulder, "Would you rather eat now? Or risk losing control with Amelia? Or with your own brother?"

She didn't have to say more. In the doorway, she called back, "Good night."

"Good night," I called back.

It was too easy to imagine Stone and Amelia savaged, bleeding out in the tower.

I fell on the man and sank my fangs into his throat.

CHAPTER 17



*A*melia

STONE and I were getting ready for bed that night when he asked me, "Do you think Brennan's right? That you can control people in your dreams?"

I blew out a breath. "I can't control people in real life. It seems like a waste if my powers are only when I'm asleep and can't do anything with them."

"Take me with you tonight," Stone asked.

"I don't know how to do that! Liam is the one who always pulls us all into our dreams."

Stone rested his hands lightly on my shoulders. "Amelia... we have to make sense of your powers."

"I don't have any powers!"

"I don't think that's true." His voice was gentle but firm.

"If I have powers..." I chewed my lower lip. "Do you think I could have stopped Nathan all along? I could've protected Dylan, I could've saved myself, but instead I just..."

"You did protect Dylan," he said softly. "You did save yourself."

I closed my eyes. "I could have saved Brennan."

"Well. Maybe you still will."

I didn't even realize I was crying until he folded me into his arms, and I sobbed against his hard chest.

Stone held me tight, his fingers rubbing soothing circles into my back.

"It's okay," he whispered. "You didn't know. You couldn't have known."

I pulled back and wiped at my tears. "But now I do know. And I feel like I have to do something."

"Then let's figure out how to harness these powers of yours."

I nodded, feeling a renewed sense of determination. "Okay. Tonight, I'll try to bring you into my dream."

Stone smiled, his eyes lighting up. "I'll be ready."

That night, I lay in bed, my eyes closed, focusing on the sound of Stone's breathing. I reached out with my mind, feeling for his presence.

Suddenly, I was standing in a dark forest, the branches crowded overhead blocking out the moon. The night was lit with luminescent flowers that swung from the trees.

Stone was beside me, his eyes wide with wonder. "Amelia," he breathed. "This is incredible."

"I don't know how I did it," I said, looking around. "But this is my dream where Liam and I usually meet."

If I didn't know how to use my powers, what use were they? But he gave my hand a comforting squeeze, and I tried to accept that this was enough... for now.

"It's not just Liam controlling the dreams," Stone said. "It's you too."

"I have nightmares..."

"Maybe sometimes our nightmares reveal something we need just as much as our dreams."

I gave him an uncertain look. That hadn't sounded like a very Stone-ish thought.

He admitted, "I had a nightmare the other night that's been... haunting me."

"Do you want to tell me about it?"

"No." Then he relented. "But I think there's more to our dreams than any of us have realized, so I will."

He told me that he'd had a dream where his father appeared and insulted him, using the same insults that the man once used against Liam. "I realized... I've always hated the part of me that I saw as weak. The part of me that was like Liam. I wanted to protect him, but I didn't want to see myself as being anything like him."

He scrubbed his hand across his face. "I know that's fucking shameful. Liam deserves better."

"Two things," I told him, gently pulling his hand away from his face so I could look into his eyes. The night forest sang around us, a quiet murmur of bird song. "One, you were a child trying to survive. You didn't betray Liam because you didn't want to be abused like he was. Okay?"

He ran his hands over my arms. "We both know the guilt and shame from being abused is its own force. Reality doesn't matter."

"The second thing," I said, because that was too painfully true, "is that maybe your subconscious was trying to tell you just how like Liam you are. Because you have powers too."

He shook his head. "I assume my mom must have had an affair, that Liam was half-Fae like you..."

"You two look so much alike." I chewed my lower lip, studying his handsome face.

He sighed. "I don't know, Amelia."

Just then, Liam ran toward us. "Amelia! Stone!"

Liam, Stone and I all hugged tightly. Then Stone freed himself, looking uncomfortable at his own display of emotion.

"I have to tell you something," Liam told me. His eyes were wild, but by now, I no longer took that as a sign he was unhinged.

"What is it?"

"I got inside Brennan's head. I saw the wedding." Liam swiped his hand through his hair. His face was impassioned as if he had suffered alongside me, and Stone tensed as if he were catching Liam's emotions and realizing all over again how much I had suffered.

"I'm alright," I reminded them both.

"I was trying to get him to stop. Then suddenly it was like... maybe I was controlling him."

"Are you sure?" Stone demanded.

"I'm not sure about anything!"

"That makes two of us," Stone admitted.

We talked about our emerging sense of our powers and the possibility I could call people to me.

"So call the others," Liam said, giving me a smile. "See if you can pull them into our dream."

I tried, and before I knew it, Cole and Shaw were running into the clearing too.

We all hugged eagerly.

"Did you call Brennan too?" Stone asked.

"I didn't try to," I said carefully. "But I don't understand my powers..."

I didn't need to say that I wanted Brennan with us. They all knew. We all wanted him here; we just wanted things to be different.

"So now that we're together in our dreams, what do we do?" Shaw asked. But he was already folding me into his arms.

The four of them surrounded me, covering me with kisses and caresses. I closed my eyes, giving myself up to pleasure. I had problems I couldn't fix tonight. At least I could have an orgasm or five.

Their hands roamed over my body. The dream had taken a sudden, erotic turn, and I found myself caught up in the passion of the moment. Liam's lips were on my neck, his hands tracing patterns on my skin, while Stone's mouth found mine, kissing me deeply. Cole and Shaw were behind me, their hands roaming over my curves.

I didn't know how it had happened, but I didn't want it to stop. Their touch was electric, and I felt alive tonight.

I reached out, trailing my fingers over their shoulders and chests, down their arms. I had missed them so much. I needed them now.

The five of us moved together as one, fanning out and then coming together again. Liam teased my nipples with his fingertips, while Stone and Cole teased my thighs, gently stroking my sensitive skin. Shaw nuzzled against my neck, his stubble chafing my bare skin. He seemed to know just where to touch me, getting me more and more turned on.

"Amelia..." Stone whispered in my ear, his lips brushing against my skin. His hands were all over me, covering my ass, my stomach, my chest. Cole and Liam were kissing my neck, leaving trails of fire behind their lips. My head fell back, resting on Shaw's shoulder. Stone moved forward to capture my lips with his, kissing me with a need that I could match. His tongue swept into my mouth, and his hands found the clasp of my bra. He quickly undid it, and the fabric fell to the side, freeing my breasts. He gave me a reverent look, then knelt to suckle my breast. I

felt like a goddess with my men all worshiping me.

Stone swept his fingers over my nipples, gently pinching them, then brushing them over again. I gasped at the mix of pleasure and pain. Cole and Liam had moved to my shoulders, kissing and nibbling along my collarbone as they massaged my breasts.

My pussy was on fire, wet and dripping with need. I spread my legs wider

for them, an invitation.

Cole and Liam trailed their hands down my body, eventually resting at my thighs. Cole began to tease closer and closer to my clit, sending a shiver through me.

Liam was behind me, his hands sliding down my back and then moving forward to tease the opening to my folds. When Cole swiped his fingers over my clit, I gasped. I was so close to coming already.

Cole and Liam continued to tease me, pulling back when they got me close to climaxing. Then they pushed me forward again.

I was suspended in this moment, trapped in a place of complete and utter bliss. I was surrounded by these men, and I knew that they would never leave me. Even if we were separated physically...we would always find each other.

Shaw's hands slid up my body, moving over my breasts and then wrapping around my throat. When he tilted my head back toward him, his lips found mine. I moaned as his tongue swept into my mouth, and I wrapped my arms around his neck and pulled him closer.

"Shaw..."

Stone took my nipple between his fingers and gently tweaked it. The mix of pleasure and pain had me teetering on the edge.

"Oh, God," I moaned.

"What do you need, baby?" Shaw said without a lick of humility.

I didn't mind his arrogance right now as long as I got my orgasm.

Cole's fingers swiped over me, and I finally fell over the edge. I cried out as my orgasm washed over me, my thighs tightening, my toes curling with the delicious feeling. They tried to capture my mouth with theirs for kisses, but I was too lost to the pleasure.

As I regained my senses, I found myself sandwiched between them, laying on Cole's chest on the ground.

Shaw and Cole held me close on either side and kissed my neck. Their hands roamed over my breasts and stomach, teasing me.

"I've missed you," Cole whispered into my ear. I could feel his hardness pressing against me, and I pushed back against him.

"I missed you too," I whispered back.

He ran his fingers over my breasts, and I found myself arching into his touch. His cock pressed into my leg, and he began to kiss my neck. His fingers slid down my stomach and slipped between my legs. I gasped as he ran his fingers over my clit, sending shockwaves of pleasure through me.

"Are you ever going to tell me what you need?" Shaw asked, his lips running up and down my throat.

"Your cock."

"Where?"

Stone began to tease between my cheeks, pressing my second hole. I let out a gasp at the feeling of his strong fingers pressing against me.

Stone and Liam were kissing my neck and shoulders, their hands running down my body, teasing me, making me yearn for more.

I pressed back eagerly into Stone's touch now. "Can you take a cock in your ass for me, sweetheart?" Stone whispered. "Show me what a good girl you can be."

"Only if I get more than one cock," I said archly, half-teasing, and they laughed.

We moved together like one, kissing and touching and stroking. Cole's hands moved to my ass, and he lifted me up, pulling me onto his lap. Shaw and Stone rearranged us, and I found myself on my hands and knees. Cole's cock was pressed against me, and I could feel him sliding in, entering me.

I gasped as I felt his hardness enter me, stretching me.

"Amelia," he moaned, and slowly pushed himself inside of me.

My head fell forward, and I gasped. I was so full. He was so big and every movement of his sent pleasure through me.

I moved back and forth, teasing my pussy against his rock-hard cock, then slowly sinking down onto him. I could feel every inch of him as it slid in and out of me.

"Can you take Shaw for me too?" Cole whispered.

"I'll try."

"That's our good girl."

Cole ran his hand through my hair and pulled my face down to his so he could kiss me, raising my ass in the air. Shaw pressed the tip of his cock against my second hole.

I gasped as Shaw entered me, slowly sliding inside so that I could feel both of them at once through the thin wall.

The sensation of having both of them deep inside of me was powerful.

I rocked my hips back and forth, feeling Shaw deep inside me with each movement. I was sandwiched between them, and I felt Cole's hands slide over my breasts, teasing my nipples. Stone's hands moved over my skin as he kissed my neck, and Liam slipped his hand between my legs and began to

stroke my clit.

I moaned as the pleasure built up inside of me.

I could feel Shaw's hands on my hips, holding me still as he pushed deeper. I moved faster and faster, my orgasm building.

Stone kissed me softly on the shoulder. Then he leaned in and whispered in my ear. His voice was low and quiet. "You're so beautiful. Especially when you take my best friend and brother like such a good girl."

I was completely surrounded, consumed by these men. I knew that they were all mine. It was an intoxicating feeling. I closed my eyes, focusing all of my attention on the wave of bliss that was flowing through my veins.

My orgasm hit me like a tidal wave. I moaned as my pussy locked up around them, squeezing them, milking them. I thought I couldn't bear any more of intense sensations, but as my body squeezed around both their cocks, I let out a scream of pleasure.

Cole grabbed my hair and pulled me down toward him. He covered my mouth with his, kissing me as my pussy tightened and relaxed around them. I rode wave after wave of pleasure, and they rocked against me, thrusting harder and harder.

Finally, I collapsed atop Cole. Shaw withdrew from me, and I felt his seed spilling out of me. I felt completely spent.

"You're such a good girl," Cole whispered. "I'm so proud of you."

When I woke up wrapped in Stone's arms, my clit and ass throbbed in the best of ways, and I wondered how it was possible that the dream had felt so real.

CHAPTER 18



*A*melia

THE NEXT DAY held new surprises.

There are no happy surprises when you're captive to vampires.

Stone and I showered in the evening, and while he was shaving, I walked into the kitchen in my t-shirt.

Brennan was sitting in one of the kitchen chairs. For a second, I was so stunned to see someone that I leapt back before I realized it was him.

Brennan was out of his chair immediately. When he came toward me quickly, I wasn't sure how he felt, since he was wearing that damned mask.

"Amelia!" His voice held a note of alarm. "What's wrong? It's just me."

"You just surprised me." I pressed my palm to my chest, willing my rapid-beating heart to calm down. "I'm fine."

"Tell me you're not afraid of me."

"I'm not."

He hesitated. I looked away from him, not sure what to say or do with this man I had once adored. Then I saw the coffee cups sitting on the tabletop, the bags piled beneath it.

"What's this?"

"It's for you. You like coffee, right?"

I eyed him, wondering if he had been eavesdropping on Stone and me somehow—as I bemoaned the lack of coffee in the Fae world—or if it was just such a basic thing to like coffee that he'd guessed. "Yes."

I picked up one of the cups. It was still warm against my palm. When I took a sip, it was a caramel macchiato. My favorite.

“How’d you know?”

“I just picked something.”

It was hard to imagine Brennan navigating a coffee shop, standing there in his metal mask between moms who wanted a nice pumpkin spice latte. I looked down at the cup again. The name Jennifer was written in Sharpie on the side. “Did you steal these?”

“Amelia.” He said my name as if the accusation were ridiculous.

As long as Jennifer was still alive, I shrugged. A little caffeine-thievery was hardly the worst thing Brennan would probably do today alone.

“How did you go back and forth between this world and theirs? Or did the house move back and forth during the night?” I asked, tapping the top of the coffee.

“Don’t worry about it.”

“I’m pretty worried about how we seem to be in a whole different plane of existence,” I said. “When my son is in a different place.”

Brennan leaned forward. “Your son. Tell me about him.”

I felt my hands rise to my chest as my heart squeezed. “I should be there for him now. It must be hard for him, after almost being kidnapped by Nathan, and I’m not—”

“He’s fine,” Brennan interrupted. “Maybe he needs you, but he has the others.”

“The others?” My gaze sharpened on him.

“Stone’s siblings, I assume.”

“Your siblings.” My heart twisted as I thought of Cole and Dylan’s bond. “And Cole. Dylan has Cole.”

“I don’t remember them when I shift back,” Brennan said, seeming lost in his own thoughts. “You know how the memories are from when we were wolves. Dreamy.”

“So you can’t remember Dylan’s face?” My heart seized in my chest. He would never see his son’s perfect smile, the one that melted me every time, the one that looked like his. It was the smile that had helped keep Brennan—and hope—alive in my heart through all those desperate years.

“No.”

The next second, another trunk sunk in for me. “Wait. You went back. You know because you went to check on him...”

“I did,” Brennan said. “I thought you would be worried.”

“Thank you.” It wasn’t the information that touched me, but his thoughtfulness.

As if he were coming back to me, coming back to himself.

“Anyway, brace yourself,” Brennan said as he stood. “We’re having yet another visit from the Fae king today, and Aodhan is really fucking annoying.”

I’d been awe-struck and uncertain about the idea of meeting a Fae king, but Brennan’s words made me smile. “How is he annoying?”

“He’s all flashy. Look at me, I have magic, I’m immortal royalty, pay attention to me. It’s like a kid trying to get your attention to show off.” Brennan shook his head. “Fae are all so pretentious.”

I was grinning—and Brennan almost looked amused—when Stone strode into the room.

“Good morning,” he said to his brother. “Try not to return Amelia bleeding, like you did to me.”

“Amelia has more common sense than you.”

“I saved your life!”

“That’s why I said she has more sense than you,” Brennan countered. “Amelia would’ve stabbed me with one of the monster’s claws just to make sure I stayed down.”

“Hey.” I’d be offended if I didn’t know Brennan considered that a compliment. To him, violence was a virtue.

Still, they were bantering. Brennan might not feel like a King, but he certainly sounded like one of them.

Brennan nodded at the bags. “You need to put on something nice.”

“You love shopping for me, don’t you?” I teased him. “I suppose that makes sense, given that you bought me a motorcycle and a house.”

Brennan paused, and I regretted the light-hearted words. As he had so often reminded me, he didn’t remember, and so he didn’t care.

Stone seemed to pick up on my feelings, gathering the bags, then putting his hand on my back to guide me toward the door. Together, the two of us headed up the stairs to the bedroom.

I turned to Stone. “This is so painful. I don’t know if I can do this, Stone.”

“I know.” He wrapped me in his arms, rocking me back and forth, then pressed a kiss to my forehead. “I wish I could beat some sense into him, but I

don't think another head injury would help."

Stone sounded so rueful about it that I smiled, feeling the tension wound up tight inside me loosen.

Once I'd dressed in a long, shimmering gown, Brennan escorted me down the stairs to meet this alleged Fae king. I broke away from him to run back and grab my coffee. I wasn't going to let my macchiato get cold. Who knew when I'd next get a real coffee?

"Try not to be charmed by him," Brennan warned me as I looped my arm over his. "I don't know if all fae are like him, but he seems like a master manipulator."

I hadn't felt particularly charmed by the glimpse I'd had of Aodhan already. He hadn't done me any favors when he called attention to the marks.

"How could he charm me when you already charm me?" I teased, since Brennan was anything but charming lately. Still...

We walked into pale moonlight. The Fae entered the gates, and I muttered, "He looks pleased with himself."

"They always do."

He was a striking figure, dressed in the kind of fitted leather vest and trousers that definitely did not fit in at your local 711, with flowing auburn hair. It was hard not to keep looking at his face, which was strangely magnetic. Strangely familiar. I pulled my gaze away with effort.

"Do you see what I mean?"

I thought about the way people had reacted to me, perhaps the fault of my beauty. Supernatural beauty that I had never asked for or done anything to deserve.

"I'll be on guard," I promised him by way of answer . because I knew what he meant now. The Fae hadn't even talked to me, and I found myself strangely affected by his presence.

"Aodhan, it's such a joy to see you. You'll stay with us for a bit?" Adrienne gushed to him.

"I can't stay long, but I wish I could enjoy your hospitality for longer, Adrienne." he said, giving her a warm smile. But he kept staring at me. He'd barely broken away to acknowledge the vampire queen.

"I see you're already charmed by our Amelia," Adrienne said, and it would have pissed me off because I was never going to be the vampires' Amelia, but I was trying to make sense of this newcomer.

"We haven't formally met." Aodhan extended his hands toward me, and I

wasn't sure what to do. "I am Aodhan."

"Amelia," I said. I raised my hands toward him, just slightly, not sure what to do with his motion, and he slipped his palms under mine to grip my hands.

A brief tingle of electricity flowed through me at his touch. It was like a sudden jolt, that went through every muscle, the way your body jerks you back to life sometimes when you're falling asleep.

But the Fae's steely fingers kept my hand steady. "It's a joy to meet you, Amelia."

"It's nice to meet you too."

Adrienne and Aodhan made small talk, which seemed to barely include us and yet felt like it very much involved us. The fae king had helped them to find me.

Why? What did the Fae have to get out of it?

As I listened to their snatches of overheard polite conversation, I sipped my coffee.

"So did you ever make it to the hanging gardens?"

I wondered if this fae might know my father. If only I could ask instead of listening to this ridiculous small talk conversation.

"The rains been so heavy, it's knocked down so many petals from the reigning flowers--"

Or maybe this fae could be my father.

I almost choked on my coffee.

Could this fae be my father? Why is that why he had helped the vampires to find me?? Had he needed their help, then use them to get to me? But if he had, why the hell would he be helping the vampires to use me like livestock?

Something in this entire situation didn't make sense.

Then Aodhan turned to me, and suggested, "Could we go for a walk in the garden? It's so dark in the house, and the moonlight is so beautiful in this part of the world."

Brennan was already starting to say no when I jumped in and overruled him with a smile. "of course! I love to walk in the garden."

Brennan gave me a look—his posture suggested it was exactly the same look he used to give me when I splashed him when we were playing in the lake, one that said I was getting myself in trouble. He'd picked me up and tossed me in the water, and I'd come up laughing. He'd been right there, ready to scoop me up and kiss me hard. I'd run my fingers through his wet,

dark hair, looking into that beautiful face and warm blue eyes.

I missed him just as much as I did the day after I watched him die.

I wished I could stop thinking about the way he had been. Those memories made it impossible to see him as a possible villain now.

And yet...

I pushed the thoughts away to focus on talking to Aodhan. I didn't know how often I would get to talk to the Fae king alone.

“So tell me about yourself, Amelia,” Aodhan said.

“My mother somewhat raised me and my two younger siblings.”

“Somewhat? Did someone else raise you?”

“No. The human world is full of people being only somewhat raised.”

“I'm sure that's part of what makes your world so... chaotic.”

“It's certainly on the list.”

“Where was your father?”

“I never knew who he was.” I studied his face, waiting for something to give him away.

He just nodded. “What was your mother like?”

“Hard to understand.” Was he just fishing for information about a woman he had once known, all too well?

I had realized before I was ten that the timeline for my parents' marriage and my birthday didn't quite line up. That wouldn't have mattered, but I'd always wondered if that was why my mother had hated me so much. The man I'd known as my father died when I was ten, but he had always seemed to prefer Aiden and Rose, no matter how much I tried to be the perfect oldest daughter.

I didn't want to tell him anything about my mother. If he was my father, let him wonder. Until I had a way to use the information he wanted.

“Most importantly, I have a son. Dylan.” I watched him carefully trying to gauge if he felt anything to mention of a son, it would be his grandson.

“You had him with a wolf?”

Involuntarily, I turned to search for Brennan before I focused on Aodhan. “Yes.”

Aodhan's sharp eyebrows arched. “With that wolf?” he asked, indicating the house.

“Yes. With that wolf.” The second the words had left my mouth, I regretted them. I should never have told him that.

It was something about that Fae aura, I was sure of it. It was as if he had

drawn the words from me.

“So the boy will be a quarter Fae then,” he said, sounding disappointed. “That’s too bad.”

“Having fee blood has not made my life easier,” I pointed out. The dour attitude he had about the existence of my child irritated me.

“No, but it has made your life better. Not everything that makes your life better makes it easier. A great many good things come with hardships.”

“I’m quite well acquainted with hardships. But I’m pretty sure that being Fae made my life harder.”

“Why is that?”

“Because my mother hated me. And I blame the Fae who abandoned me.” I watched his face carefully, looking for any signs of emotion.

There was no emotion on his face. “Have you ever tried to do magic?”

“No,” I said.

“You should try it. I bet you would be good at it. Quarter Fae really doesn’t have any magic to their name. Just parlor tricks. All the human drowns it out. But, half fae can do some pretty decent magic.”

“Show me.” I heard the eagerness in my own voice, and knew that I was failing at the promise I had made not to be charmed by him at all. But come on, I was already picturing this man as my father.

And who wouldn’t be excited about the prospect of actually doing magic?

“There are a few first tricks we usually teach our children,” he said. “Wind-whispering—young Fae find that one quite useful—and flame-dancing, accelerating a bloom’s growth, and calling an orb of light. Each provides a vital stepping stone to the next level of magic. Which would you like to learn first?”

“The orb of light.” The thought of always being able to produce light in the vampire’s dark world was alluring.

The Fae smiled, his bright eyes sparkling with amusement. He reached out his hand and summoned a small ball of light, flickering and dancing within his palm. As he tossed it from one hand to the other, the light cast a warm glow over his features.

“First, you must focus,” he said, turning to face me. “Clear your mind of all distractions. The magic is already inside you, now let it flow through you. Imagine a spark within your chest, growing brighter and brighter, traveling down to your palm where it grows to just the size you imagine.”

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. When I closed my eyes and

imagined the orb, nothing happened.

"It's not working."

"You've spent a lifetime disconnected with your magic. Be patient."

I kept trying, and I could've sworn I felt the energy pulsing within me. Slowly, I raised my hands and concentrated on the image of a glowing orb. I felt the magic surge through my fingertips and suddenly, there it was- a small, shimmering ball of light hovering above my palms.

I opened my eyes and gasped in wonder, staring at the glowing sphere that seemed to radiate warmth and comfort. Aodhan chuckled softly. "Satisfying, isn't it? I can do so much more now than I could as a child, but I still feel a little giddy whenever I call light--just as I did when I was a boy."

"Was this the first spell you chose too?"

"It was."

I wished I could figure out how to find out who he truly was. But most immediately, I needed to learn all the magic I could from him--or find a way to learn magic on my own. Perhaps he could help me.

So I didn't want to scare him away by asking for a paternity test.

"Teach me something else."

"You'll be practicing this one for a while before you can do it consistently," he said, then relented. "Very well. How about flame-dancing?"

I nodded eagerly, and Aodhan raised his hand, summoning a small flame in his palm. He twirled his fingers around it, and the flame grew and shrank in response to his movements. It was mesmerizing.

"Flame-dancing, as the name suggests, is all about controlling fire," he explained. "It's one of the most dangerous spells, so you must be very careful."

I nodded, my eyes fixed on the flame.

"Focus on the flame, and visualize it dancing to the rhythm of your movements," the Fae instructed. "But remember, you must stay in control at all times. If the flame gets too wild, it could consume you."

I took a deep breath, feeling the magic coursing through my veins once again. I extended my hand towards the flame, and as I did, it rose from his palm and began to hover in front of me.

With a flick of my wrist, the flame began to move in a graceful and fluid dance. I twirled it around my fingers, sending it spiraling upwards and then downwards again. Aodhan watched me with a look of pride.

"You're a natural," he said, voice full of approval. "With time, you'll be

able to control the flames even more."

I beamed, relishing the sensation of power that came with controlling the elements. It was as though I had unlocked a new part of myself, something that had been dormant for far too long. "Can we try something else?"

Aodhan nodded, a mischievous glint in his eyes. He raised his hand, and suddenly a gust of wind came out of nowhere, sending my hair flying in all directions. I stumbled backwards, but he caught me by the arm and steadied me.

"Wind-whispering," he said with a grin. "One of my personal favorites."

He extended his hand and a now-gentle breeze rustled through the trees. It was like watching a conductor directing an orchestra, the wind responding to his every movement.

"Feel the wind," he said, turning to me. "Imagine it as a living thing, and whisper your commands to it."

I took a deep breath and closed my eyes, focusing on the sensation of the wind against my skin. My mind focused on the image of the wind and how it moved, and I felt the magic within me surge again. As I opened my eyes, I raised my hand, imagining the wind responding.

To my amazement, a gust of wind shot out of my hand, rustling the leaves and making the Fae's hair fly around his face.

"Excellent," he said, nodding in approval. "Now try and control it."

I concentrated hard, feeling the wind surge through me as I extended my hand towards the trees. I whispered another command, and the wind changed direction, blowing through the branches with greater force.

Aodhan watched me with a look of wonder, his eyes wide with surprise. "You truly are gifted," he said, sounding almost reverent.

For the first time in my life, I felt alive and in control. "Can you teach me more?"

Aodhan nodded, a smile spreading across his face. "Oh, there's so much more to learn. With time."

"And you'll teach me?" Maybe he was my father. Or maybe he would just help me connect to my Fae powers.

But even Brennan had admitted the Fae were more powerful than the vampires. Perhaps unlocking my powers meant I'd always be able to protect myself and mine.

He laughed. "Yes, Amelia. I'll teach you. But promise me you won't practice magic alone. It's dangerous--you can be swallowed by your own

flame or suffocated by a windstorm."

"I'll be careful," I said. I couldn't believe I'd been capable of doing magic. It had felt so easy, so right.

Aodhan held out his arm to me. "Walk with me, Amelia. Adrienne will want us back at the castle, but I want to know all about your life as a Fae child in that ugly world."

Don't be charmed. I still heard Brennan's voice in my mind as I took Aodhan's arm.

I had to be on my guard.

Especially against the sudden, rogue longing of my heart to have a Fae king as my father.

* * *

Brennan

ADRIENNE'S damn hell hounds came padding after her when I was pacing near the windows, wanting to be near Amelia.

"Adrienne," I said there quietly. "I'm not sure I trust the Fae."

"Of course you don't, and of course you shouldn't. He's Fae."

"How do we know he's even really a king? None of us have ever gone further than the forest that surrounds us."

"None of us but you have even gone into the forest," she corrected. "Both because we don't want to displease our host who lets us move the castle back and forth between these worlds, and because it is a terrifying place. But you couldn't resist a terrifying place, could you, Wolf?"

"We don't even really know where we are... and he could just tell us anything about the Fae world... maybe he's not even a real king."

"Does it matter? He's useful to us, and he finds us useful."

"Useful how?" I automatically bristled at the words.

"He values having us to work for him in our world. He doesn't want to spend time doing tedious tasks. He doesn't like to enter their world at all. Too much iron. Too much... Everything."

"I know, humans are annoying. Why..." Two pieces came together for me. "He didn't help you to find and capture Amelia. He sent you to capture

Amelia.”

“Not exactly. Using her as breeding stock was his idea. He said he knew a part Fae, part shifter who would be strong enough to carry a child for us.”

“Why did he want her?”

“He wanted to tie us to him. As I said, he can’t travel into the mortal world easily. He has us to do his bidding now.”

“That’s suspicious as hell, Adrienne.” I returned to pacing.

“To be fair, Wolf, at the start of this plan, I did not know that you were in love with this girl. Obviously, I would have been sensitive to your feelings if I had known. Though I’m not sure who else you would want to get pregnant —”

“I’m not in love with her,” I said automatically. I couldn’t let anyone think I felt too protective of Amelia.

I wasn’t sure what Aodhan’s game was, but was it possible he had hypnotized Adrienne? Because the vampire queen had protected her hive for two hundred years with her shrewd mind, and yet, now I could hear Aodhan’s hell-hounds panting at her feet.

Adrienne was still speaking. But my mind had already gone somewhere far away, trying to make sense of my next move.

“Do you know what I wonder, Wolf?” Adrienne had closed the distance between us in a few inaudible steps, so I didn’t know she was close enough to touch until she spoke. “What do you get out of working with us?”

“I wasn’t aware it was optional.”

“No, it isn’t. But why would you have more of a tie to us than you have to your own kind?”

“I don’t know them. I’ve spent five years with you all. And I believe I’ve proven my loyalty—” I gritted.

Adrienne touched my arm to cut me off. “We don’t need to review your resume. I’ve always found you loyal, and I’ve been glad to have you on our side. I’ve been glad to have you in our house, when you were willing to stay here. I just question your loyalty now.”

My heart sped. “I’ll get Amelia pregnant. I’ll get you what you want. You’re the ones who have actually been my family. They never came looking for me.”

Adrienne smiled sadly. “That’s all true, both. And yet... you’re lying.”

My heart seized.

She reached out and squeezed my forearm gently. “Don’t lie to me again,

Wolf. I'll be loyal to you as long as you're loyal to me. And if you lie to me, if you steal from me, then you'll find another way that I'm true to my word. Do you understand me?"

"Yes." I needed to understand Aodhan's plot, and I needed to make sure Amelia was safe from Fae and vampires alike.

If I just brought her back to the King pack, the vampires would come for her and slaughter the pack. If the pack came here and tried to attack, the Fae would shift the house back to Thule and slaughter them all where Fae power was strongest.

An image rose in my mind of Amelia and our dark-haired son, who's face I couldn't imagine, clinging to each other, safe on King territory.

I didn't know how to find my way there.

CHAPTER 19



*A*melia

WHEN AODHAN AND I WALKED, laughing, back into the castle, Brennan seemed even more surly than he usually was.

“What’s wrong with you?” I demanded as he dragged me toward the tower. I pulled away from him to side-step a table; I’d begun to grow familiar enough with the house to navigate it in the dark.

I was trying hard to learn to map my way through.

“I told you not to let Aodhan charm you. I don’t trust him.”

“I don’t trust him either.”

“You seemed cozy with him just now.”

“Brennan, I have a lot of experience with pretending to admire men I don’t trust. Don’t be stupid.” It was hard for him to understand my experience as a woman, I supposed. “What do you think he’s up to?”

“I don’t know. I just don’t trust him.”

“You don’t trust anyone.” I could tell he was distressed—though it was a true statement, it implied that his distrust for Aodhan was exaggerated—so I added, “But I don’t trust him either.”

His shoulders relaxed. “I thought you liked him.”

“I think he might be my father,” I said lightly. I expected Brennan to dismiss the idea. It made me feel as if I were obsessed with wanting a father again to jump to that conclusion.

“That would explain why he knew where you were.”

The two of us stopped at the base of the stairs to the tower. I couldn't hear the music from the party downstairs. Hopefully, no one could hear us.

I told him about practicing my powers with Aodhan. Brennan looked skeptical until I summoned an orb of light—a small one that burst almost immediately—and then he looked worried.

He filled me in on his conversation with Adrienne.

"What does the queen want now?" I asked. "A ball? A dinner?"

"Yes. But not with her." Brennan seemed strangely reluctant, which made my stomach curdle.

Something bad was coming.

"What does she want?"

"She thinks I should woo you."

I'd been so tense that his dour confession made me laugh. "Did she really use the word woo?"

"She's old fashioned. Also, she's noticed I'm horrible with you."

"You're horrible with Stone, too."

"Yes, but he deserves it. Now, can I take you on a date?"

"Where can we go?"

"We can go into the mortal world." He hesitated. "But Stone will be here. And if we don't come back..."

I swallowed. "I see. But they'll leave him alone..."

"Yes. Adrienne pledged her word. And I'll have the lock, which should hold them for a while, even if they thought we betrayed them. Which we aren't doing."

"That seems like too much to risk for a nice dinner."

"Well, it's going to be a very nice dinner. Also, we don't have a choice."

"I don't know how I can be free in my world and not go to my son," I whispered.

"Easy," he said. "Remember you aren't free."

The next day, we walked through the darkness of the house and finally emerged into sunlight. I squeezed my eyes shut; it felt painfully bright now.

We were back in the mortal world. No purple flowering trees stretched over the fence. There was a driveway leading up to the gate, and beyond it, I could hear honking and the sound of tires on pavement.

"How does the house shift back and forth?"

"Magic." He made a sparkle motion with his long, deft fingers with one hand.

It was another Brennan mannerism, one long forgotten, that made my heart ache.

I tried to smile. "You know I meant more specifically."

"I know."

"Where are we going?"

"Where we always go."

When we reached the cottage, there were doors and windows hung in the walls, fresh and gleaming. I gasped at the sight.

"What is it?" he asked.

"There's more to the house," I said. I lightly touched a piece of construction material left behind. "Shaw must still be having our house rebuilt."

He had frozen. "Our house?"

I pretended not to understand what he meant. There as another truth I wanted to discuss. "You bought this house for me. It was supposed to be someplace I could be free."

He scoffed. "In this world?"

"You were more of an optimist then."

"And I literally got my brains blown out. Obviously, optimism is not for survivors."

The two of us sat down on the grass overlooking the shimmering blue of the lake. I felt nervous that the pack had been here recently. If Shaw or Cole found me, they might never let me go back. They would want to launch a rescue for Stone, but they would know he'd want me to stay safe.

And he'd want Brennan safe...and locked up here until he came to his senses.

I didn't think trapping him would bring Brennan back to us, though. We would end up in a war with the Fae, and Brennan might never forgive us.

Though he should be forgiving about a little kidnapping, given his own track record.

"How did the vampires bring you back? Did you actually die?"

"Not quite," he said quietly. "But I was in pieces. The bullet shattered my skull and tore through the nerves of my eye sockets. My nose and this cheek..." he touched his mask, "shattered into a dozen pieces."

"Will you take off your mask?"

"Why?"

"Because I want to see you."

He scoffed at that. "I didn't know you were a masochist."

"Brennan."

He let out a hard, jaded laugh. "Do you want to see if you're the person you think you, Amelia? Someone who can love a monster?"

What a self-pitying asshole.

"I already do love a monster," I told him. "Your face is the least of your problems."

He scoffed.

As he raised his hands to remove the mask, I steeled myself for what I was about to see. I knew he was keenly attuned to every sound, to the way people moved. He was able to read people and scenes in the most incredible way.

He tossed the mask onto the grass with a quick, definitive movement.

The upper half of his face was misshapen, his nose and cheeks reconstructed but flat and not quite right. His right eye socket was badly deformed, the lid itself damaged. Though there was a scar across his jaw, that hard-angled jaw and the soft poutiness of his pink lower lip were the only parts of him that were still entirely Brennan.

"They did a good job putting you back together," I said.

He snorted. "There was some room for improvement. They did a better job with the next wolf--too good, he escaped. Apparently he didn't care, like I did, about staying close enough that I wasn't a danger to anyone."

"What do you mean?" I asked, trying to imagine those early days. It must have been so hard for him, with no idea who he was or where he had come from, neither a wolf nor a vampire.

"They could only save me by turning me before I died. As a young vampire, no one has much control. I stayed close to them so they'd make sure I was fed and didn't massacre anyone." He stopped abruptly, frowning, though the movement barely altered his misshapen forehead. "What? I can't see you but I can feel you looking at me."

"You're still a good man. Even as a vampire."

He let out a groan. "Remember what I told you about the dangers of optimism?"

We had a picnic overlooking the water. I ached to go back to the King pack, but I also ached to stay with Brennan.

I told him story after story from when we were together, telling him the smallest details I remembered, because Liam had said that was part of how he

got into people's heads.

It was fun and we were laughing, but then he said quietly, "I know this has just been one pretend date, but when we return to the house... I would suggest we have pretend intimacy. If we come through the gates kissing, looking as if we can't keep our hands off each other, and find a private place to make it seem like we are... intimate..."

"You need the vampires to think you're keeping to their plan." The sun was beginning to sink over the lake, casting golden rays over the water. Soon, it would be time to go back.

My glimpses of the Fae world made me think it was beautiful. But my heart was in this one. Our world was messy, and it was home.

"Yes."

"I'll play along," I said. "I can bear kissing you."

"Can you? Do you close your eyes and pretend it's the old Brennan?" The name seemed like it burnt on his tongue.

"No," I said. "There's no old Brennan and new. There's just... mine."

He closed his eyes as if I were hurting him. "Amelia..."

"I'm not going to apologize for my feelings," I said. "I love you and I don't know how to stop."

He let out a groan, as if I were killing him, then leaned over and kissed me.

As his lips pressed against mine, I felt a spark of something I hadn't felt in a long time. It was like a flame had been lit inside of me, and it was growing with each passing moment. I leaned into him, my hands moving up to wrap around his neck as we kissed.

His hand moved to the back of my head, tangling in my hair as he deepened the kiss. It was like we were two people starved for affection, and we couldn't get enough of each other.

My mind was a blur of thoughts and emotions as we kissed. I didn't know if this was real, or if it was all just an act. I didn't know if he was really the same Brennan I had once loved, or if he was just a shell of the man he used to be.

All I knew was that in that moment, with his lips on mine, I was happy.

When we finally broke apart, we were both breathless. But I tried to act as if that kiss hadn't devastated me. "Practicing for when we go back?"

His lips pursed, and he tilted his head toward me, giving me a look. I hadn't seen that look in so long, and it didn't matter that his cheek was

misshapen. It was all Brennan.

"Come on," he said. "Let's go back before Stone gets...devoured."

"You think they would eat him?"

"I think they would eat him up." He reached for his mask, and I took his hand. "I wish you wouldn't."

"Why?" he asked bluntly.

"Because I can't see your expressions."

"I don't have expressions."

"Yes, you do. Yes, your face is different now. But you still do all the same things. You always had a way you would look at me that said I was being obnoxious, but you loved me anyway. You always shrugged just one shoulder. You always nudged my hair when I got it in my face... or when you wanted to say something wicked, but still be sweet about it. And you were always sweet. You always..."

"Loved you," he said softly. "I always loved you."

"Do you remember?"

"No," he said. "But I must have done a good job of it, because here you are..."

"Loving you. I haven't tried to hide that."

"But you're still working on your Plan B for if I disappoint you."

My lips parted, and he said, "It's alright, Amelia. That's what I would do too."

Then he reached out and brushed my hair off my face. "But there's no Plan B. There's nowhere to run from me."

"You sound so creepy." My voice came out sharp, even though I was trying to keep things light.

Then he shrugged one shoulder. "I am a vampire."

"You're a wolf too." I countered.

"A hybrid."

"Brennan." I guided his fingers to the mark he couldn't see even as I claimed his lips in a kiss. "The only thing you are that matters... is mine."

* * *

WHEN WE CAME through the doors of the mansion, we were kissing.

I was caught up in the kiss, even if we were supposed to be acting.

Brennan's hands were cool against my skin as they slid under my shirt, caressing the skin along my sides.

We stumbled through the dark house, trading kisses. "We can't go up to Stone," I said. We were trying to convince the vampires we were really going to have sex.

"Why not? I want him to watch. I like when he's jealous."

"No," I said warningly, and his lips curled. I missed his old, wide smile. I wanted to coax one out of him so badly.

Together, the two of us stumbled into an empty room, and Brennan pushed me up against the wall. "You're so beautiful," he murmured against my lips. "I can't get enough of you."

I tangled my fingers in his hair, pulling him closer to deepen the kiss. My body was on fire, and I wanted him more than I had ever wanted anyone before.

Brennan's hands were everywhere, and I moaned as he pressed himself against me. I could feel his arousal, and it only made me want him more.

We were supposed to be pretending.

We were supposed to stop.

But the mark on my skin burned, and my hands kept slipping over his cool, chiseled muscles as if I would die if I stopped touching him.

Brennan's hands traveled lower, slipping under the waistband of my pants as he kissed me fervently. I gasped against his lips as he touched me, sending shivers down my spine.

His lips trailed down my neck, and I arched my back, pressing myself closer to him. The room was spinning around us, and I was lost in the ecstasy of the moment.

His breath stuttered over my throat. "We should stop."

"Yes."

"You make me insane. Actually insane." His hand fisted in my hair, as his face dropped to nuzzle the base of my throat, dipping into my décolletage.

I ran my fingers through his hair, then tilted his face back so I could kiss him again deeply.

My hands slid down over his chest and flat stomach, tracing his abs.

He groaned, deep and low. The sound rumbled in his chest, and I smiled against his lips.

As if he could feel my expression, he pulled away from me, but I held him tight.

"I'm insane for you. And I wish, I just wish..."

"What?"

He just kissed me again.

The two of us stumbled back and forth across the room until we found the shadowy edge of one of the few pieces of furniture in the room. We should have lit candles, but we didn't. It was too urgent, too needy.

I tore the mask off his face. I couldn't see him anyway, but I needed to feel his skin against mine when he nuzzled my face with his.

Brennan's hot breath rushed across my skin as he pulled my shirt off, then my bra. I closed my eyes as his lips brushed against my breasts. It had been so long since he had done this, since he had made me feel like this.

"Amelia." His voice was so thick with emotion it almost didn't sound like him.

The last of his restraint seemed to slip, and he pulled me to him roughly. He kissed me, but it was almost desperate. I could feel all of his emotions, the lust and the desire, but also the love. His hands ran down my body, cradling me, as he swept me close to him.

I wrapped my arms around his neck, pressing my body against his. I wanted him.

I wanted to come home. And whatever Brennan had become, he still felt like home.

I dropped my hands to his pants, fumbling with the button. Even though we were in the dark, I could feel his attention on me, burning with need. I pushed his pants down, and he kicked them off impatiently as he pulled me closer to him.

He lifted me up, and I wrapped my legs around his waist. He carried me over to the bed, and we fell onto it with a thud.

His lips were on mine again, and his hands roamed over my body, tracing every curve and dip. I arched my back, pressing myself against him as he moved over me, his body cool and smooth against mine.

I could feel his arousal, hard and insistent against my thigh, and I moaned against his lips.

We were supposed to be pretending.

But I couldn't just pretend to love Brennan.

If love alone could fix someone... Brennan would come back to us.

I just wasn't sure it could.

But I couldn't even think about it anymore. the rational part of my brain

had turned off.

All I could focus on was the way Brennan's body felt against mine, the way his lips felt on my skin, the way his hands moved over me.

He was mine, and I was his. Nothing else mattered.

I let out a low moan as he slid inside me, filling me completely. My body arched against his as he began to move, his hips rocking against mine in a steady, irresistible rhythm.

We moved together, bodies entwined, lost in the moment. It was like we were the only two people in the world, and nothing else existed except for us.

I clung to him, feeling his muscles tense as he thrust harder and faster. The pleasure was almost too much to bear, and I cried out as I spiraled towards the edge.

Brennan's hand reached between us, and he rubbed my clit with his thumb, sending me over the edge. My body shook with pleasure as I came, my muscles clenching around him.

He dipped his head, his mouth coming down on the place where he had marked me. I jolted with surprise, but his mouth working against his mark felt so right. As he shattered inside me, I kept squeezing around his cock, my orgasm seeming to last forever.

Then we finally collapsed back on the plush sofa.

I was so comfortable, sated and collapsed against his chest, his fingers moving idly in my hair the way they used to, that I couldn't move. I didn't care we were in the pitch black.

The world was bright for me when Brennan was close.

CHAPTER 20



*A*melia

AS GOOD AS the time with Brennan had been, I felt wracked with guilt when I went to Stone.

“Amelia,” Brennan said, and I turned on the stairs to face him.

He hesitated.

“You can come up,” I said. “If you don’t want to be alone.”

“And be around you and Stone?” he shook his head. “I don’t think I can do that.”

“Maybe someday.”

He was wearing the mask again—he must have put it on behind me—and so I couldn’t read his expression. “Good night, Amelia.”

It had felt so good to have Brennan back for a few minutes.

It felt terrible to lose him again.

My steps were slow going up the stairs.

Stone met me and kissed me...and then paused. I closed my eyes. I knew he could smell Brennan, could smell his cum and mine mingled and still leaking into my panties.

“I see.” Stone said roughly, his lips almost against mine, then took a step back. He started toward the stairs to the next level as if he was trying to get as far from me as he could.

My stomach twisted. Before I could decide what to say to him, though, Stone turned around and came back. I tensed, expecting him to yell at me.

Stone paused, clearly emotional but mastering himself. “You loved him first.”

“Stone, that doesn’t mean I don’t—”

“You love him still,” he said urgently, speaking over me. “And I want you to.”

I stared at him, the air heated between us.

He spoke more softly. “I mean, Jesus, I pushed you away because you are my brother’s mate. It would be some incredible bullshit to be pissed at you now for still loving him, right?”

“It would,” I said carefully.

“And I’ve already made you deal with enough bullshit for a lifetime,” he said, his voice still slightly rough. “I’ve reached the limit.”

“Oh, Stone.” There was laughter in my voice, just because I was so fond of him. “Are you being so nice to me because you never got the chance to grovel properly?”

“To grovel properly? I’m building you a house!”

“How is that groveling? Generous, sweet... but I don’t see how it’s a grovel.”

“I’m giving you the chance to live apart from me, even though I think it would kill me.”

When his gaze met mine, there was something different about the way he looked at me. I frowned, trying to puzzle it out. Stone was intense as always, his eyes an icy shade of blue that had once intimidated me and now felt comforting.

After a second, I realized what it was.

Respect.

Stone looked at me as if he respected me.

My heart did an unexpected flipflop. When had my dominating alpha—and I had no doubt that he would always be that alpha—grown to respect me? And how did it make me feel so much? I’d spent so long without a shred of respect from the men around me.

“You’re serious, aren’t you?” I asked him softly.

He nodded, his gaze never leaving mine.

“I am. I want you to have everything you’ve ever dreamed of, even if it means I have to give you up.”

“That doesn’t sound like you,” I said. “What brought about this rare bit of zen behavior?””

"I love you," he said simply.

Those three little words hit me like a strong current sweeping my legs out from underneath me.

And I was drowning in his brilliant blue eyes.

"I love you too," I said softly. "Though that makes sense. We are mates, after all."

"You certainly proved that."

He stepped closer to me, and I felt my heart beat faster. His hands moved from my hips up to cup my face. "Have I ever thanked you for saving me, mate?"

"Not enough." I said the words lightly, but the word mate made my heart pulse.

His lips were so close I could feel his warm breath on mine. "You saved me in so many ways."

And then he kissed me.

His lips were gentle and soft, and I melted into him as his mouth moved over mine. His tongue explored with a passionate intensity that made warmth spread through my whole body. He pulled me in closer, pressing our bodies together as the kiss deepened even further. I felt like I was floating away with him, swept up by the sensations coursing through my veins.

My hands moved around his neck and up into his hair while our tongues tangled together in a slow dance of desire. Our passion fueled each other until we were lost in each other's kiss, oblivious to anything but the pleasure we shared in that moment.

Finally, our kiss ended. He kept me close, his hands firmly on my waist. He looked down at me, his eyes filled with a fierce possessiveness.

"You're mine," he growled, but there was a question. There was a need.

I shivered at the intensity in his voice, feeling a surge of desire that threatened to overwhelm me.

"Yes," I whispered. "I'm yours."

He kissed me again, his mouth hot and hungry as he deepened the kiss once more. I moaned softly as his hands moved down to my hips, pulling me even closer to him. Our bodies pressed together, and I could feel the heat of his desire against me.

I knew in that moment that he was everything I had ever wanted. And I was his, completely and utterly. No one else could ever compare.

As we broke the kiss, he looked down at me with an intensity that made

my heart skip a beat.

"Marry me," he said fiercely. "When we get out of here. We'll have a real wedding. The kind you've always wanted."

"We'll both have to live for that to happen," I teased.

"We'll make it happen," he said confidently. "I'll make sure you have the life you deserve."

We'd have to make it back to the King pack.

I smiled up at him, feeling my heart swell with love. "Ask me properly when we make it home."

"You're going to keep me in suspense."

"I'm wearing your mark," I said, touching his symbol on my shoulder.

"That's different. You didn't get a choice about that."

"I would have chosen it," I promised.

He bent his head and brushed his lips over the mark, his touch as reverent as a prayer.

He leaned down to kiss me again, and I tangled my hands in his hair as our lips moved together. His body felt like home against mine, no matter where we were.

Stone kissed me as if he were trying to claim all of me, to claim me down to heart and bone. His hands were hot against my skin, and an image rose in my mind of what it would be like to have Stone and Brennan on either side of me, one hot and one cold.

My tongue stroked hungrily into Stone's mouth as the vision of that pleasure filled my mind. A deep, throbbing arousal coursed through me, and I knew that I wanted both of them together.

He pulled away slightly, just enough for him to look me in the eyes. His gaze held so much intensity that for a second, I forgot where we were. He leaned down and kissed me again, this time a little slower and deeper than before, as if savoring every moment. His hands moved up my sides until they cupped my face. I opened my mouth to him eagerly, feeling like I was melting into him with every touch.

The kiss deepened further until it felt like there was nothing else but us in the entire world. Time seemed to stand still as we moved together as one being. Every part of me was alive with pleasure and desire, begging for more of his touch and kiss without even knowing what it wanted exactly.

His lips left mine to trail down my neck and I gasped as the sensations of his mouth moved through me. He seemed to understand exactly what I

wanted and needed, and he was giving it to me without hesitation. His hands moved over my body, exploring every inch with a hungry heat that sent sparks of pleasure coursing through me.

I couldn't help the moan that escaped my lips as he continued to explore my body. It was like he knew every inch of me, every spot that would make me shiver and tremble with desire. His mouth moved down to my breasts, and I arched my back, pushing myself closer to him.

He took one of my nipples in his mouth, teasing it with his tongue as his hands moved over my curves. I felt like I was on fire, every nerve ending alive with pleasure. He moved his mouth to my other nipple, and I felt like my body was going to explode with pleasure.

I couldn't wait any longer. I needed him, right then and there. I pushed him back onto the ground and straddled him, feeling his hardness pressing against me. I couldn't help but moan as I ground myself against him, feeling every inch of him against me.

He groaned and lifted me up, positioning me so that he could enter me. I threw my head back and moaned as he filled me completely. A wave of pleasure washed over me, and I whimpered as I began to move. A growl escaped his lips, and he pulled me into a deep kiss as I rode him, moving faster and faster until we were both breathless and lost in each other.

I felt his teeth on my neck, and a jolt of pleasure shot through me. I felt the powerful surge of energy as his mouth joined my flesh where he had marked me before. I moaned in ecstasy, as if that mark were a link back to the time he had marked me, to every time he had pleased me.

Stone's body tensed beneath me as he claimed me, and I knew that we were about to reach the peak of our pleasure. He kissed me again, deeper than before as every kiss we shared went deeper and deeper. I felt myself reach the highest point, and I pulled away just enough to whisper my words.

"I'm yours, you know, Stone. Forever."

Then I was lost in the sensations of my own release, panting and crying out as I felt every nerve in my body exploding with pleasure. His body tensed, and he let out a deep, primal growl as he surged inside me one last time, filling me with his seed.

I collapsed against him, breathless and trembling with pleasure. I moved my head back, and his lips met mine again in a kiss that held all the tenderness and love that I was feeling in that moment.

"Amelia," he said quietly. "I know you were teasing me about the

groveling, but if it's something you need to hear..."

"I don't need you to grovel," I whispered, with a magnanimous attitude that I could only have possessed after a mind-blowing orgasm.

Otherwise, as much as I loved Stone, I would still have wanted to see him grovel. Some men do need to grovel.

"But I want to," he said, his voice teasing as he ran his big palm over my hair, smoothing it. "I am sorry. I'm sorry that I push people away when I want to protect them. Especially... you."

I kissed him.

Then he added, "But I know it's one thing to just say that. I have to show you."

"Which you're doing now..."

"By not saying a single curse word about my brother," he said.

I laughed and kissed him again.

I had never felt anything so right as I did at that moment, safe with him in his arms, his mark on my skin.

It didn't matter where we were. Even in this corner of hell, I was home with him.

CHAPTER 21



*A*melia

THE NEXT TIME I slept was marked by the strangest of dreams.

I saw Liam briefly in my dreams; he told me he'd been on his way to try to reach Brennan and help him with his memories, when he felt pulled toward me.

"How's Dylan?" I asked eagerly, with Liam's arms wrapped around me.

"He's so brave," Liam said, and I had a feeling he was parroting what he had heard from Karissa or Shaw. Liam didn't particularly care about brave or tough or spirited, the words wolves used to praise their children. "He doesn't cry for you at night."

The words wrung at my heart, no matter how he'd meant them. "So he cries other times?"

Liam sighed. "He misses you. But he has Cole, and Shaw, and Karissa, and me."

"He needs his mother. He's just a little boy."

"Yes, he does." Liam said bluntly. "But even children have to walk through hard things. This is a hard thing. But he has all of us, we're here for him, and he'll be fine."

I nodded, trying to push down the tears that threatened to overwhelm me.

He told me about Dylan's day, and he told me that Dylan didn't cry for me at night. The fact that he mentioned that made me think he did cry sometimes.

He kissed me, and then he was gone.

I had never been beyond the gates, but Brennan and Stone had. I'd tried to get Stone to tell me everything about the Fae world beyond.

Now, in my dream, I could walk right out. The gates flew open in front of me and landed, broken and twisted, at the roots of the trees.

I stepped out of the gates and into the Fae world beyond. It was unlike anything I had ever seen before. The trees were taller and more vibrant, and the colors of the flowers were more vibrant than any I had ever seen. The air was thick with magic, and I could feel it pulsing through my veins. It was the same sense of power I had when Aodhan showed me those tricks.

In front of me, I caught a flicker of movement. Someone was coming toward me through the woods. I stepped behind a tree, my heart hammering; with my back to the cool white bark, I could see back the way I had come.

The broken gates were gone. So was the house itself.

My dream had moved me to somewhere else altogether.

But the figure still passed me, moving toward somewhere I couldn't see.

Aodhan.

He didn't see me. I realized that I was invisible to him. Maybe because this was a dream, or maybe...

Because this was a vision.

As Aodhan walked past me, I couldn't help but notice the way he moved with ease and grace, like a predator stalking its prey. He was dressed in all black, his long hair tied back and his eyes focused ahead. I followed him, staying just out of sight, as he made his way through the vibrant forest.

As we walked, the forest began to change. The trees grew gnarled and twisted, the vibrant flowers turned wilted and gray. The air grew heavy with a sense of foreboding, and I could feel my heart racing in my chest.

A castle that seemed to have grown up out of the gray rock that surrounded it rose at the edge of a cliff. Aodhan walked inside--and I slipped in behind him.

He climbed the stairs, ignoring the little imp-like creatures who danced around him trying to collect his cloak and boots. He took no notice of them, even when he trod on one imp's tiny toes. It squealed, and they all rushed away then.

He walked into a bedroom.

In the bed was a young woman, as gray as the building itself.

"Hello, Father," she said quietly.

"Hello, sweet girl. I brought you something." He set a bright pink bloom on her chest, and she raised one frail, gray hand to touch the stem.

"My favorite. You stripped off the thorns."

"If I could do that in real life, I would."

"You're a good father."

He scoffed. "Call me a good father when I've saved your life."

"How is your plot, father?"

He sighed. "There's one vampire I can't hypnotize."

"Why's that?"

"He's blind. He can't look into my eyes."

Brennan.

"You could kill him."

My fists clenched. I would tear them apart—somehow—if they tried. No one was going to take Brennan away from me again.

"Too dangerous," he said. "Adrienne is powerful enough I can only influence her, and I think she truly cares for him. It might push her too far."

"And the girl?"

"Powerful." He sounded pleased.

"So she'll be an acceptable offering?"

There was a smile in his voice when he said, "You are going to live, Filuna. I just need to arrange the trade."

I was the girl. I was the trade. I glanced around, suddenly desperate to get out of here, but I didn't understand how to work my magic. I tried to take a step into the dreams, but it was just a step that creaked on the floorboards.

This house suddenly felt all too real.

They both jumped, but when they looked around, they obviously didn't see me. I pressed myself back anyway; in dreams, you never knew when things would shift.

"Did you feel that magic?" he asked, moving around the room as if he were listening intently. "Someone's using magic. On us."

My throat choked. If I was using magic... then this wasn't just a dream.

And if I was using magic in my sleep, it was magic I had no idea how to control.

Dream or vision? Dream or vision? I wished Liam were here to tell me how to differentiate between the two.

"Father," she said quietly. "Someone is always using magic on me."

He turned back to her. "I'll break the curse. It will take a few days to set

up the transaction, but it will be done soon, and you'll be well."

Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck.

It was bad enough the vampires wanted to use me as a womb.

The Fae's plans were worse.

I had to get back. Had to talk to Brennan and Stone.

Did the vampire queen know what he truly wanted?

And did the vampires have a chance against the Fae?

Aodhan paused. "I'm sure there's someone here. Wait, Filuna."

"I can do nothing but wait, Father." Her voice might be thin as a wisp but she was still snarky. Perhaps we really were related.

Aodhan staked out of the room, magic crackling around his fingers.

My eyes snapped open, and I gasped for air, my heart hammering in my chest. I sat up in bed, my mind still reeling from the vision.

Stone was beside me, awake and wide eyed, staring at me in alarm.

Aodhan and his cursed daughter, the Fae world beyond the gates, the vampires, and their plans for me.

"Amelia," Stone said evenly, gripping my arm. "Where were you just now?"

"What do you mean?" I gasped.

"You weren't here."

"What's wrong?" Brennan demanded as he rushed into the room, his eyes scanning the space for any sign of danger.

"I had a vision," I said, my voice shaking. "Aodhan, he has a daughter, and she's dying... and he thinks he can use me to save her."

"It wasn't a vision," Stone insisted.

"I think so. Unless it was just a dream... my imagination..." I stared between Stone and Brennan, desperate to have them believe me.

"I'm telling you, you weren't here," Stone repeated. "I woke up and you were gone."

His words didn't make sense, but the panic in his eyes told me he really thought I'd been gone.

"I'm here now," I promised, touching his shoulder. "I don't understand what happened."

Brennan ordered, "Tell us everything."

I described every moment in vivid detail, from the vibrant forest to the castle on the cliff to the cursed daughter.

"Brennan, how did you know I needed you?" I asked, thinking about how

I would've tried to call for him. But I hadn't needed to. A minute after I woke with Stone, he'd come rushing in.

"I had a feeling you needed me," Brennan said.

"Maybe you have some kind of magic too." I chewed my lower lip. "If Liam has powers, and I do too... maybe we all have some kind of power. Maybe that will be enough for us to fight back against the Fae."

"Right now, we need to get you out of here," Stone ordered. "What if Aodhan takes you away?"

Stone was speaking to me, but I had a feeling the words were truly aimed at Brennan.

"Obviously we have to get her out of here," Brennan snapped. "But we have to be smart. The vampires will be rising soon."

Relief flooded me. I'd half expected neither of them to believe me, knowing how stubborn the two of them could be.

"We need to test your powers," Stone said. "Can you only travel when you're asleep? Can you control it? Can you take someone else with you?"

"How do we find that out?"

Brennan didn't even seem to hear us. "You need to pretend to be normal today. The queen may want to see you... I'll work on our plans."

"And what is our normal?" I asked. "After... last night?"

Brennan said coolly, "I don't think anything has changed, has it?"

Stone rose protectively. "Don't be a dick, Brennan. Talk to her."

"We don't have time to talk about our feelings," Brennan said impatiently. "Survive now, chitchat later."

"You still won't tell me what your new name is," I said. "Just give me... us...that. What do the vampires call you?"

"It doesn't matter," Brennan said. The sunlight through the window glinted off the mask, and I couldn't see his eyes. "You know who I really am."

If only that were true.

CHAPTER 22



*B*rennan

ALL I WANTED to do was find out what I could about Amelia's rogue powers. But the queen wanted to see us.

Amelia tried to cling close to me as we headed down the stairs. I wrapped my arm around her waist, wanting to make her feel better, but I didn't know what to say or do. Thoughts of the threat ahead and what he could do to get her out of here alive filled my brain and there was no room for any other thoughts.

Adrienne was outside, taking in the moonlight. Like so many of the deadly flowers in the Fae world, her skin seemed to glow under the moonlight.

"Brennan," she said, reaching out to squeeze my forearm. "Amelia. It's such a joy to see you both again."

"Thank you," Amelia said.

"I heard you two come in last night," she said. "Was your date nice?"

"It was lovely."

"You shouldn't go out near the wolves," she said gently. "It makes it seem as if you might run away on us."

"We're not."

"Mm? You didn't see any of the King pack last night?" Her gaze raked over me. "You aren't curious about your other brothers and your sister?"

"Not particularly. I've got one of them trapped in the tower and he's

pretty tiresome on his own.”

“I’m growing tired of waiting for you to get Amelia pregnant,” she said.

“I haven’t gone into my heat yet,” Amelia protested. “I’ll be far more... fertile when I do.”

“Is that so?”

“It’s coming soon,” Amelia said, casting a sidelong glance at me, as if she were feeling shy discussing the subject. I wasn’t sure if she was lying or not. I glanced at the queen, who was always expert at ferreting out lies. “I’m sure of it. It’s been off because of... my life before this. But I couldn’t stop myself last night. The need feels like...” She trailed off, clearly embarrassed by the discussion.

Adrienne’s voice took on a sly note. “Good for you, Wolf. You’re winning her over.”

Amelia drew in a soft intake of breath. Wolf. Fuck.

It was only when the queen had left that Amelia sighed as if all the stress she carried was in that exhale. “That’s what they call you?” she asked, her tone sad. “Wolf? Not a name at all?”

“It’s been my name,” I said, though I wasn’t sure I was convinced anymore either. “I’ve been the only wolf.”

And it should have stayed that way.

“Oh, Brennan.”

“Where are you going?”

“Back to the tower.”

“Why?”

“Because I wasn’t entirely honest with the queen.”

I caught up to her in a few quick strides. “Lower your voice.”

She looked up at me, wide-eyed. “My heat isn’t starting soon. It’s starting now.”

“What does that mean?” I asked roughly.

“It means—” she began, then words seemed to fail her. She leapt into my arms, wrapping her legs around my waist, her hands sliding up my shoulders. Her lips met mine in a hot, passionate kiss.

I barely managed to carry her up the narrow, winding stairs. Because they turned so often, there were constant walls and we would end up pressed against one or the other, trading quick, wild kisses.

When we came in, Stone was in front of the fireplace. I could feel his presence in the room. I didn’t give a fuck what he thought or how he felt, so

while Amelia stumbled over her words, I carried her toward the next set of stairs.

Using my shoulder, I shoved open the door into the bedroom she usually shared with Stone. I put her down on the bed, already gripping her calves and pushing her legs back to open her to me, pushing the head of my cock against her panties to tease her. I wanted her so badly. His scent was on the sheets and it might have annoyed me, but I put my face into her hair and breathed her in deeply.

She moaned and turned to face me, her lips finding mine once again. The taste of her was addicting, and I couldn't get enough. I broke away from her lips and kissed down her neck, savoring her skin on my lips. She arched her back, allowing me better access.

I took off my shirt and pulled her towards me, my fingers tracing over her curves. As I kissed her, my hands roamed over her breasts. She moaned into my mouth and reached for me hungrily.

When I was lost in her touch like this, it didn't matter that I couldn't see. All my other senses were alive, and they were soaked in her presence.

"How do I help you through your heat?"

"You fuck me," she said, gripping my cock. "Perhaps knot me. I don't know what it's like for you now that you're a vampire."

"I'm more powerful than I was as a wolf."

"I don't need more powerful," she said with a faint smile in her voice. "I need you. I can't go anywhere until my heat eases. The only way for us to move is..."

"I have to fuck you until your heat passes?"

"Do you have to be so crude?" she asked, but her hands were gentle on my face as she guided me down to kiss her.

I didn't have the excuse of a heat for why I needed her so much.

"I need you as much you need me. I need to fuck you."

"Please, Brennan..." she murmured, and for the first time, that name felt right to me.

I pushed her shirt up, revealing her breasts, and took one in my mouth while my hand moved up her other leg to push her shorts down.

I pushed her down onto her back and moved between her legs. She was already wet and lifting her hips as I tore off my shirt and then my pants.

There was no bra to get in the way, no panties to hinder what I wanted. I grabbed her hips and pulled her towards me, feeling her heat against my

cock. I lifted her legs over my shoulders and pushed my dick inside her, hard and deep.

Her head fell back and she cried out, her breasts swaying against my palm. God, she was beautiful. I knew that without needing to see her. And she was mine. I was never going to let her go.

A dim voice in the back of my mind reminded me that the only way to save her was to send her where I couldn't follow--and to kill anyone who threatened her--but it was easy to ignore now as she groaned and arched up to meet me.

I gripped one of her legs, thrown over my shoulder, as I thrust into her. Then I found her clit and began to tease her with my thumb. Her body tensed and her legs around my hips locked, as her eyes shut tight and she came hard. I could feel her pussy gripping my cock, and my own orgasm was close, but I tried to hold off.

I wanted to feel her orgasm from my cock, not from my fingers. I wanted to watch her face as she came again and again because it was me inside her.

I wanted her to scream my name.

I moved my hands under her ass and began to fuck her harder, and her moans got louder, until her hands moved to my shoulders and she was pulling me closer. Her voice became a chant of my name, and I was going to cum any second.

When her nails bit into my skin, and she yelled out my name, I shattered too, spilling inside her.

When she sat up, I could tell the tension of her heat had eased slightly. She reached around my waist as she slipped off the bed. I took her hand, leading her out to the balcony that overlooked the forest.

She rested her hands on the railing and looked out into the night. "I wish you could see how beautiful it is out here. Can you feel how strong the moonlight is? There are no clouds for once, and the stars are glittering, and there's enough light to see..."

"When you describe it, it's like I can see it." Her curvy ass fit perfectly in my hands.

I grabbed her hips, and guided her onto me. She gasped as the tip of my cock slipped inside of her, my hands spreading her ass cheeks as I slid deeper inside her.

I filled her completely, unable to move until she was stretched out comfortably around me.

"Oh, god," she moaned, leaning back against me as I wrapped my arms around her. "You feel so good."

I brought my hands up to her breasts and squeezed. Her nipple hardened in my palm and I squeezed harder, enjoying her cries of pleasure. My cock slid in and out of her as I kneaded her breasts, she was so wet and tight around me.

I slid myself out of her, enjoying the feeling of her pussy as it clenched around my shaft, and then thrust back inside of her. I grunted as I buried myself in her completely, enjoying the feeling of her tight body around me. I could already feel her heat building, the pleasure seeping through my body.

I pulled my cock out of her and slammed into her again, my hands digging into the soft flesh of her ass as I took her from behind.

My cock slipped in and out of her easily, enjoying the way she tightened around me when I pushed in deep. I loved the sound of her moans, the way her body rocked with mine. It felt so good to be inside of her, as though I finally belonged somewhere.

She had been my home once. Even if I didn't remember.

She could be my home again.

The thoughts rose, unbidden, too saccharine for a vampire. I distracted myself by winding my hand through her hair so I could cover her neck in kisses and nips, and she gasped, squeezing around me.

My hips slammed into her, my cock still covered in her juices. With every thrust, I wanted her more and more, wanted to be deeper inside of her.

"Oh, god..." she moaned, her body flexing, allowing my cock to penetrate her. She was so tight around me that I couldn't hold myself in any longer, and I felt my orgasm rise with sudden intensity.

I covered her mouth with my hand to stifle her scream as I came, my cock buried so deep inside her with one last thrust that it felt as if we were joined together. She bucked wildly as I came inside of her, her orgasm taking her over and yanking her hips from my grip.

She sagged forward against the railing, holding herself upright as she collapsed. I wasn't quite done with her, though, and I turned her around, pushing her against the wooden railing.

I leaned forward over her, my hands on either side of her body as she braced herself with her ass against the railing. She arched her back and moaned, her feet coming up off the floor as I pounded into her. I gripped her thighs, feeling the wind move around us when we were this high up, but the

bite of danger only made me want her more.

My cock stretched her so wide that I could barely fit inside her as I thrust deeply. Her moans grew louder and louder, her whole body shaking with pleasure. I buried myself deep in her as she reached her orgasm. The walls of her pussy tightened around me as she came, a wave of pleasure rolling through us both.

She sagged against me, her body boneless as I continued to thrust into her, enjoying the feeling of her pussy around me. I was getting close to coming again, and I slowed my thrusts to enjoy the feeling of her tight body as I came.

"More," she panted, begging me. "I'm so close, Brennan, let me come..."

I thrust into her suddenly and hard, her pussy tightening around me as I came again. She cried out, her hips rocking back and forth as I came inside of her, filling her with everything I had.

I wanted more, but my body had nothing left. I kissed my way down her throat, licking the salt from her skin, and then slipped out of her. My tongue flicked against the heat on her skin. "Is this a mark?"

Her fingers rose to it abruptly. "Yes."

There was something guarded about the way she said it.

"It's warm to the touch. Hotter than your skin."

"Because I need you," she whispered.

"Is that my mark?"

She hesitated. It felt like my heart had stopped beating while I waited for her answer.

Then she whispered, "This is your mark. I carried it all the time we've been apart."

Those words destroyed me and remade me.

I was her mate, still.

She carried my mark.

Her eyes closed, her body growing calm as I kissed my way across her chest. I moved back up to her neck, and slipped my arms around her to hold her against me. Her head lolled to one side and she sighed happily.

"Feeling better now?" I asked her as I carried her back inside.

"For now," she whispered. "But I'll need more."

"And I'll give it to you," I told her.

In that moment, it seemed simple.

But nothing was ever fucking simple.

CHAPTER 23



*A*melia

THE SECOND VERSION of my heat seemed even more intense than the last. My core ached as if I were empty in a painful way, hungry and needy. The desire for Stone and for Brennan lit every one of my nerves on fire.

“Amelia, are you all right?” Stone asked at the door. I knew it had to take a lot for him to resist the urge to break it down after hearing my cry.

Brennan ran his hand up and down his dick, trying to muster up yet another round. The muscles rippled in his biceps under his smooth skin.

“I need Stone,” I whispered. I looked up at Brennan, pleading with him with my eyes. I didn't want any conflict between them. Stone was, amazingly for him, trying so hard to be reasonable and gentle with his big brother.

Brennan 's whole body tightened at that thought, a ripple of his muscles that ran through his abs and even through his powerful thighs. He worked his big dick a few more times, hard, like he'd take the skin right off it if it would work for me.

“Christ,” he cursed as he grabbed his boxers and pulled them up over his thighs. “I don't want to need him.”

“You don't need him. I need him. I need both of you.” As much as I wanted Brennan and Stone to be close.

Even with the mask on, Brennan could give me a look. “If you need him, I need him.”

Brennan stalked to the door and threw it open. “She could use your help,”

he muttered at Stone, distinctly unenthused.

Stone took in the scene and the citrus-and-salt sex scent hanging in the air. “Your heat?”

I nodded. “I didn't expect it... I guess because I went so long without having one...”

Stone nodded. “Doc told us that might happen.” Then he added, “though I didn't expect it to happen while we've been kidnapped by vampires.”

“Well, ever since you first came into my life, Stone, everything has been full of surprises.”

Seeing him standing there, big and broad shouldered, with this dark hair and his ruggedly handsome face, I couldn't stand to continue not to touch him. I got off the bed and crossed to him, barely resisting the urge to grind myself against his thigh when I pressed against him for a hug.

His arms encircled me, and he buried his face in my throat, breathing me in. “You turned my life upside down too, Amelia, but I'm not complaining.”

“Even about the vampires?”

“Right now, I don't give a damn about the vampires as long as they don't interrupt me while I'm fucking your brains out.” Stone's lips curled up at the corner in a wicked half smile it just made me want to kiss him even more.

So I did, resting my hand tightly on his chiseled cheek and rising onto my tip toes to press my lips against his. His hands wrapped around my waist, holding me steady, as he kissed me back, slowly deepening the kiss.

My nipples pressed his hard chest, caressed by the softness of his T-shirt as his big hands moved down to cut my ass. His tongue teased against the seam of my lips, and I opened for him so we could kiss deeply. His hands slid to my thighs, then wrapped around them and he lifted me in one smooth gesture.

I wrapped my arms around his neck and my thighs around his waist as he carried me toward the bed. Stone's warmth, his scent, his alpha power all wrapped around me like a crazy blanket.

He carried me to the bed in a few quick strides and laid me on my back. I spread my thighs wide open for him, running my fingers through my folds so that he could see how wet and glistening I was for him already. His eyes darkened with desire. “God, Amelia... what you do to me...”

“I want your cock,” I whispered.

“And my mate will have whatever she wants,” he promised me. All the while, I was keenly aware Brennan was listening to us, and now he began to

pace, his expression unreadable.

“In or out, brother,” Stone said, his voice level. “You’re making me nervous. I don’t want you slamming a bottle over my head while I’m balls deep in our girl.”

Stone gave him a more calm and measured look. “I think she needs both of us to get through this. Will you help me take care of our girl, Brennan?”

I didn’t think my heart could melt so close to someone saying he’d fuck my brains out, but honestly, I loved every side of Stone. Brennan’s expression behind the mask was hard to read. I couldn’t tell if he was jealous or filled with desire or both.

But after a second, Brennan said, “I’ll do anything for you, Amelia.”

“Then I need you both,” I whispered.

Stone lowered his gaze, his eyes darkening with desire as he took in the sight of wet creamy pussy. “Then come here, Brennan, and let me fuck her while you please her nipples. She likes that.”

Brennan didn’t hesitate. He nearly made me cry out as he sucked my nipple into his mouth. His cool mouth and hot tongue made me shiver. He held my breast in one of his big hands and sucked greedily at my other breast as his brother pushed his thick cock against my thigh.

“If we have to do this... fuck her right, Stone,” Brennan murmured.

Stone gave me a feral grin. “With pleasure,” he said as he bent down to lay me back on the bed. He held my gaze as he grabbed my legs in his big hands and raised them up to his shoulders. Then he moved down the bed until his head was positioned right between my thighs.

Stone’s big hands opened my thighs wide and his tongue slipped between my folds, licking from my opening to my clit and back again. I gasped at the sensation of his tongue caressing me there, at the roughness of his tongue as it moved against my pussy. His tongue found my clit and worked against it over and over.

Stone’s lips brushed against my clit, and then he bit down very gently, holding it in his teeth as his tongue and lips flicked out against my clit.

“Mmmm,” I moaned, arching my hips, my hands buried in Stone’s short hair, holding on tightly, fighting to keep my eyes open.

“That’s it, Amelia,” Stone said in a husky voice. “Fuck my face. Come for me.”

Brennan pulled off my nipple with a little pop, and I felt him lean down to kiss my hip. He kissed a trail of kisses up to my other nipple and sucked

hard, and the sensation was enough to throw me over the edge. I was coming hard, on Stone's face, feeling the heat of his mouth against me, feeling Brennan's lips on my nipples.

I was gasping, my whole body shaking as I came around his tongue. But it wasn't enough. "I need your cock, Stone."

I shifted uneasily, wanting to feel both of them, wanting to find a rhythm that satisfied them both.

"Right," Brennan said roughly. "Give her your cock."

The two of them quickly moved around, and Brennan pulled me on top of him as he lay on the bed. He pushed my thighs apart roughly, his tongue teasing against my clit. I let out a gasp, then pushed my hips back, still hungry for Stone's cock.

"Give it to her," Brennan growled at Stone, as if Stone weren't already pressing himself against my entrance.

I reached for Stone, and my hand wrapped around his cock, stroking him as he pushed himself into me. The movement pulled him out of my grasp, and I spread my hand on Stone's thigh, lost in the sensation of him plunging in and out of my pussy.

The rasping scrape of his cock against my walls filled the air, and the sound of it made my pussy contract around him, squeezing him tightly. He groaned, and my own moan was so loud it drowned him out as Brennan went to work against my clit with his thumb and his mouth.

He didn't seem to care about Stone rocking in and out of me as he licked and sucked my clit.

"Oh God, you're so fucking tight," Stone moaned.

Stone was stretching me to my limit. His big cock filled me completely, and he went so deep that my stomach quivered with every thrust. I was surprised that we were both able to hold out this long, now that I was filled with Stone's cock. He plunged inside, then paused as his knot swelled, making it impossible for him to move.

He grunted out, "So tight... Your pussy's milking my cock, Amelia. I think I knotted you."

I could feel his cock thickening inside me, and felt my pussy starting to contract around him. We were both so close to coming. I whimpered as his fingers dug into my hips, and when I came, I came so hard I felt myself spasming around his cock.

"Fuck, I'm so close," he moaned, his voice nearly lost to the sound of my

pussy spasming around him.

I could feel Brennan's cock brushing my thigh. My pussy clenched on Stone's cock inside me and I knew he would come too.

"Harder," Brennan growled. "Faster. Fuck her harder, brother."

Stone's hips slammed into my ass, and Brennan reached down to play with my nipples, stroking them as his brother fucked me into the bed. "We're going to come, Amelia. Are you ready for it?"

"Yes," I whimpered. "Oh yes..."

Brennan kissed my shoulder. "Ready to come with us?"

"Yes..." I gasped.

Stone thundered into me, his big cock buried deep in my pussy. I could feel his hot come spurting inside me as I spasmed around him, and felt the heat of Brennan's release splashing against my thigh.

And even through the fog of my pleasure, there was one word echoing through my mind.

Brother.

Brennan might have been mocking Stone, and yet... he had called him brother.

CHAPTER 24



*A*melia

WE HAD to delay our plans while I got through my heat. As soon as it was over, Brennan went out to see what was going on with the vampires.

He stormed back in grimly. The vampire queen had demanded to see us again.

As Brennan escorted me downstairs, he gave me that familiar *watch yourself* tilt of his head. Even with the mask, I could read him so well now. I just wished he would stop wearing it.

I loved his face, even though he thought it was ruined.

"Well, now I'm pleased with you," Adrienne said, smiling, as she greeted us both. "Aodhan and I have been in contact, and he offered me some Fae magic to help Amelia get pregnant and carry the child to term."

"I don't trust him." Brennan growled.

"Of course not. I've been around for three hundred years, Wolf, and it's not because of my trusting nature. But I do know about these spells--I just don't have the ingredients, because...we..." she indicated the world outside the fence with a sweep of her arm. "But Aodhan is willing to provide them."

"How can you stay here?" I asked. "At his mercy, in his land..."

"On his land, where we are left alone," Adrienne said. "Do you know how many vampire hunters there are out there, Amelia?"

Amelia hesitated.

"More hunters than there are vampires!" Adrienne said in exasperation.

"The show Supernatural ruined us. Everyone wants to hunt vampires now. It's like a John Wick movie, assassins on every street corner."

She caught the way we glanced at each other. She said, "I have a lot of time to myself. I don't sleep much at my age, but there's all that time waiting for the darkness to fall again... I watch a lot of television."

Adrienne was full of surprises.

I had to keep her from giving me anything that would make it easier for me to get pregnant. I couldn't be pregnant again. Protecting Dylan was already an overwhelming task. My heart ached every time I thought of him and how I was far away--in a whole different world--when he needed me.

"Now, I just need to assess Amelia's health," Adrienne said, stepping forward.

She cupped her hands on my face. I started to pull away, but I looked at Brennan, and he gave me a small nod. I held still and tried to breathe.

To my surprise, a warm, pleasant glow suffused me.

Adrienne's hands began to move, tracing small circles over my skin. Pleasant sensations tingled low in my stomach, and warmth spread through my body. It was a sensation I'd never felt before, soothing and comforting. I closed my eyes and let myself sink into it.

When Adrienne withdrew her hands, I felt a sense of loss. The warmth receded, and I shivered in the cool air. Adrienne stepped back, looking pleased.

"You're healthy," she said, smiling. "You'll do well for us."

Brennan stepped forward, his expression guarded. "I don't want any Fae magic. Aodhan has his own purposes at work here, I'm sure of it, and he will hurt Amelia--"

I hoped he wouldn't accidentally give away what I had seen. But I had faith in Brennan.

"Oh, it's too late for that to matter," Adrienne said, a smile lighting her face. "Because Amelia is already pregnant."

Those words dropped like stones.

My mind went blank. Pregnant? How was that possible? I had been so careful all those years with Nathan, working so hard not to get pregnant, and now... Was it Fae magic? I looked at Brennan, hoping he had an explanation, but he looked just as bewildered as I felt.

Adrienne seemed to enjoy our shock and confusion. "Yes, yes, congratulations to you both!" she said, clapping her hands together.

Brennan's face was hidden behind the mask. He inclined his head to her, seeming not to notice my racing heart and shock.

I couldn't bring another baby into this dreadful world.

But the vampires crowded around us, full of joy. Caroline hugged me, which shocked me. She seemed giddy with the idea of a baby in our midst.

All I wanted to do was talk to Brennan, but we couldn't have a moment alone. We were surrounded by the vampires.

"Are you sure she'll be safe?" Brennan asked Adrienne. "Given what carrying a vampire has done to humans..."

"There is nothing merely mortal about your girl," Adrienne assured him.

During the party, all I could do was cling to Brennan as we danced. He led me effortlessly across the dance floor, his steps sure and smooth as he held me close so I could hide my face in his shoulder. I desperately needed to process this move.

"Do you think the baby is mine?" he whispered as we danced. "Or could it belong to one of my brothers? How does the heat work... it must mean it's either mine or Stone's?"

"Does it matter?" I closed my eyes.

"Yes. I want you to be mine. I want our child to be mine."

The word burned between us. Mine. The selfish bastard. I wanted him, but I wanted the rest of my men too.

I needed Brennan, but not just him.

Would Brennan help us escape when I was carrying his child? Or would this be a reason for him to betray me to keep us here, and to fight back against the Fae? Brennan would protect me, I was sure of that... in his own way.

But we couldn't talk about any of that here, surrounded by the vampires.

"How would you feel about having a son?" I whispered.

"I want a son."

His voice was cold, distant, and I couldn't read him.

"Do you even care?" I whispered. "About Stone, about your brothers? If you don't care about your family... can you really care about your children?"

What if this crazed obsession he had with me was all he had to offer?

He whispered, his voice cool, "We'll discuss our future later. For now... smile."

So I made myself smile, but even laying my head against his shoulder, I couldn't pretend this was old Brennan, our old life.

I wished I could trust him.

The way he touched me, the way he seemed to want to consume me, made me think the bond between us was as deep and real as ever.

And yet...

When the vampires surrounded him, toasting to his fatherhood, I knew it wasn't that simple.

The vampires looked like his family, rising around him, and he slowly smiled as he raised his own glass.

* * *

Brennan

CAROLINE STOPPED me when I was on my way back to Amelia. "Do you think the baby is yours?" she asked in a whisper.

"Does it matter?" I asked. "My brothers must all be part Fae too."

"To us? No. To you? Yes. And that means it matters to me, Wolf."

I wasn't prepared to discuss that.

"Can I tell you something?" I asked.

"What is it?" her gaze sharpened.

"My name is Brennan. Brennan King." I tried the words out, tasting them on my tongue.

I wasn't sure yet if it fit me at all.

She grinned. "That's a good name. Pretty, just like you."

I groaned. "I regret ever talking to you."

"It's all going to be alright," she promised me. "Trust me. I've been around for a hundred years. Everything always feels like the end of the world and yet somehow, it keeps on turning."

"Not for everyone."

She sighed, then grabbed my hands to squeeze them. "Ah, I'm so excited! A baby wolf!"

"He's supposed to be a baby vampire," I corrected her.

"He'll be both, and he'll be perfect. Just like his father."

"Maybe it'll be a girl."

She laughed. "Oh, it would be fun to see you raise a girl."

I sighed. "I need to get back to Amelia."

"Is she okay?"

I'd only tell the truth to Caroline, but even so, I hesitated. "No."

Amelia was distraught. The room was full of joy, but she obviously could barely contain herself.

I made some excuses about her being overwhelmed, and led her toward the tower.

"What is it?" I demanded as we stood at the door. I felt air circulating from my right, and suddenly realized that the door was ajar to my office.

The room full of cameras.

"Let's talk upstairs," I added, trying to move her away.

"With Stone?"

"He's my brother. He might be the..." I didn't want to repeat that he might be the father. The vampires didn't want a baby with no vamp blood. "He should be part of the conversation."

I could feel her gaze studying me, even without seeing it.

Then abruptly, she said, "What the fuck is this, Brennan?"

She was moving away, into the small office. The faint hum of the computers didn't cover her gasp as she understood what exactly she was seeing.

"I had to keep an eye on you. To protect you." I wasn't going to apologize.

"You know what kills me?" Her voice trembled with anger. "You claim you want to protect me. But I can't trust you! Your protection doesn't make me feel safe, it makes me feel powerless."

"There's danger everywhere here, Amelia. If the vampires—"

"That's how you knew I needed you!" she exploded. "You heard Stone!"

"Be quiet," I warned her, glancing toward the rest of the house. I couldn't hear the sounds of the party—our party---anymore. But vampires moved so silently.

"Oh, no, I will not be quiet. I'm not having a baby with a man who just sees me as someone to protect."

"Because that's so fucking awful, having an alpha vampire willing to protect you with his life—"

"It is awful, if your protection is a prison!" There was a sound of a computer being dragged across the table before it slammed into the ground.

I leaned against the doorway, trying to look as if I didn't give a shit, but

my heart was hammering. She was kind of scaring me, and it kind of turned me on. How the fuck had I never been aware of this version of Amelia? Had I just not wanted to see who she truly was—how fierce and slightly frightening? Had I remembered, somewhere deep in my bones, a sweeter Amelia who had died alongside the old Brennan? Maybe we had both been reborn.

“Can you stop?” I asked coolly. “Be reasonable?”

“I’m not listening to lectures about being reasonable from a man who’s spent every minute eavesdropping! You’re obsessed with me!” More electronics shattered across the floor.

True. I would never deny it. “As if you aren’t obsessed with me.”

“Oh, I am. Because I have loved you, and I don’t want to stop loving you, Brennan. But you should try being worthy of that love!”

I scoffed, but she didn’t give me time to speak.

“I am your equal.” She shoved me, and I took a step back, my feet crunching over the glass. She shoved me again, but this time I didn’t move; I grabbed her wrists and held her tightly. “You don’t protect me. We protect each other!”

“That didn’t exactly work out last time, did it?” I heard the acid in my voice and already wished I could take it back. I liked fighting with Amelia. I didn’t want to cross the line and hurt her.

“You don’t even remember what happened in that hotel room.” Her voice was low and fierce. I was the one holding her wrists, but it felt as if she had just as much of a grip on me. “But I do. I’ve carried it all these years. And now here you are, it’s my dream come true, and you’re not worthy of me and of our son!”

Those words—you’re not worthy—were a slap in the face. Worse because they were true. I tried to shake them off. “You don’t even know if it’s a boy!”

“I’m talking about Dylan!”

Dylan.

I had only the vaguest memory of his face, a blur when I was a wolf.

“What are you saying?” My voice came out rough.

“You know what I’m saying. You can do basic math. He’s four and a half years old. That day in that hotel room—that was just over five years ago.”

“He’s my son?” Had I held him in my arms, killed for him—not that I considered killing Nathan any kind of sacrifice—and not known who he was?

“He’s your son.” Her voice was full of disdain. “And you know he can’t live here. I have to go back to him, back to the King pack.”

“The vampires will find you there.”

“The only happy ending for me, Brennan, is with my son in the King pack. Don’t make me choose between them and you. Take me home.” Her voice took on a pleading note, furious as she was. “Come home. All you have to do is let us be your family.”

As if that were so easy.

“What do I have to offer a kid?”

“Are you kidding me? You think because your face isn’t as pretty anymore, your son won’t want you? He still loves you. He carries a bandaid around in his pocket because;..”

She trailed off, so I prompted her. “What?”

“He wants to be like you.”

I pulled one knife, then another, out of my clothes. I tossed them on the table, then pulled the one from my boot. I drew my pockets inside out so she could see. “Not a fucking Bandaid in sight, Amelia. What are you talking about?”

“When you were a boy,” she said softly. “You always carried a bandaid. It was one of the little ways you took care of everyone around you.”

“I think you’ve got me mixed up with someone else, Amelia. That doesn’t sound like me.”

“No.” She shoved past me abruptly. “I suppose it doesn’t.”

Her feet thundered up the stairs as she ran to Stone. I wanted to follow her, but then I heard her weeping, his low, soothing voice, and I knew I wouldn’t soothe her pain.

She needed Stone.

And she needed the rest of her men.

I had to get her out of here before she could be stolen by Aodhan.

CHAPTER 25



*A*melia

STONE and I had a hard time figuring out when to sleep. But we caught a few fitful hours before dawn, even though it made me anxious knowing the vampires were awake on the floor beneath us—always a threat, no matter how much we pretended we were safe in our tower.

I woke to a few fragile beams of sunlight slipping through the curtains, and Brennan’s masked face leaning over me. The mask didn’t startle me anymore. Though I realized it did look frightening, it was still Brennan behind the mask.

No matter how angry I was at him.

No, how afraid. Afraid he would never be the man I’d lost.

“Get up,” he said quietly. “I’d hoped you and Stone would escape, that you could get out of here in your dreams.”

“I don’t remember my dreams now,” I whispered. “Did you really wish we had left you?”

He didn’t answer. “I don’t think you can shift between worlds. I think you need to be back on your own side of the universe. I’m going to get you there.”

He glanced out the window. “The vampires will be their weakest soon. We’ll go once the sun’s up a little more.”

“Where?” I asked.

“I’ll get you both through the portal and back to King territory. But they

will come after you, Amelia. Unless I stop them.”

I took the mask off his face gently. He froze, but he didn’t push me away. I ran my hand through the silky, dark hair above the damaged planes of his face. “What are you doing now, Brennan? Taking care of me, and your brother, and our children?”

“Yes. I’m the only one who can do that, don’t yell at me.”

I let out a laugh. “I’m not going to yell at you. It’s just good to see you again.”

He didn’t know who he was. But I knew.

He told us where to find the portal. I whispered the words to myself over and over, trying to memorize the path beyond the gates. He couldn’t shift the house back to our world; even Adrienne couldn’t. The Fae controlled that magic, leaving Adrienne at his mercy.

Brennan led us through the pitch black house to escape. Stone and Brennan kept me between them—if I had thought they were protective before they were insane now that I was carrying their baby—and I clung to Brennan’s waist as he moved through the shadows.

He froze abruptly.

“Going somewhere, Wolf?”

In the darkness, I couldn’t see anything, but I could sense figures moving around us.

“Keep going!” Brennan barked, but it was almost impossible to see anything. Then, abruptly, the shutter of one window banged open. The flash of light briefly silhouetted Brennan’s powerful form, sunlight flooding into the room. The vampires stumbled back, momentarily blinded; one was hit by the sunlight and screamed before falling back.

With the sunlight, Stone and I could see to flee the castle. Behind us, Brennan held the vampires back, fighting them off as they tried to reach us. Two came from another door and raced toward us as Stone and I ran for the door.

Claws grazed my back as the vampires leapt onto us. I slammed onto my knees.

Stone shoved open the enormous wooden doors. He reached for me, desperation etched across his face, and caught my arm. He pulled me to my feet as the vampires screamed. Their skin was burning away, deep red turning to flesh as they tried to scramble out of the path of the sun.

We ran into the daylight hand-in-hand, racing across the lush green lawn.

We trampled the wildflowers underfoot. My breathing was so ragged and desperate that I could barely hear the shouting and screams behind us.

When we reached the gates, they stood open. One last gift from Brennan.

“Go,” Stone told me, looking down the dark forest path. “I have to go back for him.”

“I want to help him too—” I said, but Stone silenced me with a look.

“Keep our baby safe,” he said, touching my belly quickly. “I’ll bring Brennan back to you. We’ve come too close to lose him now. Go, and don’t stop until you’re on King territory.”

King territory wouldn’t keep us safe from the vampires and the Fae.

But I ran.

* * *

Stone

I RAN BACK into the castle, stopping to wrench open every shutter I could. Light flooded the rooms, creating entire spaces between shadows where the vampires couldn't enter to touch us.

I reached Brennan. The two of us fought side by side, staying in the light. we moved between patches of sun, and the vampires lashed out at us whenever we had to pass through shadows.

"Take this," Brennan said, yanking a knife from his waist and flipping it around to offer me the hilt. "There's no point in shifting. We'd be too big to stay in the sun."

I grabbed the knife from him, the two of us continuing to fight.

"Traitor," Adrienne hissed at him. From a safe distance. "After all we've done for you--"

"Aodhan is going to kill her," Brennan shouted at her. "I can't let that happen to them!"

She stopped dead, her deadly claws extended in midair. "You care for the child," she said, her voice delighted.

"Yes, I do," Brennan's voice was firm with conviction. "I won't let Aodhan hurt her. Not after everything she's been through."

“Wolf,” Adrienne said wearily. “All these theatrics are for nothing.

Aodhan won't harm her. She's his daughter."

"He's got you bewitched, Adrienne." Brennan's voice was sorrowful. "I don't want to have to fight my way through you."

"You can't," she said, sounding just as sad and certain as he did. "The child she carries is mine, Wolf. The one I've waited for all this time."

"If you understood what Aodhan was planning... if you believed me... would you protect her? Or is the only thing that matters that you keep control of Amelia's womb?"

Adrienne and Brennan faced each other. A ring of vampires was pressing in on us, and I swore as I moved to put my back to Brennan's, making sure none of them could leap on us without a chance to fight back.

I didn't understand his connection to the vampires. They were monsters, and we'd have to fight our way out of here.

"You've lost your grip on reality, Wolf. There are a dozen vampires moving to intercept Amelia right now. They'll bring her back here, and you will see. Aodhan isn't going to harm her. I'll have my child, and you'll have your bride." Her voice took on a disdainful note. "And you won't have to share your mate with anyone else. All you have to do is turn on him and kill him."

She made it sound as if it were nothing.

"He's my brother." Brennan said.

Adrienne's eyes narrowed as she surveyed us both. "Him or me, Wolf."

"My name's not Wolf."

He struck out at her. Two vampires moved to intercept him, but I couldn't see the fight because suddenly the circle of vampires surged forward toward us.

The two of us fought desperately, our knives and fists clashing against the vampires' fangs and claws. The sound of flesh tearing and bones snapping filled the air, mingling with our grunts as we fought for our lives.

Brennan moved in a way that was precise and calculated with each strike, as though he had trained for this his entire life. He had, though he didn't remember it. He was even stronger now than before he left us.

"It looks like you remember everything you learned in our pack," I said as Brennan punched a vampire across the face hard enough to give him a concussion, then he shoved the vampire my way. I grabbed his hair while he was disoriented and buried my knife in the vamp's throat. "Maybe deep down, you remember how to fight."

Maybe he remembered how to be a King.

“If you keep trying to talk about feelings during a fight, I’m going to gut you myself and save the vamps the trouble,” Brennan snapped back.

No matter that I was fighting three vampires who pressed in on me, I grinned.

The lead vampire lunged towards me, its fangs bared and ready to strike. I deflected him, slashing my knife across his throat. But another vampire was already leaping onto me, trying to carry me down to the ground when I was still focused on the first.

Brennan jumped between us, slashing his knife against the vampire’s throat.

Pain flashed across Brennan's face. "In the next life, Vic," he said, before moving to the next attacker.

He had killed one of his own friends for Amelia. And maybe, for me.

The two of us fought our way slowly toward the door. Once we made it out into sunlight, we would be safe. Ish.

A vampire lunged at Brennan, sending him flying into a wall. He smacked against it, his eyes going wide as he struggled to get back up. Before he could, the vampire pounced, sinking its teeth into his neck. Blood spurted as the vampire savaged his throat.

I slammed the vampire into the wall, causing it to let go of Brennan. Then I gripped the knife and plunged it into the creature's chest. The vampire let out a gurgling sound, then dissolved into ashes. I ran to Brennan, who was somehow still awake and conscious. He groaned as he lurched to his feet. His shirt was soaked with blood.

I got my arm under his arms. Adrienne stood between us and the door. Her eyes were dark and dangerous, and she raised her beautiful face toward us, opening her mouth to expose her fangs in a hiss that reminded me of a snake.

We had to get out of here.

"Sorry," I told him.

Right before I dragged him with me for a running start, before I slammed into one of the windows.

We crashed through. We landed hard on the ground.

In precious sunlight.

The two of us scrambled up and ran for the gate.

Before us, it began to flicker. The world outside, with the driveway,

seemed to soften.

Adrienne whistled. Two dogs--enormous, red-eyed, slobbering and snarling creatures--came sprinting toward us.

"Go, now," Brennan shouted at me. "I'll hold them off."

"I'm not leaving you."

"They won't kill me," Brennan promised. "They will kill you, to hurt me. So go. Get to Amelia before the vampires and get her to safety!"

He was right about what he was had to do. I didn't want to leave him, but I had to. "I love you, brother."

"Oh, fuck off." He was already turning to face the hounds.

One of the hounds tried to go around him to me, and Brennan threw himself onto the enormous beast, his powerful arms circling its neck as it snapped at him. Brennan dragged it down to the ground, wrestling it, trying to snap its neck.

I didn't want to leave him.

But the woman we loved was out there alone in the forest, pregnant with our baby and pursued by vampires.

I had to trust Brennan to keep himself alive until we could help.

I ran for Amelia.

CHAPTER 26



*B*rennan

THE HELLHOUND GRIPPED in my arms struggled to escape. The other one was about to leap on me, savaging me with its brutal teeth, so I rolled, pulling the first hellhound on top of me. Like a shield, but a heavy, biting one. The two clashed for a second, snarling and growling.

I wished I could see Stone to know if he had made it to the path.

The beast snarled in my face.

I tightened my grip on the hellhound in my arms, feeling its hot breath on my skin. I could hear the other one circling around us, waiting for the right moment to strike.

Without hesitation, I raised my legs and kicked the hellhound off me, sending it flying across the yard. The other one lunged towards me, but I was ready this time. I grabbed its jaws and struggled to snap its neck, but its thick neck was too powerful.

As the hellhound struggled against my grip, I reached for my knife and plunged it into its neck, twisting it savagely. The beast let out a final yelp before collapsing onto the ground. The blood-slicked knife twisted out of my grip, still buried deep in the hound's neck.

In the distance, Adrienne let out a piercing scream.

Aw, poor vampire queen.

If I had my way, today she'd lose both her pets and her dreams of a vampire baby.

The beast lunged at me. It landed on top of me, lunging for my throat. I strained desperately with both my hands to keep it off me as it snapped at me. My knife glittered nearby, blood-soaked and out of reach.

“Stop, Cerberus!” Adrienne screamed.

The enormous paws were crushing my chest, but the hound stilled, its saliva dripping onto my face. I didn’t dare take my hands away to reach for the knife. Yet. I’d need to make a grab for the knife.

“Don’t kill him.” Adrienne’s voice was ice. “He needs to suffer for killing my pet.”

“Adrienne...” Caroline’s voice was pleading.

“Relax, Caroline.” Adrienne sounded exasperated. “He’s most useful to us alive. For now. Where’s the girl, Wolf?”

“Get meatbreath out of my face and I’ll tell you.” I’d do no such thing of course.

“Get off him, mutt.” The soft, feminine voice was Seraphina. Aodhan’s wench. So nice the Fae had come. Was Aodhan here too?

That voice belied her power, though, because as soon as the hound got off me, she was dragging me up to my feet.

Great. The Fae were here. The party could only get better now.

I lashed out at her, the world still dark at the edges from oxygen deprivation and blood loss, and two soldiers kicked my legs out from underneath me. Nobody liked me very much right now.

Their breathing was an anxious rasp, their clothing rustling in the breeze as they tried to keep from being burnt alive due to a wardrobe malfunction. They each grabbed one of my arms and when I tried to launch myself up and toward them, Seraphina clucked her tongue.

“Naughty, naughty wolf,” she said, and there was an electric crackle of Fae magic before my legs turned boneless. I couldn’t get my legs beneath me no matter how hard I tried.

“Maybe now you can handle him until Aodhan arrives,” Seraphina told the vampires with a dismissive chuckle.

Where was he? Arranging his trade for Amelia?

The vampires dragged me back across the yard. I felt the second we crossed the threshold into darkness, the touch of the air in here on my face became cool and dangerous.

The vampires had gotten the shutters all closed again. The scent of death hung in the air. They were nursing their wounded... and dead.

“Hang him from the rafters.” Adrienne ordered.

Just like them, I wouldn’t die easily.

Several vampires surrounded me. The two who had dragged me held me up—otherwise, I would have collapsed to the door—while another slammed his fist into my torso over and over. My body jerked with each blow, pain lancing through my side.

If the vampires were here, they weren’t hunting down Amelia. Adrienne wasn’t stupid—she would have sent some of them out, and they would now be chasing Amelia. The vampires were probably equally terrified of the sun and of failing their queen. But still, Adrienne had held so many back.

And Stone and I, between the two of us, had killed so many.

Perhaps my brother did have some value after all.

Rope slithered over the ground, was gathering and thrown over one of the beams.

“Good, maybe now things will be more interesting.” The rough material burned against my throat. “Clark, you still punch like an anemic toddler.”

None of the fury directed my way bothered me. Only Caroline mattered, whose voice was full of sobs. It sounded as if she were kneeling on the floor, her voice muffled as she leaned over a body. “Vic!” She grabbed my arm. “How could you?”

“I had to do it. She’s my mate.”

“You can’t even pretend to be apologetic,” Adrienne hissed.

“No. I can’t. Don’t be stupid, Adrienne, don’t trust Aodhan.”

One of the guards kicked my legs out from underneath me. I landed heavily on my knees.

I was wounded, bleeding heavily, cursed by Seraphina. It wouldn’t be hard for them to decapitate me and put me out of my misery entirely.

But Adrienne would want her revenge for my betrayal. She wouldn’t kill me lightly.

The promise of pain was also my hope of salvation. Amelia and Stone would be wise to leave me here; they knew they couldn’t trust me. And yet...

I was pretty sure Amelia and Stone were both far too valiant, loving, and stupid for their own good.

“My men will stop the girl,” Adrienne promised Seraphina. There was an edge of fear in her voice, as if she didn’t want to disappoint Aodhan.

“And if they don’t?” Her voice was cool.

“They’ll go back to King territory. Regardless, we’ll get to them easily.”

Adrienne said. Then she amended, “Well, not easily. They’re all like Wolf. But rest assured, you will get your girl back.”

“They won’t go back there,” Seraphina said. “They’re not stupid. They’ll know we’re coming.”

She stepped closer to me, and suddenly her fingers clutched my jaw. “It’s really too bad he’s blind. I can’t hypnotize him to control him. We could have him bring her to us, if only...”

Her fingers pressed through the holes of the mask, into my eyes, and I bit back a scream.

“I think you would find our wolf is impossible to control. That’s certainly proven to be the case for me.” Adrienne said.

“Well, I will have to find another way to get the information I need,” Seraphina said. “Luckily, there are many ways to convince people to share information.”

“Do torture him,” Adrienne’s voice purred over the words. “He needs to pay for betraying me.”

“Happily.”

Neither of their words meant much to me. But I heard Caroline’s sob, and I wasn’t sure if that one was for Victor or for me.

As Seraphina paced around me, a sense of power and danger emanated from her that made my skin crawl. I could feel her gaze studying me, as if she were looking for a crack she could use to find her way into my soul.

She spoke, his voice a low, seductive purr. “Where is Amelia going?”

“Probably Target. Mortal women seem to love Target.”

She let out a thin laugh. “It’ll be a joy to break you, Wolf. I’ve never liked you.”

She touched my temple, her fingernails raking lightly over my skin.

She whispered something softly. The next second, agony lanced through every limb.

I screamed, feeling as if my very soul was being ripped from my body. I was on fire. I thrashed against the chains, trying desperately to escape.

As she continued to whisper, the pain grew more intense. I swallowed my screams until finally, one burst from my lungs.

“Enough!” Aodhan’s voice broke through my agony. “Seraphina, what were you thinking?”

Were his words even real?

Darkness, welcome darkness, rushed up toward me.

And in the darkness, a dark haired, gray-eyed man stepped out of the fog of my unconsciousness. He was limned with light, and for a split-second, I thought I was dead and he was an angel.

My first thought was confusion. I was definitely hell-bound. So why was an angel standing over me?

He worried the long fingers of one hand with his other hand, chewing on his lower lip. He was tall and broad shouldered and when I saw his face, it came with a rush of familiarity. But I couldn't place his face.

In my dreams, I wasn't blind.

"You're not dreaming," he said. "I'm trying to reach you, Brennan. To help you."

"Who the fuck are you?"

"Your brother." His voice dropped, just above a whisper. "I'm Liam."

"I don't remember you."

"I know. But we're still brothers." His lips quirked. "Whether you like it or not. Stone usually doesn't like being stuck with any of us."

Stone. "Did Amelia make it back? Did Stone?"

Why was I fucking asking? This wasn't even real. This had to be my imagination playing tricks on me. It was a hell of a lot better than being tortured, but I wouldn't find any answers here.

He hesitated. "Not yet."

"Then stop wasting time and get them back!"

Then I was being yanked bodily out of the dream.

Liam reached for me, trying to grab my arm as the ground crumbled beneath me.

"Hang on!" he shouted after me. "I'll try to give you memories to hang onto!"

"I don't—" want your fucking memories!

He must be the one who had planted those dark-haired boys running through my mind.

But he was gone.

It was a rupture so short and sharp that my brain hurt.

I was back in the real world. The real world was always a fucking disappointment.

Aodhan knit his fingers in my hair, before yanking my head up to heal the worst of my wounds. It was brutal and painful and yet when I slumped to the ground, I wasn't losing any more blood.

“I have a deal for you, Wolf.” Aodhan’s voice was lazy and arrogant.

I wasn’t interested in making any deals with the Fae. Adrienne had been stupid to think she could bargain with them.

“He can heal you.” Caroline’s voice was excited. My heart dropped. I hated that she was here for all this misery.

“He can truly heal you, Wolf. It’s beyond the magic we borrowed from our fake cousins, but he can heal you... he can restore your sight.”

Of course he wanted to heal my sight. So he could hypnotize me into taking back Amelia.

I wanted so badly to be healed, worthy of Amelia.

But I’d rather gouge my own eyes out then force her into captivity.

“And what brings about this largess at this point?” My voice cracked, so I didn’t sound as disinterested and powerful as I would’ve liked.

“Well,” Adrienne said. “We know that you are lying to us. You’ve never been able to lie to me, Wolf.”

“Tell us where the girl really is. She won’t be hurt. I need her magic to save her sister’s life. That’s all. It won’t hurt her.” His voice was low and persuasive.

But he couldn’t look into my eyes.

As long as I was blind, he couldn’t hypnotize me into betraying Amelia.

“She’s my own daughter,” Aodhan continued. “Half mortal though she may be. Do you really think I would kill her for the sake of my other daughter? I can save them both.”

The answer, has is so often the case when narcissist talk, was in the question.

“Then this doesn’t have to be a betrayal,” Adrienne said.

I was sure she said the words because it was the Fae who couldn’t lie.

CHAPTER 27



*A*melia

I RACED THROUGH THE FOREST. The sun was shining, somewhere above the trees, but the heavy branches interlacing above me cast pools of shadow across the ground.

As I ran, I leapt and zig-zagged from one pool of sunlight. My heart rate sped each time I had to flee through the shadows.

Sunlight was life.

A bird sang somewhere in the trees above, then abruptly shut off. As a shifter, I rarely heard bird song. Birds knew that we were predators and straight away.

Hopefully the bird had gone quiet because of my presence. Not because there were vampires converging around me.

Today, I was the prey.

Ahead of me, I glimpsed an abandoned cottage, a broken-down wooden gate hanging from the stone wall.

The gate that Brennan had used as a portal to travel back to our world.

Before I could reach the gate, a vampire leapt in front of me. It was hooded and cloaked, so that I couldn't see its face. I could only glimpse eyes that were lost in the darkness of the hood.

I stopped, raising my hands ready for a fight. Since the vampire needed to stay covered from the sunlight, I had a better chance fighting it. I could go for its hood or cloak, and as long as I could push it into the sunlight, it would

have more important things to do that fight me.

The vampire didn't move toward me, though. Who was under the cloak? Caroline, who had been such a good friend to Brennan? One of the other vampires who had celebrated our wedding?

Vampires are almost silent.

This one could just be distracting me.

I swung around. Two vampires were darting toward me from the woods. I jumped back out of their reach for now, my vision narrowing at the edges to focus on the threats as adrenaline rushed through every limb.

"Leaving us so soon?" the smallest of the vampires purred.

"It's gotten boring. Seems like a waste of a near-immortal life, lounging around in the dark, having silly dances."

The vampires moved to attack. I called on everything I had learned from Cole. As the three of them came at me at once, I danced back out of the way, letting my fear show on my face. I wanted them to think I'd be easy prey. To tempt them into making mistakes.

Not being able to see their faces under their hoods that made them look even more malevolent and terrifying.

But perhaps my game making myself look helpless worked.

The biggest one came at me alone.

I leapt forward to meet him. I grabbed his hood and ripped it away, and his fist shot into my stomach as the fabric ripped from my fingers.

"No! Not her stomach!" One of the other vampires screamed.

I doubled over as I stumbled back. Underneath, he was wearing a baklava that revealed only his eyes.

We were still in the shadow. His strength was terrifying as he grabbed me and easily yanked me forward into his arms.

But I saw my chance. I pushed him forward, letting him take me, but giving him more than he had bargained for.

The two of us stumbled together into the sunlight. As the sun touched his skin, he let out a hiss of pain. The other two ran forward to help their friend. One of them grabbed me and I started to shift, letting my claws grow and my teeth extend.

Only to realize that I couldn't.

I couldn't shift.

"Do you like that?" One of the vampires demanded as the two of them leapt on me. Their friend was panting in the shade, a loud, pained rasp of

breathing. “We put something in your food to keep you from shifting. I’m sure Wolf appreciates it right now too!”

As I struggled with the vampires, they finally got the better of me.

No matter how much I struggled, they began to pull me back through the forest, back toward Adrienne and the house where I had been held captive.

Could I travel out of here without sleeping?

Stone came out of nowhere.

Stone quickly savaged the first of the vampires.

I had been trying to summon my magic and control my ability to travel now. Now when I wanted to stay with Stone and help him as he fought, my magic seemed to be pulling me away from him.

“Stone!” I screamed, reaching for him. He tried to reach me through the vampires that blocked me, but I was already phasing away from there. The world went black.

I thought too late of how Brennan had said he didn't think I could move between worlds. Where was I going to end up?

To my shock, I found myself back in that damned mansion, in the dark. Could this be a dream? I had tried so hard to control by powers how had I ended up here?

I overheard Aodhan and Adrienne talking. I had to get out of here. That frantic thought was the steady drum beat of my heart until suddenly I heard Brennan’s deep rumble of a voice. His voice rasped in pain and fear, and travelled straight to my soul.

I looked around for something to use to attack the vampires, then stopped, realizing it was hopeless. I couldn’t attack the vampires alone.

I needed help to rescue Brennan.

Stone’s shout as I disappeared still echoed in my ears.

Or maybe I was hearing it all over again.

Two vampires came around the corner and their eyes widened when they saw me. They let out a yell and rushed forward.

I ran from the room, looking for sunlight, and as I plunged into the darkness, I found myself phasing again.

Suddenly I was running in the woods once more.

I arrived just in time to find Stone, having a desperate struggle with a vampire. I attacked the vampire and took it down. I had to stay there, I couldn't abandon Stone.

I was so afraid that my misfiring magic would pull me away from Stone

forever.

“Come on, we have to get to the portal,” Stone ordered. Then the two of us were running, limping, sliding those last desperate yards toward the gate. Just as we stumbled through it, the last surviving vampire leapt on Stone’s back. Stone stumbled to his knees, and I realized how much blood he had lost already from the fight.

I grabbed the vampire and was struggling with him when suddenly...

But then I found myself traveling once again. The vampire still gripped in my arms.

Then I was in King territory. The vampire was still gripped in my arms, struggling desperately.

Dylan, wide eyed, stood in front of me.

Liam was at his side, his hand on his shoulder.

I had to get the danger away from my son. As soon as I thought that, even as I screamed for the magic to let me go, to let me stay with him, I was already traveling.

Luckily, my magic spat me out in the forest, not that far from the house. I could glimpse it through the trees, but that didn't mean help would arrive in time.

The vampire broke my hold and spun on me, raking its claws against my skin. I grabbed its arms and slammed my forehead into its nose, trying to stun it long enough to break away.

Cole was streaking through the woods. He leapt onto the vampire and brought him down, then got up, wrestling him. Then Cole got his hand on the vampire’s jaw, and he wrested his head around abruptly. A sickening crack split the air as he snapped his neck.

“I’ll take care of this so that Dylan doesn't see,” he said, and then he was dragging the vampire through the woods.

“Don't forget you have to decapitate him!” I shouted afterward him.

“I’m not a vampire killing rookie,” he promised. It hurt to see him already disappearing through the woods when I had missed him so much, then he turned and flung over his shoulder, “I missed you, Amelia!”

It seemed like such an understatement for the terrible way we'd been apart. I felt a grin come to my face, even though I was still gasping from the run and thrown off. “I missed you too!”

Then Liam and Dylan were there, running through the woods toward me. I could see Liam check his pace so that he fell behind Dylan, and let my little

boy reach me first.

I scooped Dylan up from the ground and he wrapped himself around me tightly like a koala, his little face nuzzling into my neck.

“I missed you so much,” i whispered to him. “My brave, brave boy.”

“When you appeared and then you went away again...” he whispered, and his little face creased as if he were trying to fight back tears.

His pain at losing me filled my own soul. “I have to leave sometimes, but I'll always come back to you,” I promised.

Then Liam was there, wrapping his arms around us both. I clung to him, my arms sliding around his waist, and I felt Dylan lean into Liam’s arms too. They must have grown closer while I was gone.

“Liam,” I whispered. “I left stone... somewhere in this world. I don't know where he is... but he was badly hurt...”

“We’ll find him,” Liam said. “And here I was just trying to get to Brennan.”

“He's alive?” relief flooded me.

“My little brother is apparently hard to kill,” Liam said dryly.

* * *

THEY FOUND STONE. Relief flooded me when I saw him stagger out of the car, and I was in his arms before I realized how badly wounded he was.

But it was Stone, so of course he stayed on his feet. He wrapped his arm around me tightly, and I wanted to help him bear his weight as he limped toward the house. But of course, he wouldn't lean on me. Even though it looked like he was dying as he had it along. He just pressed a kiss to the top of my head.

I turned and looked desperately for Liam.

“what's wrong with him?” I demanded. He should have been able to shift back and forth into the wolf and have that help him heal.

“He can't shift. And there was some kind of poison that the vampires used on their weapons,” William said.

“How did you know that?”

“Because I've been in Brennan's head,” Liam said grimly. “And the enchantments and poison that were used to weaken you, Stone and Brennan? Aodhan’s servant is using that information to torment them.”

“Is he OK? We have to go back and get him.”

“He doesn't want you to do that.”

“I don't give a fuck what he wants,” Stone said. “I'm bringing the last of my brothers home.”

I knew what had changed for Stone. Despite all of Brennan's faults, he had risked everything to save the two of us.

Maybe he wasn't our old Brennan anymore. But he was still Brennan.

And we would do anything to get him back.

We got Stone into bed. I hovered, afraid that he was dying.

Then Dylan climbed up into Stone's bed beside him and nestled his head on his shoulder. Stone wrapped his arm around him, and the two of them looked so natural together, like father and son.

“Rest,” Shaw ordered him. “We'll bring Brennan home. You just focus on not dying.”

Stone's eyes seemed like they could barely focus on his brother, but they still crinkled at the corners. “Alpha looks good on you.”

Shaw stiffened, the look on his face one of heartbreaking fear and grief at the possibility of losing his brother. I touched his hand gently, and he gripped my hand in his.

Then Stone fell into sleep.

“He's right,” Shaw said, his voice steely. “It's time we were all home together.”

CHAPTER 28



*B*rennan

I WISHED Aodhan would stop talking to me and go back to torturing me. It was more pleasant. I could feel Seraphina's smug presence close behind me, and Aodhan paced back and forth in front.

"I understand you don't believe me," Aodhan said. "But I'm Fae. I don't lie. Let me demonstrate what I can offer you. Bring me the vampire he almost killed."

"Of course." Seraphina answered.

"What is it?" Gideon's voice sounded weak.

"Aodhan's going to heal you," Seraphina said.

"Thank you—" Gideon began.

There was a strange squelching sound. Adrienne shouted furiously at Aodhan, and a vampire's screams rose desperately in the air.

"What's happening?" I demanded,

"Aodhan just blinded Gideon." Caroline sounded sick as she narrated for me. Even after everything I'd done, she was still trying to help me.

"Relax, Adrienne," Aodhan sound dismissive. "I know how much you love your little family. I wouldn't harm any of them. Now watch. Or... I suppose you'll have to listen, Wolf."

There was the sound of a bottle being uncorked, barely audible even for me above the sound of Gideon's agonized moaning.

"Bottoms up," Seraphina said cheerfully. God, I hated her and how little

she cared about the vampires.

Even if it was hypocritical of me, given how many I had just slaughtered. I loved my friends.

But I would kill anyone I had to kill to protect Amelia.

And our child. Children. Whatever. The blurry memory of the little boy who had clung to me, whose face I could not quite remember because I only ever saw him in my wolf form, rose in my mind, and with it a fierce protectiveness.

God, I hoped Amelia and Stone weren't as stupid and sentimental as I thought they were. They should just leave me here.

I had to find a way to get loose and kill Aodhan. Unless I did, he would go after Amelia.

There was a scuffling sound as Gideon fought back against Seraphina's grip. He was still making a low, desperate keening sound, and Caroline had begun to sob.

Then Aodhan held a bottle up close to my face, closing the liquid in it back and forth. "This is the cure that will return your friend's sight. And yours too, Wolf."

"Give it to him!" Adrienne cried. "Aodhan, he's suffering!"

"Oh, fine."

At first, Gideon sputtered in his agony. There was a deadly hush before he scrambled to his feet. "I can see!"

"See, Wolf? We're doing you a favor." Aodhan said.

"I don't want anything from you fucking Fae," I growled.

He let out a low laugh. "You could have the girl, raise your kid, live a happy life here as a vampire-wolf... the only place you'll be accepted."

"Fuck you."

Aodhan sighed. "Hold him."

Vice-like fingers gripped my face from behind, pressing into my cheek and jaw painfully. "Open up," Seraphina crooned into my ear.

I couldn't buck her off me. But when Aodhan poured the potion into my mouth, I spat it out—all over him, from his cry of disgust.

"If you take it, I won't hurt Amelia," Aodhan gritted, sounding furious. "But if you keep fighting me, I will hurt you. I don't need you unless you tell me where she's going."

"Wolf, be reasonable," Caroline pleaded. "We can all be happy together. Amelia will forgive you... she loves you."

That was why I had to do anything it took to protect her.

The girl was stupid to love me, and I was lucky.

Aodhan said, "Let's take him outside, Seraphina."

"Why?" Caroline sounded desperate, and Adrienne shushed her.

"Because I don't trust your vampires not to interfere," Aodhan said. "Bizarrely, after all your wolf has done."

The guards dragged me outside and chained me between two trees. They were so tall that I could barely reach up to grasp the bark. I felt the gnarled wood beneath my fingers. These trees had stood here for centuries, silent, watchful sentinels. They'd seen a lot, and today they would get yet another show.

The sun was growing warm for autumn, and it beat down on my face. The vampires would be trapped in the house, watching from the windows—if anyone cared—while the Fae did what they wished. Birds were singing in the trees and a soft breeze caressed my face. It was a beautiful day. It seemed a shame to waste it on torture.

Footsteps crunched on the crisp autumn leaves.

"He doesn't look like much now," Seraphina's voice was mocking.

"I don't need you for this, Seraphina. Go find the vampires. I don't trust them to bring the wench back to me."

"What a way to speak of your daughter."

He huffed. "If I had my way... you'd be my daughter, Seraphina. Fulina is weak and Amelia is so...human."

She let out a laugh that sounded cruel. "I'll bring her back. Mostly in one piece, even."

I would've thrashed against my bonds, but it wouldn't help.

I had to trust Stone and Amelia to save themselves, even though it killed me. I'd given them a head start and a fighting chance. That was the best I could do.

Now it was time I did my best not to die myself.

Finally, the pain stopped and I slumped against the tree. I was exhausted, but most of all, I was afraid I wouldn't hold out. I had been terrible to Amelia, but I would never betray her. That was the last piece of who I was that I had to hold onto.

"Leave him alone," Caroline called, her voice full of agony.

Adrienne silenced her, gently, dragging her back from the windows.

"Your friends care about you so much, or at least they did," Aodhan said.

“I am intrigued you betrayed them for my daughter.”

“I’m intrigued that you could betray your own daughter,” I snarled back.

“Perhaps you’ll understand when you meet your own child,” he said, and clucked his tongue sadly. “If you live to see them.”

Tears from the pain streamed down my face involuntarily. Caroline and Adrienne might see. The thought had me twisting against the bonds, though I couldn’t see who was watching me. They could have covered themselves from the sun and be standing right before me. I didn’t want Adrienne to see me succumb, and I didn’t want Caroline to grieve. I didn’t want anyone to see me in a moment of weakness.

The pain began again.

The world faded black at the edges, mercilessly, and the last thing I heard was Aodhan cursing that he had gone too far before I tumbled into unconsciousness.

“Brennan.”

I scrambled up and back, my palms pressing into leaves and stones. I was on the floor of a forest.

Liam crouched close to me. “It’s alright,” he said, holding out his hand. “You’re safe.”

“I’m not.” In the distance, I could hear Aodhan chanting. “This is a dream?”

“Yes.” Then he admitted, looking slightly wild-eyed, “I’m not sure I understand what’s a dream and what’s not anymore.”

“It’s a fucking relief, that’s for sure, whatever else it is,” I muttered.

“I’m going to try to stay with you,” he said.

I would’ve told him I didn’t want any brothers.

But at the moment, I was not in a position to act like a dick.

I could already feel myself being pulled back, sinking into the forest floor as it fell beneath me. He tried to catch me, and I grabbed desperately for him.

But I fell back into my body. Hard. My eyes flew open as Aodhan grabbed my head by the hair and yanked my face up to his.

“Stay with me,” Aodhan said pleasantly. “You aren’t allowed to die yet.”

As he tortured me, I found myself shifting in and out of consciousness. I caught glimpses of the same boys running in the woods again.

Then Caroline was back, trying to reach me. Adrienne, less gently, was trying to pull her away.

Caroline abruptly leapt out the window, scattering the last shards of glass

across the emerald green lawn. She landed on her feet, but with a cry as she stumbled and the sunlight made her hiss and pain.

“Caroline! Go back!”

She reached me, stepping between Aodhan and me. She was swaying on her feet, even with the sun blocked by the cloak that whispered as she walked. But she said, “Oh, Wolf, you do still care.”

Quietly, under my breath, I said, “I would only betray you all for her. Only for her.”

Caroline sighed. “I should probably want you dead too, Wolf, but it’s just so romantic. I can’t help but be a little bit charmed.”

“He’s going to kill Amelia!” I shouted.

Caroline rushed to help me, and Adrienne said, “Don’t you dare touch him.”

Caroline paused, hovering close to me.

“They have a bond?” Aodhan asked, a note of interest in his voice.

I begged Adrienne to deny it.

“They were best friends,” Adrienne said. “Though Wolf slaughtering Victor, Peter and Jonathan may have slightly soured their friendship. It’s hard to be vulnerable with someone who murders your kind.”

“Bring him back inside,” Aodhan said. “Where can we chain up the dog?”

“Back in the tower, perhaps. Since it holds such fond memories for our Wolf.”

They dragged me back into the house. “Pick a place and just kill me already,” I muttered.

“You wish, Wolf. It won’t be that easy.” Aodhan said.

Seraphina’s long nails bit into my skin as she leaned in close to me. “You’ll betray that little bitch as soon as the potion slides down your throat. I’ll make sure to tell her what you did before we drag her back.”

“Where’s the potion?” Aodhan asked, sounding confused at first. Then, angrily. “Where’s the potion? Which one of you took it?”

“Caroline.” Adrienne’s voice was warning.

I fidgeted with the bonds, trying to find a way to get free. I needed to help Caroline.

“I don’t have it,” Caroline said.

“But did you take it?”

“No.”

The word hung in the air. Was Caroline lying to Adrienne? I was sure of it. But would Adrienne out her in front of Aodhan, who would surely want even more bloodshed?

Adrienne had enough of that today.

A low growl rose up, and I felt Caroline shrink back so much she brushed against my arm. She was trying to stand by my side. All I wanted to do was get rid of her.

“Cerberus, settle,” Adrienne commanded.

“I grow tired of you vampires,” Aodhan said. “If you won’t bring my daughter home to me, what’s the point?”

“We will,” Adrienne said.

“Come here, Caroline.” Aodhan’s voice was low and soothing.

I grabbed for Caroline as I felt her body move away from mine, but the chains stopped me. I felt her fingers in my pocket for just a split second though, before she was gone.

Caroline had been quite the pickpocket in another life, or so she had told me.

Her footsteps seemed to echo across the floor as she went to him.

“Wolf,” he said. “Tell me where Amelia went, exactly. Where the portal is, where it leads. Otherwise, I’m going to let your bestie here bleed out before I decapitate her.”

“Bleed—” Adrienne began.

There was a sudden, slashing sound.

Caroline made a cry of pain that cut off abruptly as Seraphina gagged her, standing behind her and yanking the two sides of the gag. The sound of Caroline choking made me strain forward.

“Leave her alone!”

“Then save her life.”

“Aodhan,” Adrienne said. “This is not what we agreed to.”

“I think the terms of our arrangement have changed.”

“Stop him.” Adrienne said, her voice ice.

“Finally!” Seraphina crowed, her voice delighted.

I was still fighting my chains as I heard the room erupt into war.

“Cerberus, kill,” Aodhan said, his voice ice, and the vampires began screaming.

CHAPTER 29



*A*melia

“THE FAE HAVE a hard time in our world,” I told Cole, Shaw, Liam, Karissa, Teresa, Aiden, Lawson and Rose as we stood grouped around the table in the library. “That gives us an advantage.”

“Not hard enough,” Shaw said with a shake of his head. “Our mother functioned, more or less, in this world.”

“The fae have sent vampires—mostly Brennan, since he can be out in daylight—to do their work here,” I said. “So I don’t think they’ll want to come here. But you’re right, we have to face the possibility we’ll be attacked by both vampires and Fae.”

Liam ran his hand through his hair. Sometimes I thought perhaps I shouldn’t have come back here. But we would bring the fight to the vamps anyway.

“The Fae will have to phase the house back to our world in order to come after me.” I said. “That gives us our chance to rescue Brennan.”

“Let me give them their distraction,” Rose said. “I look like Amelia. But, you know, younger and cuter and not-pregnant-with-my-niece-or-nephew. Let me do it.”

“No,” I said. “But you’ve always been a good aunt.”

Rose caught my hands. “Please let me do one thing for you,” she said softly. “And for Brennan. Let me begin to atone...”

“You don’t have to atone!”

“Maybe I don’t have to atone to gain your forgiveness,” she said softly. “But for my own sake... please, let me help.”

“Okay,” I said, regretting it even as I gave in. “But you need to get out of there, fast. Listen to Shaw. He’ll know what to do.”

Karissa snorted. “The only time I would approve that message...”

Shaw gave her a look, and she said, “I’m kidding. You have been a surprisingly good alpha.”

Shaw just gave her another look, so that faint praise clearly had not helped.

We knew, though, there were vampire guards that would be dispatched first to check the location before Adrienne’s forces went in. Which meant, to have few enough people at the castle for us to rescue Brennan, we needed them to be thoroughly diverted.

So, my sister went with Shaw and several other shifters to a location where Rose could be seen, but they could escape. The vampires wouldn’t move until nightfall. My wolves were ready to spirit Rose away, down through the caves to the water where they would escape by boat.

The whole thing made me beyond anxious.

“I want you to stay here,” Cole told me, gripping my upper arms gently. “Just like Rose said. We can’t risk you.”

“I can’t just sit here and leave Brennan to his fate,” I said, then, knowing that would not persuade him, I added, “You need me; I know the vampires’ castle.”

Cole’s jaw worked. “You’re just trying to manipulate me into bringing you along. We have the dream link through Liam.”

‘It doesn’t always work when we’re focused on a fight, when our adrenaline is going,” I said. “You can’t count on it. You need me.”

“I do need you,” Cole said. “Which is exactly why I want you to stay here.”

But in the end, they let me come. No one was going to risk losing Brennan...forever, this time.

We had to get into the castle to save Brennan. After my time wandering through the castle--to Stone's great dismay--I was confident I knew every inch of it.

Liam, Cole, Shaw and I went in along with many of their best fighters.

As we made our way through the castle, I couldn't help but feel like we were walking into a trap. Every creak of the floorboards and each flickering

torch made me jump. But I knew we couldn't turn back now, not when Brennan's life was on the line.

Then the first enemy leapt out at us.

With lightning reflexes, Shaw unsheathed his sword and clashed it against thir sword. Cole and Shaw were quick to follow, each of them wielding their own weapons with precision. Our team of fighters moved like a well-oiled machine, taking down the bloodthirsty creatures with ease.

“Are these vampires?” I asked, staring down at one. “I don’t know his face.”

We turned a corner and found ourselves face to face with a group of Fae, led by Seraphina. She smiled wickedly.

"Well, well, well, what do we have here?" she purred. "Amelia the eternal victim, leading the troops? I couldn't have wished for anything more entertaining."

I gritted my teeth and charged at her, my sword raised high.

Seraphina moved with a grace that was almost hypnotic. She twisted and dodged, her movements so fluid that it was hard to keep up with her. I swung my sword at her, but she parried it with ease and laughed mockingly.

"You humans are so predictable," she taunted. "You came back to us. All we had to do was bring the house back to your world and make a show of leaving, and you came in right as we hoped."

“You’re pretty predictable too,” I promised.

Seraphina's expression turned cold and she lunged at me, her claws extended. I blocked her attack and countered with a swift kick that knocked her off balance. Liam, Cole, and Shaw were fighting off the other vampires, leaving me to face Seraphina alone.

She recovered quickly, her eyes blazing. Seraphina met my sword with hers, and we clashed in a shower of sparks. She was fast, supernaturally so.

We circled each other, swords at the ready. I could see the hunger in her eyes, the thirst for my blood, but I couldn't let her win.

Seraphina took advantage of my distraction and lunged at me, her sword aimed for my heart.

I dodged just in time, and our swords clashed again.

I could see the frustration in her eyes now, the anger that I was still standing. But I wouldn't give up.

With newfound strength, I pushed Seraphina back, disarming her with a swift move. She stumbled, her eyes widening in surprise. That was all the

opening I needed. With a fierce cry, I plunged my sword into her chest. As I pulled it out, I was already whirling to decapitate her.

Blood splattered across the wall. Across me. Revulsion rose in my chest, but I couldn't stop. I had to reach Brennan. We had come too far.

FOR A MOMENT, there was silence. Seraphina's head rolled across the floor and it seemed as if she looked up at me, her eyes full of shock and disbelief. Then she crumpled to the ground, dead.

I stood there, panting, my sword still in my hand. The adrenaline was still coursing through my body.

As we caught our breath, I looked around. Liam, Cole, and Shaw were all battered and bruised, but they glanced at each other and grinned--a mix of adrenaline and anxiety, because we were so close to Brennan...we hoped.

"Let me take the lead," Liam said grimly.

I knew what it cost him to move ahead of us, and it made my heart ache. I moved to cut in front of him. "Liam... let us."

"We both know what I'm capable of, Amelia. And I'll do what has to be done for my family." His voice was grim.

He led the way, slaughtering everyone who came near us.

We made our way to the tower apartments. As we slowly ascended the stairs, my heart was pounding in my chest. We had no idea what we would find, but we knew it couldn't be good.

I could barely make out the details in the dark, even with my orb flickering above us, but I could hear someone's labored breathing in the corner.

"Brennan?" I called out, my heart pounding in my chest.

An answering groan shattered the air. I motioned for the others to spread out as I advanced towards the corner. There he was, chained to a post, his shirt soaked in blood.

I rushed to his side and began trying to undo his bonds. "Brennan. Stay with me."

"You shouldn't have come back for me..."

"I know," I said. "But hopefully being rescued by me and your brothers is the motivation you need to stop being such a stupid dick."

His head jerked up. His mask was gone, and his already battered face looked terribly wounded, almost unrecognizable with the blood and bruising.

"Get used to it," Shaw told him. "She calls us all dicks."

"For good reason," Liam said.

"Except Liam," Shaw amended. "She always likes Liam."

Then more Fae came rushing in. "I'll hold them off," Shaw said, moving to fight them. "Get him loose."

Shaw and Cole joined the attack while Liam and I freed Brennan from his chains, with difficulty.

Then Liam gathered Brennan up in his arms.

An image I had seen in dreams--Brennan, gathering a broken Liam from the road and carrying him to pack territory--rose in my mind.

Now, it was Liam who carried Brennan, slinging him over his shoulder.

Together, we fought our way out of the vampires' darkness.

CHAPTER 30



*B*rennan.

BEING AROUND, my brothers might be worse torture than I had experienced the hands of the Fae King.

I woke up being prodded by a doctor. I startled, but before I could attack her, Amelia's soothing hand caressed my shoulder and I breathed in her scent.

"It's all right," Amelia whispered. "You're safe."

"No, and neither are you," I sounded weak as a kitten. "You shouldn't have come back for me. Where are we?"

"Roll onto your side," the doctor prompted, pushing me with her hand at the same time.

"Get away from me," I said.

I shifted then, scrambling, remembering the potion Caroline had slipped into my pocket. Did I still have it?

"Don't be difficult," Amelia chided. "We all like Doc a lot better than we like you."

Her voice was teasing.

The doc snorted. "I don't know about that. But now that he's awake and feisty, I'll give you some time. I'll go check on Stone."

"He made it back?" I asked. My voice came out more urgent than I wanted to, and I could almost feel Amelia smile.

"Yes," she said, but she didn't sound happy. She sounded wistful.

At first, I thought it was because she wasn't sure I would stay, I wasn't sure I would live. Then I realized her sadness might not be for me. "Stone's not in good condition?"

"No," she admitted. "But he'll pull through. He's just like you. Too stubborn to die."

"I didn't choose not to die." My voice came out too sharp, and I could feel her tense against my anger. "I never would've chosen to be like this."

Her hand had frozen against my shoulder. I regretted the sharpness of my tone and the way it obviously made her feel. I didn't want her to be afraid of me.

"Well, I'm glad you're alive, whether you like it, or not," she shot back.

Hearing Amelia sound spirited was a relief.

"I'm glad you're not easy to break, Amelia."

I froze as soon as the words were out of my mouth. It was something I never would have said if I hadn't still been half out of it from my.

But to my surprise, her hand just began to caress my shoulder again comfortingly. "the only thing that could have broken me was losing you."

The words hung between us. Had I been broken by losing her? Even though I couldn't remember her? I felt as if that must be a pale shadow of the man she remembered, the man she really loved. She loved me for his sake. I wasn't sure there was anything left of him.

"And I couldn't break," she said quietly. "Because I had to protect your son."

She said the words carefully, as if she wanted to read how I responded.

"What do you want from me, Amelia?" Whatever it was, I wanted to give it to her. I just wasn't sure I was capable. I didn't belong here. I didn't want to depend on any of them instead of fighting alone. I didn't want to come face to face with the son that I didn't remember and couldn't see, who had been waiting expectantly for a man that I wasn't any more.

All I was going to do was hurt these people. I could feel it. They'd be better off if I was dead.

"I just want you," she whispered, but I knew it was a lie. Even if she thought it was the truth.

Luckily, I'd have one more chance to die. "Adrienne will be coming. Worse, so will the Fae. You take the vampires down. But the Fae... Tell me did you have a plan." and tell me it's not stupid. I didn't have a lot of faith in my brothers.

“Yes, we have a plan. We had to just get you out of there. But we know they won't leave us alone until it's done. They'll have to come for us in our world.”

“This is not a good idea,” I seized her wrist. “Amelia, where are we?”

I hated that I needed her to tell me the place.

“We're home,” she said, and my heart sank. “We're on king territory. We're back in your old room period where you grew up.”

Fuck. “We shouldn't be here. They'll know where to come for you.”

“yes, and they'll find fortified lines. Well trained troops. You made the packs far stronger than it was under your father, and stone kept going, making them stronger. And now we have Liam.” her voice took on the tone that was almost reverent. Jealousy spiked through my gut. I wanted her to talk about me like that. “we have better chances than you think, Brennan. You don't know how strong your brothers are. They're incredible fighters.”

Panax scabbled at my chest. “No, you're the one who doesn't understand our chances. I lived with the vampires. I know the Fae. They're going to come for you, and if you care about everyone unpacked territory, you've got to get you into another world.”

The Fae had destroyed my vampire family in minutes. The sound of Cerberus tearing Adrienne apart as she screamed would stay with me forever.

“So you want me to run? Abandoned my son...”

no,” I interrupted her. “It wouldn't be abandoning him. But the fate will come after you, and you don't know what they'll do to him. I'm not talking about forever. We get you into another world. And I'll go back and deal with them.”

She let out a short sharp laugh. “you're insane. You can't even get out of bed and you're going to deal with them, but you don't think your brothers could be of any use--”

“What are you going to do when one of them gets killed protecting you?” I demanded.

“What am I going to do when you get killed?” she sounded exasperated.

“You got over at once, you'll get over it again.”

“I never got over you. Now, can you hobble out of that bed? We've got a war to plan. And, Karissa made lasagna.” she said that last in a much more lighthearted tone.

“I'm not going to some family dinner,” I said. “I'm not going to pretend these people i don't remember are my family.”

“They are your family!”

“And you'd all have a better chance at surviving if you weren't!”

For a few long seconds, there was only silence. I wished desperately I could see her face.

“This is why you're an asshole, isn't it?” she asked. “You think you can protect us all better by pushing us away? You didn't even want us to rescue you.”

“Because it puts you in danger. Don't try to understand me, Amelia--”

“Oh, you can pause that I'm so dark and mysterious bullshit,” she scolded me. “I get it, you don't want to talk about your feelings. You don't want to even admit you have feelings. You don't want to deal with the fact that you have a family and a pack who remember you and expect things from you and you have to work with them, maybe even be nice to them, connect with them emotionally--”

“Will you stop? Like you said, we've got a war to fight. None of that stuff matters if we're all just a pile of corpses by morning.”

“It's the only thing that matters. Because family is what we're fighting for. Pack is what will save us, just like we'll save them.”

For a second, I couldn't even respond. “How have you seen so many terrible things and you're still so innocent and naïve?”

“Because I'm stronger than you are,” her voice took on a teasing tone. “unless you want to show me what an emotionally open, vulnerable, strong man you can be by limping to dinner and being nice to your brothers.”

“you're trying to bait me.”

“Is it working?”

“No.”

“Then why are you getting out of bed?”

“Because I'm fucking hungry, and I fucking love lasagna.” I hadn't remembered that, but suddenly I was sure of it.

I walked across the room, but I didn't hear her moving behind me. I turned back at the door. “What?”

“It's just the way you walk so easily across the room. Like you knew where you were going.”

“I've always found ways to compensate. I tracked you down, didn't I?”

“and then watched over me from the shadows instead of kidnapping me for the vampire's dark plan,” she filled in.

“Stop it, I'm not the man that you think I am,” I said, trying to leave her

behind.

Out in the hall, I could hear Stone's raised voice. "I'm fine. I have to be there."

"you're not fine, and we can all come in here." there was a smooth, calming voice.

Amelia said. "I'm going to need you to be the reasonable one for a while, Brennan. Because I have to deal with stone too. And you two are a pair of emotionally unavailable, I-push-you-away-because-I-love-you, deranged peas in a pod."

I heard stone limping, dragging one foot on the carpet. "Why don't you just shift?" I demanded.

"Why don't you just shift?" he snapped back.

"Seraphina enchanted me after I held back the hordes so you could escape. Badly, apparently."

"I'm so glad you're still alive, brother," Amelia sing-songed, obviously trying to prompt us to talk to each other the way she wished we would.

"The Fae fed us something that kept us from being able to shift," Stone said.

"No, I always kept an eye on our food. I brought it straight to you..." I trailed off. I'd stopped to talk to Caroline, when I was coming in from the market. I hadn't wanted to go to the fucking market and shop like a maid, but I'd done it, for Amelia.

I'd even stood in front of the flower stall for a few minutes, knowing I had no idea what I could even pick out for her, smelling the sweet floral scent of the blossoms rising in the air. Then the shopkeeper had come over to talk to me, and I'd asked him if I looked like someone who bought fucking flowers.

When I came in, and Caroline had been worried about the plans Adrienne was making for the wedding, and she had warned me about the consummation ceremony. I had left the basket with Caroline, just for a few minutes, while I went and made my case to Adrienne.

Had Caroline betrayed me?

"It will wear off," Amelia said, with a level of confidence I thought was entirely undeserved.

"You don't know anything about Fae magic."

Then you can tell us all about it during our planning session." Amelia leaned in close to me, her hand resting on my forearm. "brace yourself. You're about to be exposed to people who love you. It's going to be horrible."

“Not our boy,” I said desperately. I didn't want him to see me like this. I didn't want to know him if I couldn't be the father I should be.

“No,” Amelia said, sounding sad. “ I know you're not ready. Dylan is having dinner with Aiden and Lawson tonight. He's pretty excited. They're having a cookout, hot dogs and s'mores--”

“Sounds like a lovely way to spend an evening while the Fae are plotting to kill us all,” I said.

Then I became aware that we had entered a room where other people moved and breathed. I could feel their presence, even though it was quiet for now.

“Oh, Brennan.” It was a woman's voice, desperate and tearful. I could hear her moving toward me.

”Easy,” Stone said softly, and I wasn't sure if he was talking to me or to her.

She threw herself into my arms, and I hugged her back mechanically. I didn't want to be hugged, but I understood that it meant a lot to her to have me back. I just didn't feel the same joy.

Quickly, I sorted out who was who. Liam was the brother from my dreams, and Shaw was the other brother who had been left behind here. Coal was stone's best friend. There was a woman, Teresa, and I couldn't quite figure out her place in the mix. Then, there was Amelia's younger sister, Rose.

They all talked so much. It was overwhelming. The vampires had found it funny to try to touch me and see my disgusted reactions. They found it funny to talk to me and hear my one word answers. They had enjoyed my surly nature. But here, these people obviously expected something else from me.

They obviously thought it should fix everything and have me back.

“ I have something to tell you all too,” Amelia said. There was something hesitant in her voice, and I wanted to stop her, but it wasn't my place. Anyway, I doubted anyone could stop Amelia from doing much that she attended to do.

“It's still early days,” Amelia said into the expectant silence. “But I confirmed with doc. I'm pregnant.”

the room erupted with joy.

It seemed like an overreaction to bringing a baby into this terrible world, especially at a time when they were under attack.

Stone gripped the table desperately, as if he were about to topple over.

Amelia let out a cry as she rushed to him.

Having me here fixed nothing. Stone was still dying.

I knew the poison that the Fae had probably used.

I didn't know the antidote.

I had to get away from them. The last thing I needed was to get to know them better, to get attached, when he would take everything I had to keep Amelia and her son alive. They are planned to take on the Fae through the power of family love was so preposterous. They were going to die, and I didn't want to be around them.

“I've got to go,” I said abruptly, standing out from the table

“No, it's not safe for you,” Karissa leapt to say.

“let him go,” Stone said, “he can take care of himself.”

“if that's so, how come Liam had to carry him out of that vampire nest?” she snapped back. I was not going to stand here and debate.

I was already going.

CHAPTER 31



*B*rennan

I WENT BACK to my room to get the damned potion for Stone. I wouldn't die from being blind. Stone was going to die.

Amelia couldn't bear that.

She wasn't going to go with me. Not voluntarily. I saw that now. The brief fantasy I'd entertained of us slipping off into a new world and starting a life together was just that, a fantasy. Than I'd hoped to hide her somewhere while I dealt with the vampires. I would really prefer to be able to see them coming. I had adapted, but I needed to be able to shift, and a bare minimum. A site would be a helpful extra.

But when I thought about Stone dying... No matter how much I tried to be fine with it... I wasn't.

I rummaged through the clothes that I've been wearing when I came in, nervous that that had gone through my belongings. But now, the potion bottle was still in my pocket.

I slid it into my pocket. I needed to get Stone to take it, now, before anything could happen to the healing potion.

When I stepped out into the hall, I realized that they had already left the house. They taken Stone outside in the hopes that the moonlight would help restore him.

I went out of the house to find him, and then realized I was on the wrong side. I started to go around the house, listening to the faint burbling of the

brook.

Then I heard footsteps running toward me.

I turned to one side, eager to avoid whoever it was.

A small voice called, "You came back!"

I reached up to make sure my mask was in place so I wouldn't scare him and hesitated. Keeping Dylan away from me was for the best thing for him.

But he was here now. What was I going to do, turn and run?

Suddenly, little arms threw themselves around my legs. I froze, not sure what to do.

"You rescued me!"

"Pick him up." Liam's voice was quiet, so quiet I wasn't sure if he was really there.

I couldn't do that. But I knelt down so we were face to face. Poor kid. Being face to face with me was really disappointing.

He recognized the mask I wore. Not my face. That was so sad.

"You're okay," I said.

His voice was so...sweet.

Something in my chest cracked open.

He was sweet and innocent and this world would tear him apart. I had to protect him just like I had to protect Amelia. I was overwhelmed by the thought of trying to keep them safe when hell itself was about to descend on us.

"I'm okay," he whispered back, throwing his arms around me and hugging me. "We're okay."

We were a long way from okay, but I wished that was true.

I tried to put my arms around him, and found myself cupping his cheek with one hand. "Sorry, I can't see you," I explained as I rubbed my thumb across his round little cheekbone. "But I can feel what your face looks like, and I can see you in my mind."

"Does it hurt?" he asked. "Does your face hurt?"

"No, not anymore. I'm used to it," I lied. "And maybe one day, I'll be better."

Fuck, why had I said that?

I was going to give the potion to Stone. But when I imagined myself, healed and able to see, to protect, standing between my family and the Fae... it took everything I had not to reach for the potion bottle right now.

"You can touch my face," he said, laying his hand over mine. "Can you

really tell what I look like from just that?”

“Yes,” I promised, moving my hand gently over the curves of his face. “I can imagine you in my mind.”

But it would never be the same as actually seeing his face. I blinked and tears spilled onto my cheeks. I shook my head, willing them away. I didn’t cry. I hadn’t even cried in my rages when I realized my face was ruined and my sight was gone.

“It’s okay,” he said. “I cry sometimes too.”

“You’re what, four?” I didn’t remember what Amelia had said. “It’s different.”

I’d said the wrong thing, and I regretted it already, but I didn’t know how to talk to a kid.

“Why are you so sad?” he asked, and then, a few seconds later, “Is it because you’re my daddy?”

I almost bolted upright. “What?”

“You’re my daddy, aren’t you?”

I didn’t know what to say.

After a few long seconds, realizing I’d left him waiting, I said, “Yes.”

“I’m so glad you came home,” he said, then pressed his face against my neck.

His face was wet. Slowly, it dawned on me that he was crying too.

I wrapped my arms around him and picked him up. “Come on, let’s get you to your mother. All she could talk about was coming home to you.”

I didn’t know what to do with him. My little boy smelled like campfire, and he nestled into my shoulder as if me carrying him was the most natural thing in the world. Two shifters—they must be Aidan and Lawson—hovered at the side of the house, as if they had tried to give Dylan and me some space once they realized they couldn’t keep him away from his father.

I carried him around the side of the house to find Amelia and the others there. I could pick her scent out, it didn’t matter how many shifters were around.

“Oh!” Amelia let out a cry and ran to us.

“I found my dad,” Dylan said, sounding more like a little man when we had an audience.

“Oh,” she said again. Her voice was uncertain, and I gritted my teeth. She apparently felt I was unfit for fatherhood, just as much as I did. “I guess you did.”

I put my arm around her. She was stiff when I said, “Thank you.”

“For what?” From her tone, she expected a barbed response.

The way she’d said the words made me want to give her what she expected. But I overruled that first impulse.

“For taking such good care of our son,” I said. “For being so strong and keeping him safe.”

She turned her face into my shoulder, as if she were going to whisper to me, but as I lowered my head to hers I realized she was trying to choke back tears.

“I didn’t do a very good job,” she whispered.

I whispered back, “Bullshit.”

She laid her hands gently over Dylan’s ears and smiled through her tears. “Little ears, Brennan.”

For a second, I felt a rush of happiness.

Then Stone let out a low cough, as if he was drowning in the fluid building up in his chest. That happiness curdled instantly.

I handed Dylan over to Amelia, pressing my hand to the side of his face one last time to feel his features. “I’m going for a walk.”

If I took the potion... no one had to know why the miracle had happened, why my sight was restored.

What if it fixed my mind too? What if all my memories came flooding back?

“Okay.” She sounded as if she wanted to ask me what was wrong, but she had to hold back with Dylan in her arms. As I had hoped.

I gave her a quick kiss on the forehead, then headed away from the house.

I walked through the woods, using the senses I’d developed to skirt through the trees. This was familiar territory after all. I’d stalked Amelia through this forest.

Then I turned. There was a path I’d taken a hundred times, up a steep track that led up and up a mountain.

How the fuck did I not give it to Stone? I would be able to protect Amelia and Dylan far better if I took it. But if I gave it to Stone...Stone would be able to protect them too.

But I’d never see their faces. I would always have to wear this damned mask. I’d never fit in to this pack, or anywhere else.

The memories I did have of him, the ones I could trust, played through my mind. The way he had leapt to defend me when the two of us fought that

monster. The protectiveness I'd felt for him as a wolf once I knew he was my brother. The fragments of connection we'd shared—before I pulled away each time—over how we loved Amelia, and how exasperating she was.

These people remembered me and loved me.

Why did that hurt so much?

Thorns pulled at the hems of my pants, and I realized that I'd reached the top of the hill. The moonlight fell on my face, as it was falling on Stone below...but not healing him. The breeze up here, freed from the trees, ruffled my hair, but did nothing to cool my temper.

“Fuck!” I shouted, because I was alone for once. The way I liked to be. In that house, in this pack, with that family... I would never be alone again for a second.

There would always either be too few people in my life... or too many.

I almost ran into the stone cross erected up here. It was choked by thorn bushes, and I frowned as I reached to run my fingers over the cool, etched stone. I had always been a wolf when I came up here.

Now, my fingers traced the grooves.

In loving memory of

Our beloved brother and alpha

My fingers froze.

I shouldn't go on.

But I did, finding the letters:

Brennan King

They had built this memorial for me. They had mourned me.

I should've stayed dead to them. It would have been easier for all of us. They could leave me in the past, and I wouldn't have to live up to memories that I didn't even share.

The world washed red.

The next thing I knew, my chest was heaving with my wild breaths. The gravestone was toppled over. I stood over it, my hands ripped apart by the thorns and dripping blood onto my own grave.

“Are you done with your tantrum?” Karissa asked from behind me, her voice surly.

I whirled to face her, not that I could see her. “I want to be alone.”

“Yes, Brennan. We can all see that.”

“So why are you here?”

“Because I'm your sister. I don't give a fuck what you want.” She came

closer to me, and I heard her kneel. She swore under her breath. “You know how long it took to raise these roses? You just trampled them.”

“My gravestone’s rather irrelevant at this point, is it not?”

She let out a hard, bitter little laugh. “You wish it was relevant though, don’t you? It would be better than having to face all of us.”

I scoffed. “You don’t know me.”

“No,” she said. “I suppose I don’t.”

I would’ve turned my back on her, but it didn’t matter when I couldn’t see her anyway.

“But you don’t either,” she said. “I don’t know who you think you are, but you’re not... that different from the old Brennan.”

“Sometimes you can indeed judge a book by its cover.”

“What are you saying?”

“That I’m a monster.”

“You’re a drama king, that’s what you are.” Her bony finger poked into my chest, surprising me. No one scolded me like that. “Which is just the same as you always were. Oh, angst, angst! I’m alpha but I fell in love with a girl from a rival pack.”

Her voice had turned into a mockery of mine.

“I don’t remember.” I reminded her sternly.

“We know! You make that abundantly clear as you angst at us all. Can we be excited for ten minutes that you’re not dead, and not the villain?”

“I am the villain!”

“If you were the villain, you wouldn’t be holding your son and standing by Amelia and preparing to fight the Fae!”

I shook my head.

“And you wouldn’t be up here, bullying my poor roses because you’re so sad you lost us all!”

“I’m not sad about losing you. I don’t remember you.”

“You’re a fucking liar,” she said. “Worst of all, you lie to yourself, and it’s embarrassing. I might not know what you’ve been through the last five years, but I know your tells. I know when you’re really detached, because I saw you give up on loving our asshole father, and I know when you care, and you care about people, Brennan!”

I shook my head. “It doesn’t matter how many times you say my name, you don’t know who I am.”

“Sure.” She sounded dismissive. “Now, fix that headstone. Clean up your

mess. I don't want anyone to know their beloved alpha came back from the dead just to throw tantrums like an angry little toddler."

"If you want my gravestone up so badly, do it yourself." What was the point of having my tombstone here when I was walking around?

"Stop being an ass!"

"I came up here so I could have ten minutes by myself without disappointing anyone! If you didn't want to be disappointed, you should've given me some goddamned space!"

For a few long seconds, she was silent.

Then she said, "You're right. You deserve some space to process."

I stared in her general direction.

"What?"

"I don't know what to do with you when you're not yelling at me, queen bee." She'd just called me drama king, so it only seemed fair to promote her to obnoxious royalty.

She let out a shaky laugh. "Yeah, you never have."

Then she took a step toward me. "You really don't remember me? You don't remember calling me that?"

"No," I said. But it was a strange nickname for her that had come to my lips. "I'm just going to keep disappointing you, Karissa."

"I know. That's okay." She touched my arm. "I'm going to leave you, Brennan. You're right, you deserve space. But I'll still love you. No matter what."

I wanted to tell her no one loves anyone no matter what. That's not healthy.

But she was already picking her way back down the hill.

She left me alone with my grave.

CHAPTER 32



S tone

“ARE YOU GOING TO BE OKAY?” Dylan asked me, hugging me tightly.

I didn’t want to lie to him. As I hesitated, Cole picked him up. “Your Uncle Stone is tough. Let’s get you off to bed.”

“Then come back,” I ordered Cole. Amelia cut me a look, and I added, “Please.”

Amelia and Cole disappeared into the house. Karissa had vanished, probably to harass Brennan—the two of them always had a special bond that involved a lot of yelling—and Liam was probably off being... Liam.

So now it was just Shaw and me. I leaned back on the porch swing, hating how weak and tired I felt.

Hating that I was dying.

I needed to be on my feet helping my pack prepare for what was coming.

“Do you think we’re doing the right thing?” I asked Shaw. “Staying here, fighting the Fae when they try to breach the pack’s territory?”

“Yeah.” He shoved his hands in his pockets. His regret was written all over his face. “We’re going to take casualties. But I think it’s our best chance.”

He didn’t want to carry that burden. He had never wanted to be alpha.

“I’m alpha,” I reminded him. “Even though I’m dying. This is my call to make.”

He shot a disbelieving look at me. “You know, you can take a break from

being a dickhead. You need to keep your strength up and it must be exhausting.”

“I’m not trying to be a dick. You’ve done a good job as alpha.”

He let out a breath of disbelief.

“But this isn’t you,” I went on. “Amelia needs you to lean on. She always has... you’ve always been the only one of us who isn’t fucked up.”

“Really?”

“Really. Liam is good to her, but in his own way. Brennan is at least one-third bad guy at this point and he needs Amelia to pull him back... and I’m, you know. Stone.” I flashed him a tight smile. “You’re the one who has always been there for her. She needs you.”

“So who does the pack need?”

“Cole.”

“Yeah,” he burst out. “Cole would be the right alpha for our pack, but who’s going to follow him when he’s not a King?”

“He could challenge me.”

“Except he never would. Especially not when you’re dying.”

“The pack doesn’t know that. Doc’s always discreet.”

We’d wanted to keep it a secret so the pack wouldn’t feel like things were going wrong before we even had to face the vamps.

“Did you ask him?”

“I wanted to know first if you would have his back.”

“Of course I’d have his back. Cole always has our back.”

“He’s like a brother.”

“A better one than any of us deserve.”

For a few seconds, silence hung between us.

“We are going to figure this out, Stone. You’re not going to die.”

“I know,” I lied, because he had to believe it. I’d forbidden him to travel into the Fae world to search for an antidote. We needed all hands on deck to protect Amelia. “I just want to make sure the pack has a leader for the fight to come... and I don’t want you to have to carry that weight.”

“You also know he’ll be a better alpha than me.”

“I didn’t say that.”

“You don’t have to.” Shaw faced me. “You’re right. I’m good at looking after Amelia. I want to be her bodyguard for this shit. I don’t want to carry the burden of the pack.”

I nodded. “You’ll have to deal with Brennan too. He’ll need to be by her

side... and you need to make sure he doesn't kidnap her."

"You think he's still a risk? That he might kidnap her?"

"I think his love for her is dark and obsessive."

"He's a danger to her?"

"Not exactly. Maybe. But she likes it."

Shaw ran his hand through his hair.

Cole stepped out the front door. "You wanted to see me, boss?"

His tone was light and joking, the way it always was when he called me boss. But still, there was a distance there, one I'd placed between us.

Even though he was my best friend.

"I'm going to find Amelia," Shaw said.

The two of us exchanged a look.

"What's going on?" Cole asked. "You have that look you get on your face when you're plotting."

"I am. I keep going over the plan for how we protect ourselves from the Fae when they come."

He nodded, his face troubled.

"How's the pack doing?" I'd had to keep my distance to keep my condition a secret. Cole understood that.

"They're alright. There's no one left who doesn't want to fight for you and for us." Cole had helped me root out every traitor, and I trusted his perspective on the pack.

"The pack can't see me as weak. Not when we're going to need all of them to fight like hell," I reminded him.

"No one knows."

"But they will." My voice came out calm. "I need them to know I can still lead this pack. That I can fight."

"What do you need from me?" He asked the question swiftly. No hesitation. Cole would always do whatever was needed for the pack.

"Challenge me."

Cole frowned. "The last thing the pack needs now is... dissent."

"They need to know they have a leader who'll take them into battle in front of them. If I can't do that... it has to be you."

Cole shook his head. "No, I'm not betraying you—"

"You're not betraying me when it's an order, Cole," I cut him off. "My last one as alpha, if I'm not strong enough to fight you. Because then, I can't lead them."

“I don’t want to replace you.”

“I know.”

“Don’t make me do this.”

“Are you telling me you’ve never thought about being alpha?”

He hesitated. He would make a hell of an alpha. We both knew that.

“I’ve never thought about betraying you,” he said, which was the exact same thing. “Or Brennan.”

“You know Brennan isn’t capable of being alpha. He barely gives a fuck about anyone in this world but Amelia.” I shook my head. “He was a good alpha in his time. But things change. Brennan’s not meant to be alpha anymore.”

I coughed then, the coughs shaking me. “And neither am I. I can’t shift. I can barely breathe. I’m not the one to lead them into battle.”

“Were you going to try to trick me?” he asked. “You said at first you needed me to prove to the pack that you were ready for a fight. You were going to lose and, whether I wanted it or not, make me alpha?”

“Yep.”

He shook his head. “So why didn’t you?”

“Because that’s no way to treat our pack’s best choice for alpha.” I hesitated. “Or my best friend. Better than I deserve.”

“Stone...”

“Do it,” I urged him. “For the pack.”

He looked away. He knew the pack as well as I did, how they needed an alpha’s strength.

“I’ll do it,” he said. “But only because it’s your order.”

I got to be an alphahole one last time.

It didn’t take long for the two of us to gather witnesses. Shaw came outside, looking drawn and tired.

"Stone can't shift," Cole called to the crowd. I'd told him that he needed to tell them. Otherwise, they wouldn't understand why we didn't transform into wolves. "Because of the Fae magic. And we need to be ready to fight them. So I'm challenging him for alpha."

There was a murmur amongst the crowd.

I took a deep breath and stepped forward, feeling the weight of their gazes on me.

I looked around at the assembled pack members, searching for any signs of dissent. I could sense their unease, their fear of the unknown. They needed

a clear leader.

I knew what I had to do. I took a step forward, meeting Cole's gaze.

"Very well," I said. "Let's do this."

The crowd stepped back, creating a circle around us.

Cole and I stepped into the center of the circle, facing each other.

Cole didn't want to do this. But he always did his duty. He always had my back.

The energy of the pack members was palpable, their excitement and fear mingling in the air. I could sense their anticipation, waiting for the fight to begin.

I flexed my muscles, feeling power coursing through my body. One last time. I just needed to summon enough strength to make this look convincing.

The pack needed to believe that Cole deserved to lead.

I could look weak for their sakes. To protect my family and my pack. That was more important than my pride.

Cole matched my movements, his body rippling with strength and agility. We began to circle each other, each of us waiting for the other to make the first move.

Suddenly, Cole lunged at me, his body a blur of movement. I dodged to the side, narrowly avoiding his attack. I countered with a swift kick, which he blocked easily.

The fight continued, each of us trading blows and dodging attacks. Sweat poured down my face, and I could hear the sound of my own heart pounding in my ears.

As we circled each other once more, Cole suddenly lunged at me again. I braced myself for the impact, but he feinted at the last moment, causing me to stumble.

I stumbled for a moment, but then regained my balance, launching myself at Cole with all my strength. He met me head-on, our bodies colliding with a resounding thud.

For a moment, we were both locked in a fierce struggle, neither of us gaining the upper hand. The memory of a dozen tussles when we were kids rose in my mind, and for a second I could've sworn I saw his face when we were young and stupid. But then he'd stopped arguing with me, and he'd backed me up without any hesitation--whether I was right or wrong--all these years I was alpha.

He'd been a better friend than I deserved, and I was going to be just as

good to him.

We continued to grapple, both of us trying to overpower the other. I could feel my strength beginning to wane, and Cole finally managed to pin me down. He held me in place for a few seconds before gradually easing off.

I yielded, raising my hands in a sign of submission.

The pack cheered raucously and I felt a swell of pride that they looked up to him so much. Cole was the new alpha.

He stood up and walked around the circle, addressing everyone directly. His voice was strong and confident now, no trace of doubt or hesitation left in his tone. He promised them protection from the Fae threat and success for our pack as long as we worked together under his leadership.

I nodded in agreement, standing beside him and showing my support for his words with every gesture I made. I had chosen the right alpha for our pack--for our family--and it was time to start anew.

* * *

Cole

AMELIA CAME RUNNING out of the house. I saw the hurt in her eyes as she looked between Stone and me.

“This was my choice,” Stone said to her gruffly, turning away from the crowd so none of them could hear.

“You just make decisions without talking to me?” She threw her hands up. “Typical, Stone. You don’t get to die on me when you’re pissing me off!”

Stone’s lips curled up. I could’ve sworn he liked it when she yelled at him. In fact, heat was crackling between them.

“I need to get inside before...” Stone trailed off.

Amelia and I immediately moved to his sides. She looked across his chest at me and glared with those brilliant, bright eyes. The look went straight to my soul as we shadowed Stone, who limped up the stairs, ready to catch him if he stumbled.

“Cole... I never could’ve been alpha without you at my side. This is fair. This is the right thing.” Stone’s icy blue gaze met mine evenly. “Trust yourself.”

I nodded jerkily. I didn't want Amelia to think I had betrayed Stone, that I would ever hurt him.

As soon as we were inside and Stone had settled onto the couch, looking tired and worn, Amelia pulled me to the other side of the room. "What happened out there?"

"I challenged Stone for alpha."

She looked up at me in disbelief. "He made you, didn't he?"

"It was his order."

She shook her head in disbelief. "Only Stone would boss someone into taking over for him."

"Amelia, I didn't--"

"Wait," she said, holding up a hand. "I know. He wanted to make sure that you were the one in charge. There's no one else here that he trusts with his authority."

She was right; Stone had put me in charge because he trusted me. It still felt like a shock.

"And there's no one else I trust in exactly the way I trust you," she whispered to me, looking up at me with wide, luminous eyes.

"I will do my best for the park, and for you--"

But she cut me off, pressing her lips to mine. I kissed her back hungrily, savoring the sweet taste of her lips. My hands roamed over her curves and as we took turns exploring each other's bodies with deep kisses, a desire began to build in both of us.

Stone watched us from the couch. I could feel his eyes on me as Amelia and I continued to kiss. His presence only added to the intensity of our desire and soon I was pulling away from Amelia so I could undress myself. As my clothing fell away, revealing my bare skin, Stone got up from the couch and walked towards us. He stepped behind Amelia, running his hands over her body before taking off her dress himself. She shivered at his touch but did not keep him from removing it completely; instead she leaned into him, letting herself be taken in by the moment.

"We shouldn't," she whispered. "Not now."

"We should," I said, "because we don't know what tomorrow will bring."

The words were grimmer than I intended in front of Amelia, and her gaze snapped up to mine.

"Cole's right," Stone said.

"Are you sure you're up to it?" she asked him archly. "I don't want to hurt

you."

He grinned. "I might not be at my best right now, but I'll still have you screaming."

"Is that a promise?"

Before he could answer, I stepped up behind Amelia and pressed my lips to her neck. She shuddered, her eyes widening as she looked between Stone and I.

"Yes," Stone said in response to her question as his hands roamed over her body. "That's a promise."

My own hands moved forward, my fingertips tracing over the curves of Amelia's body before sliding down to caress the delicate skin of her inner thighs. She gasped softly at the sensation, arching her back against me as I teased her with feathery touches. Stone slipped in front of us, gently pushing himself into Amelia until she was filled with both our presences.

She gasped again as we began to move together in perfect harmony; each thrust bringing us closer together until we all fell into an ecstatic frenzy of pleasure and passion. Amelia cried out each time my hips met hers while Stone whispered words of love and adoration into her ears. With every stroke we took

we grew closer not only to each other but to the moment.

The heat in the room was unbearable, and soon Amelia was shuddering in pleasure around us, her orgasm taking over her body as she held onto Stone and I with equal strength. We continued on until we all reached our peak together, collapsing in a pile of sweat and contentment as we embraced each other tightly in the afterglow of our lovemaking.

Stone and I held Amelia between us.

"I'll always be here for you," he whispered to her, then he looked up and his gaze met mine. I knew the promise was meant for me too.

"Thank you," I said before turning away from him to give Amelia one last kiss goodbye before it was time for us to go our separate ways. She smiled up at me gratefully, holding onto my hand until the last possible moment as if she couldn't bear to separate.

But I had the pack to lead. She would take care of Stone, and Shaw would take care of her.

CHAPTER 33



*A*melia

I WOKE that night to voices in the hallway outside. I checked that Dylan was asleep and then, with my heart beating rapidly because I was afraid of what was coming next, I slipped out to talk to the men.

Shaw and Cole looked guilty when I stepped out.

“What did you do?” I asked, looking between them.

“Nothing,” Cole said. “But there’s... a visitor requesting to come onto our pack lands from neutral territory.”

My heart dropped at the word visitor. “Aodhan? Seraphina? Adrienne?”

Cole shook his head. “Your mother.”

My knees went weak. “I thought it might just be a monster.”

I would’ve preferred any of those monsters over the one who raised me.

“What do you want us to do?” Cole asked kindly.

“Why’s she here?”

“She was being pursued by a monster.” Cole’s lips knit together. “A monster from the Fae world, I believe. I’ve never seen anything like it.”

“You saw it?”

“And killed it,” he said shortly.

“I would brag if I were him,” Shaw said. “That’s why he’s the alpha.”

Cole rolled his eyes.

“Aodhan must have sent it here,” I said. “To drive her to us... or give a reason to let her in.”

“We can’t trust her,” Cole agreed.

But she was my mother... and the thought of having her in danger twisted at my heart. There was still some stupid part of me that wished one day she would wake up and see my worth.

“Is there a way to protect her until we find out if she’s working with Aodhan or if she’s his prey?” I asked. “She doesn’t deserve our help, but...”

“Of course,” Cole said. “We’ll make it happen. Do you want to see her?”

I shook my head. I ached over Stone’s sickness and I feared Aodhan’s arrival. I didn’t want her around me when I was vulnerable. Seeing my mother was an affair that would require my best mindset, an hour of meditation, and ideally a shot of whiskey.

The first indication we had that the Fae had arrived and we were under attack was the ground shaking. Dylan ran out into the hallway to me, and I gathered him up in my arms.

"I love you, and I'll come back to you, but right now I have to help Uncle Cole, Uncle Shaw and Uncle Liam," I said. "Can you stay with Uncle Stone and Aunt Karissa?"

"I'll protect Uncle Stone," he whispered into my ear, and my eyes flooded with tears that I blinked away before he could see them.

"I know you will," I told him.

I handed him over to Karissa, and ran after Cole.

As we were leaving the house, he told me, "You called me Uncle Cole."

"You know you're family," Shaw said, coming up on his other side. "Don't be sentimental when we have a lot of decapitating ahead of us."

"Do Fae need to be decapitated like the vampires do?"

"I don't know, but I'm in the mood to cut off some heads anyway."

Liam and Brennan flanked us too. Brennan looked back toward the house, not that he could see, so it looked as if he was listening. "Where's Stone?"

"Karissa was taking him and Dylan to the safe room down there," Cole said. "The cubs are locked down all across the pack by now."

Brennan nodded, but there was a quick flash of disappointment in his eyes. I wanted to ask him why, but I didn't get the chance.

Because an enormous winged monster dove toward us.

“Is that a dragon, are you fucking kidding me?” Shaw demanded.

"Could it be Aodhan?" Liam asked.

Brennan shrugged. “I learned what I could in that world, but I couldn’t make it far beyond the forest.”

As the monster dipped lower, it spilled a half-dozen Fae soldiers off its back.

We shifted quickly, forming a line and attacking the dragon. Even though it was huge, we were fast and coordinated and kept it just off balance. More shifters ran to help us.

The dragon rose and flew away, bleeding from a gash in its side.

We looked at each other, trying to regroup.

"How many shifters like that do you think Aodhan has on his side?" Cole demanded.

"I don't know," Brennan said. "You should've let me go back into the Fae world and find out."

"We didn't save you so you could get yourself captured by the Fae."

Brennan scoffed in response.

"Look out," Shaw warned, tightening his grip on his sword. "Here he comes again."

As the monster swooped low to the ground, several more Fae figures slipped off its back. They had flown right over our perimeter.

Liam shouted for everyone to stay back and he stepped up, eyes blazing with power.

He reached out his hands and pushed it forward. I felt the energy radiating from him, a strange invisible force that swept through the air like a wind of pure magic, overwhelming all the Fae in its path.

The Fae froze in place, as if Liam had taken control of their minds. He kept them contained while Shaw and Cole turned to face the dragon.

"Let's kill this asshole before he can drag in any more friends of his," Shaw said.

Cole charged forward, roaring and slashing with his claws. Shaw followed right behind him, hammering at the dragon's scales with his sword.

I saw Stone and Dylan in my mind, safe in the safe rooms, but I also felt an urge to help Cole and Shaw in their fight. I kept back, though, as one wrong move could spell disaster for all of us.

The winged monster roared in pain as Cole slashed into its side. Shaw was relentless with his sword strikes, coming up from behind to attack it again and again until finally the beast collapsed on the ground. Its face shifted.

Aodhan lay on the ground in front of us.

Just then, I heard a scream. A familiar voice.

My mother, racing toward us, chased by a Fae monster. It had wings, fangs, and claws - a grotesque creature that seemed to be made of evil. My heart sank as I saw it get closer and closer to her.

I didn't hesitate. I shifted and ran toward her, leaping over obstacles in my way. The others were close behind me.

My mother was backed up against a tree, and the Fae was closing in. I could see the fear in her eyes.

I tackled the creature from the side. It let out a blood-curdling scream and flailed around, trying to shake me off.

Shaw and Cole arrived and finished it off with their swords.

I shifted back and ran to my mother. "Are you alright?"

She was shaking, and I could feel her heart beating fast.

"Thank you," she said, tears in her eyes. "I thought I was done for."

I glanced at the dead Fae monster.

"Is he dead?" I called over my shoulder, thinking of Aodhan.

"Not yet, I'm about to fix that," Brennan shouted back.

"Wait." I looked at my mother. She looked so much like me, with her auburn hair and blue eyes. "Is that my father?"

She nodded, still teary-eyed. "And of course he came after us. The monster. As if he hadn't brought enough pain into our lives."

I didn't know what the hell she was talking about. She was the one who had brought so much pain into my life.

"Come with me," I said. "I'm going to finish him. You should know he's really gone and he's never going to come after you again."

She came with me, and I went over and grabbed Aodhan by his hair, pulling him up to his knees. I could see the fear in his eyes as he looked up at me.

"You should be afraid," I told him. "You came after my family and my pack. You killed so many innocent people. You've caused so much pain and suffering. And now you're going to pay for it."

Brennan walked up, sword in hand. "Let me do it."

"Are you asking because you want to protect me or because you

"Any last words?" I asked him.

He tried to speak, but nothing came out.

I nodded to Brennan, who raised his sword and brought it down.

Blood splattered on my face as Aodhan's head was separated from his body.

My mother whimpered, but I felt a sense of closure, like a weight lifted from my shoulders.

"It's over," I said.

"He stalked us sometimes," my mother said. "When your father died..."

She looked away, closing her eyes in her pain.

"Aodhan killed him."

She nodded. "He didn't want anyone to take his place, even though he didn't want me himself. I married your stepfather, desperate for protection. When Aodhan visited me... he told me he could see how little I loved your stepfather."

"You let my stepfather be so cruel to me," I said. "Did you even care?"

She met my gaze. Only her lips moved, the word not audible, when she whispered, "No."

"I didn't think so."

"You were his child, Amelia. I didn't choose to have you—he enchanted me."

"I'm sorry he did that to you," I said. "I'm sorry you were hurt."

She looked gratified.

"But I'm more sorry for the innocent child I was, who you tortured," I said. "I just wanted you to love me so badly. Well, here you are. You're safe. Aodhan will never come after you again."

"Amelia—"

I could feel my men step up to my side, surrounding me.

"I wasn't anything like him," I said. "And you should have loved me."

Her lips parted.

She couldn't say it. She couldn't even claim she loved me and lie about it.

"I'm never going to think about you again after this. But you can remember me for the rest of your life. Remember that I saved you. Because I'm better than you. Anyone who would abuse a child the way you abused me is nothing, and you're nothing to me."

"Get off our pack territory," Cole ordered, and there was an alpha rumble in his voice that made my mother stiffen.

She looked at me as if she wanted to plead her case. But how many times had she told me to shut up when I had looked at her, and I had needed so much more from her? The gap in my heart where a mother's love should've been had healed somewhat, loving Dylan the way I'd never been loved.

And my men closed up around me, blocking her from my view.

“If I were you, I’d run before I lose my patience,” Cole warned her, and there was a note of danger I’d never heard in his voice before.

Then I was surrounded by my men, and they had healed me even more. She might never have loved me, but they loved me enough for a lifetime.

CHAPTER 34



S tone

“IT’S OVER,” Brennan said when he stepped into the room. “At least for now.”

“Aodhan got away?”

“Aodhan’s dead. I just...” Brennan shook his head, then realized Dylan was in the room. “I just have a hard time believing in happy endings, I guess.”

“Come on, I’ll take you to your mom,” Karissa said, and she and Dylan left.

Then it was just Brennan, standing in the door.

“Even with the mask, I can tell you don’t want to be here,” I said. “Go. Find Amelia.”

“It’s not that.” Brennan closed the door.

The two of us hadn’t been alone since we fought the monster in the forest. I wished I could read his face.

“Can you do something for me? Without asking a thousand stupid fucking questions?”

My heart sank. He was going to leave. “Well, since you asked me so sweetly.”

He stepped forward, and I raised my hand. “Before you say anything else. I’ll do something for you, if you’ll do something for me.”

“What?”

“Take the fucking mask off.”

He scoffed. “You don’t want to see my face.”

I didn’t answer. I didn’t want to try to explain the need I had for my brother.

“Fine, you asked for it,” he said, pulling the mask off and flinging it impatiently onto the table. “Fucking ridiculous that you can see me and I’ll never see you...”

He trailed off.

“What?”

“Just take this.” He pulled a bottle out of his jacket and thrust it toward me. “Don’t make it a big deal, don’t be weird, just take it.”

“and what am I taking?”

“It’ll fix you.”

“Does that mean it could...fix you?”

“Probably not. There are bits of my brain that are missing entirely, and I don’t think even magic can change that.”

“But it might.”

“I’m alive. You’re soon to be not-alive. You need to take it.”

“If there’s a chance... you’ve had so much stolen from you already. You should be selfish. See your son, your mate...”

* * *

Brennan

MY HEART ACHED at the thought of Amelia.

I needed him to take the damned potion before my demons drop-kicked my inner angel right off my brain.

Let’s be honest, the angel was barely hanging in there as a general rule.

“Do I need to pin you down and pour this down your throat? Because let’s be honest, Karissa would help me.”

Stone scoffed. “Don’t drag her into this.”

“Why the fuck didn’t you make her the alpha?”

“Are you angry?”

“No.” I didn’t want to be alpha. I wasn’t even sure I was going to stay.

“You sound angry.”

“I mean, the fact you haven’t already taken the damn potion is pissing me off.”

Stone finally reached out and took it from me. I felt a sense of loss when the crystal bottle was no longer cool against my fingertips.

“I’ll do it under one condition,” he said.

“Nevermind, I’m going to take it, and then I’m going to kill you myself,” I said, reaching out my hand, though I had no such intention.

He let out a laugh. Fucking obnoxious, my brothers.

“You have to give us all a chance.”

“What does that even mean?”

“I know you don’t want to be here. I’m just asking you to... try.”

“Why do you know I don’t want to be here?”

“Because you look just like Liam did when you brought him home.”

“Shut up and drink the fucking potion before I take it back.”

Stone did.

Amelia came in behind us. “What’s happening?” she asked.

Stone slowly pushed himself upright. “I feel... better.”

“You’d better.”

“I thought you might’ve slipped me something that would finish me off.”

“Why would I do that?”

“Come on. I know you thought about killing me,” Stone said. “I could see it on your face.”

“I was wearing a mask. You couldn’t see anything on my face.”

“It was a vibe. A touch-her-and-die, I’m-her-one-and-only vibe,” Stone said. “But you’re going to share her nicely, aren’t you?”

Amelia’s face lit with joy as he rose from the bed. “You’re alright!”

“Thanks to my big brother, who never lets me down.”

“Fuck off,” I told him. “Fuck all the way off.”

But he hugged me anyway.

Stone and Amelia shared a long, intense kiss. I couldn’t see it but I could hear it, and that was even worse.

“Time for me to move on,” I said.

“Stay,” Amelia said.

“We did this already,” I said, gesturing between the three of us. “When Amelia was in heat.”

“It’s different now.”

"How so?"

Amelia didn't answer. She just pulled my face down to hers and kissed me. It felt different now that I wasn't wearing the mask, and I felt a sudden rush of shame that she was seeing me like this.

But she didn't stop.

Stone's hands were running over her skin, occasionally bumping into my hands as I gripped her hips.

Amelia's breath was coming in short and shallow exhales each time Stone kissed her collarbone. I could feel the heat radiating off of us, as if the air around us had suddenly become a sauna.

I moved my hands over Amelia's body, exploring the contours of her curves with a sense of reverence and awe. She responded to my touch with gentle sighs and murmurs of pleasure, making me want to explore even further.

Stone moved his hands up from her waist and cupped her breasts through the thin fabric of her dress. As he teased her nipples, her breathing changed. The intense sensations coursing through my body made it hard to focus on anything else besides the feel of Amelia's skin against mine.

The three of us moved together in harmony, something we could never achieve in any other part of our lives.

When it was over, we lay there in a tangled heap on the bed. Amelia's body was draped over Stone's chest and she was still breathing heavily. I held her against me, feeling the warmth of our combined bodies.

We stayed there for a few moments, savoring the moment and basking in the afterglow of pleasure.

Amelia kissed my cheek. It was different than usual, a small everyday kiss, not a passionate clash of two people who fought as much as they fucked.

"Thank you," she whispered. "For taking care of him for me."

I nodded stiffly.

"Of course he did," Stone said. "Brennan's always looked out for us all."

And I knew he meant well, he was trying to pay me a compliment.

But his words just made me want to run.

That night, we gathered for another family meal. Everyone was toasting to each other, and to Stone's health. Teresa gushed about how well Aiden, Lawson and Rose had fought on the other side of the pack lands. When Amelia hugged her sister, Rose cried.

I didn't really understand any of it. It was warm and cozy and full of love.

The more they tried to pull me in, the more I felt like an outsider. I listened to their laughter and their voices.

“You can keep sleeping in your old room,” Karissa told me.

“Thanks.”

“It’s just...Amelia and her son need their own rooms. Even if she ends up in your bed.”

“I do not need to have this conversation with my sister.”

She laughed, a genuine laugh that was still far too loud for my mild displeasure. I frowned as I realized why. My sister. She was delighted.

It would be easier for all of us if I didn’t care about these people. Because the fact that I cared was what was killing me now. She wanted so much from me and yet, two little words had made her happy. So little. It was sad, sad enough to make a pit open in my stomach.

This house was cozy and warm and full of love. Under the floorboards, it was all grief and sorrow.

Maybe love and grief go hand in hand.

It’s a lot easier to avoid them both than to feel them.

That night, when I lay down in my bed, the room still smelled of Amelia. I laid there longing for her, wondering if she had ever longed for me like I did now.

Late at night, I rose. I expected Stone—or Cole, now—had someone watching me, but I made it out of the house without being watched. The expectation made me pause on the front porch. But I didn’t sense anyone watching me.

I made my way through the forest. I wished I could shift into the wolf. The question of whether or not to that enchantment would pass, or if we had to seek out a cure in the fake world, haunted me.

If I left... That would be a good reason. Making it so that stone and Amelia and I could shift again. Made sense I would have to leave for that. It wouldn't even be selfish. I walked to the edge of packed territory. I was looking for a gate like the one I had used to shift back and forth between worlds. I wondered if it would still work. It was magic borrowed from the Fae. I was half surprised that the fae king hadn't burned my palm off or cut off my arm to reclaim his magic.

I passed a large, flat stone, that gave me an eerie feeling when I passed by it, as if perhaps it were haunted. Beyond that, I found a house with a small fence around it, wildflowers taking over the yard, and again carefully latched

shot. I examined the house, but it felt as if it were empty. After a few minutes, I felt safe enough to move to the gate and lay my hand on the wood.

I muttered the words in my borrowed spell. Pain lanced through my palm as the rune burned into the wood. I'd had one to lock the door, and another ruin to unlock worlds.

And then the portal opened. The gate swung open before me, moved by magic, and an arc of magic burned above the gate.

And in the world beyond, rain fell steadily. Mist escaped that world and floated into ours, and as the wind shook the trees beyond, flower petals rained at my feet.

As I stood at the gate and hesitated, a voice called out behind me. "Brennan!"

I turned to face Amelia. And as I did, I took a step back, reaching for the gate.

"Are you leaving me?" Her voice was twisted with pain.

"no, I would never want to leave you."

"oh?" her voice was shaky. "because I think that if you were planning to stay, you wouldn't be opening portals to whole new worlds in the middle of the night."

"I don't know how to do this, Amelia."

"What? What don't you know how to do?"

"all of this." I swept my arm to indicate our son, our family, our pack. If I stayed. All those would be ours. "I don't know how to be a father or a friend or a brother..."

"do you think anyone does? That no one has questions, feels overwhelmed, feels insufficient? There is no one human shaped who isn't fucking lost." Her hands gently cupped the pitted, scarred sides of my face. "Hopefully, we don't hurt each other too much trying to find our way. Hopefully, we even help each other. We call out in the dark, and we stumbled towards each other, we tell each other where the holes are in the earth and what to watch for and where we find safety. That's all we can do. Everyone feels alone in their journey sometimes. But you have to call out."

How did she sound so certain and so pleading all at once? As if she had the answers, if only she could get me to accept them.

I laid my hands over hers. "I wasn't leaving. At least, not for long period"

"Then where were you going?"

"I just wanted to know that I could leave."

The words hung between us. I wished I could see her face. I knew my confession hurt. But it was the truth.

“You can leave,” her voice was soft. “We just don't want you to. Does that help?”

“If I leave... would you go with me?”

I shouldn't have asked that question. She was silent, long enough to make me reconsider opening that portal and diving through.

“No,” she whispered. “I'd never leave Dylan.”

“We could take Dylan.”

“I'd never leave Cole and Shaw and Liam and Stone. I love you, Brennan. But I love them just as much.”

I nodded. “I thought so. I wasn't leaving, not when there's still danger. But I wanted to go back and see what was happening.”

“What danger?”

“We killed Aodhan and Serafina. But what about your sister?”

“You can't call Felina my sister. Especially given her willingness to see me die to save her life. She was so weak. I don't think she's a threat.”

“Just because someone is weak doesn't mean they aren't a threat. Sometimes, that makes them the biggest threat of all in their own way.”

She nodded. “So do we go and find her and make sure she can't come after us?”

“Not you. Just me.”

“She's my sister.”

“And you're my pregnant mate.”

She touched her belly, clearly surprised by the intensity in my voice. I sure was.

I cleared my throat. “You're not going into danger. Stone wouldn't allow it either.”

“Are you two ganging up on me now?”

I slammed the gate shut, and the portal disintegrated. All that was left were the flowers that had drifted in, pink and white petals scattered over the disintegrating brown leaves. Part of me had worried Amelia would be headstrong and dive into another world.

“We are not,” I said shortly.

“I think you are.”

I started back through the woods. “I'll stay as long as you need me. I'll even tolerate the way you all pretend to love me when really, you love the

idea of me. It's easier to love a ghost."

"It is hard to love you," Amelia said from behind me, her voice exasperated, and my heart dropped. "Because you're choosing to make it hard!"

I whirled on her.

"No, don't say it." She pressed up against me, her hand flat against my mouth. "Whatever dickish thing you were about to say. We love you anyway, because we don't know how to stop. We never will. But that doesn't change the fact that it's hard." Her voice dropped to a whisper. "And it hurts."

I took her wrist and pulled her hand away from my mouth, but kept gripping it.

I didn't know what to say. So I just kissed her.

Amelia resisted, and then her lips parted against mine. She kissed me back hungrily, her body swaying against mine.

This world sucked.

But I'd stay in it for her, at least for a while.

CHAPTER 35



Cole

THAT NIGHT, I had a restless feeling. I could tell Amelia wasn't in the house. Her presence seemed to fill up the whole place. I paced outside, ready to shift and follow her scent.

Then I saw her and Brennan, walking back together across the dew-soaked lawn. His arm was around her waist and his head was bent toward her. The two of them were talking quietly, and even if his face was ruined now, he smiled at something she said, and it transformed the way he looked.

Amelia looked up and met my gaze, and her eyes crinkled at the corners. Her face lit up when she saw me, and it made my heart melt.

"Shouldn't you be in bed, Cole?" she called, a little further away than she probably would've been normally when she spoke. She wasn't just greeting me; she was showing Brennan what was around them.

Brennan stiffened.

"Shouldn't you be?" I returned.

"Not without the two of you," she answered saucily.

I grinned at her as she reached the porch steps. "You have changed a lot since you first arrived here."

"Arrived?" She arched her eyebrows. "Since I was first kidnapped, you mean?"

"Are you going to hold that against us?"

"Forever," she assured me.

Then suddenly, she was slumping forward. I jumped down the steps to catch her in my arms as her knees buckled. Brennan fell just the same way, landing on his knees before he face-planted in the grass.

“Help!” I shouted toward the house, laying Amelia down in the grass.

But no one answered from the house.

After a few long seconds, I realized no one was going to answer.

“Ah, you’re the one who isn’t Fae at all.” A woman was walking toward me. “Our enchantment doesn’t work on common wolves.”

“Filuna,” I said.

“How did you guess?”

“We expected you.”

A half-dozen Fae materialized out of the darkness behind her.

“Luckily for us, your half-Fae friend here opened a portal for us to walk through,” she said. “Right onto your pack lands. My father really thought of everything... before you killed him.”

Her voice hardened. “So now... kill them. Everyone in the house. Leave my sister.”

The six Fae soldiers spread out, moving toward me and the house beyond me.

I swung Amelia over my shoulder and grabbed Brennan’s collar, trying to draw them both with me into the house. I dragged Brennan up the steps. That would hurt in the morning, but all I care about right now was keeping him alive through the night.

I dropped them inside the doorway, then turned to face them.

She had a smile on her face as if she thought we were easy prey.

“You needed help?” Aiden’s voice was steely as he stepped up. “We heard your scream down at the cottage.”

Lawson was by his side.

Then Rose was running up the hill, with other shifters following behind her. She’d woken some of them up.

The fight was on. Most of all, I needed to get Amelia and the others awake so they could fight too.

I moved toward her. “Nice trick.”

“Being Fae is almost always an advantage over being as human as you shifters are,” she purred. “But it does mean we have our weaknesses.”

I was close enough to see a supernatural glow from the pendant around her chest.

I lashed out at her. She let out a cry of surprise and one of the other Fae rushed to defend her.

But I was already ripping the necklace away. It burned in my hand, but the magic faded as soon as it left her skin.

Her face immediately turned pale, and she wobbled. The guard grabbed her arm to steady her.

So maybe the loss of the pendant wouldn't wake my friends. I wasn't sure if the one object controlled both spells. But either way, it sure made for a bad day for her.

"Get the girl," she told the guard. "That's all that matters."

"You're going to have to go through me," I said.

"Are we?" Her brows arched.

The guards all attacked me. The others and I fought back.

But she slipped by me as I was engaged in a bloody fight. I looked back to find she stood at our own front door, which limned with a magical glow.

Rose raced for the steps at the same time I did. She was closer, and she made it to the door.

The next second, our entire house phased and was gone.

CHAPTER 36



*A*melia

WHEN I WOKE UP, I was on the floor in the house. I blinked, looking at the hem of a long skirt that teased against a pair of bare feet.

I finally managed to turn my head, despite how heavy it felt. I was so drowsy.

Filuna's face came into view. "Hello, sister."

"What did you do to me?"

"I gave you the best sleep of your life! You're a mom, aren't you? You should be grateful."

A sudden jolt of fear made me sit up.

Dylan was in the house.

"You made me leave my men behind," she said sadly. "The last of our father's mercenaries. But they'll be coming soon, once they deal with your wolves, and then..." She raised one finger and swept it back and forth, making a rhythmic sound like a ticking clock.

I tried to move, and realized I couldn't. My arms and legs felt impossibly heavy.

She toyed with the glowing ring around her finger. It took everything I had to turn my head just slightly to look at Brennan, and fear jolted through my heart for a second before I saw the faintest rise and fall of his chest. He was still alive.

"I just wanted you to be awake for this part," she said lightly, holding up

a crystal bottle. “So you can see me as I drain your soul.”

“Why?”

“Because I have to pay my father’s debt if I want to live.” She cocked her head to one side, studying me. “Your lives are short and dull. It makes no difference if you die now or later.”

“It makes a difference to me.” I kept my gaze focused on her face, even though I could see someone moving behind her. I didn’t dare look at them to see who it was, because it would give them away.

“Let’s see if this works like Father said,” she muttered, then popped the cork off. “Take Amelia’s soul.”

It felt as if my life was being drained away from me.

Then Rose slammed something down on Filuna’s head. Filuna crumpled.

“Her ring!” I shouted, but Filuna had landed on the floor and begun to fight back against Rose. The two of them scrambled. I tried to move my fingers, but, couldn’t reach the ring.

“Mom?” Dylan’s voice was a soft call. He was creeping down the stairs, wide eyed and afraid.

How was he awake? Was he a quarter Fae like my father had assumed? If this spell was related to the Fae blood we all carried, he would be immune. Or was he half... because Brennan and I were both quarter Fae... and just so powerful? Either way, it didn’t matter for now.

Rose was thoroughly distracted. I looked at him and whispered, “I need you to get the ring off her finger.”

As Rose struggled to pin Filuna, he darted in and pulled the ring off her finger.

Immediately, I felt some of my limbs begin to tingle with pins and needles so agonizing I could barely breathe. But I tried to force myself up to my knees. Pain didn’t matter.

Filuna slammed Rose’s head into the ground. My sister lay stunned.

A terrible smile came over Filuna’s face as she saw Dylan. I lurched toward her, but my body wouldn’t obey my commands yet.

She managed to snatch Dylan up. He tried to run, but she was insanely fast.

“Give me your soul or give me your son.”

She had a knife in her hand now, and she pressed it to his throat.

Dylan met my eyes. His eyes were wide and terrified, his lips set. This time, he didn’t freeze.

Rose climbed to her knees, eying the knife.

Rose lunged for the blade. There was no attempt to protect herself, because to do so would've given Filuna time to drive that knife into Dylan's throat. Her palm wrapped the blade, protecting Dylan even as she let out a scream of pain.

Dylan bit Filuna's arm. She shook him off and leapt away, already pulling another knife loose.

"Get out of here!" I cried to my sister and son, hoping they would take care of each other as they ran from the room. A trail of blood fell behind Rose.

Filuna and I both looked down at the bloodied knife. The blade was wet my sister's blood, and that infuriated me.

We leapt for it at the same time.

I was closer, and fast as she was, I got it first.

She swiped at me with her knife, coming in fast, pressing an attack. I managed to stomp on her foot and then drive the blade into her gut. She doubled over, looking profoundly surprised.

"Take Filuna's soul," I told the crystal. "If she has one."

After all, I was Fae too.

Filuna's eyes met mine.

"You know, if you'd wanted to be family, I would've gone to the ends of the earth to figure out a way to fix the curse," I told her conversationally. "But you didn't want to be family."

I helped her down to the ground, since she was already growing stiff, and began to search her for the key that would bring our house back to our own world.

CHAPTER 37



*A*melia

WE HAD COME HOME from the Fae world and I had slept, and slept, and slept. As much as I loved those men of mine, all I wanted that night was an undisturbed night of sleep.

Dylan came into my room in the middle of the night. He had gotten used to sleeping in his own room while i was gone, so I had kissed him good night and hovered until he asked me if I could leave so he could go to sleep.

But in the middle of the night, he'd come into my room, dragging a stuffed animal behind him, and climbed into my bed. I woke up when he came in and watched him for a few seconds as he stared at me, as if he needed to know I was really there. Then I gathered him into my arms and the two of us fell asleep.

It still felt like a luxury to curl up with him like that, when Nathan had always been so jealous of any time I spent with my own little boy. But my men would never be jealous of how much I loved Dylan. They loved him just as much.

The next morning, I woke up too early. My schedule was still thrown off from living in the vampire hive. It wasn't even dawn yet as I left Dylan sleeping in bed and went down to the kitchen. I was really excited to be able to use a coffee maker after my time with the vampires.

But I wasn't alone for long. Brennan came in, and hesitated in the doorway.

“Do you think you could drink a cup of coffee instead of ripping apart a rabbit to start your day?” I teased him.

“Do you think you could wait until I wake up to mock me?”

“Probably not.” I handed him a cup of coffee and carried my own toward the door. I glanced over at him when I was almost up there. “you could come sit on the deck with me while I watch the sunrise.”

“Hm. You get to watch the sunrise. I'm just up at an ungodly hour.”

But Brennan still sat down on the porch beside me. He stared straight ahead, but by now I could tell when he was focused on me, and it felt like having his gaze on me.

“Now do you believe it's really over?” I asked Brennan.

I wanted to hear the most cynical man I knew say that it was over. Then I could really believe it. After all, he was the one who had said optimism wasn't a good trait for survival.

“I think are done and Fulina will never come after you again,” he said carefully. “I wonder about the debt that Aodhan wanted to use you to pay. I wonder if there's someone out there who feels like they have a claim on your life.”

His words chilled me.

“Or maybe not,” he said. “Maybe it's really over, forever. But whatever may come, I'll be here, and I'll protect you. I'll never fail you again.”

His voice turned raw on those words. But I felt like I'd failed him too, in that hotel room and every day after as I fought for my survival—even when that had meant pretending to love Nathan.

We both had a past that was dark and shadowed, a land we never wanted to travel through again, but that maybe we would always feel at our back. But it made the world that spread ahead of us feel even brighter and bigger.

“That's a big promise,” I whispered, lowering my voice so it wouldn't break. “Everybody fails each other sometimes.”

I could tell he was about to argue with me, so I added, “All I need you to promise me is that you'll stay.”

He sighed. “I don't like making promises.”

“That's part of having kids, Brennan. It's just a string of never ending promises.”

He mulled that over for a second, then nodded. “I'm trying to get used to this, Amelia. I thought I was one thing... this alpha vampire... And now I have to get used to the idea of being a mate and a father.”

He took my hand in his. “But I will. Because you're worth it, and so is Dylan, and so is...” he trailed off as he laid his hand on my flat belly.

I just leaned over and kissed him.

We spent the day trying to make sense of the last questions we had. The King siblings thought their mother had succumbed, in the end, to iron poisoning, rather than cancer like they had thought. They stripped the metal out of our house, and the guys seemed to find grim satisfaction in undoing their father’s handiwork. Cole drove the truck full of twisted metal off to the blacksmithing shop to be remade—but we would never go near it.

Our powers were still wonderful and mysterious to us. I had a feeling we’d spend a long time making sense of them.

That night, Karissa laid out a feast on the table. She'd been cooking all day.

Shaw came in and shook his head.

“I THOUGHT we should do this one last time,” Karissa said defensively.

The table was set with a wild variety of foods. There was a big bowl of kettle corn nestled next to the glazed carrots, a chocolate sheet cake, fried chicken and mashed potatoes next to a platter of golden brown corn dogs.

“What's this?” Brennan asked.

“Every year on your birthday and the anniversary of when we lost you, Karissa would cook all your favorites.” Shaw filled in.

Karissa sniffled. “Now I'm not going to do it anymore. You better learn how to cook.”

Brennan tensed when he heard her emotion. I glanced around at my men to realize everyone had paused, hoping like hell that Brendan would respond in a way that soothed Karissa's grief.

Even now that we had him back, it still hurt. We had lost so much by not being together for so long.

Brennan reached out and touched Karissa's shoulder. “Thank you.”

It was a small gesture, but then Karissa was crying, and Brennan pulled her into his arms and gave her a hug.

At dinner, there was so much to talk about. We still had so many questions. Had I made my men travel to meet me in my ‘dreams’? Was my magic so strong that I had been able to draw them from another world? Had the world I dreamt of always been the Fae world itself, and had I been

traveling to it—and drawing Liam with me?

Were we done with the Fae world forever?

For now though, we could all rest in the fact that we were together. The room was full of light, and love, and chocolate cake.

Brennan

I STEPPED out onto the back porch, leaving the happy, noisy chaos behind me. It was still a lot for me to handle. I had never enjoyed the vampires' parties. Someone was always trying to grope me. I hadn't realized at the time that I was waiting for someone, but now I knew that I had always belonged to Amelia. I had always carried her in my heart, even when my mind failed me.

The door opened and closed softly. Heavy footsteps, then a hesitation. Liam. I could tell it was him, a tall powerful guy who didn't quite know what to do with himself.

But I had a feeling he was learning.

“Still mad at me for going into your mind?” Liam asked.

“No.” I shook my head. “But I don't want any more second hand memories. It's not the same, seeing something through someone else's eyes. It just feels... wrong.”

“That makes sense,” he said.

He came and sat beside me on the steps. For a few seconds, there was silence.

“I did want to show you something,” he said.

“I'm not wild on the idea of opening my mind up to you, knowing how easily you can control people.”

Liam shook his head. “I don't want to control anyone. I don't want to hurt anyone.”

“Your powers seem wasted on you,” I said, but I didn't entirely mean it. I couldn't imagine anyone who could carry all that power better than Liam.

And when it came down to it... when we needed him... He had used his powers to protect us all.

“Maybe,” he said. “Maybe it's a good thing I'm crazy enough not to use them.”

“Maybe it is,” I agreed. “What did you want to show me?”

Instead of answering, he held out his hand. “Let’s walk.”

“I don't think so,” I said but he didn't take his hand away, so after a second, I sighed and put my hand in his. Fine. I would trust my brother.

Together we walked into the woods, and into his mind.

For just a split second, I could have sworn I was walking on a bright road, hand in hand with Liam. But it was a different version of the two of us. We were small, and the straps in my backpack dug into my narrow shoulders.

“Did you put that memory in my brain?” I asked sharply, blinking back into the moonlit forest. “Going to school?”

“No,” Liam said softly. “Did a memory come back for you?”

I shook my head. “I don't know. Do you remember us walking to school together when we were kids, maybe?”

“Yeah, we walked together when I was in first grade and you were in kindergarten. The next year, we had Stone with us too.” Liam smiled. “You and I practically had to drag him to school. And not just kindergarten. All he wanted to do was slip off and run in the woods.”

I didn't remember that. But I did remember feeling safe and comfortable with my brother, walking hand in hand into something unknown.

“Probably just my imagination,” I said, because I didn't want to hope too much that my memories would come back.

“This is what I wanted to show you,” Liam said, and I turned around and the darkness of our shared mind.

A little boy with russet brown hair faced Liam and me. When he smiled, it was magnetic. He looked like Amelia, with wide blue eyes and ruddy cheeks.

“Dylan?” I asked in disbelief.

“I just wanted you to see what he looks like.” Liam said.

I felt overwhelmed seeing him. And I could have sworn when I looked at him, I had another flash of memory, of another little boy.

One of my brothers.

I tried to focus, tried to capture the rest of the memory as it faded into wisps like a dream. But then I opened my eyes at the sound of the porch door slamming shut again, then feet running out into the woods.

Then a small voice. “What are you doing out here?”

I could picture his face, saying those words. For a second, I choked up and couldn't speak.

“Looking for you,” Liam said.

Liam held out his arm to Dylan, and the little boy walked with us. After a second, I put my hand on Dylan's shoulder and pulled him into my side. He leaned into me, wrapping his arms around my waist.

“You know, I fought my way out of the longLoad pack when they intended to kill me,” Liam said. “I killed so many of them . But it came at a cost. You found me and carried me the rest of the way home.”

I had a feeling he wanted to hear something tender from me. But i didn't remember.

“I must have fought so hard to get you back because I knew how useful you would be one day,” I said.

He shook his head. “that's not why.”

“I know.”

The saccharine version of myself had died with the vampires. I couldn't give him what he wanted.

“I'm going for a run. Goodnight, Dylan.” Liam ruffled Dylan's hair. “Take care of your dad.”

“I will,” Dylan said, sweetly, innocently, as if I didn't stumble over those words. Dad.

He had given me a gift. I could imagine Dylan's face as he curled against me, talking to me about what he saw above us in the night sky.

As Liam walked away, I called out impulsively, “I love you, brother.”

“I know,” he answered.

I grinned to myself.

Dylan got up and took my hand. “We should go home. Back to mommy.”

“Yes, we should.”

I didn't need Dylan to lead me. But I let him bring me home anyway.

And when I came through the door, Amelia was waiting to kiss us both.

CHAPTER 38



*A*melia

OUR ABILITY TO SHIFT RETURNED. By the time the winter ball came, our time with the vampires beaded into a nightmare. All that mattered was that Brennan was home. We were all home together, the way we belonged.

I danced with each of my men. But Brennan stole me away into the woods, and we left the lights twinkling in the trees for the darkness, where the two of us kissed wildly as he pinned me up against a tree.

“I love you,” he murmured against my lips.

“I love you too,” I said softly.

“Do you want the others here?” he whispered against my throat.

“Do you?”

“It feels right when we’re all together,” he murmured. “Let’s meet at the house.”

The house was finished. I didn’t know if I wanted to move into it or not.

If I did, I wanted them with me.

It seemed as if they were all drawn to the house too. Maybe I pulled them there. As Brennan pinned me up against the wall, they all came in.

When Liam joined Brennan, I felt warmth spread through my body. They wrapped their arms around my waist, Liam’s hands exploring my curves as Brennan nuzzled into the nape of my neck and breathed in the scent of my skin.

The others surrounded me, a wall of masculine beauty and muscle that

made me melt. I felt so safe pinned between them all.

I let out a small gasp as Brennan's lips trailed down my neck, sending shivers of pleasure down my spine. His touch was electric, and I found myself melting into his embrace. The men in front of me were all staring intently, their eyes dark with desire.

As Liam's hands moved lower, I couldn't help but let out a moan. His touch was intoxicating, and I was lost in the moment.

Stone and Brennan knelt down and caressed my feet, their lips tracing every arch and tendon. Shaw stood directly in front of me, his gaze never leaving mine as he raked his hands through my hair and down my back.

The men's touch was like magic, and I felt myself getting wetter by the second. I closed my eyes and savored the feelings as they continued weaving their spell. They picked me up and carried me to the bed.

Liam's lips against my neck, Stone's fingertips, Brennan lifting my leg over his shoulder, enveloping my skin in his hot breath as he teased me with his lips. Shaw's rough hands exploring my back, sending shockwaves of pleasure down my spine. The heavy breathing and moans of five men.

The sensations overwhelmed me, and I had no idea how much more of this I could take. I wanted to feel them all inside of me.

Cole lifted my other leg, teasing me with quick teases against my pussy before moving away.

"Please," I gasped.

"Please what?" Shaw asked, his voice raspy and deep.

Brennan's mouth found my ear, and his breath tickled my skin. "What do you need?"

"You," I said, my voice barely above a whisper. "All of you."

"Say it."

"I need you, Shaw. Cole. Liam. Stone. Brennan."

"How?" he asked, his voice a low growl.

"Everywhere."

Shaw's hands traveled down to my side, and he ran his fingers over my hip before slipping his fingertips into my panties.

He pushed my panties off, and I felt air against my aching center.

The men moved around me, their hands caressing my skin as they explored my curves.

Shaw wrapped his arm around my waist. I found myself perched on his lap, his thick erection pressing against my ass.

"Can I get in there?" he asked, his hand exploring the small of my back.

"You can have me however you want," I said, my voice barely above a whisper.

I spread my legs wider, and he pressed forward, his thick shaft entering me in one forceful motion.

I threw my head back and cried out as he filled me to the brim, his girth stretching me to my limits.

Shaw sat back, pressing his back against the headboard, and I threw my body against him. I had no control, and I didn't want any. I wanted them to take me however they wanted.

Shaw gripped my breasts, his fingers pinching my nipples as he thrust into me.

"You're so perfect," he said. "So perfect."

He kissed me roughly, his lips claiming mine as he continued to thrust.

"Get in here, Brennan," Shaw muttered. "She can take us both. She wants to take us both."

Brennan hesitated. Then he positioned himself so could press his cock against my aching core. I groaned at the feeling of his tip caressing me while Shaw filled me.

"Fuck, I want that," Brennan muttered. "I want to feel that tight little cunt."

"Fuck her," Stone commanded, his voice somewhere behind me. "Make our girl happy."

I felt something hard push against my lips.

I parted my lips, and Cole's cock slipped between them, filling my mouth. My body was already buzzing with pleasure, and with Cole in my mouth and Shaw in my pussy, I was exploding.

The men took me in every possible way, and I loved every second of it.

Cole pulled his cock out of my mouth. I instantly missed his taste but then felt another thick shaft press against my lips. I opened my mouth willingly, wanting to taste every inch of him as he pushed himself into my mouth.

"Fuck me," I gasped. "I want to taste you both."

My words seemed to be what the men needed, and they pushed deep inside of me.

I savored every inch of them, moaning against Cole's cock as I struggled to keep my pace.

"Fuck me," I moaned. "I want to feel you everywhere."

"That's what you're going to get," Cole said. He pulled his cock out of my mouth, and it was quickly replaced by Brennan's.

Shaw pounded me senseless, his hips slamming against mine as I struggled to keep up. Soon he was grunting every time he thrust into me, and I knew he was going to come soon. I didn't want to wait any longer.

I reached forward and grabbed Liam's cock. As I stroked it, Cole thrust into my mouth faster and faster, and soon he was groaning in pleasure.

"Fuck," he said. "Fuck."

He came with a grunt, and his cum filled my mouth. I struggled to swallow it all as it filled my mouth, but I wanted every drop.

As Shaw kept pumping into me, Brennan thrust into me harder than the other men, and I struggled to keep up. "I'm going to come," I whispered, sensation washing through me like a river sweeping me away.

"I want you to," he said. "I want to feel your tight little cunt squeeze my cock as you come."

His words pushed me over the edge, and my body exploded.

I clenched around him. He thrust into me a few more times before he pulled out/

I collapsed on the bed beside Shaw, and the men gathered around me, their cocks still hard and ready.

"I'm not done with you," Cole said with a grin, leaning over to kiss me.

"Good," I said. "Because I'm not done with you either."

"I love a woman who knows what she wants," Cole said. He turned me around so I was on all fours and began to thrust into me. I moaned as he filled me, my body already craving more.

My body was on fire as they took me in every way possible. I had never felt so desired. So loved. And so satisfied.

By the time they were done with me, my body was spent. I fell asleep wrapped in their arms, all of us lying together in the bed.

That night, I didn't dream.

Because I was home.

EPILOGUE



Each man of mine wanted something different for our wedding. Of course they all had to be special.

Liam's request was a private ceremony in the woods. He wanted to be alone with just me, I could tell. But he was the one who suggested we celebrate our vows immediately afterward with our families.

Deep in the forest, surrounded by the hush and the soft sound of falling leaves floating around us, Liam looked into my eyes and told me, "You know, you save me, Amelia."

I took his face in both my hands. "We save each other, I think."

Then he kissed me, soft and slow.

When the two of us walked back a half mile to where our family waited on the path, they cheered for us. Rose hugged me, beaming at me.

She wasn't in a rush to get married anymore. I was grateful for that. In the King pack, she could just...be a teenager.

"He's my favorite," she whispered to me. "But don't tell anyone."

"He is pretty special." I felt myself smile as I watched Brennan, Cole, Shaw and Stone surround him, patting his shoulders and grinning at him. I was pretty sure they were telling him he was lucky to go first.

A month later, my men, Karissa, Aiden and Lawson, flew to Vegas with Shaw. Sitting in first class, I asked him, "Is it really an elopement if you bring everyone you know with you?"

"This has always been my dream," he said.

"I thought your dream was of always being the filthy player I first met," I returned.

Shaw gave me a wink. "I was always only waiting for you, babe."

“You’re ridiculous,” I told him, but I let him kiss me anyway, and then the two of us tumbled back in my seat as he kissed me, until I was worried we’d get scolded by an airline steward.

I drank mocktails in Vegas while Shaw had the raucous party of his dreams. The truth was, I loved dancing with him, and I loved when my men and I took the dance floor and I danced with all five of them under the strobing lights. Their hands teased over my body and lit a fire I was eager to quench that night when we all tumbled into bed at the hotel.

Shaw was hungover when an imitation Elvis married us, but he said it was still the best day of his life. He wanted to wait to mark me until I had the baby, just in case it hurt the baby somehow, but he was drunk again when he got a mate mark of his own worked in amongst his tattoos.

He grinned at me, that devilish, irresistible smile. “I want everyone to know I’m taken by the most beautiful, brilliant, sexy, amazing woman in the world.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll make sure everyone knows you’re taken,” I’d promised him, before straddling his lap to admire his tattoos up close and personal.

Cole’s wedding the next month was big and traditional, in front of the whole pack. The sprawling green yard was taken up by the dance floor and by what seemed like a thousand flowers decorating every available surface.

Dylan carried the ring, and Cole lifted Dylan up onto his hip when Dylan reached us. Dylan leaned his head on Cole’s shoulder, looking totally comfortable like he belonged there, as Cole and I said our vows.

The whole pack was at our party afterward. Dylan and his little friends raced amongst the tables, playing hide and seek and tag. There was an endless stream of well-wishers, until finally Cole took my hand and pulled me away with him to his little cottage. He carried me over the threshold, then set me down, kissing me deeply just inside the doorway.

He grinned at me as he leaned against the door, pinning me. Luckily, he was pinning me right where I wanted to be. “I just want some time alone with my wife.”

He said the words like he relished them.

“You know you’re going to need to move with me,” I said. “Wherever it is we decide we want to all live together.”

I couldn’t decide between the big house and my rebuilt cottage. I loved them both so much.

Both places were full of happy memories now, even though they had been

touched by so much darkness too.

“Wherever you go, I’ll go,” he promised me, and then he was kissing me again, and the two of us stumbled through his cottage to his bed.

All Stone really cared about was our honeymoon. He said yes to everything I wanted with regards to our wedding—I loved when Stone just said yes—and as soon as we were married, we flew to California.

The night we checked into the hotel, we walked out onto the beach and watched the ocean thundering in on the beach.

“I know you never made it here and you dreamt of coming,” Stone said. “I wanted to give you the chance to see the west coast.”

The breeze ruffled his dark hair. He looked relaxed, different, now that he wasn’t carrying the whole weight of the pack on his shoulders alone. He and Cole and his brothers were finding a different way forward now.

“I was running away from you,” I teased him. “Are you sure I won’t run away now?”

He let out a growl and moved behind me, his arms wrapping around my waist. He kissed the nape of my neck, and I cocked my head to one side, welcoming more kisses. “Never,” he said against my skin. “I’ll never give you a reason to run away from me.”

A month after we came home, Brennan and I had a small ceremony in the cottage, in front of his family. Aiden walked me down the aisle. I stopped at the end of the aisle and smiled at my younger brother. His tousled brown hair didn’t hide his scar anymore. He didn’t seem to be ashamed of it anymore.

Marrying Brennan was better the wedding I’d dreamt of, all those years ago, when I picked out a dress in a thrift shop.

Best of all was going home with my men afterward.

And a few months after I was a properly married woman, the five of them paced, and Rose held my hand, and I delivered my second child.

When she was snuggled in my arms, fed and drowsy for the first time, Dylan came in and climbed up onto the bed beside me. “Can I hold her?”

She was dark haired and blue eyed and half Fae, like her big brother. And like her big brother, I was sure she would grow up to be powerful.

But most of all, she would be so very loved.

A NOTE FROM MAY

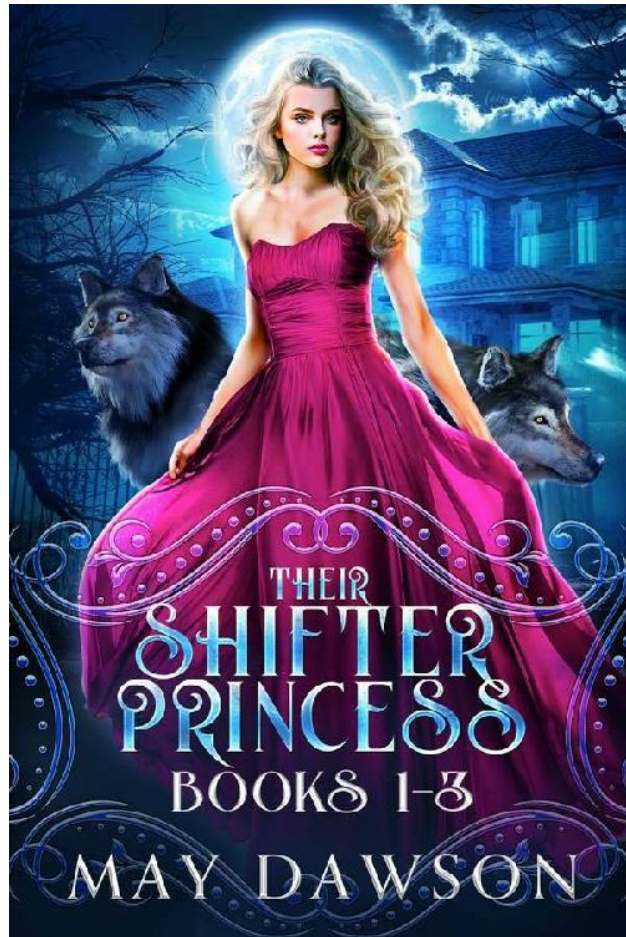
I hope you enjoyed The Darkest Mark series! What am I up to next? Alphahole ice Fae, dragon shifters, forced proximity, fake marriage... Heart of Ice is going to be a wild ride.



Join my Facebook readers' group, [May Dawson's Wild Angels](#), for exclusive excerpts, giveaways and discussion!



ALSO BY MAY DAWSON



All I care about is saving my little sister from the mansion of horrors where we've been raised. Enter four alluring men, who seem to be determined to protect me... if I can trust them. But they're hiding secrets of their own.



Five years ago, I was found wandering in the woods with a sword, a note, and no memories. Now four Fae kings have come to find me... but these ex-lovers of mine are determined to punish me for sins I don't remember.