



# WOLF SPELL

THE WITCH AND THE WEREWOLF

BOOK I

JN MOON

# **WOLF SPELL**

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URBAN FANTASY ROMANCE.

THE WITCH & THE WEREWOLF SERIES.

BOOK 1

JN MOON



The Witch & The Werewolf Series.

**Book I of III: Wolf Spell.**

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*NOTE: JN MOON is a British Author.*

*The following is therefore written in **British Grammar.***

*Just like Bram Stoker's Dracula!*

# CONTENTS

[FREE Book. Wolf Moon.](#)

[Savernake Pack](#)

[The Hunt](#)

[Bitten](#)

[Eye of Newt](#)

[Coven](#)

[Dragon Flame](#)

[Wolf & Witch](#)

[Adara](#)

[Lifting the Veil](#)

[Dragon's Lair](#)

[The Faceless](#)

[Bite of the Werewolf](#)

[Wolf Trap Excerpt](#)

[Wolf Moon](#)

[Wolf Spell Notes](#)

[JN MOON Books](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Connect](#)

**FREE BOOK. WOLF MOON.**

GRAB YOUR COMPLIMENTARY COPY OF WOLF MOON

A LONE ALPHA. A COMMUNITY SHATTERED BY A BLOODBATH.

A LOVE BORN FROM THE ASHES...



*Dedicated to my friends and teachers who have stood beside me and believed  
in me.*

## SAVERNAKE PACK

Face to face with a dangerous alpha was not how I'd imagined my Saturday night. Let alone being on his territory, which he'd see as an invitation to claim me and my friends. Uninvited and on werewolf land, we knew the rules. But we didn't have time to wait to be asked.

We were looking for Josey's best friend, Lisa, who we believed had run off, or worse, had been kidnapped by a werewolf. We knew his name was Nathan and we also knew it was forbidden for witches and werewolves to date. Lisa was new to coven life, but had been highly recommended by Josey, so throwing that away had shaken us to our core.

And as for the Savernake pack, they were one of the most brutal.

I resisted a shiver as dread gnawed at my stomach and fear caught in my throat. Against the wishes of our coven leader, we were at the edge of the forest, his forest at night, alone to face a ruthless pack.

Her hands slunk into her coat, Josey glanced at us. "I just can't believe it, I've known Lisa all my life. She's always wanted to be in the Badbury Rings coven. That's all she's spoken about since we were at school, and I would've invited her earlier but Mattie insisted Lisa waited until she was more adept at magic. I knew she had it in her, I don't believe she'd throw that all away for a guy. Especially a stinky werewolf! Unless it was her magic that attracted this animal to her?" She frowned. "The Savernake's are known to dabble with the



occult.”

I bit my lip. I was one of the few, perhaps the only witch who didn't believe we should be segregated. I didn't see werewolves as evil, at least not all of them. Or all shifters for that matter. As witches, it was expected, if we wanted to pair up, to do that with mages. To keep the blood lines pure with magic. It was archaic to say the least. I had fought to get into the Badbury Rings coven, coming from a family where my mother was outcast as a rebel. My father left when I was young, all I knew was that he thought my mother's ideas were too radical. She'd never dissuaded me from joining a coven, even though she'd been asked to leave the Badbury Rings coven herself, always letting me make up my own mind. When I'd asked her about it, she'd shake her head. “It doesn't matter, follow your own heart. It just wasn't for me. A hedge witch through and through, I work better alone. I didn't like being told what to do, what to think. You want to join a coven, see for yourself.”

And perhaps being more like her than I realised, I found myself disagreeing with my friends about their stifling beliefs. But I kept it to myself. Otherwise, like my mum, I'd be asked to leave, too. And I wasn't sure I wanted that. They were pretty much the only family I had. Mum and me, we weren't exactly close, I rarely saw or heard from her.

As we walked on the track leading to the forest, the ground squelched beneath my boots. Rich with the scent of rotten leaves and rain, the path was littered with burnt copper, red and yellow leaves. Their colours caught in the weak silver rays of the moon. Trees outlined the path, their shadows swaying on the breeze, the velvet night clawed in around us.

Pulling my coat tighter around me, my other hand tightened around my athame. I wasn't planning on using it, it was more for show and the um, the illegal magic I'd imbued it with before dragging my two friends here.

As for mages, admittedly I didn't know many. The few I'd met were arrogant, from very rich families and would certainly look down on someone like me.

I'm not from a wealthy family. It was expected, if you wielded magic, that you could at least be rich. Austin was the only mage I knew who was also from an ordinary family. He was great as a friend. But the rules were strict. But then so was our coven leader, Mattie when she said she would face the Savernake pack and we should stay out of it. Yet, here we are!

Becca grumbled. "For the goddess's sake, Elsa, stop biting your nails, you're making me nervous!"

Peeved, I slunk my hand away. Becca, who was picky and had more confidence than anyone I'd ever met, was a close friend to Josey. The two were almost inseparable. Becca was a hundred percent focused on coven life, and had been like a mentor to me since I'd joined. Apart from Lisa, I was still seen as the new girl. Becca gasped, "Josey, we should keep our voices down. At least until we meet Marrock. You know these wolves roam the woods. We should've let Mattie handle this, I can't believe you two talked me out of a meal with Jamie! God, I could be sitting in a warm restaurant right now eating tapas!"

"Hey, Lisa's here somewhere. I don't know about you, because I only met her a few times but there's no way I could think of her being here, and... God knows what's happened to her! I don't care if Lisa chose to come here, I only care that she's alright."

Josey's stare bit through me, her teeth gritted. "That's because you're new. You don't realise the repercussions if Lisa is shackled up with a wolf!"

Urgently I whispered back, "There are no repercussions. It's made up. If she's ok, and here out of her own choice, then so be it."

Now Becca stopped suddenly. "No. That's not it at all. Aside from Lisa and all her associations, friends, all of us will be shunned by every coven on the planet," she exhaled. "Mattie said the witches, even the mangy werewolves that had gone missing, it's a result of the two species interfering with each other. As in, if you mix outside of your species, it makes all magic unstable."

I couldn't repress a giggle. I know it wasn't appropriate. I do that though sometimes. Laugh when I'm scared.

*"Interfering?* You mean sleeping with each other. You really think vampires stick to vampires, demons with demons? Do *you* really know Jamie's history? You think he only dates other witches?"

She fixed me with a mean stare. "Yes, he wouldn't break the rules. He'd risk being kicked out. Of shaming his entire family. What would you know?"

I wet my lips, shaking my head. "Nothing." That killed our conversation.

The cold moonlight barely lit our way as shadows stretched from the trees surrounding us as we made our way alongside the woods.

Aside from the crunching of our boots, the only other sounds were the thumping of my heart that clouded my ears and the occasional haunting cry from an owl. Bitter air stung my nose. I twisted my neck, trying to hunker down into the high collar of my coat, keeping any warmth in.

I ought to feel at home in an ancient forest at night. I am a witch after all.

But something far scarier lurked in these woods and though I couldn't yet smell them, I knew they were here. Watching. I could feel their eyes burning into me.

But this couldn't wait until morning. We had to do this now and the blood magic I'd used as protection, though highly dangerous, felt like smog around me.

They'd sense me for sure.

My fingers gripped tighter around my athame. I prayed to the goddess that they wouldn't leap out to tear us to shreds. We were, after all, on their territory.

In the wolf's den.

A vicious and bloodthirsty pack who feasted on the blood of humans.

And vampires. And witches.  
And who used magic.

Like a knife smarting skin, his voice made me jerk, booming across the night, my heart skittered.

“Well ladies, welcome. You’re either desperate or foolish. Which is it?”

Marrock, the alpha, emerged silently from the trees and stood in front of us. I hadn’t smelt him.

As he strode forward, the moonlight outlined his dark brows and wavy hair that framed his angular face. His stare fell to me, bronze eyes pierced right through my soul.

My stupid heart skittered. For a moment I almost raised my chin in defiance, but he could sense fear. Perhaps he’d respect honesty.

I met his eye, trying to steady my voice. “One of our witches was seen with your pack member two nights ago. We’d like her back. Alive.”

Marrock said nothing. Barefoot, he was dressed only in jeans that clung to his muscular legs, tattoos adorned his toned body.

Trying hard not to swallow, I held my breath in an attempt to calm my pulse as he circled us, his breathing hard.

Josey called him out. “Where’s Lisa? And don’t claim you don’t know, you’re the alpha. If you’ve harmed her...”

He ignored her and still pinned me with his stare. He figured, I guess, I was the weakest. I’d remember that. I swallowed back my pride, letting him believe whatever he wanted, so long as it helped Lisa.

Leaning in he lowered his voice, “Why you? Your coven master too scared to

meet me, so she sent her lessers? Or was she afraid that, by the very fact that you entered my territory, well now... *you're mine*. I can claim you. Or was that the real reason you came here, Elsa?"

I could feel his breath on my neck as he stood behind me, not touching but so close.

Blinking for a moment, I almost swooned. He was on fire and thank God I'd used potent magic because he was hot as hell.

Addictive. Dangerous. Forbidden.

Josey and Becca made grunts of disgust. I really doubted they meant it.

Trying to sound confident, I replied, "We came... Mattie, she doesn't know, I mean our coven leader, she doesn't know we're here. How do you know my name? I've never-"

He put his hand gently on my shoulder as he whispered, "Oh I know you. I know all the witches. So, no one knows you're here?" A chill shivered down my back as he stepped away, his shoulders dropped as he stood before me but now kept his distance.

In the soft glow of midnight, I caught a better look at his face. Dark curly hair, a few strands swept over his eyes, stubble framed his square jaw and his wide lips. I'd heard all the tales about him but I'd never met him until now. He was right of course, it was the law of his kind.

If you stepped foot onto their territory without an invitation, they could claim you. And you, by their law, had to submit. But I wasn't one to kneel. Not to Mattie and especially not him!

Sighing, his voice was calmer as he said, "I don't mean to frighten you. You are all foolish. I mean, you all know the rules but I'd like to think I'm progressive. A witch you say. One of many I imagine. We've all suffered losses over the last few weeks. Well, she could be here, I don't know." He

shot me a smile, sexy and scary. His lips parted a bit too wide, so I caught a flash of his fangs.

Then he turned his face to Josey and Becca. “I am the alpha, obviously, but I don’t keep tabs on my wolves twenty-four-seven. It’s up to them who they choose to date. Or bed.”

Narrowing my eyes I say, “Progressive? You eat people.”

“Only bad people, Elsa. And only when I’m in wolf form. I mean tonight,” he grinned again, “I had steak. Organic, in fact. That’s pretty... *progressive*, wouldn’t you say?”

“So, is she here? It’s forbidden...”

He laughed as he flaunted his authority, almost puffing up his chest.

I shifted from foot to foot, glad I was wearing my leather jacket and baggy jumper, as I felt his eyes burn through my clothes as he slowly surveyed me. I was here to rescue my friend, not be coaxed by a jackass, however hot he was.

“Forbidden, blah, blah, blah... We are werewolves. Immortals. Yes, we eat who we please and we share our beds with whoever we choose. Who are you to judge us? Your kind has killed innocents caught in the crossfire! Forbidden, ha! If I choose to bed a witch, who the hell are you to tell me otherwise? Love doesn’t choose. Ah. You’ve never been in love, have you Elsa? Married to the craft?”

“We need Lisa back. Now.”

He shrugged, a boyish grin on his face. Then dramatically holding up bent arms he said, “You’ll have to see for yourself. With all that’s been going on, I’ve had bigger worries, as I imagine you have. Maybe she thought she’d be safer with us. Still, I don’t ask each member of my pack who they’re bedding.”

I sighed. At least he wasn’t trying to tear me to shreds but he wasn’t

helping much, either. He was enjoying the attention and he'd be in deep shit when other immortals found out that a werewolf was sleeping with a witch.

As for Lisa... she'd probably be thrown out of the coven. But we'd try and stop that if we could. Or at least I would.

Stepping forward, right up to him, I locked eyes with him and asked, "Can you at least show us where we might find her? The wolf's name she was seen with is Nathan."

I rolled my eyes as he licked his lips, his eyes lingering for too long. "Nathan huh? Well good for him. I'll show you, Elsa. But-"

Interrupting, I pushed past him, distracted. I saw the shadowy figures of wolves in the treeline.

Becca huffed, "Yes, yes. You want something in return for helping us get our sister back from your mangy beast. I'll be happy to inform the council of your progressive, witch bedding nature. Primitive. We'll pay your price, so long as Lisa is safe and... unharmed."

He scowled, snatching her arm. "Your opinion of my pack sickens me. What do you think we'd do to her?"

"Not eat her? That would be a good start."

"No. But my price might be to eat *you*."

"Welcome to try, Marrock."

His voice raised, sharp, he bit back, "You should show a little respect. You're on my territory, wanting my help. You all make me sick. Arrogant, prudish witches."

I turned to face him again, and now I spoke a little softer. Truth was,

Marrock had a brutal reputation. He was as cruel as he was charming. It irked me that he was right, though. We should play along, for Lisa's sake.

“You're right. Forgive us, we're worried for her. We've all been through Hell. Some witches from other covens have gone missing, your werewolves, too. Odd that it hasn't affected vampires or demons though. It seems someone's singling out our two species. We've all heard the rumours.”

I heard Josey gasp, and I glanced over my shoulder wide-eyed at her. She looked away.

He stepped towards me, his brilliant eyes burning into mine. “Rumours? That we eat witches? Ok, fair enough. We *have* killed witches in the past, but they were hellbent on destroying us. Though,” he sniggered, “I wouldn't mind eating you, Elsa.”

I couldn't help rolling my eyes. “Do you think your cheesy pick-up lines work?”

He shrugged. “Hey, I've never had complaints! Look—” he glanced away, his brow furrowed. “Some of my pack have gone missing. We're all on edge. Follow me, ladies.”

I called after him, sharper than I'd intended,

“It doesn't bother you that Nathan, a member under your protection, will be punished if he and Lisa are found together? You'd rather make lewd suggestions, seriously?”

Before I could blink, he was before me, growling, snatching at my arms. “Look! A few of my pack have left, in the wake of hearing about other werewolves from other packs, murdered. Nathan is perfectly safe, I saw him yesterday. As for him hooking up with a witch, I'll kill anyone who tries to harm him. He can screw who he likes, I only care that it's consensual. As for



sex, we're part animal. We always want it, I've yet to meet a woman who can keep up. But don't tell me you're not turned on, I know that you are." He narrowed his eyes, lips parted. I almost felt I could hear his heartbeat speed up. I burned inside. Chiding myself, I shouldn't be feeling that! For a second my heart burned, and... other areas. No! I'm here to save Lisa. I'm not his groupie.

He continued, his eyes studying my face, his body just inches from mine. His scent was musky, his presence sparked a primal craving within me. Swallowing hard, I forced my breathing to slow down.

But he knew, as his smile widened. "You want me as much as I want you. I know you find me attractive."

I laughed. Unfortunately, it was shaky. "I'm sure that you know you are attractive, Marrock, you and your giant ego."

Sneering, he stepped aside.

I couldn't say anymore. It was clear that screwing and killing were his life. Nothing I could say would change that. He was a mister right now, rather than a mister right. If you slept with him, you'd have to accept the fact that he'd be onto the next woman before the next sunrise.

Shooting a glance at my hand, he says, "Your dagger, or no, athame. Bless you that you think that will protect you against us. You reek of blood magic. Subconsciously, you know you wanted to meet me face to face. Otherwise you would've simply called me."

I said nothing. I didn't call because I didn't trust him. If he'd killed Lisa, he'd hardly say, sure, pop over.

Still, it would be reckless to believe him. Whatever he claimed, he was deadly, so we followed him and picked our way through the undergrowth.

"You sure there isn't an actual path to Nathan's place?" Josey snapped.

Without turning around, he answered, "I thought you ladies would prefer

the scenic route. Or is this too uncivilised for you? I could have my pack carry you if it's too much."

As for me, I tried to memorise every detail as he was leading us off the beaten path, so I could trace my way back if I needed to. But there were no markers, and I'm not great on tree species.

*Good thing I brought my broom to fly home on. Sorry, I couldn't resist!*

A very faint sound of feet padding in the distance didn't escape me or my heart. My fingers gripped my athame tighter, my muscles tensed.

Suddenly he turned, rushing me, his arms on either side of mine as he pinned me against a tree.

"You are full of fear, Elsa. Your heart is making me edgy. You should know-"

Tilting my head, I raised my knee slowly to his groin, then drew my arms in together, pushing him back.

"I get it, my fear is exciting you. Deal with it. I don't kneel to any man, Marrock. If anyone kneels, it would be you."

His shoulders rose as he laughed hard from his belly. "You what now? Really? You want an alpha, me, to submit? *To you, a woman?*"

Shaking my head, I responded, "Come on, caveman. Enough of your last century games. The twenty-first century really is lost on your kind, isn't it?"

Becca muttered, "And soap by the smell of them."

His stare didn't break as his lips drew tight together. Then his face softened into a smile. "I like you. You're kind of hot. I've never met a

woman who stood up to me. And lived.”

“What, most women melt under your lupine gaze? You don’t get out much.”

He shrugged. “Yes, they do. And you’re right, I don’t get out much. I have a pack to run. Come on, love. Nathan lives this way.”

Becca whined quietly. “She’d better be here. I could be eating shrimp and tacos instead of being in this wet, stinking place!”

I got it. It was wet, it hadn’t stopped raining for days. Now my boots were damp. Cold bit under my scarf, travelling down my neck. But aside from that, I loved the forest. Being out in nature, with comforts, it was my favourite place. And oddly, I liked most shifters. Not this one though. A fact that Becca and Josey chided me on constantly.

He strode quicker. We had to double our pace to keep up with him.

Swallowing hard, I could hardly believe I just said that to him, that I had stood up to Marrock. I could fight him for sure, and maybe I’d win. But his pack, all of them? I cursed in my head. I needed to be more careful. Act a little less brazen. I was in his den after all. Without an invitation.

The scent of wood and the sweetness of rotten leaves changed. Iron, copper, blood. Marrock stopped dead still, his head tilted back as he inhaled deeply. Peeking through the thick oaks and maples, an orange glow dappled, reflecting through the dense branches and as my sight adjusted, I saw the outline of a snug lodge. Perhaps Nathan had been hunting?

Without speaking, Marrock broke into a run, weaving in and out of the coarse shrubs and tightly packed trees. He didn’t flinch as branches tore his skin. I gripped my athame tighter as we followed him at a distance, unable to

pick our way through as fast.

Whining, Becca stopped. “Bloody hell, Elsa! Remind me to ignore you forever. Look, my jacket has torn on these bloody brambles. What’s the mangy alpha up to now?”

Ignoring her, I struggled through the almost waist high undergrowth to catch up to him. My legs were sore, like Becca, as brambles had snagged at them.

Panting, he stood outside the home, wide eyed, hands limp by his side as he stared up at the open front door. Sweat glistened on his forehead and his chest. He went to leap forward, I snatched at his arm and missed, instead grabbing his hand. His gaze fell to my fingers, wrapped around his, then he locked my stare, slack-jawed.

“Marrock, what’s wrong? Surely the smell is blood from a hunt. I can’t detect human blood.”

His lips twisted into a growl, he tugged his hand free and bounded away, frantically looking up at the branches above.

Before I could catch up, he ran into the lodge.

Trees had been cleared for the home, a log cabin, two-storeys high, and glimmering from the roof were solar panels. The sound of flapping as a windmill chugged on top. I’d heard about the werewolves, and other shifters moving to use off grid power. Most witches were sceptical, but I thought it was apt. After all, they were part-animal and most animals live in harmony with nature. So why wouldn’t shifters, werewolves? Even this vicious pack seemed to want that. After all, whoever heard of werewolves getting an electric bill?

We ran up the wooden steps and I managed to squeeze through the front door that this alpha was blocking.

On the wall opposite the door, a huge pentagram trickled, smeared in blood.

My breath hitched, and I could feel his anger burning like heat, now he laid it on me.

Grabbing me by the neck so fast, I dropped the athame which his eyes followed as it tumbled out of my grip. Then pressing himself against me he snarled, “Bloody witches! What have you done? This is a trick. You’re here to distract me, whilst your stinky coven destroys my pack? Huh, is that it?”

Josey and Becca spat a curse at him, pummelling him with a bolt of heat but that made him tighten his grip around me as he growled.

I tried to knee him in the balls but he blocked me. I couldn’t breathe, let alone answer. So close to me, his body pressed into mine, I could feel his heart beating faster, matching mine.

“I’ll burn you alive, Elsa. And your witchy friends. Then I’ll piss on your ashes. You hear me, bitch?”

Josey lunged at him, he threw her off without trying, snarling, “Your magic has less power here. I’m warded.”

“Well this house obviously wasn’t warded enough, alpha-hole. Why the heck would our coven do this? The clue is, we wouldn’t. You have absolutely nothing that interests us,” Josey chided.

Becca stepped back warily as Josey rubbed her head, seething and slowly scrambled up.

*I should’ve come alone.*

A voice shouted his name in the distance. Gasping for breath, shaking, I slumped as his grip loosened.

“Marrock, look!” the shifter squealed in horror.

As the alpha stepped away, I tensed, summoning a whip of fiery energy, feeling its heat as it whirled from my heart through my limbs like an electric

current. For a split second my eyes flickered, then muttering a spell I blasted him with a bolt of scorching light. Unlike Josey and Becca, I'd added blood magic to my incantations.

It smashed into his back, taking him to his knees. Anger boiled inside of me. "This has nothing to do with us, you insolent prick! You don't interest us that much. Next time..."

A cracking, snapping of bones had me inhale sharply.

The alpha was changing, morphing into the beast. I scooped down, grabbing at my athame as his knuckles wracked the ground.

Panting he snarled, "Try that again, I'll set my pack on you. Do you understand?"

Shaking, I edged outside the doorway as he remained in human form.

I tried to think, but shock reverberated through me. I glanced back at the pentagram and as he bolted out, and made my way to the back wall.

Cringing at the iron stench, the dark magic stuck in the back of my throat. Casting my hand over the pentagram, it felt familiar somehow. As I held my hand there, dizziness had me blinking rapidly.

Becca and Josey sprang over to me.

"Holy hell, no wonder he was pissed off!"

Becca shuddered. "What the...? Who could've done this, our coven is the closest. This has to be something to do with Lisa, oh God, Lisa."

Turning too fast, I put my hand out, Josey grabbed it. Keeping my voice low I said, "Do you think this is their doing, one of the packs? Marrock might be alright with his pack dating witches, but I'm betting most of his pack aren't."

Pulling my hand away, I steadied myself. As I eyed the place walking around, Josey and Becca mustered magic to reveal whose blood was sprawled on the wall.

The lodge was cosy. Thick wool rugs lined the wooden floor, a fire was

dying in the burner and pictures of who I presumed to be Nathan and his family, his friends adorned the walls. I could see why Lisa would've fallen for him. Like Marrock, his dark hair fell just below his ears. High cheek bones, square jaw and stubble. Huge dark eyes with a smile that would melt any heart. His features were softer than Marrock. A young man, or werewolf not as jaded as his alpha.

A small gold frame twinkled, catching my eye. It was next to a chair beside the log burner on a round teak table. A photo of Nathan and Lisa, laughing in each other's arms.

So, who had taken the photograph? And she'd obviously been seeing him for sometime, in secret, for him to have a photo of them. This wasn't a recent fling.

What other secrets were hiding here?

I walked back over to the wall, leaning in to smell the blood that had been used to smear the pentagram. As my finger lightly touched the blood, ice blasted through my veins. I shook violently.

I knew whose blood it was. Suddenly confused, my head swam again as if I was drunk. Stumbling, ignoring the protests from my friends, I followed the alpha who had bounded ahead of me. He stood dead still. Then he cried out.

His voice echoed through the surrounding forest, ripping right through my body.

“No...no ...no!”

As I neared him, numb from shock he spun around, his eyes like saucers, fangs extended, half morphed into the beast, he lunged at me. Gripping me tightly, he pulled me into him. Muscular arms wrapped around me, I couldn't move.

Lowering his voice, he said, “You do not want to see this. I'm sorry, the pentagram, I thought, come away, you can't see this...”

Emotions welled, bursting like a dam, bursting the bubble of the strong witch, of the independent woman that I showed to the world. Tears betrayed my sense of strength. Choking them back I whispered, “It was her blood on the wall. It was Lisa’s.”

Becca and Josey wailed, their screams cutting through me.

Marrock’s voice deepened, “Adam, alert the others. Cut them down.”

I twisted to break free of Marrock’s arms but he only tightened his grip, pulling me in as if there was any gap between us.

“I’m sorry, Elsa. I was wrong. I know this can’t be you. I don’t detect a hint of malice from you, unlike others of your kin. I overreacted. I’m prone to that. But I don’t want you to see this, you should remember her as she was.”

“No, let go of me. She’s my friend.”

“God damn woman, let me help. Let me at least save you from this... nightmare.”

But I didn’t. “I need no saving.”

He broke his grasp, as I twisted around, stumbled, stupefied only to end up in his grip again as the horror, the shock of what I saw made my legs turn to jelly. I couldn’t breathe. As a witch I’d seen horrors. But I’d never seen anything like this.

As the sweat broke on my forehead, my breath caught in the back of my throat. I felt Marrock’s strong hands gently pull me away, his voice soft as he muttered.

The big bad wolf had another side it seemed.

“We will find who did this. We’ll need to work together. They’ve used magic, obviously. And we’ll slaughter them just as they’ve slaughtered our



friends...”

## THE HUNT

Dread still clawed at my throat, clung to my limbs. I forced myself to breathe deeply as I slowly pushed him away. He took my arms in his hands, worry tugging at his twisted lips. I flushed, embarrassed to look so weak. However terrible this was, I should look strong. I represented the coven. Mattie, our leader, would be fearless.

Becca and Josey gripped onto each other. Josey, full of wrath, shot him a look full of daggers. Her raw voice cut through him, “This is all your fault. You and your progressive ways! You should never have allowed your wolf to contaminate her, filthy monsters!”

Unable to contain his rage, he let go of my arms and lunged at her then flung her into his pack. The burly men encircled us, each sneering towards us.

Pointing, Marrock ordered, “Get them off my land. Only she can stay. If they don’t comply, put the finger cuffs on them.”

“Elsa, come on. We’ve seen enough. We must tell Mattie. Hurry.”

Choking back the bile, I shook my head. “No. You go. I’m staying for now, though I want to leave. I’ll see what I can find out. You go.”

Becca narrowed her eyes on me. “I can’t believe you think you can help... *them*? Choosing wolves over witches. It’s sick, Elsa, these mangy things...”

Look what's happened to Lisa. Don't expect to be welcomed back. Come on, Josey."

Josey held a mean stare with me. Honestly, at times like these, I knew why my mum had left the coven. Mages, it seemed, had it easier, freelancing with whomever they please.

They shrugged off the shifters' hands who were about to frog march them out and they didn't look back.

The stench of flayed flesh and blood had me choke back a gag. Marrock put his hand on my arm. His voice was almost a whisper, "You don't have to pretend to rise above this, Elsa. It's bloody awful. In all my years, I've never seen anything so appalling, so vile. You can't deal with it. *Heck, I can't deal with it.*" His eyes darted around us, as if he was waiting for an attack. I could sense it, too, not just from the massacre but something deeper, older. Malevolence hung in the air, heavy, like fog weighing us down.

His pack scrambled, their sounds of horror, disgust, gagging and the unmistakable click and clank as rifles were loaded and checked.

I gasped. "I need to find out who did this, I need-"

"A drink. Come. You know, you surprise me. You could have easily run back to your coven, and yet you want to help?"

I shrugged, inhaling hard to catch my breath.

"Why do you let them talk to you like that, why are you even in a coven, you clearly don't belong there?"

My shoulders slumped. "I joined because of the camaraderie. I've only been in the coven for about a year. I never realised it was so..."

"Authoritarian? Geez. Come on, you look pale, you're either going to

puke or pass out, so let me take you away. We can come back at first light. Whatever was here,” again his eyes scanned the trees around us, “well, it ain’t here now. *I hope*. Looks like it’s after your kind, as well as mine. Besides, Mattie isn’t the most endearing of people. I don’t want the rest of her witches trampling around my patch. You, I don’t mind so much. For now.”

I hesitated, but I knew he was right.

Nausea lolled. I wiped my forehead with my sleeve.

Reluctantly I held out my hand, catching his half glance under his fringe as he forced a smile.

I didn't care now. Seeing my friend sliced up, body parts strewn from branches, well, holding an alpha's hand in comparison to that, wasn't a problem.

I did need him. Or somebody. I couldn't do this alone and his past transgressions, they seemed insignificant compared to this. Maybe his barbaric side would even help get us through this?

Marrock stayed close, his warm hand engulfing mine as he slowly led me back onto the path and past Nathan's lodge. As they passed us, his pack narrowed their eyes with mistrust, but said nothing.

Witches and werewolves had a shaky, violent past.

Taking a sharp left from the path, we wound our way through the forest until I could see a large lodge. The warm copper glow from the windows and a soft yellow beam of light over the front porch spilled into the forest around it. Comforting and inviting. A longing even, a chance of respite that I needed. I felt oddly faint, scared and totally out of my depth.

Outside, a truck and an old sports car were parked. At the front of the two-storey lodge, rows of neatly grown herbs, spices and plants with thick wool insulation at their bases. I suspected that he didn't grow the herbs.

Wooden steps led up into his home. He pulled his keys from his pocket with his free hand, and never let go of mine. I gulped. It seemed to have taken until now for my head to clear, for my thoughts to become coherent.

But as he stepped inside, doubt strangled my throat, my breathing hitched as he pulled me in with him.

I needed to get out. To run. Or I'd be next.

What the hell was I doing? Was this a trap? Had he or his men slain my friend, I mean I couldn't tell. I was so shocked by the images. Or had Nathan gone crazy, turned into a wolf and devoured Lisa? Was I next? What the bloody hell was I doing trusting this alpha whose reputation was brutal, to say the least. How did I know?

He saw this, smelt the sudden fear and let go of my hand, his eyes averted. His voice was like silk as he said, "Look, go if you must. I get it, you don't trust me. Heck, I wouldn't trust me if I was you. And if it helps, I don't trust you, either. I mean, that massacre involved magic, and you're a witch. And we already know you've used blood magic on this night, for whatever fine a reason. For all I know, that dark, twisted and forbidden magic could have set off a stream of bloody events. And yet, here I am offering you sanctuary in my home. But I swear, I have no idea what this is, except you're not safe on your own in the woods tonight. Hell, I don't think any of us are. Stay, go... whatever. But if you come in, I will do my best to protect you. Perhaps you could do the same for me?"

For some stupid ass reason, at that moment I did trust him. Or perhaps I just wanted to trust him. Something that awful, shared between us made me feel drawn to him. Foolish, I know.

Mattie would know soon thanks to Josey and Becca, but she'd never realise the full horror of it. I dragged my shocked self into his home and followed him into his grand living room. Oak stairs ascended on one side, a

large fireplace at one end with opulent, furnished seats encircling it. I narrowed my eyes as I saw the pictures around his home. They were expensive, you could almost smell the money. A framed skull, wearing a crown with paint bursts which made it look like the painting was sparkling and unusual fine art paintings of werewolves, silhouetted amongst darkened trees. I didn't know how his pack made their money. I doubted it was anything legal though. But whatever it was, I could see he at least made a lot of it.

As he made his way over to an oak side table, glancing over his shoulder, he caught me staring. "I like unusual and pretty things to look at. Please, sit down. And don't be nervous. If I'd wanted to eat you, I would've done it by now. Drink?"

Absent-mindedly, I found I was biting my nails again. Placing my hands beside my legs, I pulled my back straight in the chair. My mind now firmly back in the game I asked, "Shouldn't you be helping your pack?"

"I'm the alpha, if there's any evidence, or anything of note, they'll let me know. Right now, I need to think. With you." He handed me a glass, quart full of whiskey. I sniffed it. I don't usually drink.

His voice was slightly gruffer now. "Drink it, you'll need it. It's smooth. Look, a werewolf and a witch..."

He sipped his drink, then splayed his hand before sitting in a large chair next to me. His furniture was oversized, the cushions were so soft I wanted to lose myself in the chair, to slink down, to hide. Before us the fire in the hearth was dying.

Leaning towards me he asked, "You ever heard the tale? The Witch and the Werewolf?"

Tentatively I sipped the drink. “No. Did you just make it up?”

“Jesus Christ, you don’t trust anybody do you? What the hell, with your coven master, has she told you nothing? As far as I know, she’s still involved. Look, about a century ago, there was a wolf from this pack called Zale.”

“Zale sounds like a modern name, surely?”

Slamming his drink on the table before us, Marrock lunged over from his chair. “Elsa, do me a favour, love, either shut the hell up and listen, or go home.”

I bit my lip.

He huffed, “Thank you. That’s why I don’t date, you women are exhausting. You never, ever shut the hell up! Now, Mattie, your coven master, or whatever the heck you call her, should’ve told you this as it involves your bloody coven. Zale was a descendant of Lycaon, you know who he is right?”

His words bit.

“Lycaon, the first werewolf. Yes.”

Though no one believed it, that Lycaon, a mere mortal who snubbed Zeus, and Zeus proceeded to change him into a lycan, or werewolf. Hence where the name lycan came from.

“Zale fell in love with a witch from your Badbury Rings coven. They kept their love a secret, as you pointed out earlier,” Marrock’s voice was sharp. “Werewolves and witches cannot love each other. But nonetheless, for Loren and Zale it must’ve been true love.” Marrock held my stare. I looked down at the golden liquid in my glass as he leaned towards me. “Because they left everything, everyone. Abandoned their families, their friends. And eloped. Your coven, and my pack, run under Torak, my predecessor, hunted them for years, decades. I’m not sure if you even know how old your coven master is, but Mattie and Torak made a pact to kill Loren and Zale, to set an example.”

I swigged some whiskey to dull the anger rising in me. “Mattie would never kill a witch, not unless that witch had done something seriously evil and I don’t see what this folk tale has to do with-”

Shaking his head, he raised a free arm. “There you go again, jumping to assumptions. Let me finish?”

I raised my brows, exhaling hard.

“Well, the Badbury Rings Coven and my Savernake pack did capture them both. Surrounding them, they burned Loren alive at the stake, and made Zale watch as they whipped him, nearly flaying the skin from his back.”

I opened my mouth, but he anticipated that.

His voice shouted right through me. “I was there, I saw it. Though I didn’t know all of this story at the time. I was a kid then. You have to remember, this was almost a century ago. We, pack members, questioned less, you know, back in those days. We were, in those days, more obedient. But Zale, being one of the first turned by Lycaon, fought back, struggling even as they shot arrows into him. Needless to say, he escaped and no one has heard from him since.”

“And this Lycaon? Why didn’t he save his child, his progeny?”

Marrock shrugged, his voice calmer. “No one *had* heard from him in centuries. Of course, there were tales of him. Some said he was living in the Black Forest, others said that he’d gone deep into the jungles along the Amazon. But back in nineteen-twenty-one, we didn’t know much. I do know that it affected me. That’s why I didn’t care if Nathan, or any other pack member shackled up with a witch, or another shifter. Or even a mage.” With his hand around his glass, he pointed with his index finger. “I do draw the line at vampires, though. *Dead things*... No. But even then, I’d never kill one of my own for it. It would disgust me. But Mattie, well, maybe you don’t know as much about her as you think.”

“What, you’re telling me is that Mattie put the flame to the kindling to this Loren? I don’t believe it. She’s so... She’s like a mother. I still don’t see



what this has to do with this carnage. Zale, a werewolf from a century ago. Maybe he wants revenge, who would blame him? But why wait for a century? And what we just saw, well, that was more than a werewolf attack. It was dark magic.”

He got up and strode over to the side table bringing back the bottle. I glanced at it. “Apt name for the whiskey, as it relates to the story.”

“Humm, long marriage. This whiskey is over fifty years old, older than you I’d wager. A new witch with so much to learn.”

“So you think Zale has come back, using magic to right the wrongs?”

He didn’t answer, just watched as he poured more whiskey into his glass. He offered it to me. I shook my head. I’d kill for a coffee.

He slumped back in his chair. “Honestly Elsa, I don’t know. Perhaps someone who knows the story is using it as a copycat. There are some biased werewolves, shifters, demons, as well as witches it seems. When Torak was killed by Lucifer, I took over as alpha and I disagreed with a lot of Torak’s ways. As I said, so long as my pack are not screwing bloody vampires. I made it clear to my pack that we would not continue the persecution of those who married outside their packs. I haven’t got a lot of support, I can tell you that. Mattie was livid. She insisted that we persist with finding Zale. And I forbade her from hunting my species and from setting foot on my land. That’s partly why we use magic.” His voice deepened, “To protect us against your kind. That hasn’t worked, has it?”

I grimaced. I didn’t believe they, or he, practiced magic because of Mattie’s coven. That was just an excuse. Still, he wouldn’t let it go. “Look at Emma and Lucius, from Conor’s pack. She’s both mage and werewolf and married to Lucius, a demon.”

“Emma is unusual though. Who knows where she got that power from?”

And Conor, her alpha and his friend Sabian have always been benevolent. Many think it's wrong, though, that she and a demon wed. This threat, this abomination has to be closer to home. It has to be from your pack, or my coven. Who else knew about Lisa and Nathan?"

"Shit, they hardly hid it. When did you know?"

I frowned at him and sat up in the chair. "A few days ago, when she went missing."

"Ha! Dumb... Well, they'd been here and sighted out and about together for quite a while at least. I wasn't concerned, though I admit Mattie is always cause for concern. I thought at first, tonight, when I smelled that blood magic on you that you were Mattie, come to challenge me, to demand Nathan's head for defying the rules. I was about to, well, defend my pack."

A hammering on the front door made me jump. Marrock slammed his glass down on a table beside him, brushed past my chair and opened it warily. Cold air swept through, fresh. Sunrise was coming...

"We found this," a deep shaky voice said.

I turned to look.

"Thanks Adam. What the..."

The pack member's lip curled at the edge as he saw me, then held out his hand to Marrock. A poppet. The cloth doll's arms and legs were hanging by threads, twisted and splattered in blood.

Marrock growled, turning to face me as he snatched it from Adam. Adam disappeared sharply as Marrock paced towards me.

"Yours? Tell me Elsa, whose is it? Because I can clearly see the mark of your coven, look."

He threw it at me and as it landed on my lap, I had a flash of vision. The mark was unusual, and was as he said, it had our coven's crest on it. On the back of the doll, an oak leaf in the centre of a pentagram. I could feel the power from our sabbath, feel the energy of my sisters.

A cold shudder ran through me as I moved to place the glass on the coffee table, he snatched it up, smashing it into the fireplace.

Then he snatched at my wrists. I punched my palm into his chest, willing a blast of power through him. It smarted, he doubled over and as I clambered up and over the chair to get the hell away from the wolfman who was crouching, snarling before me, before I got to the door. His hair partly covered his face, which was transforming before my eyes.

“I don’t think you’re so pretty. I will claim you, though, just to punish you, bitch. I was willing to give you the benefit of the doubt, but I see your witch-ass has tried to betray me, so I claim you for myself. You’re mine to do with as I will.”

I shouted back at him, “Why would my coven leave evidence at a crime scene? We’ve been framed, you mad old dog!”

Though the poppet, it did feel like the magic that Mattie used.

In that instant, stupid me, I hesitated as he grabbed my wrists tightly, knowing full well that I needed my hands, my fingers to weave a spell.

His eyes blackened, leaving no whites, his chest rising as he almost howled, “Adam! Get the witch cuffs!”

Shit...

“It isn’t me! You’ve gone feral, you crazy wet dog! If it was me, I’d hardly walk into your home without a weapon, would I?”

His eyes darted to my belt where my athame was sheathed. He leaned in, his fangs brushed my neck. “What’s that for then, cutting cake? No, I should never have trusted you. After Lisa and Nathan, I thought what the hell. Here’s a nice piece of ass, maybe I’ll take her for myself. But no, like all of your witchy kind, back-stabbing bitches. Too late.”

Adam appeared. I couldn’t swallow. The handcuffs had metal finger holders attached, rendering my hands immobile. Marrock’s smile engulfed his face. He bit my neck, not drawing blood, thank god, but sucking on it to mark me. I winced, trying to lean away but the more I did, the more he

pushed himself into me.

He was excited, I could feel that. Wild, savage, and he was about to direct all that at me. Fighting back the fear, I took a breath and let my body sink, which had him falling with me. Then smack.

My knee smashed into his erection, instinctively he let go as I pushed him into Adam and got the bloody hell out of there.

Pack members stood outside. Sensing my fear in the wind, some started shifting. I knew some would shift into wolves, others the monstrosity of half-beast, half-man, the true werewolf.

I had seconds.

Which way? I drew my athame and skirted around the back of the house, weaving magic with shaky hands before me. The whiskey had blurred my mind a little but luckily for me, the abject fear and horror of Marrock cleared my head pretty darn fast.

I stopped, turned around, that familiar heat licking through my limbs and belted out a whip of ice-blue fire all around me.

Only to see a wolf leap up over it. Quick as I could, I screwed up my face, magic tingling through my veins like bubbling water and using my hands to cast a dome of white-hot flame all around me.

Marrock was suddenly there. Naked, blood smeared as he gripped Adam's hair, Adam's severed head in his hand as Marrock started morphing. But not as a wolf, as the beast, roaring. His eyes looked into me, full of hate.

Death permeated all around me. Surrounded, encircled by wolves baring fangs, and the bipedal beasts, I was doomed.

## BITTEN

My hand cramped from forcing magic, I needed something more powerful. As my left hand continued to weave the spell, my right hand shook badly, channelling the blood-fused sorcery. As I continued frantically, clouds cloaked the pale sunrise, and a waist high fog hung like phantoms watching from the tree line all around me. The misty morning sky darkened. It was useless.

After everything, the spells were draining me fast. Like a drug, the blood magic felt heavy, addictive. I felt a shadow pass over me. I almost swooned under the heady energy. I closed my eyes, and dropped my hands, which let the barrier down.

My whisper was carried in the wind around them, “Come...”

I didn’t need to see them, I could smell that they were closing in. Then I opened my eyes a fraction, grinning as my gaze met Marrock’s. “Fire!”

Before they got close enough, flames emblazoned before me, Marrock, morphing back fast, screamed, “No! Retreat!”

Not all fire kills witches.

But some were as lucky as Adam, I guess. Flames whipped around them, their only defence was the beast that they’d morphed into and their rookie

enchantments.

Werewolves. Unpredictable feral liars.

But Marrock, morphing now to the beast, stomped towards me, through the fire.

My throat felt raw. “Brighter, hotter!”

The next thing I knew, I was off my feet. I lunged my athame through his side. He didn't even flinch! He held me by my neck, his other hand pushing my head to the side as his oversized and rank jaw opened up over my neck.

Choking from his rancid stench, I screwed up my face, my legs kicking as I tried frantically to cast another spell.

He growled in my ear, “Want some werewolf in you? Here, have a bite...”

My body went limp as his teeth sunk into my flesh, his vile curse pounding through me. I felt weak, dizzy and sick all at once.

He snatched my athame, pulling it out of his side and hurtling it to the ground as his jaws clamped harder.

Hot fire whipped through me, nausea bubbled as I was tossed, just as he had tossed the poppet at me, into the undergrowth by the tree-line.

My hand instinctively touched the bite, wet, burning as I fought the pain, desperate for any magic to undo this.

His tainted, stinking blood.

Rasping, I tried to struggle up but he was there again in the blink of an eye, bloodied with fury in his eyes. Half morphed, his guttural roar bellowed through me. Holding my athame, his lips curved into a mean smile.

“I'm feeling in a sporting mood. You have ten seconds head start. Then you're mine. I'll enjoy hunting and claiming you, Ms. Brandt. Go!”

I struggled up. Screw you alpha-hole.

Without looking back, I bounded into the trees, searching frantically for a denser part of the forest. Muttering and weaving my fingers as I ran, I tried in vain to use a masking spell, something to hide or mask my scent. If only I

could do that.

“That won’t work, I’ve already found you.”

Dishevelled, I screamed, “that wasn’t ten seconds!”

He flashed his fangs as he smiled. “I lied.”

As he threw me against a tree, a blood-curdling cry cut through the forest, cut through me. And him. He stopped dead, his eyes darting around.

His face changed back to human form, thank god. Now he turned away, to where the noise came from.

Fear.

Snapping of branches, of feet trampling, twigs cracking underfoot.

Oh my god, I’m going to die. Either by this lunatic lupine or by some crazy witch. Suddenly a life without magic seemed like a dream.

It screamed again. It was a man’s cry. And one filled with terror.

Marrock’s men were at his side, though keeping a distance as his eyes scanned all around us, but his hands were still around my neck and he forced his body into mine.

No doubt because my knee was itching to nut him.

Stepping back, he threw me aside. “Take her, put the cuffs on her. Then find me. Hurry.”

A pack of them descended on me, snatching at my hands. The metal finger cuffs burned my skin.

I tried to mutter an incantation but with so many pulling on my wrists and snarling, it was useless. My only hope was that whoever from our coven had put that poppet there, would find me. And that my fate wouldn’t be the same as Lisa’s.

Cold iron seared my skin as the shackles were clamped shut and they pushed me hard towards the path Marrock had taken.

Trying to keep my footing, we trampled through the forest as the weak morning sun cast a few rays which seemed to dance through the branches

above. No birds sang, the place was as silent as the grave except for the heavy footfalls from the pack.

They'd all shifted back into human form now, a few wore jeans, others naked, tousled hair, all muscle. Brutality gleamed in their eyes. I noted there were no women.

I stumbled, was grabbed at, straightened up and pushed before we came to another clearing only to find Marrock stood at the edge.

Slack-jawed, he motioned his hand to stay back as something was being flung about through the trees.

A man. Skin shredded, he was obviously a werewolf, but bigger than the others. His bare flesh was torn, ripped, bleeding as an unseen force threw him around like a ragdoll.

He groaned, grunted and was almost unconscious, probably from the pain of being whipped about.

Sweat ran down my back, an icy grip of fear. This was witchcraft but on a totally different level. The whole place was heavy, like a force weighing me down, oppressive. Angry.

His long blond hair was streaked with blood and tangled with brambles, his short beard darkened with bloodied mud. Even though he was the largest, muscular werewolf I'd seen, now his limbs were limp. Whatever it was that had this power over him, sliced open his skin before throwing him again and again against a tree, then as he crashed into it, only to be flung at our feet.

The silence seemed enduring. My throat was tight, my hands and fingers hurt like hell, but the shifters stood a little further back from me. Marrock stepped tentatively forward towards the man. I couldn't see his face but as he gained on him, he fell to his knees. Bending over him, Marrock's body shook hard. Then holding up his left hand, a claw extended and he drew his own blood and placed it over the victim's mouth.

He muttered, it was inaudible to me, but he trembled and shook like a child.



No one moved or dared to speak. Still Marrock persisted, now using his free hand to try and pump his blood into the lifeless body.

A bird cawed far off in the distance, making us all jump, then Marrock twisted around. “Uncuff her and bring her to me. Hurry.”

They eyed each other before moving in on me, tentatively pulling me over to where the dead man lay. One, a young red-haired man, who had been sneering earlier, full of bravado, now trembled in fear as he clumsily unlocked my shackles, jerking at Marrock’s instruction. Then he forced me to my knees over the corpse and skittered away into the treeline.

Pointing to the man, Marrock barked at me, “Do something. You’re a witch. You have magic literally pumping through your veins, you have to restore him.”

My mouth curled. “And if I don’t?”

“I’ll let my pack on you. Then I’ll kill a human. You choose.”

“I don’t have my athame.”

He snatched my hand; his claw extended instantly and sliced my wrist before I could blink. Sneering he growled, “If you fail...”

“I might,” I shouted. “I don’t know. He looks dead. I’m no necromancer, you stupid-”

Stopping my anger, I wavered. If I helped this werewolf, that was it. Game over. Marrock would probably kill me anyway, and if he didn't kill me, well I would be outcast from the coven either way. From every coven. Forever. I’d already overstepped the mark a thousand times over since I’d been here. We were not allowed to help werewolves. They were the enemy. That was the ruling. But that wasn’t all. I didn’t want to share my blood with him. I had no idea who this shifter was, but sharing blood creates a bond. And only death can break that connection. And I’d heard that a bond made in blood was addictive. Powerful. I wanted to keep my power to myself. But now I didn’t have a choice.

Marrock whispered, his voice almost hoarse, “I will submit to you, if you save him.”

God, he sounded almost genuine.

“I don’t need your submission. Let me go.”

“Help him. Do it now. Or I’ll destroy your friends.”

As my wrist shook, I bent over the man placing it to his lips. We weren’t vampires obviously, but our blood can have restorative effects. The bite from Marrock on my neck now stung like a son of a bitch, and instinctively my free hand covered it.

My blood flowed. Nothing happened.

I kept my wrist to his lips, scowling at the bastard alpha before me.

“He’s dead. What-”

My wrist was suddenly gripped by the man's hands, his nails digging into it, breaking the skin. My heart almost leapt out from my chest, I gasped in shock.

I was yanked forward over him, rasping as his eyes flashed open and locked onto mine.

Transfixed, I couldn’t look away but the pain from the bite in my neck eased.

And as he sucked, an overwhelming calm washed through me. The palest blue eyes I’d ever seen looked right into me, ripping into my soul, my heart. I couldn’t move. Numb, my hand froze, as he, we stayed locked in this spell. His spell.

A wolf’s spell.

His heart, his being seemed to melt, merge with me.

I saw images...

Running through a vast, dark and wild forest. Felt his fear, the loneliness, the horror. Isolation. His scent, musky, earthy enveloped me like a warm embrace. I didn't want to move.

Now I could literally feel his heartbeat. It seemed our hearts synced

together, I felt ease, safe, like nothing, no one could ever hurt me.

Then I was swept up in a torrent of desire, as his lips pressed to my wrist, feeling him sucking, heat pooled through me. Sweat broke on my forehead, and tingling between my legs. My eyes travelled over his body. He pulled me closer, his body moving slowly, writhing. He was feeling the same! A carnal desire so strong swept through us.

My face burned, I glanced back into his eyes. They widened, locked into mine.

Time ceased to exist at that moment. I was only aware of him, his breathing, my breathing. Passion. Connection. Bonded together. Like only he and I existed. It was exquisite and intense.

I hadn't realised he'd let go.

His muscles softened on the earth beneath him, the golden shimmer of his fair hair, his short beard, how his hair fell over his strong jaw. Tattoos etched on his skin seemed to glow and twist, his chest rising and falling.

The rising sun cast a molten copper glow over him as I knelt dead still, still staring into his eyes. A flicker stirred in his eyes of the wolf, of the animal, the beast trapped inside the man. Of torment. Sadness. I felt a longing, loneliness tugging hard at my heart.

A whisper, a cheek brushed my neck as strong arms were pulling me up, gently, away from him. I didn't want to leave. I opened my mouth; no words came and I held his gaze like my life depended on it. A longing so strong to be near him that I had never known before. I was turned away. I struggled, twisting back, unable to reason, to control my actions until my eyes rested on Marrock's puzzled face. His face was softer now, at peace almost, but the blond man... a noise shifted.

I moved, like time itself had slowed down, to see a huge wolf, and watched as it padded towards the treeline. He stopped, pale blue eyes locked on mine, before bolting off through the forest.

My body sank, unable to breathe and stunned.

Marrock pulled me into him. Like the kinder alpha before the feral beast had seized control of him, his voice was quiet.

“It’s ok. He’s gone off to heal. You did good, Elsa. Hell if I know what just happened, maybe his power was too much for you, but you saved him.”

The words seemed distant, like sounds in a dream. Pulling me into him, he edged his head away from mine, “Eric, Matt, make sure this place is locked down tight. No one is to breathe a word of this, not even to each other.”

His eyes darted up, a crow cawed in the tree above us, then flew off. “Shifters come in many forms, we don’t know who’s listening. But we’re being hunted and Elsa here, well, she just saved Lycaon. Father of all lycans. The first of our species...”



Battling against my foggy mind to shake myself out of this dream-like state, I realised Marrock was leading me back to his house. I should have been afraid, I should’ve run. Or used magic on him. But since Lycaon, I felt that an abyss in my soul that I hadn’t even known existed was filled. It felt warm and like nothing, not this brutal alpha, nor his pack could harm me. I wasn’t completely without fear. But a calm hugged my soul, like they didn’t matter to me now. They were not the threat.

And Marrock’s bite didn’t sting anymore. Instinctively I touched it, it had healed.

A noise from the forest made me and Marrock glance back. A whisper of musk, stirring in the tree line, I knew he was watching. Waiting. I could sense him, as he could me.

“Lycaon is watching over you. I have no idea what just happened, but it seems that you two are connected now. I would never go against his wishes,

and,” he caught my eye, “I apologise for earlier.” His chest rose heavily as he inhaled. “For too long, immortal has fought immortal, and when I saw that poppet with your coven’s mark on it, I lost it. I was being truthful when I said I wanted a truce, that I believe we should be able to live, marry, date whoever we please. But it’s been constant attacks from witches, vampires, hell, other werewolves. I’ve been fighting all my life.” He huffed, his eyes held a weariness. “I’ve been at war for so long, I don’t actually know another way of living. Now though, we’ll have to face your coven master, I can already smell her. And find out if she knows who’s behind the attacks on my pack and your coven.”

He edged his mouth close to my ear. “She hates us, and I wouldn’t be surprised if she killed Lisa for dating a werewolf.”

## EYE OF NEWT

I couldn't believe that. Mattie was the gentlest soul I'd ever met and saw her as family. It was true that she did detest other supernaturals, but witches? Then again, if the Savernake pack weren't lying, and that *was* a poppet from our coven. And I had sensed her magic. Still, there had to be another explanation.

There were ten in our coven in total, but I didn't know the others well. They pretty much kept to themselves and still saw me as the 'newbie,' since I'd been there around a year. Plus I hadn't attended the same school, so I was the odd one out. We certainly hadn't been rich enough for that.

But whoever had left the poppet in these woods, she would have had to get inside their territory, commit the murder and leave undetected. And that, like the magic I'd just seen on Lycaon, was beyond my grasp.

Sat up, poker straight on the steps of Marrock's home, the hood of her anorak pulled up, Mattie's face was hidden as we entered the clearing. But I could sense her unease. Mattie was older than us, though until Marrock had said, I had no clue she was about a century old. She looked early sixties, had a soft, kind face, with small eyes and naturally white hair. She was a fan of colours with her bright baggy jumpers and old jeans and preferred sensible boots to shoes. She was like a grandmother to us all. The matriarch.

She didn't speak, neither did we until we walked right up to her. Marrock held out his hand in a gesture of greeting. "Welcome Mattie, can I invite you inside for a coffee?"

She ignored him, her stare piercing through me. "Becca and Josey told me to come here, and ask you, both of you, where Lisa is. What's going on?"

The magic oozing off my coven leader was thick and wild, almost choking. "Lisa is... I think you'd better accept Marrock's offer. There's something far worse out in the woods, more terrifying than we thought. It's hunting us and the werewolves. Something beyond my power to reason."

Her voice was cutting, rising up in her anger. "Oh Elsa. So headstrong. You should have left this to me. My dear girl. Well we're in this godforsaken forest full of violent male energy, what else to expect? Mix that with magic they don't understand," she inclined her chin to Marrock. "And this is what happens. Especially when a witch and a werewolf commit such a vile sin."

Raising her head, I could see she glared at Marrock who in turn sneered back. "They're animals, feral and unable to control their base instincts. Witches and even mages are, well, civilised. Born from a lineage not tainted by beasts and outlaws. That energy is the result, it breathes life into murder and mayhem. Lisa and that werewolf she hooked up with brought this, all of this, upon us. Wolf and witch don't belong together. These are the consequences. Ancient forces. It's not for nothing that it's forbidden. That much energy combined unleashes a darkness, something we can't control. That's *why* it's condemned. So Lisa's dead then? And the werewolf, where is he?" She eyed past us as if expecting him to just rock up.

My mouth dried, eyes small as I heard her empty words. There was little empathy in her tone and it shocked me to the core.

"What do you mean, unleashed a darkness? Lisa-"

She cut me off, a flash of anger in her face as she looked from me to Marrock. "Yes, well I try to keep you younger ones safe, but this is what happens. I'll have that drink now, Marrock. Something stronger than coffee.

This looks like war. For both of us.” She sighed loudly. “If only your pack would keep their cocks in their trousers around my coven, none of this would happen.”

Disbelief had me staring. I thought she was about to smack him around the head. But her empty demeanour...

Marrock clenched his jaw, his muscles stiffened. I could see he was trying his damndest to repress his wrath as she blamed everything on him. Her hatred was blood curdling.

I repressed an icy shiver, the way she spoke of Lisa’s death left my stomach curdling.

Raising her brows at me, she shook her head. Marrock brushed past us pulling out his keys as Mattie mumbled, “I won’t ask what you’re doing here. I only hope you haven’t been compliant in any of this.”

The feeling of Lycaon came flooding back to me. As soon as that hit in my heart, my body soothed and I felt more of an observer to these events rather than someone caught up in them.

But bloody hell, if she found out about that... But was the feeling I had with Lycaon the same as Lisa had with Nathan? Was I next?

“I need to head home. I have work soon,” I said as I stood in the doorway as Marrock and Mattie both frowned at me.

“You’ll stay. You’re already involved I can see, you’ll have to call in sick.”

“No, I really can’t. My shift starts in a few hours, so I need to rest first. There’s not much I can do here.”

I really, really didn’t want to go. A yearning burned inside of me, unyielding. I had to be close to Lycaon. Conflicted, as another side of me, the rational side, wanted to be far away from the power that had almost destroyed him. And this darkness that Mattie believed was born from Nathan and Lisa’s union. My shoulders ached, I was hungry and cold. Of course, if he were



here, perhaps as Marrock had said, his power would be enough to sustain me. But he wasn't and Mattie's energy, her anger was draining me fast.

I turned to leave and Marrock fumbled, opening a drawer. "Elsa, wait!"

Mattie's stare burned into me as the alpha rushed over, thrusting a small card into my palm.

His voice was pressing, sincere, as he said, "Thank you. Here, take my number and call me. We owe you so much. Go, get some rest. We'll take it from here. Mattie?"

Mattie, usually warm, full of encouragement now scowled. "Helped them? First, you came here without consent. You wanted to be the one to find Lisa. Or perhaps you thought you were helping me. But you weren't. There's a reason we have a code and now this alpha says you helped them. You cannot trust them, foolish girl. They'll screw you then they'll eat you. No Elsa, you're such a novice. Heed my counsel. Stay away, consider yourself barred. I may consider letting you back but any arguments though..." she held up her hands defiantly. "And I will banish you. Is that perfectly clear?"

I ignored Mattie, instead, catching Marrock's eye. With his back to her, he rolled his eyes. Then taking my hand, he held my gaze for an instant which had my coven mistress hiss, then he squeezed it.

Without saying another word, I turned around and shut the door.



I didn't get far. Outside the rain was drizzling down in a wet mist. The sort of rain that doesn't seem bad but gets you soaked anyway.

I pulled up my sweatshirt hood and made for the exit, not that I was clear where I was going.

One of the pack spotted me, jogged over. He was the big guy who had taken Marrock's orders earlier. Eric, I think. His beard was chock full of dirt, as was his face. A beanie was pulled over his head, and a thick chequered

shirt, unlike Marrock, this werewolf was clothed. His boots squealed in the muddy grass. Wiping his palms on his jeans he asked, “Are you looking for your car?”

“No, I had a lift.”

“No problem. I’ll drive you home. We’re indebted to you now that you saved *him*.”

Eric’s demeanour was completely changed from earlier. Though he didn’t smile and seemed all about business. Similar to Lycaon, his eyes were soft blue, but not as pale. Perhaps another descendant.

He turned and strode fast through the forest, following a small bracken filled path. A path hardly trodden by the looks of it. I was tense. Not afraid of him but whatever lurked out there, but as before the sense of their elder, of Lycaon gave me a feeling of protection. Though I realised that was foolish. I had given Marrock the benefit of the doubt and that had almost ended badly for me. No, I needed to be on guard.

My shoulders sank, I breathed heavily with Mattie’s judgement. Cast out by my own kin, by everyone. Great. Screw them.

But I didn’t really work like that. I couldn’t just switch off my feelings. Let’s face it, being singled out and unfriended by your own kind hurts. Like a punch in the gut. Heck, if I didn’t feel anything, what would that say about me? But now I needed to catch a few hours of sleep before work, and luckily, I was so exhausted I probably could sleep rather than overthink everything.

Eric was thankfully not big on small talk and the drive home was peaceful. I stared out of the window at the incoming dawn, watching the ground smoulder as the sun heated the wet grasslands that surrounded the wood. Almost dozing off, Eric gave me a gentle nudge, and I muttered my address.

I tried to break the uneasy silence between us. “Have you met Lycaon

before?”

“No.”

He stared straight ahead.

Ok...

The silence became more uneasy, until finally he relented. “Marrock has met him before. Lycaon is the first of the species, but after him there were many other bloodlines. Lycaon made others, but they split away from him, creating their own progeny. My line is originally from Norway, as is Marrock’s. Though Lycaon was the first of our kind. The true alpha. Whatever was controlling the father...” Sweat beaded on his forehead.

I touched his arm to reassure him, but had the opposite reaction as he flinched.

“S... sorry.”

“Eric, I was just going to say, whatever this malevolent force is, there’ll be a way to subdue it. Both of our kind are being attacked. If we don’t stop it, who knows which supes it will attack next. I’m sure we’ll find a way.”

His mouth turned down as he gave me a quick side glance and asked, “You are?”

“We have to.”

He wasn’t convinced. Neither was I, but there were other magicians, mages, witches far more powerful who could help...

I could sense that the wards around my home were still intact as he pulled up outside.

Letting out a long sigh, my shoulders and neck ached. Thanking him, a short nod and Eric drove away.

I stood still for a moment.

What had just happened! After a long sigh, I unlocked my door and then placed my keys on the hook on my bookshelf.

Such a familiar routine, but nothing in my life now was the same as when

I'd left my home earlier.

I stared longingly at my fireplace as a flurry of emotions whipped through me. Uncertainty and doubt clawed at my heart but as soon as Lycaon's face flashed in my mind, these feelings were replaced with a familiar warmth.

The soft scent of sage wafted over me, combined with warm notes of cinnamon and spices. I loved this time of year. Rich smell of fallen leaves, hunkering down with a log fire, and my favourite scents filling my home. And on that note, I placed some logs in the wood burner, and lit them before closing the door. I needed a wash and I wanted some heat in my radiators, and this was my source for it all.

Pulling my phone from my coat, I typed in Marrock's number. His card had a silhouette of a howling wolf's head and then just his number. Black thick card, expensive with the wolf graphic etched in bronze.

Werewolves.

Most were the same, so I'd heard. Charming one minute, ripping your head off the next. Mattie had said it was because the human side and the animal side were so conflicted. But Sabian and Conor had conquered that, and ran the most benevolent packs in Britain. Never killing humans, or tearing apart animals. Though they did hunt evil immortals. And to be fair, there are a lot of them.

I fought my mind to stave off thoughts of Lycaon. No good would come from that, but the experience was addictive. Marrock had been right. The werewolf, or lycan as they called him, was powerful. The fact that a malevolent energy tossed him about like a bit of old rag... No, I wouldn't go there. It was too terrifying and I couldn't breathe if I thought about it. I'm home. Be present.

I grabbed a quick shower, the horror of the night replaying over and over. Forcing myself to breathe slowly, I steadied myself, my palm pressed against the wall.

I'd seen some crazy stuff as a witch but this was way beyond me.

Chucking on my PJs, I climbed under the covers. Just as the weight of sleep sank into my limbs, I sat up, cursing that I hadn't set my alarm. Better set two. I'd only have about four hours, but that's better than nothing.



My head was groggy as my alarms buzzed, my mind swam in a cloud of surreal dreams. Snapping jaws, the poltergeist activity in the forest left my skin crawling until finally falling under the wolf's spell. Lycaon's pale eyes. His teeth in my skin and the steady, rhythmic beating of his heart matching mine. My head swooned. I couldn't shake the memory of how the light seemed to radiate from him, his blond hair, those ethereal eyes, piercing...

Heat thrummed through me making my breath quicken.

Blinking, I sat up feeling more tired than before and forced myself out of bed. I needed strong coffee and not to think of the smoking hot, naked Lycaon. No, coffee and a cold shower.

After a quick wash and dressing, I scanned my tired eyes in the mirror. I dabbed on some under-eye make-up and a touch of powder. My body was compelled forward with the thought of coffee and after downing a cup, I put the rest in a flask. We rarely had coffee at work, as I worked at an apothecary and herbal teas were encouraged.

My secret? I hate herbal teas. But that's bad for business. I scanned my home, checking nothing was out of place and now, clean, partially rested with enough caffeine pumping through my veins to shift an elephant, I pulled on my coat and boots to head out into the autumn day.

At least it had stopped raining.

Luna Rose Apothecary was only a short drive from home. I felt a bit of

relief because I had some semblance of normality after yesterday. I loved my job, it didn't pay much but it was close to home and Luna, who owned the apothecary, was fun and independent. She was a friend more than a boss. She wasn't part of any coven, so I knew she'd be less judgemental. Heck, it looked like I might not belong to one now anyhow.

The shop was chock full of dark wooden bookshelves and tables crammed with herbs, crystals, you name it, we had it. Pagan? Check. Wiccan? Check. We carried a large number of spells, ingredients and Luna had set up a trade with another local supplier, both of them growing and picking their own herbs, usually under moonlight. Moonlight gardening, using the power of the moon cycle to infuse the herbs for incense, spells, and those herbal teas I mentioned that I never drank.

I parked around the back. I normally work in therapies. Massages, detox, facials using oils and a pinch of magic. Sometimes I did tarot readings, rune readings and the like. With the chaos of yesterday behind me, I was glad to be here, though I had no clue what or who I was treating today.

As I walked in, the calming scent of lavender and spicy black pepper washed over me. I heard laughter then a loud exclamation from Luna as she spun around and rushed towards me, her purple and bright yellow hair, one colour on either side, tied up in ponytails. Only she could pull that off.

"Oh my God! Are you alright, Elsa? Austin heard about your night. The whole community is gossiping about it, so obviously we had to, too. Being as we love you and all. I was expecting you to take a sick day to be honest. You went head to head with that alpha-hole, Marrock. Whoa, well done!" She laughed and started clapping.

Beaming like a fool, Austin, a mage of many talents, came over and wrapped his arms around me, squeezing out a hug. His tumble of dark blond hair had been recently bleached and cut short. He was definitely going for the Spike look. Obviously, we ridiculed him, but he could pull it off. With

piercing eyes, his sculptured face was able to rock the bleached look and his ability at magic was second to none. He wasn't six foot but Austin didn't need muscles or height. His charm and craziness were unique and more than made up for it.

"You ok, Elsa, you crazy witch? We love you, you know that."

A smile tried to creep up on me, but I was too confused, too taken aback. "Everyone is talking about it? Mattie may ban me from the coven."

A torrent of emotions swelled inside me like a sea storm. I bottled it all away, my fingers clenching and unclenching.

Luna, always honest and direct, said, "Good. You don't need them. But hey, you know my views. And that's why your first customer today is good old Hakon. His notes are in the file. He should be here any time now."

She hugged me like she was trying to squeeze the life out of me. I did the same back. "Thanks guys. You're the best."

"Hey," she pointed at me, "anytime. I have to get out front, sell some spells, but we'll catch up later, ok?"

"Sure."

Austin let out a breath. "I have to grab some supplies. But with Hakon here, you can rest assured you'll be safe. If you need help with anything, just text me. Don't try and fight this alone. We're here. I'll catch you later."

"Thanks, that really helps."

Austin had been getting close to Luna for a while now. He was a great guy, and like Luna, direct. He rarely thought before opening his mouth, which could be pretty amusing as long as you weren't on the receiving end.

As they went out to the front of the shop I sat down, poured my coffee in a mug and pulled out Hakon's file.

Stress. Unable to think straight. Tension and pain in his shoulders.

The bell on the back door clanged.

"Well, my favourite witch, you doing my massage today, love?"

I shuddered as the vampire walked over and leaned in to kiss my cheeks.

His boyish grin, small intense eyes and dark strawberry hair, Hakon was charming and damn sexy for a dead man. Not bad for a vampire over a thousand years old. When he laughed, his smile was infectious. But he was as brutal as he was kind. Lucky for me, I was a friend. I doubt anyone would last long as his enemy.

As his icy hands cupped my face, cold seeped through me. Hakon did love his European gestures. It could be an eventful day with him, Austin and Luna. Three extroverts together in a small place. I enjoyed watching them play off against each other. And Luna was right, Hakon was one of the fiercest, oldest vampires in these parts. His loyalty to his friends was unwavering. Mattie had always hated the fact the Luna Rose Apothecary was open to all with a few exceptions, by appointment only. If a new vampire or werewolf strolled into town, they had to have a recommendation from Hakon, or another of his ilk to get an appointment. That way we didn't become easy food for the vampires. I suspect they'd let us massage them first though, then drain our blood?

Maybe I should learn to think like normal witches?

“Well, you've had a rough night I hear. I heard Marrock's pack had been attacked, werewolves gone AWOL, witches, too. Only the vamps and the demons seem left out. Not that I'm complaining.” He exhaled a painful grunt as he moved his head from side to side. “I feel guilty asking you for a massage, except this pain... Never had it before.”

Smiling, I responded, “It's my job, Hakon, and I'm glad you're here. I feel safer to be honest.”

“Come here.”

Engulfed in another hug, I think I'd had more hugs in the last twenty minutes than I'd had in the last twenty-years.

“Thanks, Hakon. It's good to be at work though, with some normality.”

“Giving a vampire a massage. What a weird normal, eh? Still, we're



friends, Elsa, and I took the liberty to phone Austin, who,” he peered past me towards the shop door, “who I know is hitting it off with Luna. We’ve decided to help you. Austin’s bringing in his protege, too, I believe. Grace. She’s working with the Wychwood pack at the moment, part of her initiation.”

“A mage?”

“Yup.”

I raised my brows. That would go down like a lead balloon with the coven. “Well, Mattie will hate that but she’s all but physically thrown me out anyway. Come on. You look stiff.”

“I am. But not bad for a walking corpse...” he chuckled.

As we went to go into the treatment room, Austin popped his head around the door that led into the shop. “Hakon, what time this evening?”

Hakon opened his arms wide and let out a howl. “Oh my God... it’s Spike. Where’s Buffy? Should I be worried?”

“Thanks, Earl Hakon. Time?”

Hakon laughed, grinning at me. “His hair does look good though.” Then he fixed a stare with the mage. “No mate, we’ll go tomorrow, during the day. Elsa here needs some rest, unless...” He nudged me. “You could always have a bit of my blood to sustain you? Yes?”

“You know I won’t, Hakon. Go back, really? I think Mattie will-”

Austin answered me, “Yeah, no. Whatever. I’m bringing Grace, Hakon and you, Elsa. You’ll be safe. I’m prepping a spell so any malevolence in the air, I’ll shift us into a portal super-fast. We’ll meet up outside Savernake woods then and rid that place of this godforsaken evil.” He shot us a wide-eyed grin. “Eleven good for everyone tomorrow? By the south entrance?”

I sighed. “Alright. I’ll look for something to subdue a witch’s curse. Or spirit...”

Hakon nodded. “Ah yes, the tale of the witch and the werewolf. Damn right. Come on love, let’s leave Spike to his role playing, my shoulders are

like wooden planks.”

As he stripped off in the therapy room, I prepped his oils outside. Tapping on the door, Hakon answered and I went in.

“So, I used lavender, bergamot and neroli?”

“You’re the expert, love, I do appreciate it. I was heckled by a couple of young fangers because I have these massages.”

I spluttered a laugh. “Oh no. You kill them?”

“Almost. If I killed every vampire that hacked me off, there’d only be about three vampires in existence. It’s my age. And their snarky attitude. Still, we wouldn’t want that sort of thing coming here. And I always leave here feeling fangtastic.”

“Thanks, Hakon, for your humour and your recommendations.”

For the undead, he was stiff. It was always odd massaging vampires, they were so cold but after twenty minutes they heated up. A little. I think some of them came in for the contact, touch and the banter. We were picking up a good trade from the undead. Many had spent several lifetimes feeling lonely, isolated.

“So, Marrock, how’s that old wet-dog doing? Kudos to you for facing him, and alone. Elsa?”

“Yeah?”

“For the love of God, please don’t do that again. Next time, call me. Screw what Mattie says. You’d be better off without her. She’s into some shady shit.”

“Shady, Mattie?”

“Mate, I’ve been around long enough to know. I can smell it on her. You don’t get to my age without gaining some knowledge. Look, I don’t know much about last night, just the whole supe community is talking about you facing down Marrock. Tell me everything.”

So I did. As I rubbed more oil into my hands and massaged his lithe back and limbs, I went over the events. I hesitated about telling him about Marrock's attack on me, but guessed he knew the alpha well enough.

As I finished the massage, I placed my hands on his back.

"Well, I feel two hundred years younger. Thanks, love. Look, I'd heard about some weird demonic energy, I bet I can guess who's involved with that."

"Who?"

Before I could blink, he sat up, towel wrapped around his waist.

"There's talk..." he glanced away. Uncharacteristic of him. As if he was weighing up how much to tell me. "You need to be more careful. These attacks, um... Why not come and stay with me for a while? Luna might be staying with Austin, but this power... I mean if it could control and smash around Lycaon, I mean, bloody hell, Elsa. I've never met Lycaon. Not many have." He brushed his fingers through his short curls, pulling them off his face. Releasing a sigh, which for the moment made me forget he wasn't human, he touched my arm. "I know a great many immortals. Some are very adept in magic." The inflection in his voice lowered as he drew the words out and avoided breaking eye contact. "Some of my acquaintances are very, very adept in the dark arts. Now I think we need, or I need to have a conversation with them, yes? And as these attacks are only on witches and werewolves, well they're obviously linked." His chest sank, his voice more upbeat. "It would be an honour to host you, I have many houses. The closest one to here is Bath. You'll want for nothing. Let me do this. Now I'll go and have some conversations."

My chest softened. "Thanks, Hakon. I really appreciate that. But I want-"

He reached out again, this time lightly gripping my wrist. "Elsa, you must. I mean, for the love of all that is holy, you'll wind up dead, love. And we can't have that."

To break the now impending doom that sank into me, he almost barked, a

cocky grin on his lips. “Who’ll do my massages if you’re dead, eh? I’m a billion years old. You’re not just my therapist, you’re my friend. I’m not hitting on you. Let me pick you up after work, and we’ll go get your things. My homes are your homes.” Wagging his finger with a smile that was as sinful as him, he continued, “I promise to behave, unless otherwise directed.”

I leaned into him, his eyes widened in surprise. “You’re such a flirt, you know that? I’ll be fine at home. But thank you.”

He huffed. “Well, we’ll have to sort out protection then. It would be much easier to have you at my home. Now I’ll have to sit outside your house like some freaky stalker vampire.”

“Hakon, you’re not responsible for me. I’m-”

“You tell Marrock that? And this Lycaon? How do you know what they’ll do? Werewolves, besides a very few...Well they have your scent now. As for whatever is hunting them, and your kind...”

“Ok. Ok. I’ll stay with you. Geez, I guess I can kiss the coven goodbye then.”

Spluttering a laugh he said, “Sod ‘em. Don’t tell them. I will tell Austin and Luna, though. They may rock over, too. Anything in particular you like eating, let me know. I’ll have it delivered, my treat. I’ll pick you up at seven.”

After he left my head was spinning. Well, it seemed I wasn’t as isolated after all. Only from my own kind.

After cleaning up and washing my hands, I checked my phone. Mattie had texted me. I’d always dreamt of joining the coven. Of belonging but I had to admit its rigid rules and constant vigilance, well it wasn’t exactly what I’d had in mind when I’d joined. Free thinkers were frowned on.

I grabbed some more coffee and returned Mattie's call. Swallowing hard, I didn’t relish it. It was almost like having a pushy boss, though normally she was encouraging, if strict.

“Elsa, you need to come over now. I appreciate you’re at work, but the coven comes first.”

“Mattie, until the coven pays my bills-”

“One hour then. Take it or leave it. If you’re serious about the coven, you’ll figure it out.”

She hung up.

Great. I had another client, who if she was on time, I could squeeze in. But she was always late.

I made my way through to the shop, waiting as Luna served a customer. Rolling my lips, tense as I stood impatiently, Luna caught my eye.

“Problem?”

“Mattie. She wants me at the coven in an hour, I-”

“This time just go. Under the circumstances,” she whispered, maintaining a smile to the other customers in the shop, “she’s one who may be able to figure out these attacks. We’re all nervous.” She spoke through a forced grin. “Even if we pretend we’re not. Who’s your next client?”

“Storm. But she’s usually late. She wants a clearing.”

“Ok. You do that, I can’t remember who’s after that.”

“I have an hour free to help out here, then it’s one of Hakon’s recommendations.”

“Cool, can you get to Mattie’s and back in that hour?”

“I’ll make sure of it. That said,” my mind drifted, “I might only be there for five minutes.” A spluttered a nervous laugh.

“I’d cover you, but I can’t close the shop. I’m going to have to reorder sage, anise, black pepper to name a few. I’m going to channel some protection spells on the pentacles, and some crystals. Especially pendants.” She sighed, “I’m not sure they’ll even work, but people are scared.”

My jaw dropped. “Word got out fast.”

“Ha, that’s one thing with supes, they love to gossip. Austin is bringing Grace by, too, later. So maybe I can rope them into channelling some

protection. I don't know, if I have some old stock, I'm thinking of putting some pendants out for free, you know. It doesn't feel right charging people, human or otherwise, for something to protect them."

"Maybe ask them to attend a Sabbath here, tomorrow morning as the sun rises? Just a thought."

A smile returned to her lips. "I like that. I'll print something up. Will you attend?"

"Maybe. I'll try."

"Sounds like a plan. Well, not long before Halloween. I hope this clears up before then. And it falls on a full moon this year!"

"A hunter's moon at that!"

The bell clanged out the back and we both jumped.

"That's Storm. Thanks Luna."

No one was out the back. A chill trickled down my spine, but as I scanned the treatment rooms, there were no signs of the living or the dead.

And twenty minutes later, still no sign of Storm. I called her and it went straight to voicemail. Sighing, I finished the rest of my coffee and texted Mattie that I'd be there shortly. I let Luna know and headed out.

Pulling my coat tighter, the wind chill had dropped. I love autumn, just when I'm not outside in the freezing weather. My car chugged as the cold engine battled to life and within twenty minutes I was at Mattie's house.

A big part of me wished I could rerun last night and stay in. Yesterday my life was much simpler. I'd heard of attacks, and of witches and werewolves going missing but none of that had seemed real. But the horror of last night, now I was living in a nightmare. I shivered even though my car warmed up fast, and my mind kept replaying the scene, and the deep emotional pull to Lycaon. However addictive he was, I was sure I needed to stay away.

The question was, could I?

## COVEN

Mattie's home, we called it the covenstead, was the meeting place for Badbury Rings coven.

As she answered the door, a strong waft of woodsy, earthy smoke engulfed me. She was, unsurprisingly, burning white sage to cleanse her home of negative energies.

She didn't speak as I walked in, just ushered me through.

Above the entrance hung a crystal. A stained-glass window above the door cast shards of sunlight through the crystal, cascading a rainbow of colours on the matte walls. Soft music chanted in the background, the place felt like a warm blanket wrapped around you on an autumn day.

It was snug, stacked with witchy ornaments, pentacles, crystals and painted resin skulls adorning the tables and shelves around her small living room. A fire burned in the hearth, and the soft sofas surrounding it were clustered with cats.

Her familiar amiable smile on her lips, she took a long breath.

"I'm sorry if I was harsh. I was in shock. I try to warn you ladies, to keep you safe. Lisa hadn't been here long, but her recommendation from Josey was the highest. I am responsible for your safety, I failed her. I should've known. I don't want to lose you, too. Come."

Sitting on the floor before the fire, I placed my back against the sofa as

she wandered off to the kitchen. I stared into the flames. Her home was so cosy you never wanted to leave it. She returned with a cup of piping hot apple juice with fresh ginger, cinnamon and a pinch of turmeric. One of my favourite autumn drinks. I inhaled it, the cinnamon and ginger scent filling me with a sense of ease.

“Marrock said you helped the pack. Saved Lycaon. That has to stop. I should expel you for that, let alone going there without my blessing, and at night. There was a reason that I was going to speak to him, you’re not powerful enough, nor wise enough to negotiate with an alpha, the Savernake pack in particular.” She wagged her finger, “You’re lucky he was generous, legally he could claim you for his own! *Revolting*. Only an animal would have such barbaric rules. Imagine that thing humping and grunting all over you!”

I stared hard into my cup, keeping my mind on my surroundings. Oh dear, I had imagined that, and the fact he was so wild was... well, hot as hellfire! Keeping a stern look, I was grateful she couldn’t read minds.

She stopped and sipped her drink, hands hugging the mug as she slumped in her high-backed chair next to the hearth. Staring at the flames, her gaze flickered back to me.

“Once you have attained power, you would not only be able to control your magic but command those beasts yourself. Their animal nature makes them easier to control, to submit to us. The fact that Marrock set about attacking you, that’s horrifying. Had Lisa listened she would still be alive. Aside from their feral nature, when a witch and werewolf come together, as I’ve said before, the energy unleashed is malevolent. Now I have to explain your actions to the council and try to reason with them. If I’m honest, I’m not hopeful. I should have been more insistent.”

Sighing, she continued. “I take the blame for your discretions. But you’ll probably be expelled. Now tell me about Lycaon. I want to know everything.”



I doubted she'd want to know I'd shared my blood with him, so I left that part out. Or the fact that I felt so attracted to him. Bonded even. That his naked body took my breath away. I mean, there was another reason why they called him their alpha... No Elsa, concentrate! I could feel her eyes burning into me, so, instead I told her a lie about the magic I'd used to restore him. Her eyes narrowed, lips pressed tight together as her stern look said it all. I had expected her to launch into an attack, and a stiffness gripped my shoulders, waiting for it at any moment. Until last night, I'd only known her as caring, warm and encouraging.

“Did Marrock tell you of the poppet he found, with our coven's insignia on it?”

“Pfft! Anyone could have placed that there, anyone from his pack trying to frame us. Another good reason that witches and werewolves don't mix.”

“Why? Perhaps if I knew-”

Her voice rose, exasperated, “You don't need to know why. You've been in the coven less than a year. You're in no position to question. Look what happened to Lisa, do you want the same fate?” Shifting uneasily her stare fixed on me relentlessly, “I am worried about you, Elsa. You seem infatuated by these... these men. You should be looking for a mage, a man, a gentleman who will treat you like a lady, and introduce you to the right sort of families. If you're lucky, you could, with your pretty looks and your skill, manage to marry into a middle-class family. Perhaps even send your children to the Academia of Necromantia? But, well... your chances aren't good after last night. You'll have no chance if you continue on the downward path, think about it.”

She huffed, “I know the allure of passion, I was young once, too. A rogue shifter, all that muscle. Striding about naked, savage, full of sex. And if that's your thing, rutting with shifters, oh, I'm sure they're virile enough. They'll love you and leave you, and on to their next female conquest.” She shuddered, “And for what? A night or two of lust, and all you'll have to show

for it is a runt in your belly and outcast by them and your own kind. Is that what you want?"

She muttered, her eyes blazing into the fire which sparked, "I blame your mother. Your father tried to tell her. Where you get these revolting ideas, the Goddess only knows!"

I grimaced. But only for show. Thinking of Lycaon and Marrock naked, well we obviously didn't see eye to eye.

I had to change the subject, "Who is this council? Witches?"

"Never you mind, young lady. The less you know the better. You should prepare for the worst. They'll want to question you. You've broken every rule in the book. Do you understand?"

I didn't answer. Getting up, I rubbed the head of Mollington, a long-haired ginger and white cat. Mollington stretched out, showing her belly. That made me smile.

"I have to get back to work, is that all?"

"All?"

Her phone rang, and she leapt out of the chair, putting her cup down on the small glass coffee table beside her, pointing to me as she moved to the kitchen.

"We're not done here."

Moving to the mantelpiece, I stood in front of the hearth, the heat soothing my legs. On the ledge I noticed what looked like an invitation. Glancing over my shoulder, I checked to see if she was out of sight. Gold writing on a thick white card, I could feel, sense something unpleasant about it. Almost like an invisible string of power unleashed as I stared at it, it seemed to grip my fingers. Tempting me, pulling me towards it.

Secrets...

Something from the invitation seemed to be luring me to it. Or, ok, maybe I'm just nosey. But in my defence its energy felt malevolent. A second glance and I could hear her speaking in whispered tones, I edged it back

using the tip of my chewed nail from the wax spilled bottle that it was placed behind. I didn't want to touch it, its energy was unsettling, weird, but mainly because she'd know. Flicking it back, I caught a name... Adara.

There was a date and a name. The date was tomorrow, the name, Ellsworth Hall. Was this her counsel?

Moving away I grabbed my coat, perching on the arm of the sofa alongside the cats. My phone pinged.

Luna had messaged me. No more clients this afternoon. She could do my next appointment and I should take a few days off but stay in touch.

Distracted as she came back in, Mattie barely looked at me. "You'll have to go, this will have to wait. Go to work then get home and lock the doors. Whatever that sinister force which Lisa and Nathan awoke by their monstrous union, it's rampaging. By helping the wolves, you could be a target. Here, take this."

She fished a pendant from her pocket. Glimmering, it was the symbol for the triple moon goddess. Thrusting it into my hands she said, "May the goddess watch over you. Prepare a spell, powerful with a hint of blood. Now go."

"Mattie, I didn't mean for this to happen. I was worried about Lisa, worried something bad had happened and..." I glanced at the cats.

"And what, spit it out Elsa! We've never had secrets before, you and I."

I held her glance. "Obviously I know you're highly competent, I didn't want Lisa thrown out over a guy and I didn't want anything to happen to you. I convinced Becca and Josey to go. I accept all the blame. Do you really think that violent entity is a result of Lisa and Nathan? I mean how?"

She chewed on her bottom lip as her eyes narrowed.

"Well that's very noble of you Elsa, and I appreciate you taking the blame for your mistakes but it's not enough. For whatever reason, you've poked the hornet's nest and now because of you this entity is out of control. Yes, it's common knowledge that witches consorting with werewolves

unleashes bad magic. Stay away from them, especially this Lycaon. The father of Lycans. And that bloody Marrock.” Shaking her head, she said, “If only your parents had had the good sense to send you to the academy, none of this would have happened.”

I bit my tongue. She knew why I hadn’t gone to the same school as everyone else. We weren’t that rich.

“Here, let me help you.”

I scooped up my hair as she leaned over and fastened the chain of the pendant.

“Now, stay home and stay safe. I may still just be able to save you.”

Standing back, a twinkle in her eye. “You have the makings of a fine, powerful witch, Elsa. Don’t chuck it all away for those two-faced mangy beasts! I can see already they’re sniffing around you like dogs in heat. You’re normally a good girl, if a little wild. Nothing we can’t change. A fine mage, and a bright future amongst your own could, if you’re very lucky, still be on the cards for you. So keep your door shut, and for the love of the goddess, your legs closed. Do you understand?”

I gave her a small nod. I didn’t argue. She wouldn’t have to worry though. I was staying with Hakon tonight and hunkering down.

Shuddering as the images from the night before flooded my mind, a sense of foreboding tugged at me, weighing me down.

No, I must be firm, I am safe. I’m a witch. I am powerful. And I’m most definitely not dating a werewolf. Not a rugged, rutting naked werewolf...



I pulled my coat tighter around me. The autumn wind bit at my fingers as I strode to my car, shivering. The light was fading, and I was grateful for the time off. I’d do another spell after I’d eaten and lit the fire. On that note, my

stomach grumbled and I tried to think about cooking, but Lycaon's face took over my mind. I hadn't dated for ages. Let alone a werewolf. Aside from the fact it was, as Mattie reminded me, forbidden, werewolves *were* volatile. And they loved the pack life.

Me, I loved the coven but I also loved my alone time. The coven was something I stepped in and out of, I mean we didn't share a house.

A pack... you lived alongside each other.

As I drove back, I could feel a burning sensation as if I was being watched. Glancing at other drivers, they seemed to catch my gaze, a darkness emanating from their eyes. Like the air had shifted and a sinister presence wrapped around me, around everyone, tightening its grip. It got heavier as I waited in traffic, the street lights flickering to life, and the misty rain clouded the fading light.

Finally I pulled up at home and checked my phone. Hakon had messaged me. Did I have any dinner suggestions, and breakfast?

He was cute though. If I didn't know better...

I felt a slight easing in my shoulders being back home. Before getting out, I quietened my mind and stared at my small house. I couldn't feel anything, from inside my car, the wards I'd set up seemed to be strong.

As for Hakon, I'd never spent the night at his house, but I knew enough that he was trustworthy. My body literally softened knowing I'd have one of the most powerful vampires at my side, but a part of me, a big part was sad, and knew that this spelled the end of my coven days. Short lived as they were.

Maybe Mattie was right. Josey and Becca's lives were kind of mapped out. I'd been invited to their Halloween ball, which I knew was an honour. No one outside the Academy got an invitation. Obviously it was on

Halloween and they assured me there would be plenty of eligible mages to date. We weren't pressured to marry, it wasn't the nineteenth century, but it was encouraged to settle down before the age of thirty years. Keep the blood lines strong and all that jazz.

Who am I kidding, it sounded like a cattle market and the fact I was reminded that, *'if I'm lucky'* made me feel less than whole?

A warm rush of air washed over me as I opened my front door. I turned around, startled, as I heard the roar of an engine. A small, sleek green sports car pulled up alongside mine and Hakon stepped out, waving. Why so early?

"Hey love, don't mind me. I'm early because there's been, well, problems. I can wait out here if you like?"

"No, come in. I have some things to do though."

He reached into the car and pulled out a messenger bag which he slung over his body. Then strolling over with a sexy smile he said, "I can stay here if you'd rather. I just need a chair in a corner. I've already eaten, so no fear."

"No, I only have one bed and you're too old for sleeping in a chair. Think of your shoulders and my hands fixing them. I'll be putting them right for weeks."

"Ha. Well, it's up to you."

I closed and locked the door. "I'm getting a coffee, just sit where you want."

"Cheers, love. You go do your stuff. I've brought my tablet to do some research. I'll fill you in when you're ready."

Towering over me, he bent slightly and kissed my head. "Don't worry, I'll keep you safe."

"This feels... I appreciate it, Hakon. I've been your therapist for months now and I know we know the same people, but why? I don't mean to sound rude, I'm just a bit surprised to have all this attention."

Nodding he took off his bag and sat on the small sofa. Sighing he

answered, “Austin and Luna speak highly of you. And you’re not just my therapist, I consider you a friend. This situation is far more perilous than you realise. It’s what I can do to help. And I like helping my friends. I’ve lived long enough to know that good friends, good people, for a vampire are few and far between. Keep them close. As I said earlier, Marrock, his pack, Lycaon, they all have your scent now. Now I’m not suggesting they’ll go all feral and track you down, but on the other hand,” he gestured with his fingers splayed, “well, they could. As for this... this poltergeist, for want of a better word, if it drives them insane, or possesses them, well... Aside from Sabian and Conor, you just can’t trust a werewolf. But that’s my experience, and we both know I’ve been around for aeons. But don’t you think it’s interesting that this entity didn’t attack you? Perhaps that should be your focus.”

Shrugging I replied, “I don’t think it’s anything to do with me. I was as terrified as anyone else. I need to find some powerful spells for protection.”

“You can use my blood if it helps.”

“Thanks, but I won’t need it.”

Using vampire blood was a double-edged sword. I wasn’t sure it would bode well with the angry spirit of a witch. Also, it was easily tracked. Vampires may be dead, but it’s an esoteric magic that binds their lifeless bodies to the pursuit of blood. And Hakon’s would be potent. If I used his blood, he’d be able to track me, no matter what. And being a good friend was one thing. But being tracked for life, I’m not so sure.

I left him on the sofa scrolling through his tablet as I wandered to the kitchen, putting the kettle on. Dragging myself upstairs, I pulled out my overnight bag from under the bed and stuffed some clean clothes and toiletries in it.

That done, I had to think of spells. Austin and I, as others had, compiled a list on Cloud, it was much better to have access to magic via your phone than carrying hefty books about. But some spells shouldn’t be shared.

Elemental magic, soul magic... I knew what I needed to do. Rushing

downstairs, I grabbed my phone and Hakon's attention.

"I need to phone Marrock. Lycaon's blood and mine will be a powerful mix for a spell..."

His jaw dropped as he looked up from his tablet. Hakon went to speak but Marrock answered, his voice shrill.

"Hello?"

"Marrock, it's Elsa. Can you find Lycaon, I may have a solution?"

"Lycaon? Maybe. We've had another attack and five of my men have gone missing. It's carnage here. Look..."

I could hear him as he muffled the phone and, in the background, shouted to his pack. Then he was back on the phone, "Elsa, I'll see what I can do."

"I'm coming over. I'll put a spell together."

"Seriously? You'd be better off waiting until sunrise. The moon's almost full, and well-"

"That's why we need to act fast. I know it's dangerous and I'd be lying if I said I'm not scared, but... look, Hakon will be with me. Maybe Austin, too. I'll call you once I'm there."

"Alright. Appreciate it. I'll do what I can to protect you."

He hung up abruptly. The shouting and strained calling in the background made my imagination run wild.

Hakon eyed me. His stare was cold, lips pressed tight together.

"Hakon, this entity, perhaps it is the estranged spirit of a witch who was burned at the stake for loving a werewolf. Lycaon, a werewolf was saved by a witch, me. Is that a coincidence? I mean it's crazy. But if I combine Lycaon's and my blood, I should be able to at least subdue her spirit. It's the best I've got. And I need to create it fast. But I'll have to perform the ritual at Savernake woods." My mouth dried and I swallowed hard. "With Lycaon at the site where they burned her. Marrock witnessed the horror, so he should be able to show me."

"Well," he huffed, "you're either brilliant or crazy. What if it makes her



spirit angrier?”

I shrugged. “Do you have any better ideas?”

Rolling his lips, he gazed back at his laptop. “No actually. I have contacted some of my friends who are very proficient in magic. They all lead me back to Austin. No one wants to touch this one. It’s been suggested to use elemental magic, or conjure a Golem, or perhaps a Hell demon to fight off this spirit. Anthony has many contacts in Hell, though they may kill him before helping him. And us, too. Or use a quartz crystal to trap this spirit, but coaxing it into the crystal is the problem...”

“The crystal may work but I doubt it would bind a spirit for long. She, her soul needs to find peace. And Zale is the key. But we have Lycaon, Zale’s maker, or father of the wolves. I don’t think adding demons or Golems into the mix is a good idea. That could start a war.”

Hakon let out a long sigh. “Well, a war over love. Battles have been fought for less. So, this father of the wolves, you think you can trust him? You’re not concerned with trusting the strongest werewolf?”

“Aw, Hakon, I have you to protect me. The werewolves, your immortal enemies, and now you’re fighting fit after your massage.”

He stuck out his tongue, then his face became serious. Frown lines ran deep in his forehead. “Well then, I’d have to move in here missy, I mean how else will I protect you every day? I think you should reconsider though. Letting the wolves into your life. If you unlatch the door, and let them in, there’s no going back!”

He was right and part of me filled with trepidation. The other part of me yearned for him. For Lycaon.

The fluttering in my stomach, the surging heat from the thought of Lycaon made me unable to eat, even though I knew I should. Hunger replaced by desire, by a craving.

I felt Hakon’s stare burn into me. A cheeky smirk on his lips, he grinned

from behind his tablet. Slouched on my sofa, my gaze fell to his long legs clad in leather trousers, he smelled of citrus, bergamot and lemon.

His black silk shirt outlined his svelte figure and with his boyish face with strawberry curls, he licked his lips. He was the epitome of a tempting, dangerous vampire. Ironically, he smelled good enough to eat. Repressing a shudder of inappropriate thoughts, I said, "I'm going to prepare the spell. Then I'll be ready to leave. When we get there, no posturing to the werewolves."

Puckering his lips, the vampire's wide eyes were full of mischief. "I wouldn't dream of creating a fight. Besides, I'm rather keen to meet this father of werewolves. He's even older than me, that's a first. You go do your witchy things, I'll keep researching spells and potions that might help. And perhaps stop looking at me like you're going to eat me. Otherwise, I won't be responsible for my actions. Plus, you'll be with your hairy boyfriend in a while, and I don't do werewolves. Ok?"

I felt my cheeks burn. "I just thought you looked nice. There's no need to go there."

"I'm always there, love. I am a vampire after all." He shot me a lopsided grin.

I pointed to the door, a bit dizzy as I walked away from the hot vampire.

Geez, a man drought for months. Men really are like buses. None for ages then several all at once. And all of them are dangerous as hell.

All of them forbidden by the coven.

Upstairs in my study, I ran my finger over the spines of the many spell books and grimoires I had. Which one would speak to me?

A tingle ran down my back and a spark burnt my finger. I pulled out the book, *The Dragon Grimoire*.

*Dragons...*

I fished my phone from my back pocket and texted Austin. He knew a

dragon shifter. Could he contact him, ask him to help? There was a good chance he wouldn't come to our aid, as most immortals weren't affected by this catastrophe. Plus, as Hakon had said, they were keeping their distance. And I didn't blame them. But maybe I'd be lucky. And if anyone could sweet talk a dragon shifter, Austin could. So I had to hope.

A hammering on the front door made me jump.

Hakon called from the bottom of the stairs. "Austin and Grace have arrived. You ready to go meet your lupine boyfriend? I can almost smell the wet-dog before we leave."

I came downstairs clutching the grimoire. Austin was reading his text message, Grace, his protege was teasing Hakon.

She was young, I'd guess around twenty years old. Strands of blonde hair peaked through her hooded coat. Shorter than Austin, her bright eyes sparkled. An eager mage. Austin on the other hand looked tired. I guessed he needed his protege. As far as I knew once she'd qualified, she'd be able to take some of his work and earn some serious cash in the process.

She mocked Hakon. "Look at you, dressed in silk and leather and smelling like you're on the pull. Hoping to get some werewolf action, Hakon? All that testosterone, all that feral, masculine heat?"

He screwed up his face at her, and again stuck out his tongue.

"Did you know we were going to the woods? Ah," she shook her head, a mischievous smile on her face. "It is the werewolves isn't it, all those sweaty alpha males semi clad, or naked. You're hoping to get lucky?"

"I'd rather shag a demon, thanks, wet-dog smell doesn't exactly turn me on, love. You've been working for Conor's pack too long. I'm not sure what you women see in these burly overbearing men. I bet they're all vanilla and shag like hounds. You just don't know what you're missing."

I laughed. "Ok, are you offering to teach us? Let me guess, hand-cuffs, whips and chains, Hakon? I'm betting you enjoy the power?"

He placed the tablet aside, got up and brushed down his trousers as a gesture whilst locking his stare with mine. “Don’t knock it till you’ve tried it, love. And no, *I* prefer to be the submissive one. Makes a change from all the responsibilities I have. Nothing like surrendering yourself, body and soul to a beautiful woman. If you fancy it, you have my number.”

Spluttering a loud laugh, Austin looked up. “Ah, yes. Chained by your lover... Mortal men like to dominate because they’re, well, mortal. Weak. Now then, when you’ve got eternity before you and unimaginable powers, well... It’s quite a... no, I’ll leave it there. I’ll get all hot and bothered and now we have to go and stop this catastrophe. So...” He shot me a playful wink.

I couldn’t restrain myself from giggling. “Well now we know what to get you for your birthday. Nipple clamps.”

He huffed dramatically and chided, “I’ve already got those. Do keep up, Elsa.”

Then he continued, “Back to business though. I thought you’d want to know, Luna is holding a sabbath tonight. They’re going to charge some pendants, send healing light our way.”

“Good. I have a feeling we’ll need it. Marrock was distressed. They’ve had another attack. We need to be prepared.”

Grace answered me, “We’ve got it. We’ve set up a link to a portal to whisk us all into if we need it. We can be out of the woods in an instant!”

“Even Marrock’s pack?”

“Um,” she glanced at Austin.

He shrugged. “No, but we *can* do that. Just hadn’t thought of it. We’ll need to increase our magic. Other than that, we’re both versed in the Elemental arts, so...”

Hakon barked, “Come on then. Elsa’s boyfriend is waiting like a good boy and all this tension is making me... well, just come on.”

I grabbed my coat, and handed Grace the grimoire. Austin peered over

her shoulder. “I have the Dragon Grimoire on Cloud, no need to bring it. Good choice though. I’m waiting to hear back from Luke. I’ve asked him and told him where we are going. Luke grew up with werewolves, Conor’s pack in fact. So I suspect he will help. He’s probably, well, that’s none of our business. Anyway, I’ve packed some jeans for him if he does turn up. Ready?”

I glanced around. Picking up my bag which contained my spell, some personal items and my athame, I felt like I’d lost something.

Hakon rattled his keys, grinning.

Frowning, Austin put his hand up. “We didn’t drive over, blood sucker. Do keep up. I’m transporting us there through a rift. Geez, we are mages man!”

Hakon muttered, shoving his keys back in his pocket.

I winced, too. “Really? That always makes me feel sick.”

Grace elbowed her tutor. “I told you. Here you two, take one of these.”

Hakon stared at her hand, and his voice squeaked as he admonished, “What the hell is that? I’m a vampire, not a child.”

“They’re not sweets, they’re for calming your stomach. I made them. They do have sugar in them though.”

I nodded. “Do I want to know what else is in there?”

Grace shrugged. “They’re vegetarian, there’s no insects or body fluids in them. Just herbs...”

Well they tasted bitter despite the sugar but as we swayed and wavered in the abyss, my head swam but my stomach was settled.

## DRAGON FLAME

Outside Savernake woods, moonlight cast a silver gleam over the rain, which glistened like a thousand diamonds on the grass and bracken around us.

My breath looked like smoke, hitting the chilly air. Even wrapped up, I shivered in the bitter night. The moon was almost full. Shadows cast strange figures that seemed to ebb and bob amongst the forest before us.

Marrock was meant to meet us but instead we were met with only a deathly silence. Even Austin was quiet, which probably worried me more. Hakon strode towards me, his arm gently blocking my path.

Almost growling, his voice low, he said “Stay behind me, little witch. I don’t like this, I don’t like it at all.”

Grace echoed his thoughts, “Danger is in the air. We’re too late. Can you smell it?”

We all could. The metallic scent was as thick as fog. Blood had been shed. My stomach curdled. Clenching my fists, I edged forwards with the vampire and mages by my side as we strode carefully into the depths of the Savernake forest, trying not to make a sound. My heart hammered, thumping in my ears and every breath seemed deafening.

A crow cawed, its sounded shrill above us. Flapping its wings, Austin cursed and shot his hand up, palm facing the bird. An almighty thump as it

soared down and landed, caught in a web of silver-blue light cast by the mage.

Ruffling its feathers, I scorned Austin, his cat-like grin confused me. But I needn't have. Before us the bird exploded into a brilliant illuminating light casting thousands of silver shards and in its place a young man with large deep eyes filled with fear. A mop of yellow blond hair, he crouched, naked and afraid before us.

“Well, a raven shifter? You must be from the Shadow forest? I only know of one of your kin and he... you live there?” Austin asked.

His voice was shaky and quiet as he answered, “I am. I was sent to check on the Savernake pack. Some of the pack have, well, we know they're missing. Are you going to kill me?”

Austin was before the man before I could blink, a swift glance at Grace who nodded. She weaved a spell, metallic scarlet runes shimmered in the sweet damp air, and then in her hands a thick red blanket of wool which she wrapped around the shifter in the blink of an eye.

The hairs on my arms stood on end, my skin tingling as their magic, like static all around us, prickled on my skin.

A warm smile stretched across Austin's face. “No, Brennus. It is Brennus isn't it? I don't know of many raven shifters, but I've heard of you. Will you help us, you've seen a lot I imagine. Are they dead, Lycaon, Marrock?”

Austin helped the shifter up as Brennus stumbled. The mage steadied him.

“I'm sorry, I couldn't risk you flying away. I know you're afraid, I felt that and still do. We're all afraid.”

Licking his lips, Brennus pulled the blanket tighter around him, trying to stave off the chilly air as he glanced slowly at each of us, taking in his predicament.

“Bren, you can call me Bren. Everyone calls me that.” Looking around as if we were being watched, he continued, “They’re not all dead. But some are. There’s another, Zale.” His tone dropped to almost a whisper, strained as if saying the name would arouse the devil himself.

He had us hanging on his every word.

I took a breath. “What of him? What have you seen?”

“Like a ghost, Zale’s wolf has the purest white fur, he seems to appear like the fog, materialising from nowhere. But with *her* spirit, leaving a trail of death and vengeance in their wake. He is back and he won’t rest until he’s taken all of their lives. Even the father of wolves cannot stop him. We heard the tales, even from far away. Some of the wolves and,” he locked his sorrowful eyes with mine, “and witches have sought refuge in our pack. But we worry that their fate could become ours, by us giving them shelter. You can’t help, just being here puts you in the path of death. You should, we should all leave now.”

I sighed, my limbs like lead I stepped gently towards Bren, my hand resting on his lithe shoulder.

“I won’t do that, I think I can help. You saw what happened with Lycaon, my blood saved him. I have a plan...”

Bren wrinkled his face. “Yes, I watched when Marrock forced you to save Lycaon. I saw what happened. Loren’s soul, she didn’t harm you but...” his eyes closed briefly. “We should leave. Something’s really wrong here. I know they were punished but even tortured spirits don’t tear others to shreds.” Turning his head to Austin, then Hakon, Bren fixed his stare on me.



“They can’t help you. Even the two mages. You must go.”

A howl startled us as it echoed around the whole forest. Bren threw off the blanket and started to transform. Austin’s hand shot up to stop him, Hakon grabbed Austin’s wrist, his voice soft, “No, let him go. The lad is terrified. We shouldn’t force anyone to help us. How will you live with yourself if his blood is on your hands? Only those who are prepared to fight this evil, and die, should stay. Leave him.”

Nodding, Austin complied.

I wrestled with my mind, the howling got louder, closer and I wanted to draw my athame. I spun around. Was it Lycaon? Was he hurt? An unusual instinct to run and protect him overcame me. But then there was nothing normal about how I felt about Lycaon.

A cry from behind me had me turn too fast, my head spun as the howling turned to growling. In the distance, I could see under the cold moon, the silhouettes of two wolves. Fighting. One huge grey wolf, I knew that was Lycaon and the other as Bren had said. Large, powerful and brilliant white.

Zale.

Snapping and snarling, the grey wolf lunged forwards.

Legs bent, the white wolf crouched then suddenly sprung up, wrapping his jaw around Lycaon's front paw. Yelping, Lycaon tried to scramble back, whining in pain.

My breath stopped as my heart pummelled, both wolves locked eye to eye but Zale would not let go.

A flurry of fur, Lycaon tried to bite Zale but couldn’t reach as Zale’s jaw locked onto Lycaon’s paw.

Grey and white fur turned red, until he released his maker. Zale bolted off into the depths of the thick coppice of trees whilst Lycaon staggered slowly

over to us.

Treading through the undergrowth off the path, we hurried over, though for a moment Austin stood watching in stunned silence.

Then Austin couldn't contain himself, his voice cut through us, "Bloody wow! The size of him!"

Hakon swallowed, muttering, "Good boy. Stay there, there, there," a hint of fear in the vampire's voice.

I stood, hands by my side, limp, feeling powerless as the wolf, Lycaon, hobbled towards me. His head almost reached my height. Hakon yelled as the wolf narrowed its pale eyes as its stare tore into my soul.

The seconds seemed timeless. Blue eyes locked on mine, his musky scent, sweet with moss and bracken, we stood eye to eye. The man trapped inside the wolf. The curse of Zeus.

Then my heart slowed and I felt connected to him. Just as the trees are connected to the earth, or the sun and the sky.

I'd found what was lost but I'd never known that it was missing.

Did he feel the same?

Suddenly he shuddered and spasmed, yelping as he collapsed on the ground. His body breaking as he whined. His back cracked open. Bone splitting as sinew and flesh transformed before my eyes. The scent of blood and flesh filled the air. I was frozen to the spot watching.

Cold crept over my skin until finally the man, the father of the wolves, emerged.

On his knees, he placed one hand on the floor, rasping from the violence of the transformation from beast to man. Shaking, he slowly rose to his feet. Naked and bloody he gripped his right hand, his head dropped.

His long-tangled hair caught the moonlight, the light shone from his skin coated in a sheen of sweat, highlighting his muscular frame.

Unable to stop, I found myself before him. Our eyes locked, my breathing slowed. Noises around us in the forest faded, a crisp silence seemed to hold sway over us. It was as if we were both afraid to step forward. To take that final step. To know the future. Everything would change.

Lycaon closed the gap between us, his tread heavy with purpose, large arms pulling me into him. Yearning, a raw desire. Awakening a passion that burned like wildfire. As he pulled me into him tighter, I felt my body melt into his, my head burrowed into his chest as it rose and fell, his heart pounding. My skin warmed, as did his as we held each other tightly.

No words were needed.

No fear, only solace. Like a place I had searched for all my life but had never known, I needed him, his arms, his embrace.

His scent filled me and I never wanted to leave him.

Why did I feel this for a man I'd never even spoken to? Was it because I had saved his life? Or did I now have his curse? Had the curse of the werewolf infected my heart?

We stepped away from each other, aware of the others' stares. In the distance, shadows of the beasts edged out from behind the old twisted oak trees, the moonlight dappling down through the tree canopy.

Amber and red eyes, like lasers radiated from the forest. Wolves. Savernake's. We were surrounded by what was left of Marrock's pack.

But for a moment our eyes met, his chest rose, and we couldn't look away.

The vampire broke the spell.

A cold hand on my shoulder, Hakon's voice was quiet, respectful.

“Come now. We should enact the spell that Elsa has brought and bring some peace to this place. Lycaon I take it? I'm glad to meet you. It's not often I meet someone older than me. And the white wolf, Zale?”

Lycaon's eyes darted from me to Hakon. His lips curled slightly. He held his right hand again. I could see the bruises forming, dried blood and bite marks. It was swollen and purple and black.

Then he shot an icy glare at me. “Your friend is a vampire?”

His voice had no accent. I'd wondered what it would sound like. As he was from Greece originally, I thought he'd have an accent. But that was two millennia ago. It was deep, but soft. Commanding.

I wet my lips, holding his gaze. “Hakon is a friend, yes. We've come to help, I have a spell, I-”

I could hear Hakon gasp, trying and failing to repress a growl.

Lycaon's shoulders tightened. “You saved my life, Elsa. I am indebted to you. But I cannot be around the undead. You should go, leave now. You cannot help any more. To stay is to die. I can't be responsible, nor save you from him.”

“From Zale, your progeny? And Loren's spirit. You're a werewolf, I'm a witch. Just as they were. We're already connected, that's obvious. I believe together, our blood combined, we can help them. Ease their anger, their souls.”

His lips twisted, his voice questioning. “Help them? Zale has become a monster, ravaged with violence at the barbaric burning of his lover. An anger

that has been left to grow and fester for a hundred years. This pack, and the Badbury Rings coven deserve their fate. Though some of Marrock's men are innocent. As is he. I see you, Elsa, an uncommon witch. Caring for both werewolves and witches. And for saving me. Though I have little semblance of humanity left and the wolf inside of me is strong. Overpowering at times. For your own safety, you should leave."

Lycaon's stare fell on Hakon as he snarled, "I don't need *them* to help."

Hakon exclaimed, raising his hands, a hint of mischief in his voice, "Because you handled that so well last time? Excuse me mate, but you're not exactly my favourite species, either. You stink, and your physique would make a lesser vampire whimper. But this isn't just about you, is it?"

I reached out to Lycaon's injured hand. Channelling energy from the goddess, I summoned healing. A warm, bubbling heat trickled through me, into Lycaon and I noticed his eyes flutter for a moment.

"Hakon's right. Other werewolves and witches, innocents and many more I suspect, who would never agree to punishing Zale or Loren, they are being slaughtered. Look at Lisa, Nathan."

My heart stung, my gut churned as I saw their dead bodies in my mind. "Loren and Zale punished them, and why? Lisa and Nathan were together, perhaps in love. Yes, they were from the pack and coven that were responsible for Zale and Loren's fate, but they themselves weren't. This has to stop, and we need all the help we can get. Luke will be here, a dragon shifter. His blood will add potency to the spell."

Lycaon's shoulders dropped a little. He didn't look convinced, but he raised his chin and offered a small nod.

From the forest Marrock emerged. His dark hair was matted with earth and blood, low slung jeans were torn and caked in dirt.

There was a small spark in his eyes as he exclaimed, “Elsa! Thank God you’re here.” He noticed Lycaon and then Lycaon’s hand.

His face twisted. “Zale, he’s gone? He attacked you?”

Lycaon nodded.

Marrock eyed Hakon, then Austin and Grace. “Vampires, mages. You’re here to help?”

I answered him, “They are. I have a spell.” Turning to Austin I asked, “Any update on Luke?”

Austin rolled his eyes. “I did ask him to help. He wasn’t happy. I think he was busy, if you know what I mean. He said he’d be here as soon as possible though. So, you’re after his blood?”

“I am. Marrock, can you take us to the site where Loren was killed?”

I noticed that despite Lycaon’s warning that I should stay away, he now moved to stand beside me, listening intently to everything I said.

My face burned as Lycaon caught me off guard, staring at him. Quickly, I glanced away.

Marrock shifted from foot to foot. “Of course I can take you there. But Zale...”

I waved my hand. “If we can convince Zale to help, it would mean he and his lover’s spirit find some peace. They have every right to be livid and punish those responsible. But not innocents. I understand though, he’s been angry, heartbroken for so long he doesn’t know another way. But, we need to find a way to help him. In the meantime, Austin and Grace can form a barrier of protection. Lycaon, I’ll need a drop of your blood.”

His voice softened as he pinned me with his stare. “How do you suggest we coax Zale into submission? Even I cannot do that.”

I glanced at Grace before answering Lycaon. “We have to convince him by working together. I’m not asking for anyone’s submission. It’s up to us, actually you and me, to convince him that slaughtering everyone isn’t going

to give him justice. From what Marrock told me, a hundred years ago everyone was more obedient. No one back then questioned these rules that werewolves and witches had to be segregated. I know many still cling to this. I think it's outdated and an affront to our intelligence, our rights, and freedoms. We already have a silent council who act when immortals step out of line. That's fine. We need them. We need Zale to know that what happens today impacts the future." I glanced at each of them. "This is bigger than us here. This impacts all of our kind, werewolf, witches, vampires, heck even Nephilim and angels. I could go on, but you get the picture. This injustice could pave the way forward to create a better future. I know it's asking a lot, fighting against the old established ways. Luke's presence, as well as his blood, would help."

Lycaon dared a small smile. "Elsa, I'm impressed by your bravery. You walked into the wolf's den alone and held your own against Marrock. That takes guts. And now this. A visionary. I had never thought to think so far ahead. But Zale is old, as is his thinking. I'm even older. Most will oppose you, many would kill you for saying this, let alone try to change the order of things."

"Yes, but this segregation is insane. We live in a world packed full of humans. We know that if they found out about our existence, they'd wipe us out within a few years, maybe sooner. They may not have magic, but they have science. And weapons. We would be seen as the threat. We need community, to come together, not hide in spiteful factions. That's the bigger picture."

Marrock slapped Lycaon's arm. "We may not see eye to eye, all of us. But I am willing to step into the future, who knows, maybe I'll even stop eating humans?"

Hakon narrowed his eyes at the alphas. "Well, gee, that's mighty big of you."

Tightening his jaw, the father of wolves shook his head. "I'm letting these

ideals get ahead of me. Although I like it, there's a problem. A huge flaw in your plan. *Because* Zale and Loren were together, their being together, that much supernatural power caused this evil to manifest, or so we're told." He frowned.

Hakon waved his hand. "That's bullshit. I mean, really? I can hear it in your voice, you don't really believe that. Who would? Yes, back in the day lies were told to keep immortals under control. No, this energy unleashed *could* well be from the ravaged soul of the witch. But there are other forces about, always have been. Who's to say it's not something else or someone with an ulterior motive?"

Marrock's voice was low as he said, "Food for thought. We have many enemies. It could be magic, or someone stirring it up from the grave. The timing is certainly telling. We're almost upon the anniversary of Loren's death, and with the upcoming autumn equinox, which falls on the full moon..."

Silence clung to us as his words left us with more questions than answers.

"Were you able to get anything from Zale, has he spoken to you?"

Lycaon shook his head. "He's turned feral. I had in the past searched for him. After I found out what had happened, of course I went looking for him. But it was futile. He completely disappeared. I didn't even sense him. Until now."

Marrock nodded. "Come then, I'll take you to the place where this catastrophe began. But be warned, it has a sinister energy. No one goes there. Nothing grows there. Keep your wits about you." His shoulders slunk as he led us through the forest.

Every sound, a broken twig, an owl's cry piercing the silence in the distance, made me flinch. And still the feeling that we were being watched.



A few figures from the pack stalked from the depths of the forest, their shadows moving swiftly through the thick copse, though they made no sound. All of us were silent. I tried to watch every foot fall, as Marrock led us deeper in the wood.

My muscles burned from walking, I realised we were slowly going uphill. The trees looked like charcoal under the canopy and the chill of the night nipped at my fingers. But for now, the rain held off. I slunk my hands in my pockets, as silver moonlight struggled to peep through the branches above. Ivy entwined around tree trunks and draped like ribbons, whilst firs and spruce were mixed with oaks and elms. All interwoven above us.

Beside me, I could feel Lycaon's glances warming on me. As we trudged deeper forwards I caught his eye. My cheeks were hot for the moment as we locked our gaze, then I saw his cheeks flushed, too. A warmth ran through me, like the comforting heat of the hearth with this alpha as he never left my side.

Marrock's voice was husky as he said, "We're nearly there." But he didn't have to say anything. You could feel it in the air, the magic prickling like electricity. It was thick and oppressive.

I could see a small cabin set to one side and the clearing, where even the branches from the outlying trees touching the circle, were bare, like bony fingers reaching down to the ground.

No grass, no foliage, just barren soil, moist from the autumn weather and a feeling that chilled me to the bone.

A lone torch was staked in the ground, the sooty flames flicked in the breeze.

I gulped and looked at Hakon, whose pale face turned paler.

He muttered, "Bloody hell, mate."

In the centre of the clearing, skulls were arranged in the shape of a

pentacle. Werewolf skulls. Large craniums, short snouts and fangs. And in the centre of the pentagram, a witch's skull.

I could tell it was a witch's skull because large gold runes glistened from it.

Nobody spoke. Austin gripped Grace's arm, his beady eyes glanced nervously at Hakon who strode ahead and bent down almost touching a beast's skull, then thought better of it. I rasped, about to call to him not to touch it, but he'd stood up, turned around and was surveying the area.

I muttered nervously, "I need to be quick, this isn't safe. The rest of you go. We'll stay, perform the ritual. Hurry."

Leaning into me, Lycaon murmured, "Those runes... Why the symbol of mercury?"

It was clearly visible. Covering most of the witch's skull, an eclipsed moon, a symbol of the sun and a cross. I clenched my fist. At the edge of the place I noticed the ground moving.

Pointing, I spoke quietly. "Look what is moving at the edge of the circle... snakes. Mercury and snakes can symbolise transcendence of death. Someone has been trying to raise the dead. No doubt raising or channelling Loren's spirit, this is the reason for the killings. We need to be quick and the others definitely need to get out of here."

A whistle on the wind followed by a thud as Hakon teetered, clutching his arm, mouth open then quickly with clenched teeth as he yanked out the dart that had been fired into him.

Austin shouted something to Grace, the next moment I felt nausea loll in my stomach, everything was black and silver, like thousands of stars surrounding me.

Grace and Austin had tried to get us out of here, as she said, fast access

through a portal. It hadn't bloody worked! We were still here, trapped! My legs wobbled. Falling forward I fell flat, landing on Lycaon who had gone a pale shade of green. Austin's voice was full of fear, muttering, spitting as he and Grace cast a myriad of spells, the sigils breaking up fast, fading like steam in the air. Rolling off of Lycaon, I rasped, doing the same. Weaving something, anything to protect us. But nothing worked.

Another thud, then another.

Hakon, Austin, Marrock and Grace toppled, falling like felled trees as darts fired into them.

I couldn't swallow. For a moment I was frozen in fear.

I tried to scamper up, Lycaon pulled me back to the ground, his face etched in horror. I wanted to cry out, to run, to save my friends, but I couldn't move. My eyes darted around the copse, looking for the enemy.

Lycaon's eye line focused on a tree close to us. Strange runes were etched on it. The symbols looked like arrows with crosses running through them. Churning, my stomach lolled, fighting it I braced.

I had to channel magic. This wood, Savernake, had become Hell.

Whispering, he leaned into me. "No. Do not practise magic here, not now. It has become a beacon. Those marks in the tree, that's the sigil of the Svefnthorn. A Norse sleeping spell. They are not dead. Someone is trying to capture us." He raised his chin, sniffing the air. "We need to go. Now!"

As he finished speaking, a horn bellowed across the forest followed by the sound of feet, running, tramping through the woods.

My heart skipped a beat, a beading of sweat broke on the back of my neck.

"Elsa, we have to go."

I glanced hopelessly at our fallen friends. "How are we going to get them out? I have to use magic."

“No time. Follow me.”

“I won’t leave them. You go then.”

He snarled, which made me flinch. His pale blue eyes flaming scarlet suddenly. “They’re not dead. If this enemy wanted them dead, they’d be corpses.”

The thudding of feet drew closer. I was torn. I glanced from him to my friends, the sound growing closer and closer and the horn resounded right through us. The icy night pressed in around us. Air filled with the scent of blood, of beasts. Hostile magic.

“I, we can’t help them now. We’ll come back for them, Elsa...”

He spat the words through gritted teeth. Nodding, my body like lead as reluctance weighed me down, I followed him. Scampering low back into the forest, he reached for my hand and pulled me close.

He led me through the thickest part, running as if his path was clear. Stumbling, I faltered.

“Elsa, come on.”

“Wait... Do you hear that?”

Above us, a melodic beating pounded on the breeze. A stir of wind swept Lycaon’s hair across his face. The rhythmic sound grew louder and heat prickled on my face. As we glanced up, craning our necks to see through the canopy as we crouched beside a tree.

A colossal dark shape twisted, blocking out the moonlight.

Our backs against a tree we strained to see it swooping low, it turned and plunged down.

Then suddenly ahead of us, the trees illuminated a brilliant scarlet, orange and yellow as a whip of flame shot downwards followed by screaming.

The pounding stopped.

Silence gripped the forest and in the distance the thumping of something large shook the ground.

I heard flapping which stirred on the breeze and roaring bellowed through us.

My body buzzed, thrumming with adrenaline, half excited, half in fear as I whispered frantically to Lycaon, “It must be Luke. Come on.”

Dodging in and out of the trees and staying low, we made our way back to the clearing.

Luke was still in dragon form. My tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth, dry from shock at actually coming face to face with this magnificent beast.

His massive reptilian head was poised, peering down at Hakon.

Trembling, I edged forward, my hands up to show I was unarmed and called gently.

“Luke, I’m Elsa. Austin’s friend. They’ve been drugged with darts. We managed to escape. If we put them on your back, can you get them to safety?”

The dragon tossed his huge head, his emerald scales catching the silver light as he veered towards me. I felt Lycaon’s hand on my back.

The dragon almost filled the clearing, his tail hammered on the ground sending shockwaves throughout the forest, his eyes gleaming like jewels. Then stretching his wings, a brilliant luminous splay of lights, indigo, scarlet, yellows engulfed him. We covered our eyes with our arms to shield us as the blinding lights engulfed the dragon.

Then, before us stood a man, lithe with a young but weathered face. Piercing illuminated jade eyes. Everything about him seemed to glow, as if the fire within him was flaming. He was lean, shorter than the werewolves. Raising his chin, he licked his small lips.

His voice was deeper than I expected but then he was a dragon shifter.

“Elsa. Where’s Austin?”

I came forward with Lycaon by my side. Lycaon stared wide eyed at Luke, who now noticed Lycaon and pinned him with a stare before opening his arms and throwing the alpha a hug.

Smiling, Luke's hard features softened.

"How long has it been? I'm glad you're here."

Stepping back, Luke indicated to Hakon.

"You were unable to help? This is worrisome. They darted the mages, which was wise of them."

As Lycaon opened his mouth to speak, Luke shook his head and began to chant. From his fingers fiery sigils danced in the air.

I watched as a glistening light sprung up around the clearing, as if the thinnest glass was being erected. It towered, going up and up until it peaked at the top closing in on itself.

Luke shook his hands.

"There. Apologies mate, I saw something shifting through the tree. Didn't like the feeling. Now, Austin or Grace should have some jeans for me." He half-laughed, half-grunted at Lycaon. "Going natural I see? No change there." His brilliant eyes darted to me. "And you, Elsa, I'm guessing want a drop of my blood. What's your plan?"

I took a breath, not realising that I'd been holding it. Luke bent down and scooped up the mage, carrying Austin whilst Lycaon carried Grace placing them beside Hakon.

I answered him.

"I made a potion and with the blood of the three of us added to it, I hope to expel the evil from this place, but more than that, to give Loren's soul some peace."

Luke eyed me then Lycaon. "A tall order. So the vengeful spirit of a witch? I'm not sure I understand how it became so powerful." As he spoke he opened the rucksack next to Austin and pulled on some jeans that the mage had brought him.

Then Luke waved to the pentacle made of skulls. "Though no doubt this nonsense helped enrage and empower Loren's soul. I guess that's her skull in the centre?"

I swallowed hard. “She was burned alive. It could be...”

A chill shuddered through me.

*Was it Lisa’s skull?*

Lycaon touched my arm. “We will need to put all these souls to rest.”

We jumped, startled at the sound of something smashing into the warding that Luke had set up.

On the other side of Luke’s diaphanous barrier, the dark shadows of werewolves threw themselves against it.

I tried to stop shaking. “This may be a stupid question, but how do spirits have a physical presence, slamming against the barrier?”

Luke raised his brows and shrugged. “Energy. They’ve been manifested with nefarious power, that power is what you’re hearing. They won’t get in. They don’t have the power of my blood. But it won’t last long.”

I pulled the spell bottle from my pocket. “Is that Marrock’s pack?”

Lycaon’s voice was hoarse as he strode over to it, peering up close. “No. In fact, these are the damned souls of werewolves. Made even more powerful by this infernal pentacle, I imagine.”

Lycaon turned to face the shifter. “Luke? I’d pick the werewolf skulls up, but no doubt they’re hexed. The skulls of the damned, their souls need to be blessed and destroyed.”

Luke nodded. “You want to do this now?”

Glancing back to the warded wall, Lycaon nodded. “Yes. It can’t wait.”

Shrugging, Luke replied, “Ok. I have a trick. Elsa, Lycaon, say a blessing for their souls.”

Confused for a moment, Lycaon screwed up his face, then mumbled a prayer in Latin, whilst I did a blessing for the witch’s skull, whoever she was.

Luke took a long breath, his lean body filling with air, then he bellowed fire, on every skull except the witch’s.

Immediately a calm descended over us. Luke’s eyes narrowed. “Elsa, I’ll

leave the witch's skull to you. Are you ready to get this spell done?"

I nodded. "Aren't you going to take Austin, Marrock, Grace and Hakon on your back?"

Twisting his lips he mused on my words. "It's always a risk for me, changing into dragon form. My dragon, as you saw is so big, easily spotted by mortals. It's far easier to open a loop as I am and whisk us away."

I turned the small bottle over in my hands. "If it's easier to transport through a time loop, then why did you arrive here as a dragon?"

With a wry smile on his lips, he said, "To rescue you lot. I find that shifting into a bloody huge dragon and annihilating your enemies with dragon fire generally works fast. Now that's done, for now at least, well..."

Lycaon bent down, touched the end of a dart that had wedged in Marrock's arm. Carefully he dabbed his finger tip near the wound then smelt it. He wrinkled his face, leering away.

"Wolfsbane. I'm not sure what else."

Dismissing it, Luke flicked his wrist. "Don't panic, mate. We'll sort them out when I get them home, once this spell is cast."

He raised his brows at me. "Alright then, Elsa, a drop of dragon's blood? You ready?" He nodded to the warding and continued, "It's holding but we only have about another five minutes and I need to conserve my energy to get us out of here."

Lycaon stared at the shadow werewolves. Although the skulls in the pentacle had been obliterated with a blessing, the shadow wolves remained, except now they just peered through, their arms limp by their sides.

"Lupine souls chained to the woods... Who the hell is behind all this?"

The wolf spirit's eyes were just empty eye sockets, like an abyss waiting to suck you in, to consume you. I tried and failed to brace a shiver. They were the type of golem that feeds off your soul.



Trying to keep my voice steady, I already felt I'd bitten off more than I could chew. Turning to Luke, I asked, "did you see many others in the forest? Where are they from? I can't catch their scent."

"I saw a dozen. The dart shooters were human. Or witches. I think. Either way, they're ash now. So, what's in the potion, Elsa?"

"Lavender, St. John's Wort, sage, along with a few secrets from the coven. Mixed with our blood, it should break the evil that raised Loren's soul."

Lycaon locked eyes with me, my heart fluttered. I could sense a warmth building between us. Despite the fact we were up against something more powerful than us, I still felt a comfort around him.

Luke interrupted. "Oh, you two are together? God, I can feel that now. What an energy you both give off. I feel like a spare part."

Chuckling, Lycaon replied, "You're never a spare part my friend. We're not together. Elsa here saved my life. With her blood. I am bound to her now."

I swallowed hard.

Bound to me. *To me?* No, I have to concentrate.

The dragon shifter raised his brows, wide-eyed. "Lucky her. Well then."

Feeling the heat on my face, I passed my athame to Luke and held out the small bottle so he could add a drop of blood into it. As he did this, he flashed me a cocky grin.

"Ironic that Loren and Zale were punished for being together, and now you two, bound together, are going to save their souls. A werewolf and a witch. As I live and breathe! At least we're living in more agreeable times. Though many supes hate, and I mean really hate the fact that witches, shifters, vampires intermix. I should know."

I nodded as Luke, having pricked his finger and shed some blood into the phial, now passed the athame to Lycaon.

As Lycaon concentrated on the bottle and his blood, he sighed. "Well I

wouldn't know. I've been alone a long time."

Luke didn't let it rest. "You had, what, forty sons and as many wives back in the day? Busy were you? No wonder you've been on your own, needed a rest I think."

"I had three wives and seven sons." Lycaon darted his glance at me. "Not at the same time. Before the curse, I wasn't immortal, but I had a type of semi-immortal power imbued in me. A tale for another time. My sons have long been laid to rest. As have my wives."

Clearing his throat, Luke looked at me. "He's just letting you know that so you don't have to worry about any angry exes looming around." He winked.

My cheeks burned hotter. I nodded sharply.

Good to know.

Though my body swooned with Lycaon, and hell, Luke was hotter than hellfire, I had to concentrate. I could fantasise later if I stayed alive that long.

Plus, I needed something to look forward to.

I walked over to the witch's skull, then pricked my finger, watching as my blood dropped and mixed with theirs. Gently swirling the bottle, I recited a blessing, a general blessing before I would chant a spell to cast out the evil from Loren's tormented soul.

The blood sizzled and spat, seemingly cooking the herbs. Smoke snaked through the thin neck of the bottle.

I grimaced, shrugged and started the spell.

My hand burned as the glass bottle heated fast. The ingredients got hotter, boiling, then flinching, I dropped it. It wasn't meant to do that!

In one swoop, Lycaon stepped forward and swept me back in his arms as the bottle exploded into a thousand shards, glass splaying everywhere.

Luke hissed, "Bloody hell!"

Opening my eyes, grey fog filled the area where I'd dropped the bottle. I coughed, the air dense with the smog as Luke's pained voice asked, "Uh, I'm

guessing it wasn't meant to do that?"

As we stumbled back, something emerged from the smoky air. I turned, gripping tightly to Lycaon as screaming skulls, pale against the darkness emerged from the smoke. They leered towards us, screeching, the sound piercing our eardrums.

## WOLF & WITCH

Glittering runes blazed brightly and I found myself still in the alpha's arms but now falling fast, my stomach somersaulting as my legs, my feet felt no ground beneath me.

Until... thud!

I rasped violently, unable to catch a breath, shaking with Lycaon wrapping his arms tighter around me and whispering, "I've got you."

Realising we were somewhere else, the air smelled different, sweet and musky. Spots dotted before my eyes. I took an unsteady step back, holding onto Lycaon's arms as I did so.

Luke cleared his throat. "Yeah, sorry about that. Probably all my fault actually. Still, you're alright and I've got us all back to my home. See?"

I tried to swallow, my mouth filled with dust as Lycaon snapped at the dragon. "What do you mean, your fault? What the hell happened back there?"

I looked at Luke whose face was burning up.

He shook his head as he bent over Grace, Hakon, Austin and Marrock who were laid on the floor beside him, still in a torpor.

Luke scrambled up, rolled his lips, his chest rising. "I um, well, I was otherwise engaged when Austin contacted me. With a woman. A vampire woman. We were in bed. I drank her blood. As you do, when you have sex with a vampire."

My lips twisted. “With a what now? You drank a vampire’s blood and added that, that tainted blood to the ritual? Are you insane?”

Shrugging he said, “Sorry. I was in a hurry. Austin said it was urgent. I’d already drunk it. I should’ve thought that through, my bad.”

Lycaon’s fingers flexed, his muscles tensed. His voice cut through us, “And you didn’t think to tell us this? You mixed vampire blood into a witch’s spell? You’ve probably made everything worse, foolish shifter. And why the hell would a dragon shifter drink the blood of a leech? An undead thing? For god’s sake, you’re a dragon.” Tilting his head, Lycaon growled, “I suppose you let her drink yours?”

Luke’s eyes narrowed, he sucked in his cheeks. His shoulders tensed as he grabbed a book next to him, and slammed it against the wall. “How would you know? You’ve been celibate for centuries, huh? Vampire blood is a potent aphrodisiac. It heightens the experience. Especially for a dragon shifter. And no, I didn’t let her drink my blood. It was just sex, Lycaon. If you weren’t so uptight, you’d know that. Hell, you’ve tasted Elsa’s blood, there’s no difference. Except you’re too repressed to shag her.”

Leaping on Luke, Lycaon had his hands on Luke’s shoulders and slammed him back until he pinned him against the wall.

Luke laughed, “Hit a nerve did I? It’s too late now. Look, I know I should’ve said something about it, about the vamp blood. Hit me if you want, I won’t fight you. We’re on the same side.”

Rushing over to them, I tried to squeeze between them. “It’s done now. It is bad, worse even. But it’s done. We’re all back, safe. But what of Marrock’s men and others? We don’t have time for this. Mattie said she had to make a case to some council, and then I found an invite to something called Adara. It’s tonight at Ellsworth Hall. There may be a clue there. And then there was the poppet found at Savernake. Who left that there? Mattie won’t give me any answers and after her reaction, or lack of it, with Lisa, there’s no point asking her. Or anyone from the coven. They’re all under her orders. This

whole situation makes me sick.”

Also very afraid, but I wasn't about to admit to that.

We were all silent, the whole horror just seemed to go from bad to worse.

Clearing his throat, Luke muttered, “Well, at least the sex was good? So there's that.” He shot a lopsided smile, Lycaon sneered and dropped his grip on Luke, but shoved the shifter one last time. Clenching his jaw, his pale blue eyes now flamed red, whilst Luke's pupils, however relaxed he looked, had changed shape like a dragon's.

Both panted, piercing the other with a hardened stare.

“I'll go with Elsa, see if there's someone in this council who can help. Can you at least help them?” Lycaon gestured to our friends.

Luke's voice was rough as he answered, “Of course I can.” Luke implored me with his eyes, his face softening. “I'm so sorry, Elsa. I hope you can forgive me?”

“Luke, it's done.” My gaze fell from him to Hakon, who looked surprisingly peaceful in his sleeping state. Would I drink Hakon's blood in a fit of passion? Not likely. I tried to ease the tension.

“I've heard sex with vampires can be quite... intense. Me, I would kill for a coffee though.”

Luke's smile returned. “You've got it. Ellsworth Hall, do you want me to take you there?”

A nervous laugh escaped me. “What, on your back, as a dragon?”

“No. Through a portal.”

“Well, that would save time. A map, I need to look it up. I'm not keen to just walk through the front door.”

His voice seemed deeper now, Luke nodded towards the door.

“You two freshen up. I'll make you a drink and you can plan your next move. Healing our friends will take a little time.”

“Aside from the darts in their arms, there were markings of the Svefnthorn carved on a tree.”

“Thanks Lycaon. I am familiar with Norse magic, so I'll look into it. Now, Elsa, Lycaon, let's swap numbers. I'll do a clearing spell, cleanse the vamp blood from my system.”

I realised now that we were in his basement. It was warm, the brick walls painted white and our friends slept on their backs on thick rugs. A large wooden bookcase filled one wall from floor to ceiling, whilst tables scattered around the side filled with ampules, phials, various metallic mixing bowls and jars of herbs. I gasped as something thin and string-like suddenly moved within its jar, twisting and writhing. I wasn't sure I wanted to know what it was.

Luke strode over to a staircase and headed up, Lycaon followed.

Glancing over my shoulder, two more archways led to other rooms down here. I guessed this was where he performed his magic.

A dragon shifter who practises magic. Hot indeed. Let alone his adventures in the bedroom with the vampire.

As for the weird stuff in the jars, yeah, maybe not so hot.

No. Concentrate...

I guessed feeling safe had unleashed a slew of emotions. And their scent, and the looks of these two, well, I had to force my mind on the matter at hand. And ignore the rushing heat that swelled through my core.

As if reading my mind, Lycaon turned slightly at the bottom of the stairs, his eyes locked with mine as he smiled. Then he stood back on the step and held out his hand, gently ushering me before him.

My heart skittered and heat pooled through me as he watched, his eyes drinking me up as I edged past him, his hand brushing mine.

I followed Luke through a bright hallway and through to his kitchen. Take away containers filled the sink drainer; two empty bottles of red wine and his clothes were strewn over the backs of dining chairs that lined a kitchen

breakfast bar.

Luke grabbed the kettle and filled it up. Turning quickly he said, “It’s early. Why don’t you two grab a wash, you especially, Lycaon, smell like you haven’t showered in a century. And catch a rest. I’ll grab a drink, do the same then start the clearing on our friends. This council, if it’s witchcraft, I doubt they’ll hold it in the day.”

My shoulders sank, tiredness now pulling me down. “Oh, you have no idea how much that appeals to me, but no. There’s no time like the present. In fact, if this council doesn’t sit until tonight, getting there early could be our advantage. But I’d like to wash my hands. And drink coffee, the stronger the better.”

Lycaon piped in, “I had a shower at Marrock’s earlier. Before the attack. So thanks for the comment. Some jeans wouldn’t go amiss though.”

Luke shrugged. “Sure. You’ll find some in my drawers in the bedroom. Elsa, there’s take-out in the fridge, I highly recommend it. Can’t fight on an empty stomach.”

Lycaon nodded to me, “I’ve eaten, thanks. Elsa?”

I tried to hide my frown. What had he eaten, a human? As a wolf?

“No. I’m hungry but I can’t face it.”

Luke stepped over, put his hands on mine as I leaned against his messy breakfast bar. “Look, have some soup or rice. You need something in your stomach.”

Pushing past him, Lycaon pulled himself up, then stood in his place. His shoulders tense. “He’s right. I feel better after the steak Marrock cooked for me. You should eat.”

*Phew!*

“Rice then, thanks. With soy sauce?”

Grinning, Luke nodded. “I have some in the fridge. Go clean up, lovey.”

I noticed that last word, Lycaon tensed again and glared at Luke, but Luke had turned around making the coffee.



“Where’s the bathroom?”

Luke spun back around. “Up the stairs, last on the right. You can’t miss it, it’s the room with the bath in it.”

I rolled my eyes, nodded and headed up, leaving Lycaon still burning a hole with his eyes at Luke as Luke busied himself making coffee and getting rice out from the fridge.

On the next floor I had to pass by several rooms. His home was quite large, a Victorian terrace and the bay windows spilled in light. A heady scent of wood and sweet frankincense filled the landing. Passing by Luke’s bedroom had me stop in my tracks.

The door was thrown wide open, bed clothes a mess, but gleaming above the bed, the ceiling had a mirror. Really? He liked to watch himself...

I spluttered a laugh, imagining. How vain. Or kinky.

On the bed posts hung silver chains with handcuffs and as I carefully peered forward, though careful not to step inside the dragon's lair, there were blobs of dried candle wax on the pillows.

I knew I shouldn’t pry but I couldn’t stop. Picturing Luke, the dragon shifter chained up, naked with wax dripping onto him... Drinking blood from a vampire, I was totally immersed in that scene, so I nearly yelled out loud when I felt a whisper on my neck to find Lycaon grinning at me.

“You like that? Pleasure and pain?”

I didn’t turn to face him, I leaned back tilting my head to whisper in his ear.

“I assumed the cuffs were for him?”

He shot me a sinful grin, his hair curtaining his eyes. “Oh really Elsa? I see. You like to chain up your men?”

He edged back as I twisted around.

I looked past him. “You left Luke downstairs?”

“He’s making coffee, and your rice.”

Shaking his head, he splayed his fingers, stepping away. Lowering his voice to almost a whisper he said, “You should know... Sometimes, the wolf, the human-animal gets... confused. Wild. I want you but...”

I tried to lighten the mood but as we were in Luke’s home, kept my voice as quiet as possible. “So chains are a good idea then?”

His eyes closed, face wrinkled. A small grin tugged at his lips.

Sighing, his words were soft, quiet. “You should be with a mage. Your life is hectic already. I want you, but what am I doing?” He looked past me.

I placed my hand on his broad chest. Immediately his energy surged through me as his eyes followed it. My voice was calm.

“I mean, isn’t what you feel for me just because you’ve had my blood? It’s just that, isn’t it? This connection we have?”

His chest rose and fell slowly, his eyes still locked on my hand on his chest.

“*Just that?* You stir me like no other. I’m battling every instinct, every moment I’m with you. You mesmerise me. Your blood is in me. I’m compelled to be with you, this bond, this blood spell is intimate. I’ve only shared blood when I’ve made another a werewolf. Your blood has awoken a desire within me, passion. Emotions that I haven’t felt in centuries. That I was, am afraid to give life to... I want you Elsa. I want to be with you.” Exhaling, he broke the intense eye contact.

Pounding fast, my heart threatened to burst out of my chest. I mean, I knew what I felt about him. Feeling torn between him being way out of my league, my ex’s were usually, well, fairly toxic. I seemed to attract them. Luna had said I just needed more confidence and trust in myself. Like you always get a feeling, however below the radar, when you meet a guy. But Lycaon, he felt completely different. Like my whole body, mind and soul was at peace with him. And I burned with a passion that almost felt all-consuming. But how to tell him this, what now? Instead I fidgeted, my fingers instinctively going to my mouth before mumbling, “I feel the same

way about you.” Feeble I know. Maybe I could tell him more, maybe.

He moved towards me, running his large hands down my arms. “I’m glad you do. When I drank your blood, when we were connected and I felt the rhythmic beating of your heart, looked into your eyes... I felt breathless. I felt,” his eyes darted to the side, his heavy breathing sending shivers of desire through me. “I felt like I’d found my soulmate, my one. A craving, my body, my spirit were on fire. I ran away as the wolf to heal. But also,” he met my eyes, “because I was overwhelmed. This is all new to me. And I don’t know what will happen, and that, Elsa, honestly, it scares me. I’m used to keeping my own counsel and locking my feelings away.”

I swallowed hard. There was so much I wanted to say, but I felt terrified of saying too much, too little. I didn’t know him. He could be gone by tomorrow!

“I’m scared, too, Lycaon. And I know it’s forbidden, and, this situation... But I can’t help what I feel. And I feel, I feel found when I’m with you.”

He wrapped his fingers in mine as I leaned against the door frame. Then slowly he gripped around my wrist, but it was gentle. His eyes met mine. “I, we werewolves don’t love lightly. We love until death, and beyond. You know about Zale already. I would end the world to save you. But you know nothing about me.” His eyes glanced past me. “I’m mainly a loner. I hunt humans, immortals. I eat them. In wolf form of course. I’m the opposite of Hakon. I prefer the quiet of the woods than the flashy lights of the city. Though, Conor has introduced me to many modern ways of living. So this, *just sharing blood*. There’s nothing light in that. You’d be wise to remember that.”

“I know a few things about you. You feel the same about me as I do with you. And from what I’ve learned, most immortals, especially those who’ve lived longer, prefer the quiet.”

Heat soared through me, addictive, surging. I should stop. I should step away. But I couldn't. My breathing deepened. Stirring whirled inside me and the weight of his gaze into mine, every fibre of me felt alive. On fire.

He closed the gap between us. As he pulled me into him, I could feel his arousal hard against me. Almost growling, he muttered, "I want to kiss you."

As I edged up on tiptoe, purposefully pushing myself into him, a cascade of desire flooding through me, Lycaon bent down to reach me.

His lips pressed against mine, electricity between us, his lips brushed my face. He inhaled deeply and I felt his body tremble against me. Slowly he parted his lips against mine, his breathing deepened. His long hair curtained my face, his hands sliding slowly down my arms. Wrapping his fingers around my wrists, he hitched my arms above me, guiding me back to the door frame, pushing me against it as I surrendered to him.

My heart skittered as passion crashed through me in waves. His tongue teased mine, then he gently bit my bottom lip, murmuring a low hum. We locked eyes. Taking in every breath, every movement caressing, willing, surrendering to each other. As I met his tongue, slowly edging my hips into him, he groaned. Pressing harder, our kiss became carnal, greedy.

Slowly he stepped away, lowering my arms. A boyish grin on his face, I noticed it was flushed and could feel the heat in my cheeks.

"Well, that any good? I'm very out of practice."

"I wish we didn't have to stop."

"I've wanted to do that since I first met you. Necessity forces us apart, though. Elsa..."

I swallowed hard, trying to compose myself. He wasn't the only one. I'd thought about him since I'd met him. When he'd drank my blood, broken, bloody, naked beneath me.

"Yes?"

"Next time I won't want to stop. I want to tear your clothes off as it is."

But we need to go. Shall we?"

He turned, his lips curved, warming his face. His eyes shone like a summer sky, his smile full of sex.

"Is that a promise, Lycaon, for next time?"

His face beamed.

I hadn't seen him smile much, obviously, but it suited him. He could look imposing as hell, his size, his physique. But when he smiled, he lit up my heart.

Now he winked and said, "Yes."

Headily I went to the bathroom to freshen up and compose myself. Splashing cold water on my face, I cringed. Dark circles under my eyes, so I used more cold water, and worried that Luke would be laughing downstairs.

But after lots of water, feeling refreshed, Lycaon went in after me. The smell of coffee led me down to the kitchen where Luke gazed up, his face partially hidden under his fringe.

"So Elsa, you approve? I heard you and Lycaon talking about my room. Just let me know if you ever want a first-hand tour," he said with a grin.

"Bloody hell, you can't keep it in your trousers, can you? Thanks Luke, but I'll pass."

"Ah, vanilla huh?"

"I'm not interested in one-night stands. A man like you, you're worth so much more." I broke his stare, reached for the coffee and added in some sugar from the bowl. A two-sugar day...

He leaned on the kitchen counter, smiling. "Ah, you're looking for true love? I guess we all want that. Until I find it, I'm tasting everything, trying everything. It may surprise you but not long ago I was very reserved, in fact, I didn't feel worthy of much."

Now I frowned. "I mean, how was that possible? You're intelligent, good

looking and a dragon for God's sake."

A boyish grin on his face, he whispered, "Follow me. I have a gift for you, and you alone."

I took another swig of coffee. I was feeling out of my depth, yet everyone assumed I knew what I was doing. Still, placing the mug down I followed him into his living room. Large historical paintings of knights and dragons crammed on the walls, which made me grin. I wondered if any of these represented his history. I mean, I had no idea how old he was.

"The dragons won, we always do," he said as he caught me staring at the paintings. Crouching down, he pulled open a drawer from a wood-wormed chest of drawers. Rummaging around it, he fished something out.

"Here, take this." Frowning, he continued, "I'm worried about you. Austin thinks highly of you, he's a close friend."

Lowering his voice, he stared past me, then back at me. "Take it. If you get into trouble, you need to recite this. I know you don't have the power yet to transport out of trouble. This will give you that, though it's not totally accurate. I used it when I began practising magic. Here's the enchantment."

A small amulet with the Seal of Solomon, the pentagram etched with runes around its circumference and a note with a simple spell.

"I like him," he nodded to the door, "but be careful. Us shifters have a feral side, we're part animal after all. We can't always control that animal."

"Thanks Luke. And I'm always careful. Mostly."

"*Mostly?* Just watch yourself."

Back in his kitchen, as I examined the amulet, Luke closed my fingers around it, leaning in. "Put it away for now. And take my advice." He glanced up.

Lycaon bounded in, eyed Luke, then pulled up a bar stool and sat as close to me without actually sitting on my lap.

Luke leaned back against the sideboard. "Well, look at you two. Ironic. First Zale and Loren, now Elsa and Lycaon. You're going to need some

powerful magic to stop history from repeating itself. Many will actively hate you. God, I feel bad screwing up that spell. I'll get on it, get the others back on their feet. Ellsworth Hall? Once I get these sleepy heads up and running, we'll come find you. You're going to need us, especially when you both shack up. And let's be honest, you will. I can feel your attraction, your energy, so it's only a matter of time." He spluttered a laugh. "Unless you want to go upstairs now?"

"I don't share. I'm an alpha."

Luke shrugged, a cheeky grin on his lips. "How quaint. Suit yourself, you don't know what you're missing. Still, you're going to need a masking spell to get into Ellsworth Manor, and Elsa and I can do that now."

He jutted his chin towards the door and still clutching my coffee, I followed him down to the cellar.

"Shouldn't you help them first?" I peered over at Hakon.

He dismissed my comment with his hand. "They're sleeping. Let them rest. I assume you two want to leave as soon as possible?"

Lycaon almost barked, "Yes. We do."

"Ok then. This shouldn't take too long, any thought's Elsa, on how to mask yourselves?"

I glanced at Lycaon. "Well, it's a coven, or a council. I'm guessing it's mainly Lycaon who needs it, as I am technically, possibly still in a coven? Henbane, hemlock, mandrake... and..."

"Foxgloves?" Lycaon offered.

Luke's face lit up, his smile beaming. "I like it. I don't have foxgloves. Try again?"

"Bindweed? Good for curses and hexes?"

Luke winked at me. "You got it. Everything is arranged alphabetically. Bindweed first." He eyed Lycaon. "I'm impressed, you know your herbs!"

Shrugging, Lycaon stood with his back to the wall at the bottom of the stairs. "I'm a werewolf, I've lived in forests."

Lycaon's nonchalant response seemed to suggest he didn't want to discuss it further. Rolling his lips, wide-eyed, Luke strode over to the floor-ceiling shelves and ran his fingers across the wood.

I grinned at him as we got the other ingredients. He nudged me. "You love this bit I bet? You know, making, casting spells? That buzz, that power?"

"I do, Luke. Being able to help."

He teased. "C'mon, it's more than that. You have the ability to... well, never mind. Shall we?"

We took what we needed, dropping the herbs into a small wooden bowl, then Luke took them to his desk, passing by Marrock as he did so. "He looks cute when he's sleeping! Bless..."

Lycaon stirred, then sat on the bottom stair, watching in silence.

Smacking his lips together as he mixed the ingredients, Luke eyed me. "You want to say it, or shall I?"

"Oh, you. I've only known you hours and already your magic is, well potent. I wish you could teach me!"

A smug smile, his brows rose. "I'm a dragon, potent is my middle name!"

I leaned into him. "Is that what the vampire told you?"

"That's not all," but before he could say anymore, Lycaon cleared his throat. I scratched my head, embarrassed and realised that biting my nails was the key to all things. The atmosphere shifted, now feeling strangely uncomfortable.

I hadn't thought we were flirting? Maybe the king of wolves, being alone for so long, wasn't used to banter. In my experience, every other person, male or female, supes tease one another. Sometimes they flirt. A lot of them are old, but it's usually just a laugh. An icebreaker. Plus, a lot of them do sleep around. No shame in that. I was just, well... boring, I guess. A one-man woman, like Luna. Becca and Josey liked to keep their options open. Who am I kidding? I'm usually single!



Casting a flame from his finger, Luke lit the mixture and recited what sounded like Latin over it. The smoke bellowed thick, woodsy and snaked from the copper bowl he'd transferred the spell into. Then he wafted it over me, still chanting, and moved to Lycaon, who stood up, towering above him.

Catching my glance, Lycaon's pursed lips softened. As his eyes darted back to Luke, I flashed a glance over his body. I had to stop doing that. I couldn't concentrate and I couldn't control the ripples of lust thinking about him naked. But I figured, well, we could die soon, so...

As I brought my thoughts back to the moment at hand, I felt Lycaon's stare on me. He wet his bottom lip, fire in his eyes that made me feel...

"Would you two stop that? Either stop it, or go upstairs right now! Bloody hell, magic in the air, literally, how can I concentrate!" Luke laughed as he stole back to his desk, placing the copper bowl down. "Feel free to use the chains on him Elsa. I bloody would!"

Both Lycaon and I instinctively looked at the floor, like kids being scolded.

I held back a chuckle but muttered, "Taming the beast?"

Lycaon raised a brow, his lips curved at one side as his gaze rested on me.

Luke joked, "Come on then, I'm taking you there now. This tension is turning me on. I've got stuff to do!"

## ADARA

Luke transported us about a quarter of a mile from Ellsworth Hall. An imposing Georgian manor set in acres of manicured grounds and fortunately for us, surrounded by trees.

Four stone Palladiums marked the entrance, the building was lined with stone balustrades, and large rectangular windows. But we needed to find a less grand entrance, the servant's door.

Luke had told me that Adara meant noble, so this council was possibly some type of hierarchy order for the witches. Hakon had hinted that Mattie was involved in some shady dealings. We'd whisked up a masking spell to conceal our presence, with the help of Luke, but whether that would work against such a powerful coven, we'd soon find out.

Wide-eyed, Lycaon scanned the area before us. Lifting his chin he sniffed the air. The day was slowly fading, the shadows elongated, like bony fingers clawing on the grass. It was almost dusk, which we needed. Although trees adorned the grounds, they were small, fruit trees mostly, plum, apple, pear and scattered far apart, which meant dashing from one to another. With the amount of windows from the manor overlooking the grounds, it was highly likely we'd be spotted.

"We'll wait here a little longer." A smile danced on his lips. "What can we do for thirty minutes until darkness comes?" He nudged me. "I'm only

kidding.”

Bobbing his head to look past the tree, he continued, “Mostly. I’m kind of kidding. What are you hoping to find there?”

He stood inches from me. For a moment I forgot why I was here, consumed in his scent. His t-shirt stretched outlining every muscle over his hard sculpted body. Placing his huge hand next to me, his arm almost blocking the view, I breathed him in. He blinked rapidly, rolling his lips to hide his grin.

I leaned into him. As I did his hands wrapped lightly over my cheeks, bending to meet my lips, firm, demanding.

Gulping, I moved back. “Everyone tells me to be careful with you. Your feral nature. The big bad wolf. You’re not going to eat me, are you?”

He breathed a laugh, his eyes resting on my face then slowly surveying my body. Heat swirled through me.

Leaning closer, his voice barely a whisper, “Not in the way you’re referring to. No. You should be careful, but I won’t harm you.” His gaze averted past me. “The wolf, the beast... Doubtful. But it’s a wild animal, Elsa, and I only have so much control. I can promise you this,” he pinned me again with his stare, “I will do my best by you. So ...” he nodded towards the manor.

“Good to know, I appreciate your honesty.”

He dropped his shoulders, glancing up through his hair which fell over his face. “If, as a wolf I’m hunting or feeding, you’d best stay far away. I don’t think it would harm you. Then again, it’s primal.”

I nodded. “In the manor, I want to find something to help. A council who are seeking to put Loren’s soul to rest, to help Zale.” I twisted around, scanning the space between us and the hall. “Somehow I doubt that’s what we’ll find.”

“Well, yeah. Most supernatural species are amoral. Intent on gaining power and harming, slaughtering others. Conor spoke well of the few vamps he knew, most are just fangs on feet. Screwing and bleeding whoever they come into contact with. And leaving a trail of death. Not that I can speak. I’ve killed humans, hell Elsa, I eat them. But in the main, only the evil ones.”

*In the main?*

His magic, his spell suddenly lessened and my mouth ran off without engaging my brain. “Is that what you tell yourself? I’ve never killed a mortal. Or an immortal. But if I had to, I guess I would. I don’t know.”

Lycaon leaned into me, his hair touching my face, hot breath making me tremble. “You won’t have to. I’ll do it for you. I told you, I’m here for you.” He edged back. “If that’s too much, you should let me know.”

As he scanned the place before us, the night wrapping slowly around us, I caught his eye. “Maybe it is too much, but I can’t turn this off. I think about you. I’m the witch, yet you’ve bewitched me.”

Again he tried to withhold a smile. “Same here Elsa.” He moved back. “I’d better stand over here, before I ravish you. I can’t concentrate.” He avoided eye contact.

I swallowed repeatedly, trying to get my breath back. “Well, whatever happens, we’re going to walk into the lion’s den. Hopefully we’ll meet a better fate than Loren and Zale...”

With dusk wrapping around us, we ran from tree to tree, moving closer to the house. The sound of tyres on gravel had us stop, peering around the trees.

Limousines, Bentleys, Rolls Royce’s were a few I could identify. Porters were on hand to open car doors. The people who stepped out were dressed in black suits and cloaks, hoods covering their heads. As a few glanced around, I saw they wore oval shaped mirrored masks. I glanced at the number plates which I saw had been removed.

Neither of us spoke. If they were witches, which judging by Mattie’s invitation I guessed they had to be, they’d hear us however quietly we

whispered.

As they headed inside the manor, a break in the guest line, we headed for the back of the building. Lycaon sniffed the air, nodded, picking up scents and noises that were inaudible to me. He pulled me with him behind another tree. I slammed into his body, he bent down, his lips on mine.

For the moment I forgot everything. The cool night breeze wrapped around us, the shadow of the trees concealing us and his scent, his kiss consumed my mind, my body.

“We’ll be ok. I got this. But whatever you hope to find, that’s on you. I can track, break-in, and escape in ways you can’t imagine. I haven’t exactly always toed the legal line, Elsa.”

“What? You’ve burgled people?”

His eyes widened. “So you’re worried that I’ve burgled people, but you’re not concerned that I eat them? No, I don’t steal from humans. But I’ve had to retrieve artefacts. I can smell things you can’t even imagine.”

“I know what the wolf eats, well... as for your sense of smell, I’m not sure I want to know what you can detect.”

We managed to get around the back unseen. At the servant’s entrance, a small wood and iron studded door separated us from the house.

Lycaon turned, about to shove his shoulder into it, but I grabbed him.

“Wait, no, it’ll be warded for sure. Hold on.”

It was. And it was beyond my magic to undo it.

“Shit, I can’t break it.” I stepped back and looked up at the roof. “That’s usually the best place to get in, unless they are warring with Nephilim or angels, they rarely ward the roof. I mean, who can get in there?”

“Get on my back.”

“What?”

“Climb onto my back, I can get us up there. Unless you brought your broomstick?”

“Are you going to change into a wolf?”

He twisted his lips. “No. Do you want me to?”

“No.”

“How would that help me, turning into a wolf?”

I tried to withhold a huff.

“I don’t know. Can you climb up the building?”

“Sure. Come on.”

This was all very Twilight for me. He bent down as I jumped up, hitching my legs around his hips and interlinking my fingers around his neck.

Striding over to the servant’s door, he looked up. With a smooth leap, his fingers hooked over the stone window edging. Claws extracted, shuffling his legs, he raised his left arm, his claws piercing through the stone but as his right hand reached and his claws scraped the stone edging, he rasped.

Wincing, he pushed away, my stomach flipped as he landed, legs bent but he was on his feet.

“Shit, sorry. Zale, because he is my progeny, his bite lasts longer on my hand. If it were any other wolf, my hand would’ve healed by now. You alright?”

“Yes. Damn... How about you?”

“Well, my pride is shattered and my hand is throbbing like a bitch.”

“Here, let me look.”

“No, as you said, any magic could be detected. We’re on our own, Elsa, with only our wits.”

“Oh no.”

A small laugh escaped his lips. “You seem to be doing pretty well so far.”

Yeah, I was sure that was luck, actually.

Before I could continue, the sound of feet alerted us. We ran and crouched behind an industrial bin, peering around as a stream of staff were flocking to the door.

I was certain they’d hear my heart pounding as it thumped in my ears.

As they filed in through the door, a mini bus pulled up behind them with more staff pouring out.

They were dressed in black, the women with beige aprons, hair tied back, whilst the men wore waiting suits. All human.

“Now’s our chance Elsa, come on.”

“No. Look at us, we don’t look like them. Wait a moment.”

Moving my fingers, he sucked in air. “It’ll be alright. Here...”

As I drew the runes, he shivered as magic rippled through him. Then I did the same for myself.

“It’s such low level magic, hopefully it won’t be detected. It’s only used on humans, and it won’t last long, ten minutes if we’re lucky. What they’ll see, fingers crossed, is staff, we’ll look like them.”

His jaw open he glanced down at his t-shirt. “I don’t see any change?”

I whispered urgently back, “Well no, it’s not for you. They’re mortals, so casting an illusion is easier. Just hope we don’t bump into actual witches. Otherwise, get ready to run like hell.”

“I can do that. If we have to run, jump on my back.”

“Ok, Edward.”

“Who?”

“Never mind.”

For an instant he shot me a lopsided smile, but his face quickly changed to serious.

“It looks like they’re filing in and going straight ahead of that doorway, I suggest we go right?”

He shrugged. “Why, is that the way?”

“Who knows. We just need to lose them once we’re inside.”

“Ready?”

I nodded.

I pulled him back, or rather I grabbed his arm. “One last thing, keep your head down. They look drugged, or bewitched. We must act the same.”

A curt nod and we checked to see if the way was clear.

A tall man dressed in a formal day jacket with waistcoat and extremely pressed trousers came striding towards the door. His short jet-black hair contrasted with his pale skin and small mean eyes. He surveyed the area like a hawk.

Behind him half a dozen men, dressed in jeans, boots and t-shirts carried heavy trunks. The hawk-eye man stood by the door, overseeing them as they shuffled inside.

Please don't close the door, please don't close the door...

I saw Lycaon's muscles twitch. I thought the same.

Shifters.

As soon as they disappeared, we strode over fast. Checking inside the door that the way was clear, we stepped through and took a sharp right.

Almost letting out a sigh of relief, but we weren't out of the woods yet. Before us was an old fashioned kitchen with what looked like a Victorian washing machine, or mangle.

The mangle is basically a bucket with a turn handle. Was this a museum? Hanging from the ceiling, fake hops and spices. Along the back wall, a huge range for cooking, and other antiquated kitchen equipment that I'd seen in old houses open to the public.

The concrete floor had seen better days, too, brown from worn in dirt. The ceiling was so low Lycaon was nearly bent double. A yellow tub sink sat at one end. In the wall I spied a small staircase leading up and out.

As we walked up the stairs, Lycaon's heavy tread had the floorboards groaning.

With the others that preceded us, some noise helped mask it.

At the top of the narrow twisting stairs, a long corridor stretched both ways. A flickering bulb hung in the low ceiling, casting shadows and barely visible light.



“Servant’s corridors,” Lycaon muttered. “Which way?”

“Right. We want to edge into the house, but stay out of sight. So we’ll use this servant’s passageway to make our way in?”

The floorboards creaked even more. We slowed down and made our way in. Barely discernible in the wooden wall, on our left a small door that led into the house.

In these stately homes in bygone days, servants were to be out of sight at all times, hence the corridors built into the walls. We’d been lucky to find it, but it was stuffy as hell.

I’d had a brief look at the plans of this home, but honestly being in this small corridor behind the walls, I had no clue where we were.

Stopping suddenly, we heard voices. Someone was barking orders on the other side of the wall.

Lycaon frowned, shooting me a worried stare as we both stood frozen to the spot. I could barely breathe as the voices got closer. All I could smell was musty damp and urine. I didn’t look down, I didn’t want to know.

God knows what he could smell.

He gripped my hand, his chest puffing up as if ready to punch anyone who entered the corridor.

Then behind us, footsteps, others were coming. He nodded to his right, slowly we snuck away and the voices inside the room got closer still. Unlocking his clasp from my hand, Lycaon reached easily for the bulb, took it out which threw us into darkness.

The small door from the room opened, we braced in the shadows not even daring to breathe.

“Aw shit, who’s taken the bulb? Stinks of piss in here...” The footsteps behind us traipsed closer and the door from the room slammed shut. I let out a breath but neither of us moved for a moment. Then from the room on the other side of the corridor, more footsteps, heavier, in a hurry came towards us.

Grabbing my hand, he led me away as the corridor behind us suddenly filled with the scent of blood and death.

With vampires....

Before I realised, Lycaon had skirted in front of me, scooped me up in his arms, head lowered and ran so fast I couldn't breathe.

He lunged his shoulder to the left, we crashed through a door and in the blink of an eye, Lycaon had kicked the door shut, lowered me down carefully then had his large hands around a sideboard and was wedging the furniture against the door.

He puffed, looking about. Shouting came from another room, he muttered, "We need to move."

Scanning the room, there was another doorway at the opposite end from where the voices were coming. Dashing over to it, we both peered through the archway leading into the next room, then ran in, then through that room into a library.

The voices drew closer, and in the walls in the servant's passageway the sounds of banging as the vampires were trying to shove the sideboard out of the way. Lycaon stopped, my heart was in my throat as he raised his chin, sniffing the air. Turning to the bookcase he whispered, "That went well! Look, here, another passageway."

"What if it's the same corridor that we just left?"

"Not the same wall and it's behind a bookcase. I don't think you'd have a servant's corridor hidden behind a bookcase, do you?"

My voice was strained as I answered, "I hope you're right."

He felt around the casing, the yelling from the others got closer. Almost booming through my chest, my heart quickened. We were running out of time.

Witches on one side, vampires on the other... Why in hell did I think this was a good idea?

His eyes scanned the floor.

“Look, give me a hand.”

On the ground a curved scuff mark, he was right. The indentation showed where the bookcase had been dragged open.

He found a loophole along the edge, and straining we pulled the bookcase forward a little. The fear of a nest of blood thirsty vampires waiting for me inside this new passageway made me hesitate so he squeezed in before me, then grabbed my arm tugging me towards him.

Nothing. He gasped, and with all his strength pulled the bookcase shut.

Cold and pitch blackness encased us. I fished out my phone and pressed the torch on, not wanting to use magic here. We walked as fast as we could without making a sound, leaving the shouting, the scent of blood and footsteps behind us. The passageway led sharply down, so I guessed we were entering the basement.

My plan had failed epically, just like the spell and my mind jumbled, full of defeat, of failure.

Mattie had been right. I should've trusted her. I shouldn't give in to my feelings. Everything was going wrong. Now we were trapped in a house with immortals who would no doubt want our heads. Everyone had been wrong to trust me, and I, foolishly had now endangered Lycaon's life.

The lower we walked, the colder it got. An icy chill caused goosebumps on my arms and the silence was deafening.

“It's like a crypt here. You alright?” His voice was quiet yet still echoed lightly.

“Well, everything's gone to shit. So there's that. How in the hell will I find anything to help now? I should've...”

He pushed open a door before me. A warm bronze light sparkled, lighting up the whole place. It came from an orb placed in the centre, emitting the radiance and heat.

Desks and bookcases lined the outer walls, with a quartz crystal table in

the centre where this orb was placed. Light penetrated the quartz, and the crystal wands that faced out from it glowed.

Glass cases adorned the tables filled with herbs, strange substances of rainbow colours and small bones.

Werewolf skulls hung like trophies, along with vampire and demon skulls. Witches' skulls carved with golden sigils like the one in the forest, grimoires, crystal skulls... herbs.

Heat swirled through me, my eyes taking it all in. Part of me was fascinated, the other, terrified. The raw power in this room alone...

Lycaon pointed. To one side, a wicker basket on the floor filled to the brim with poppets, poppets with the oak leaf sigils.

“Holy shit, Adara? They were behind killing Lisa and Nathan? Oh God...”

Sweat broke on my forehead, my mouth watered as nausea churned in my stomach. Hakon was right, Mattie was involved in some shit. Adara, did they control Mattie's coven, was she being controlled? Confusion buzzed, my head was dizzy.

He was standing over the basket and bent to pick up a poppet.

“No! Don't touch anything. Just look. It could be cursed, or hexed, I mean they could've hexed it so if someone touches it they'll know. This is horrifying. Hakon was right. I've been working with the coven for nearly a year, am I next?”

Suddenly I wondered if Becca and Josey knew about this, I mean were they safe? And Luna, a lone hedge witch.

Catching my breath I said, “We need to look around here fast. Others are in danger, Marrock?”

He fixed me with a stare. “Dear God, yes. And Loren's spirit, this,” he gestured to the room, “this coven must be responsible for unleashing the

darkness on Loren's soul and on Zale." He growled, "And on me..."

"There must be spells to dispel this magic here. Look but don't touch anything."

"Why are there so many werewolf skulls, who the hell are these people? Who owns this place?"

I shook my head. "Some Lord, I don't know. I just saw the invite in Mattie's home, some council. I presumed a witch's council. Now though?"

Keeping our voices as quiet as possible, Lycaon called to me as he studied the other side of the cellar. "Elsa, Elsa, come here. Look."

"Oh my God, how did they get Luke's blood?"

"It gets worse. They have Lucifer's blood, Hakon, mine." His pale eyes turned scarlet, feral.

I gripped his arm. "I don't know, but this is more dangerous. That must be how they were able to control Loren's spirit and render you powerless. This is *how* they're so powerful. Look, if they have your blood, they can effectively control you. You're their puppet. Blood is the life force. They can control all of us. How did they get it, how did they steal everyone's blood?"

Before I could stop him, he grabbed the small glass phial labelled Lycaon and shoved it in his pocket. His muscles clenched, and I could smell the earthy scent of the wolf struggling to get out. His eyes searched the room, looking for an escape.

Letting out a low growl as he went to run to the next room, I snatched at his arm.

"Calm down. They'll hear us, there are more of them than us, we'll be caught, Lycaon."

His face had started to morph into the wolf, but as he watched my hand grip his arm, his eyes watching as I placed my hand on his chest, his breathing slowed and his eyes met mine. His heart was pummelling, but his face softened. His voice was strangled as he whispered, "We should leave."

It's not safe here, I cannot protect you."

My heart quietened now. "We will. I've seen enough. Let's go. Grab Luke's blood, for God's sake. Hurry. We should take them all."

"Look, other names... Conor, Sabian. If I can't carry them," he smashed the small glass phials on the floor. The blood pooled and mixed.

Then we scoured the room looking for a door, at the far corner we found some stone steps leading upwards.

"This way, I can smell the night air. But I can also smell many others. I'll have to carry you. Are you sure you can't fly?"

"No. But Luke gave me this. It should transport us out, away. But I've never used it before, I don't have his or Austin's power."

It was the small amulet that Luke had given me. Bronze with the sigil of Solemn on it. A different type of magic. Dark.

"Use it. Who cares so long as we are away from this hell mansion? I say we burn it to the ground."

"There are innocent people here, we can't kill them."

He snarled, it seemed he was battling his wolf. Fighting, killing, escaping...

A sound above had him jerk, his head jerked like a wolf's catching a scent. Then he pushed me against the wall and growled, "Use your magic. Or the wolf will come out and devour everyone."

I shoved him back.

Holding the amulet between my finger and thumb, I recited the spell Luke had taught me.

Prince Seir, demon of Hell

I conjure thee

To help me now

Let your power take on me,

And remove me from trouble,

In one, two, three...

I linked fingers with Lycaon, his nose crinkled, gawking at me when suddenly I felt my body shaking, the ground moving and everything was plunged into darkness.

Another stomach curdling ride until I felt my knees smack on the ground next to Lycaon outside.

Cold wind bit at my fingers, I gasped for breath. But I didn't want to open my eyes. I could already sense them, smell them and Lycaon's roar bellowed through me.

## LIFTING THE VEIL

Opening my eyes, they were silent as they watched us.

Surrounding us, dressed in black, their hoods disguising their hair and the mirrored masks that reflected our faces back to us. Beside them on chains, a pack of rabid vampires and werewolves.

One word shouted in my mind.

Adara.

Now Lycaon didn't hold back.

Claws extended, vampires and werewolves lunged towards us tugging on their restraints. I felt the blood drain from my face, my breath caught as my heart raced.

On his knees, the wolf started breaking out of Lycaon. His body ripped, snout jutting from his face. His fingers extended as I was flooded with the scent of his blood, his flesh. As he morphed, the ringing of bullets stung my ears and my alpha, my protector screamed as they pummelled into him. His wolf disappeared, the man slumped on the ground, his scream piercing through me long after he had stopped.

His body spasmed, and instinct or compassion, I didn't know which, had me cover him with my body before a pain stung my back.

Lycaon grabbed me, his face strained, already he was forcing the bullets out of his body. They sizzled as they dropped on the ground but again, they



fired, he collapsed and rough hands grabbed at me pulling me back as I yelled, kicking before everything went dark.

Cold was the first thing that I was aware of when I came around. Shivering I found that I was laid on a concrete floor, a thin veil of light from a single lightbulb in a cell.

Rasping, Lycaon was curled up before me. His wounds had congealed, he was trembling. I leaned over him, examining where they'd shot him, then carefully pulled his body onto my lap to try and share some heat, to keep him warm.

I could feel their magic. It was almost suffocating.

They'd given us water, wanting us alive which probably worried me more, but for now I concentrated on helping him.

My athame was gone, as were the phials of blood from my pockets, the amulet from Luke and obviously my phone. Lycaon spluttered, arguing in his delirium. Somehow I would have to give him my blood, but I had nothing to break my skin. I am squeamish, not a good thing for a witch. But it hadn't been a problem until now.

As Lycaon came around, I brushed his hair back from his face.

"I think we're being watched." I bent down, kissed his lips and whispered as quietly as I could, "Do you have the strength to cut my wrist, you need some blood."

He mumbled, then pushed himself up. "No, I won't do that again. You can't keep feeding me. I'm not a vampire, and well, it makes the wolf stronger. And my human side weaker."

I offered, "That would be good, right now."

Sitting up, he pushed himself to his knees before standing uneasily and brushed off my attempt to help him as he bent over, hands on his knees. His hair hung over his face, dirty, tangled. His t-shirt was in shreds. Anger flared through him. I got up, stepping back as he tore off his top, snarling before

throwing himself at the bars.

They didn't move.

Then he spun around, eyes like coals, jaw clenched as he hissed at me, "This is your fault, all of this. Your kind, you not only ruined Zale, now you're trying to ruin me."

Weaving my fingers, nothing happened as he came charging at me.

Holy shit, I had to, what, actually fight him? He's huge, and part wolf.

Surprising myself, I leapt out of his way at the last minute, but he grabbed me all the same, roughing me against the wall as his fangs extended and he muttered in my ear.

"You're right, we are being watched. Play along."

Without changing my horrified expression, I put everything I had into shoving him back.

He was like a wall. He didn't move. He laughed, his voice vicious.

"I'm going to eat you, little witch." Lifting his chin, he sniffed the air, then narrowed his eyes at me.

Now I knew he wasn't actually trying to kill me, I took a breath. But he was still terrifying.

But even under these circumstances, he was hot as hell, which wasn't appropriate. But he was playing them. His lips opened as he realised, he was turning me on, every lick of his lips, every growl, every grunt. I stared at his bloody chest.

He threw himself into me again. Whispering in my ear as he pretended to bite my neck. "You want me too much. If it helps, I feel the same. But not now. Play along, fight me."

Raising my voice I said, "I'm not going to be your meal deal today."

His body overpowered me, his hands pushing me into the wall, his legs planted on either side of mine. I darted my eyes down, he noticed then as carefully as I could whilst trying to remain authentic, I squeezed up my knee. I stopped just before his balls. He was hard but he got the picture and feigned

being kneed in the groin.

Then he lunged at me, spun around and again threw himself at the cage door. I moved in the nick of time, he was trying to break it.

But it still didn't budge.

A stony voice called out, "Stop that."

A small man with a mirrored mask came into view, almost as if he'd stepped out of the shadows. He was joined by two burly men, their arms like tree trunks. Shifters by the smell of them. They also wore mirrored masks and hoods. One carried what looked like a dart gun.

The man pointed to the gun. "See this? It's laced with liquid silver, so there will be no pushing out bullets for you. As for you witch, we've got a little extra for you." He nodded to his henchmen. Burly, dressed in combats and t-shirts, each one had guns strapped to their legs. One jangled a set of keys, whilst the other took aim for Lycaon with the dart gun.

Like nails on a chalkboard, the small man demanded, "Lie down. Hands on the floor. One wrong move and you're dead meat."

I glanced at Lycaon. We did as ordered as the key rattled in the lock.

As the armed guard stood over Lycaon, I was nudged by a boot to get up. The man pulled out a set of finger cuffs, as Marrock had done.

I wanted to run, to fight as adrenaline pumped through me. Anger and fear swelled in my gut but with the dart gun pointed over him, I couldn't. Liquid silver... Even with my blood, would he survive that?

The iron burned cold on my flesh, like an ice burn, then Lycaon was nudged and ordered to stand.

Cuffs were placed on Lycaon, his hands behind his back, then with the dart gun between his shoulder blades, we were marched out of the cell and through the cellar. I tried to scan the area, looking for a way out but every time I glanced around, I had a gun shoved in my back.

Small, slippery stone steps led up and into a large chamber. Now my blood ran cold. On the walls hung whips tipped with metal spikes. Hanging

from the ceiling, shackles stained with dried blood and on a table rusty surgical equipment. A scattering of bones in a far corner, and an upright bed complete with restraints.

They led us through here and we came out into a vast hallway.

Double front doors let in cold air, guarded by armed soldiers, and squinting up, portraits of nobles, I guessed, hung from walls. Tables along the corridor held ornate vases etched in gold leaf and a crystal candelabra that sent a splattering of glittering orbs around the place. Obviously we were in the main entrance of the manor. Gilt cornices, scarlet wallpaper and huge glass chandeliers sparkled above us. At one end, gleaming silver suits of armour complete with swords lined a wall like knights waiting for instructions. As they marched us forward, I couldn't help but glance at the armour. Something about it unnerved me. But my nerves were already shot. Still, we hadn't been held in that torture room.

“What do you want from us?” Lycaon spat.

The smaller man shot a curt nod to the guard who shoved the dart gun into his shoulder blades. “No questions. Any more disruption, you'll get the silver and she'll get the fire.”

I couldn't see Lycaon's face as we were marched in single file, but I could feel his anger.

Inside the room, its ceiling towering above us, all the masked members lined the edge, standing without speaking.

There was no furniture in here, just the gold wood panelling along the walls, thick scarlet and gilt wallpaper and the varnished floor that smelled of polish.

I searched their masks, looking for her shape. Hoods concealed their hair, their heads, but was Mattie here? It was hard to see the outline of the members as their cloaks concealed their bodies, I guessed that was the point.

But she'd had the invitation, so she had to be here. This whole situation didn't do much for my trust issues. I'd thought of her as a friend, yet here she

was, ready to stab me through the heart. All I could see was myself, reflected back from their masks. They were all shapes and sizes and all wore a strongly scented perfume, no doubt to throw us off.

The small man bowed, then left. His henchmen stood forward, ensuring that we didn't move. The doors were shut. Then one of the masked members stood forward.

It was male and his perfume masked his species. Taller than the others, slender, his voice boomed. Opening his arms, you could hear his smile in his voice, though with the masks and hoods, his identity was concealed.

“Tomorrow night we will complete our mission. Everything has fallen into place. As I told you, *I* would not fail. On the anniversary of Loren's sacrifice, we will have complete control of all the packs. Even werewolf lineages that fall under different alphas, why, these all originated from Lycaon. With him gone, they will be at our mercy. Then we will take the vampires. Questions?”

A woman stepped forward. If Mattie was here, she was hiding in plain sight. And vampires, that meant Hakon would be next?

Her voice was shrill as she pointed at me, “Why her? She's nothing. Though I agree she needs eliminating, sharing her blood with the wolf. And her radical ideas. We should just kill her now, why are you wasting time? Get rid of the problem. Now.”

Others muttered, some nodded glancing to each other, a few hissed. Would Mattie help, or watch me burn? My throat swelled, I felt dizzy, disoriented that I was about to face death. As I tried to breathe, I shivered with fear.

Lycaon growled, springing forwards.

My legs weakened, oh my bloody hell, we were going to face the same fate as Loren and Zale! But something, something snapped inside of me. Glancing at him, my mind shouted no! I clenched my muscles, I would find

the resilience. I would rather fight on my feet than live on my knees...

The dart gun was shoved between his shoulder blades. Whoever the tall man was, I knew he was a warlock. A flick of his wrist, an incantation and Lycaon was on his face, writhing in agony. But the warlock had a weakness.

He bent over wheezing. Magic against the father of wolves was no easy thing...The warlock was drained already.

Good to know. That's the thing with bullies, they get so into their ego, that if you remain quiet, sit back you don't even need to try. They reveal their weaknesses themselves.

He straightened up. "No. She is valuable. Just as Loren was. You'll see tomorrow night. Bring me his blood."

A group of shifters, by the size of them, all of whom were hooded, rallied around Lycaon. One wielded a large curved dagger, another a bowl. Wincing, I watched in horror as they took off a handcuff, slit his wrist and bled him.

Filled with anger, I glanced at those watching. But still I could pick up nothing except my horrified reflection. No one else moved. Lycaon cried out as they tried to force his blood faster, and after several minutes, he collapsed.

The bowl was passed to the leader. He turned his back on us, lifted his mask and took a drink.

In disgust at them, I crouched down beside Lycaon who was in a haze, muttering. A guard took the bowl from the leader, who re-masked and spun around whilst Lycaon's blood was passed around.

Each time one of them took it, they turned their back on us, lifted their masks and drank from the bowl.

So they were trying to infuse *his* power into themselves, alongside every other concoction they had drank.

That would drive any being, however powerful, insane.

Tomorrow, no doubt, they would bleed him dry before killing him. As for me, I knew now that they planned to sacrifice me, too. Probably the same fate as Loren.

This leader, he'd made it sound like Loren had known what would happen, that she had tricked Zale, sacrificed herself for the sake of this coven, or whatever the hell this was. We needed to get out. And we needed to find Zale. And bring an army of immortals to crush them.

As if reading my mind, the woman who had spoken earlier strode over to me. I could now sense her magic. A witch.

"Don't even think of escaping. You're part of the problem. You disgust us." She raised her head to the leader who nodded. And those who had drank from the bowl now stepped forward, surrounding us, our faces mirrored back. A whirl of heat, their chanting was monotone and I felt a compulsion to tell them everything I knew.

But to her shock, I smiled back. Nothing more. I could feel her rage.

Oddly the leader snapped, "Enough. Take them. We will meet back tomorrow."

Lycaon staggered up as the two guards pushed us forwards. He still had one hand unchained but the dart gun was again shoved against him. My fingers ached and burned from the cuffs, but for now at least we were alive.

Silence fell as we were pushed out of the room back into the hallway.

As we walked down the steps, Lycaon fell on the last step.

"Get that bloody thing up."

One of the guards growled at the man, "He's the alpha, our alpha."

"He's the problem. Just like this bitch. Pull him up."

The second guard grabbed Lycaon's arm, Lycaon immediately started to shift, fangs extended. He fixed his fangs into the guard's neck so fast it took me seconds to realise what was happening.

As the guard with the dart gun reacted, I threw myself at him. It felt like I was walking through treacle. Everything was in slow motion. The guard with the gun stumbled but didn't fall over but Lycaon was up and had bitten the other guard's neck. His throat shredded, no way that guard was going after us

and the first one laid there as blood poured from his artery, Lycaon morphed, pulling free of his chains.

The bleeding man tried to scream as his life drained away fast. Then the sound of feet running, Lycaon grabbed at my wrists. Pulling the bondage free, but not the lock. We didn't have time.

He snatched up the dart gun. "Get on my back, keep your head down. Close your eyes."

I didn't argue. I had no idea where he was going, but I knew we needed to leave. He crouched down as I clambered on his back, again, and I buried my head into his shoulder as he picked up speed.

He didn't go up the stairs.

"Hold on," he cried as he flung his arms forward, smashing open a door. Fresh air whipped around me as he ran, faster and faster. Shouting echoed behind us as they realised we'd escaped and a chill of fear bit into my heart.

The howling from their feral wolf shifters shook me to the bone. Unable to stop shaking, I clung tighter, my hands gripped together around his neck, knuckles white. My legs burned from squeezing around his waist so hard as Lycaon raced through the night, heading for somewhere, anywhere for us to shelter.

A voice had him stop dead.

"You're wasting your time. You're surrounded. Stop now or we'll kill the woman."

I edged off of him, distracted at the rustling around us. Biting my lip, my mind buzzed, fear ran cold through me as I searched my mind for a spell to undo the finger cuffs.

"You cannot win, you are outnumbered. Within seconds our werewolves, our vampires will tear her apart. But not you, Lycaon. We want you alive."

Lycaon lowered the dart gun, whilst I fumbled with the cuffs. I had to get these off.

My voice shook, but I figured what the hell. I was dead anyway and we



were outnumbered. I was terrified but I didn't want to cower. I'd rather die standing, so mustering what was left of my courage I shouted, "Who are you? What gives you the right to decide who lives and dies by some archaic system?"

The masked leader stepped out from the shadows. "Ah, the *problem witch*. But your mother was a traitor, turning her back on her own kind. I'm inclined to get rid of you now. You, it seems, like your mother, you won't listen, not even for your own good. I had thought to give you, Elsa the benefit of the doubt. I see I was wrong. And worse than that, you endanger us all."

He turned his head, Lycaon growled. With my shackled hands, I reached out to Lycaon. "No, stay alive. Don't fight them." I didn't hold his gaze, his wide eyes implored me. I was in truth terrified but I guess I'd known my fate ever since I walked into Savernake Woods that night to face Marrock.

It was weird, like catching your shadow in the light, a quiet sense of foreboding. Now I realised that this had been my reason to join the coven in the first place. It wasn't the camaraderie or the belonging. It was to hide from the fear. To seek comfort. Even though I had never been fully accepted, I'd always known I was an outsider.

Lycaon barely listened as four shifters edged from the trees, one holding another dart gun aimed right at him.

Then something odd happened, as if someone controlled me, my thoughts, my body. As they came to grab me, I linked my hands together and took a swipe using the cuffs. Smacking the nearest shifter in his temple faster than I could think, the sound of the dart whistling through the trees and a weak cry, I realised Lycaon had shot someone.

I staggered as one of the shifters took a punch at my head. Lycaon was transforming as the shifters closed in on us. A rattling of metal, chains and werewolves and rabid vampires charging through the undergrowth towards us.

Holy shit!

Lycaon had partly morphed into a wolf, still standing beside me, he whispered, “Ready yourself to run. I will take you...”

Shaking as the enemy now gained on us, and through gritted teeth, Lycaon whispered urgently, “Now!”

I heard the shuffling, the crack of a gunshot as Lycaon grabbed hold of me, crouched slightly and ran. The bullets came from behind Adara, he screamed, staggering, as I tumbled forwards. The werewolves and vampires were already before us before a sudden heat burned around me, the enemies were on fire. The trees illuminated in amber light, more screeching behind us, around us, the heat intensifying.

A cocky voice called, a voice I knew, challenging, threatening.

“Come on then you masked cowards, come and have a go if you think you can take me. I’m the oldest, except for Lycaon and I pity you all if you believe you can take my life. But I welcome the challenge. Unmask, show us who you are, fraidy-cats!”

Leaping from a tree to my side, Hakon, with magic oozing from him, packed with amulets that glistened from his neck, smiled.

“Didn’t think we’d leave you, huh?”

In his hands he held two automatic guns, turned his back on us and fired. The air around us filled with smoke, shouts and cries. My ears stung, ringing with the sound of gun fire. The scent of copper and flesh was thick, recoiling from the fear, choking back a sour taste in my mouth.

Panting, I tried to calm my mind in the midst of the chaos. My skin burned inside the cuffs, shaking, I tried to cast an incantation to release the lock. But it was useless. A vampire came at me baring teeth and claws.

I used the metal shackles as a weapon. Though it dived as I went to smack it in the face, I anticipated that. It didn’t stop, but spinning around as Lycaon’s claws sliced through its face. Recoiling, it stepped back as Hakon finished it, firing bullets that had the fanged creature splatter into pieces. I wiped my face with the back of my arm, jumping violently as a voice

whispered behind me.

“Elsa, here...”

A large wolf sprang alongside Hakon. Shouting, Hakon nodded to him “Alright mate. Conor, behind you!”

The wolf spun around so fast for its size. Opening his massive jaws, bit the head off of an incoming vampire, it tumbled out of his mouth, bouncing on the ground.

I winced, holding back a gag.

That was the first time I met Conor. Lycaon’s mentor to the modern world.

The wolf, Conor pounded toward a werewolf, who on seeing him, backed away. Members of Adara were fleeing, though some shouted, pushing their feral servants in the line of fire.

Grace grabbed my arm, mumbling a spell which had the cuffs tighten. Swearing, she did it again, her face wrinkled. Letting out a gasp, the restraints sprung open and fell from my fingers. Sucking in her cheeks, her fingers weaved, dancing over my hands which had turned red and blue from the iron until they slowly regained their colour. “Let’s go. Lycaon! Conor, Hakon!”

Behind her, Austin was shooting out fireballs, but most of these were being hurled back at him as some of the Adara members stood defiantly wielding their brand of dark magic.

From their hands, a twisted plume of grey smoke that wove and spun into the shapes of the beasts we encountered earlier with Luke.

The shadow souls of werewolves.

Without a barrier, which as we were all separated was impossible, I knew no other way to fight them.

In their diaphanous forms, they collided into Hakon, dropping his guns, rasped as if the living magic within him had been sucked out.

I shouted to Grace, who was wide-eyed in horror, whilst above, Luke, in dragon form glided on the currents. A whip of fire from his mouth followed

by screams then he circled back up.

It was only then that I noticed Marrock, like Lycaon, half-changed battling with werewolves and vampires. Grace shouted above the din, “We need to go, Marrock!”

I shot another glance at him, he was being overpowered by werewolves pounding on him. Austin was fraught trying to use his magic.

Sucking in air, I lowered my lids and conjured a breeze. As I felt it, the magic soared through my veins, my body swayed and I channelled more power. Perhaps Grace had imbued some extra kick, but now this wind turned into a hurricane, whistling on the air, sweeping up debris, leaves in its path. Swirling, strong, its energy increased, and I intended more. Yells bellowed through me, through the woods as werewolves, vampires were swept up in the hurricane, cycling around. My head spun, I wobbled before Grace shouted, followed by Austin and I, too, was spinning through the air...



Landing on my feet, my body toppled as nausea rolled through me. Wide-eyed I found Grace clutching my arm, a quick smile before guiding me to a chair. Her voice was erratic.

“Marrock, he’s not here! We have to go back!”

Before my eyes adjusted properly, I realised she was talking to Luke. His voice was gruff, “Too late. I don’t know how he escaped our magic. But we can’t go back now. We’ll have to hope on a wing and a prayer that they don’t kill him.”

As my sight cleared, I saw Lycaon, now fully human, grab Luke by the scruff of his collar. “Send me back, I will not leave my fellow werewolf to those fiends.”

Hakon tapped my shoulder. “You alright love? You look pale. Let me get you a drink, here, sit back.”

Gasping, I wrapped my arms around him. “I thought you died, I mean... those things! You looked like you had all the magic, your soul sucked out of you!”

“Me, too, but thanks to Grace here... well, I’m shaken. It takes more than shady magic and shadow werewolves to kill old Hakon.”

He turned to Lycaon, “I get it mate, I really do. I for one would love nothing more than to rock back right now, grab Marrock and kill some more of those grisly bast... enemies. But Luke’s right. The amount of energy for us to just pull that off to rescue you two, we’d be dead, mate. And Marrock. We’ll get him back. Of that I’m sure.”

The man almost as tall as Lycaon stepped forward. Conor, I guessed. All muscle, bloodied face, with blood and god-knows what in his black hair. Dark brows accentuated his sculptured chin and stubble. Tattoos on his chest shimmered as he panted. But his voice was as soothing as it was powerful.

“They’re right. Adara, it seems, has mastered some incredible magic. Through all my years, I’ve never seen anything like it. I thank Fenrir that Mona and my pack weren’t in that fight. But we *will* find a way to rescue Marrock. He’s tough Lycaon, have faith in him. If they wanted him dead, he’d be a corpse now. They’ll use him as bait. For you.”

Restless, Lycaon picked up the nearest object, fire in his eyes, teeth gritted.

Luke grabbed his wrist, holding it down. “Enough! You’re in my home wolfman. I can’t, none of us can send you back right now. We’re out of energy, don’t you see? Look at Grace and Austin, look at Elsa. Magic isn’t an endless source of power you know. Don’t you think we’d do that, rescue Marrock if we could? We’re all you got, we’re it. No one else wants to help us. No other mages, witches, shifters or vampires for that matter. And we’re spent. So stop before you trash my home after I, we risked our necks saving you.”

His muscles started to loosen, Lycaon nodded with a fire in his eyes. Through his clenched jaw muttered, “Who the hell are they? We need to bring them all down.”

I tried to swallow, though my throat was raw. “We will. But we’re going to need something more potent than any of us has ever used. I don’t know, God-like power?”

Austin, red-faced and unstable, had his hands on the sideboard, gasped, “They are everyone and they are no one. The faceless, the hidden, who despise others and meet in secret to destroy those who don’t agree with them. They annihilate those they abhor. They’ve marked us for sure, all of us. What little energy I have left, I’m using to find Luna. Then I’ll call Lucius, if I can get hold of him. The anniversary of Loren’s death is only hours away. They’re counting on Lycaon being there for that. Once they sacrifice him, well...”

I nodded. “We need to rest, eat and put together something they’d never expect.”

Grace shrugged and said, “Yeah, we just did that. I’m not sure there is anything else.”

Luke puckered his lips. “I have an idea... and they’d never expect it. My own failure, that could be the lesson that brings them down.”

“Good. We should rest, then discuss your plan, Luke.” Lycaon dropped his shoulders, holding out his hand. “Forgive me, sometimes releasing my anger... Thank you,” he turned to Hakon, Grace and Austin, “thank you for getting us out of there.”

And then he collapsed.



“Liquid silver. How the hell did he last that long?”

I shook as Luke and Austin stood over Lycaon. The bullet holes had congealed, his blood scarlet with silver flecks.

Grace crouched beside him. “He must have endured because of your blood Elsa, because of your magic? But how the hell can we get that out? We can’t exactly do a blood transfusion, can we?” She glanced up hopefully at Austin.

Frowning he shook his head. “Technically, maybe. There’s a place that did a transfusion for a vampire, but she hadn’t tasted blood... but he’s the father. I really don’t think that would work... Umm, Marrock, even if he was here, he’s too far removed from the blood line to help Lycaon, as are you Conor, I think?” Austin looked wide-eyed full of hope at Conor.

Shaking his head, Conor patted Austin’s back. “Sorry friend, my lineage is Scottish. But Zale could.”

My voice hitched. “Where is Zale? We need to find him.”

Hakon glanced at me, sympathy on his face. “What, in Savernake, with Adara on our tail? I agree, Zale’s blood could help, but...”

“I’ll go. I owe Lycaon, and, I’ll go. Grace, do you have the energy to get me there?”

Now I was the fool wishing on a prayer.

Her lips twisted as she got up. “Yes, but,” she looked to Austin, “can Lucius help? I can get Elsa there, but I may not be able to get her back? Unless I take them both?”

Fighting my fear, I replied, “That’s better. With Lycaon dying, if that doesn’t move Zale to help, we’re lost anyway. And Lycaon has had my blood, so Zale should know that, smell it?”

Tapping my shoulder, Hakon nodded. “I don’t like it, I don’t like it one bit, little witch. But it’s the best we got. I’m guessing having a vampire watch your back may not be the best idea?”

“No. I need to do this alone, not that I want to. If I want Zale to trust me, I have to earn that. And in turn trust him first.”

“He might kill you,” Austin blurted. “I mean, he probably will. But...” he stared back at Lycaon whose breathing was getting weaker.

“I will accompany you. Zale knows of me. He knows I’m a friend of Lycaon, he’ll trust me.”

For a moment the thought of Conor, a benevolent alpha made me breathe easier. But no. If Zale kills Lycaon, leaves him to die, or what’s left of Adara kills Lycaon, then Lycaon’s bloodline will be lost. And Adara’s plan lost with him.

It was a miracle that none of us had died so far.

Unable to clear my throat, I croaked. “Thank you, Conor. That means a lot. But no. You have a pack, a family. You can’t put your life on the line again. You barely made it out alive. I have to do this. Alone.”

I tried to stop trembling. I had to act, now. I had to save him, or die trying. And that terrified me. But being in this world without Lycaon, that terrified me more.

Austin sniffed, his eyes red from exhaustion. “Do it. Do it now, Grace. I’ll phone Lucius, though I couldn’t reach him earlier. And Elsa,” he fixed me with a stare, “try to stay alive. I have nothing to give you, no artefact, no advice really.”

Silence hung for a few seconds, it felt like time stretched over me, heavy, impending doom. Perhaps Adara had won. But they didn’t have his blood.

Zale, feral and full of vengeance was our only hope.



The woods were too quiet. Grace left me with Lycaon, who was delirious and laid on the ground. I bent over him, his skin gleaming with sweat as the liquid silver had penetrated his blood stream. I knew from my herbal studies with



poison, there was only about an hour before it reached his heart.

An hour.

And I had to find Zale. And honestly, I had no idea how I would convince him to help. Their last contact had ended in a fight.

So here I was, hoping the Adara sect wasn't lurking and that I wouldn't have my head ripped off by Lycaon's progeny.

Lycaon's golden hair stuck to his face, as I brushed it away he tried to speak. Putting my finger on his lips, my heart burning, I said, "No, rest. Help is coming."

He tried again, but I stood up and searched the trees that surrounded us. My heart raced, and I couldn't hide the tremor in my voice as I called, "Zale? Zale, Lycaon is dying. He needs your help. Your father needs you."

My heart sank and vision blurred as a tingling ran through my limbs. Swallowing hard I tried again, in fact, I realised I had to keep shouting, calling his name. I had nothing of Zale's to cast a spell, and exhaustion weighed me down.

And Adara would no doubt show up first.

Despair turned to doubt.

"Zale? Lycaon needs you. He saved your life, will you at least save his now?"

My hollow words rang through the forest with no reply. No stirring from creatures, just a bitter chill that bit at my face. Clouds moved like monsters above me, grey in the inky sky as the moon teased a shimmer of light before hiding again

and uncertainty was my only companion. My heart was hollow, gut wrenched that I was losing this man, this wolfman and the only one who could help had turned his back.

Loss turned to anger, I spat my wrath at the sky, "You made him, Zeus, why don't you help? Lazy, spiteful god!"

Turning around to face Lycaon as his breathing weakened, his body shaking, glistening under the cold moon, I heard a rustle. Or did I? Maybe I was imagining it? Maybe I'd die...

From out of nowhere the huge white wolf sprung out, leaping at me, its howl piercing through my eardrums.

I screamed, my arm covering my face as his paw, claws out came lunging at me. Falling to the ground, blood pouring from my arm, I looked up to find him right in front of me. Jaw curled back, growling. I did nothing to defend myself.

Shaking uncontrollably, I raised my head but kept my eyes low. Perhaps my submission would help. Or not? Opening his jaws, he snarled in my face threateningly and for a moment I froze in terror.

I glanced at Lycaon, hopeless as it was, dying, yet being beside him gave me that feeling, the completeness that I never knew I wanted or needed.

Then the snapping of bones, a sharp cry I cast a look to see Zale transforming. On all fours, his body ripped, flesh and blood filling my nose as he transitioned violently back into a man.

It was almost hard to fear him, he was beautiful. Hooded dark eyes, framed with chestnut brows and hair, his face was worn, but kind. Aquiline features and his body lean and toned, smaller than Lycaon, his father.

He looked like a statue that had been bathed in magic and come to life.

Shooting me a mean stare his eyes narrowed. His voice was deep and smooth. "I wanted to kill him. For leaving me. Who did this to him?"

"Adara. They shot him with liquid silver, he has, I don't know, thirty minutes until it reaches his heart? Can you give him your blood?"

He crouched beside Lycaon, looking at him, his expression like a wolf's, jerking, sudden movements, sniffing over his maker.

"Why? So you can betray him as Loren betrayed me? Leave him, he has lived long enough. And he abandons every one of his progeny."

He stood up, rolling his shoulders back, small lips pressed tightly together. “I want to kill you for being a witch. But I’m giving you one chance to leave. Then,” his icy stare fell to Lycaon, “then I will kill my maker...”

“I’m not leaving him.” I could almost smell the anger raging from him.

“I thought you loved Loren, and she you? And now you’re punishing Lycaon for this? Adara is responsible, though they’ll be pleased that you’re killing the father of wolves. It’ll save them the job. And you’ll be next.”

His face contorted, mouth wide as fangs appeared. His hands were around my neck before I could blink, as he flung me against a tree, then held me there, his face a hair’s breadth from mine.

“What do you know of love? You’ve only met him recently, huh? And you gave him your blood, thereby casting a binding spell on him. A spell he can never undo. A wolf spell... Yes, I know your kind, I was deceived by a witch, remember? I thought she loved me, but she used me, just as you are using him.”

He loosened one hand, pointed one finger with an extended claw. “And now I will end you, bitch.”

All the colours around me drained. My mind slowed, like I was dreaming. I had to concentrate just to breathe. But then I realised that was pointless as he was about to end this life. My life. Struggling, I tried to turn my head, I just wanted one more glance at him, just one more look at Lycaon before I died.

That feeling passed, and again I felt something, or someone watching me. Now it almost felt like this was a game, and I was the puppet. Eyes burned into me. With Zale before me, I reacted on instinct I guessed, my knee shoving between his legs.

He was naked, this was his only vulnerability and my only chance. He doubled over in pain. Something got the wind in me, I grabbed the back of his neck as he clutched at his groin.

“I love Lycaon. Giving him my blood was no spell, you fool. He would’ve died. You could’ve helped him but you were too wrapped up in your sorrow, your pain to help another. You’re addicted to it, to the pain. It’s all you know. One hundred years of anger. One hundred years of loss, of hate, of vitriol. But you’ve learned nothing. Perhaps Loren did deceive you, I don’t know. Or perhaps she did love you and was possessed by Adara. She ran away with you, married you, abandoned her family and I doubt that was an act. You’ve been angry for so long, as Marrock said with fighting, that you don’t know any other way. Hate is all you know now. But it’s not just killing you now, eating away at your heart, now your hate is killing others. Your kin, your father. You are annihilating an entire pack for your rage. Lycaon was a fool to make you a werewolf. You’re too weak for immortality. You’re pathetic.”

I thrust him to the floor, shaken, my mouth open like a puppet. I had no idea where that came from, and he lurched up at me, tooth and claw. I held up my chin. “Do it, kill me. I’m unarmed. That’s who you are. Slaughtering those who are trying to help, slaughtering the innocent. I wanted to help you and Loren, her soul to find peace. It’s an abomination that we are punished for who we love. But you carry on, and this hatred will fuel Adara for another century. Add reason for their discrimination.”

He stopped. His mouth opened as he glanced from his father to me, his chest rising and falling heavily.

Gruff, he replied. “If I help him now, you will leave. You will leave him now and forever. No witch should ever walk on Savernake territory again.”

Now my heart crumbled. But if it meant Lycaon was alive, even though I couldn’t see him, it would have to be enough. To know that he was out there, under the moon, the same as me, and every time I looked at the sky, at the moon, I would think of him.

I nodded. I went to speak, he sneered.

His eyes lowered as he roared, “Say no more, witch. Now go. And don’t

look back. Or you will meet your death with the bite of my wolf...”

Fighting back tears, I wiped my face with the back of my arm. Stealing a glance at Lycaon, I staggered off, hoping at least I was in the right direction of the road. Adara hadn't arrived, and Zale would hopefully keep his word. The wind was colder, I shoved my hands into my coat pockets.

It was a long walk home. Mile after mile with a broken heart but at least he would live.

Eventually I found the road, my heart in pieces, my soul like lead. Hearing my pulse pumping through my ears, I shivered. I wanted to cry, to scream but there was nothing left. No energy, no will, no nothing.

The clouds above teased with the moonlight, everything else was pitch black. Stumbling, I didn't care now. Death would be easier than this.

A solitary howl pierced the silence, I shivered as I made my way out of their home. And I vowed to myself, never, never trust a werewolf...

## DRAGON'S LAIR

“No wonder I couldn't find you, what are you doing on the road, you should've called me.”

Luke chewed his lip as he eyed me suspiciously, one hand with a single, brilliant flame flickering on the breeze.

He appeared before me, nearly making me jump out of my skin.

“My phone was taken. Zale is healing Lycaon, but on the condition that I never see either of them again. So, I'm walking home.”

Rushing forward, his fire extinguished as he opened his arms and engulfed me in him.

“I'm sorry, mate. That sucks. Shifters huh, you can't trust them.”

I'm ashamed to say I wasn't able to retain my tough witch image but I did manage not to sob all over him. Stupid I know, I hardly knew Lycaon, yet living in the world without him felt like being sucker punched.

Taking a breath, I stepped away. “Have you had any luck finding something to take down Adara?”

He frowned. “Not yet but we're close. I can feel it. They'll be expecting the usual magic, Babylonian, Mesopotamian... We're thinking... Hell? We have contacts in Hell, Lucifer is the obvious one, though he doesn't live there now, and Anthony. He was a vampire. Come on, I'll fill you in. Ready?”

I nodded then took his offered hand as he muttered a spell and cast us

away from these cursed woods and to his home.

“Ah, the witch and the dragon. Tea, coffee? Something stronger?”

Sitting at the kitchen counter, an extremely pale faced man with black curly hair and blood red lips and the whitest eyes, smiled at me. Unable to control it, heat swirled through me, my heart fluttered. Confused, I caught my breath, unable to look away.

Luke grinned. “Ah yes... Elsa, meet Anthony. He has that effect,” he spluttered a laugh.

Wetting his lower lip with his tongue, Anthony peeled himself off the stool, extending a hand and holding my gaze. Like he needed to do that.

“So? Where’s the werewolf?”

*Vampires.*

Luke’s voice was gruff. “Zale is apparently healing him, but he’s barred Elsa here from ever seeing Lycaon again. And you know, they’re together, Anthony, so you stop your flirting.”

Grimacing, Anthony looked from Luke to me. “Why? Is this Zale jealous of you two?”

Luke went to answer, but I cut in, “I think he sees it as saving Lycaon from me, from witches. It’s possible in the beginning that Zale’s lover was betraying him. I don’t believe she died betraying him though. He’s bitter, and is now more adamant, ironically, that different species shouldn’t coexist together.”

Nodding, Anthony sighed. “Whiskey then? Honestly it’s like being a bloody mortal sometimes. Species bickering about who can do this, who can’t do that or the other. Well Elsa, I’m sure once Lycaon is restored, he’ll decide for himself. For now, I’m mustering the legions of Hell. Dukes, princes, knights... We’ll take down Adara and reclaim our rights. And, I’m sure you and Lycaon will get your happy ever after.” He turned away and walked to a cupboard, pulling out a whiskey bottle.

Luke shrugged. “God knows we need a happy ending. Sorry, Elsa, are you hungry?”

Anthony glanced over his shoulder at me. “I know what you’re thinking. We’ve all thought about it. So, Luke doesn’t live in a cave, huh?”

A small smile on my lips, I was moved that they were willing to fight for a cause that didn’t affect them.

“I’m not sure about Lycaon and me. I’d like to believe you’re right, but I gave Zale my word. I can’t break that. As far as this secret society goes, I know they, Adara, had samples of your blood and were using witchcraft. The leader though, a mage of sorts. And then there’s their vampire and werewolf army. Those creatures looked feral.”

Shaking his head, Luke added, “Bewitched I suspect. Especially using blood magic, that would be a potent spell, enough to hex anything.”

In my mind I rasped. Had I caused this, all of this? I had used blood magic, and then I’d given Lycaon my blood. My unstable, hexed blood! Bloody hell! I needed to think. *Oh my bloody god!*

I took the drink offered by Anthony and shot it back. It burned my throat, but I needed it. I felt numb from the shock of everything. Especially the thought of never seeing Lycaon. Especially the thought that this could be all my fault...

No, I couldn’t think about that. Not now.

I cleared my throat, then filled the glass with water and drank that. Then an idea popped into my head, along with the thought that whatever was apposing me, was my own doing. My hand shook as I placed the glass on the kitchen bar. I could feel Anthony and Luke’s eyes boring into me. Then I caught a glimpse of them exchanging a look to each other.

Loudly, my head a bit fuzzy with whiskey, I said, “Witches have been condemned and tortured for centuries. In the witch trials in the sixteen hundreds, thousands were burned alive. They’re the ones I’m going to call upon. Their souls.”



“Oh... that is genius and powerful. Not wanting to sound rude, you sure you can handle that much energy? I mean, their spirits ain't going to be happy.”

I shook my head. “No, I wouldn't presume I could manage this alone. I'll ask Luna, Austin and Grace.” I caught Anthony's eye. “Thank you for your offer. It means a lot that others who aren't involved will help, it really does. But this is a witch thing. I can't stop though, they have Marrock and God knows what they'll do to him. Luke, can I borrow a phone, I need to speak to Austin?”

“Sure.” He fished out his mobile from his pocket, handed it to me whilst Anthony refilled his glass. “Do you need me, want me to slay some of those vampires? I'll add the correct response is yes.”

Luke frowned. “You love killing, mate?”

“Hunting, Luke. I love hunting, it's in my blood.”

I left them to their lame jokes whilst I phoned Austin. He picked up straight away.

“Luke, what's wrong?”

“It's Elsa, Austin. I'm using Luke's phone.”

“Elsa. How'd it go, Lycaon alright?”

“Zale is helping him.” I had to change the subject. It was too painful. “I have a copy of the witches' grimoire, the Secrets of Natural Magic, can we start a ritual right now?”

“I need some time, Elsa. Best I can do is an hour? You ok, you don't sound ok, what went wrong?”

Geez, you couldn't hide anything from him! I had to lie. I hated that. But then I hated that I could've been the cause to all this, and even if not, I would never see Lycaon again.

“Everything is fine. Zale is helping Lycaon. I'm at Luke's place. I was thinking we could ask Luna, our own mini coven? With you and Grace?”

“Luna’s a proficient witch but she’s also very human. I don’t want her to come with us, Elsa.”

“Ok. You, me and Grace then.”

“Alright. I’ll be at Luke’s in an hour.”

With the swimming in my blood, I hung up then said, “Thanks Austin!”

I walked back to the kitchen where Luke and Anthony were both sitting. Swivelling around on the kitchen bar stools, they eyed me. I handed Luke his phone back. He wet his lower lip with his tongue, as if he wanted to tell me something but wasn’t sure. “Thanks. We’re coming with you. We’re not witches but we’re both well practised in magic. We’ll be your coven. Just tell us what to do.”

Winking, with a cheeky grin Anthony added, “Please don’t be worried. We’re both fully equipped with our own magic wands.”

Holding the vampire's gaze, I leaned in, gripping his shoulder. “I hope you know how to use your magic wand, Anthony. I’ve heard you have a lot of experience.”

“I aim to please,” he said flashing a fangy smile.

Luke patted my shoulder. “You’re a bit drunk. Go and lie down for half an hour. Or we’ll cast a sleeping spell on you. I’ll wake you with a coffee, Ms. Brandt. Either that, or we’ll chain you to my bed?”

He slid off the bar stool. “This way. Take those filthy boots off, geez. Yes, here...”

In his living room a large fire blazed in the dragon shaped hearth. “Here, on here love, that’s it.”

I shuffled off my coat, letting it fall to the floor and laid out on his huge, comfy sofa. Luke placed a fleece blanket over me, and my eyelids refused to stay open. For a while I forgot I was in a nightmare and instead slept in dreamless peace.

Even in my darkest moments, there were those who were strangers to me, but willing to help and try to make me smile. Perhaps I would get through

this, perhaps even with him...

Coffee aroused me from sleep. Luke's voice was soft. Anxiety writhed in my stomach, my mind churning over and over all of the events. But as I opened my eyes I found the dragon shifter frowning, sitting before me on the coffee table.

"Here, I've put a little something in your coffee to ease your mind. God knows we all need it."

I muttered a thank you and slowly sat up, my head groggy but a little less exhausted.

Smiling, Luke offered, "When you're ready, love, we'll cook up some spells."

After drinking, the coffee fuelling my energy, I went upstairs to wash. Taking a deep breath, I knew I still had to find a way to bring down Adara, or at least weaken them. I guessed that every life they stole, they gained more power. With the shadow wolves it seemed they were actually using their souls. I knew that a soul is a powerful force, but to capture and use that, even make it do your bidding, I wasn't sure where to begin. Perhaps an angel would know. Souls were their business.

I found Luke eating cereal in the kitchen, crouched over his phone at the kitchen bar.

"Breakfast?"

I shook my head. "No. Thanks though. Can I make more coffee?"

"Sure. I sent Anthony home. I love that vampire but we need to get to work. Now, this sect, this secret society, what do you know already, tell me everything. Even the smallest detail may count."

As I filled the kettle, I said, "Those shadow werewolves, they were the souls of werewolves? Perhaps Lucifer or his kin could help? They know about souls, sending them up or down?"

Speaking with a mouthful, he nodded. "Hum, that's true enough. But I'm

not sure if Heaven wants to be involved. Heck, they might even agree with a lot of Adara's philosophy. The segregation of the species. Let's keep that idea for later. For now, if we have a way to take away some of their power, well soul stealing is something we might need to learn?" He got up and put his bowl in the sink. The kitchen shone.

"You've been busy!

"Well mate, a messy room, a cluttered mind and all that."

He held out an arm, then guided me through his kitchen, upstairs past his bedrooms. Hidden at the end of the corridor, in the wall was a secret doorway. As he placed his hand over a seemingly bare wall, a doorframe appeared in metallic green, much like his dragon's eyes. He leaned into it, a slight grunt and the wall disappeared.

"Bloody Hell, you say you know a *little magic*? I feel like a fraud, a witch from a coven who has nothing compared to your magic."

"Don't worry love, it's the dragon's blood, see? It's pretty potent. Please, after you."

He pulled a cord, lighting up the place. It was warm, cosy even with mahogany cupboards around two of the walls. A thick Persian rug on the floor decorated with an emerald dragon, like him. At the far end, fold up beds were placed against the wall, a desk with papers, scrolls and huge tomes of books balanced precariously near the edge, their gold edging catching the light. Two skylights in the roof above us lit up with silver stars in the inky sky. He pointed, and said, "There's a fridge over there, juice and water in it if you want. I can't always be bothered to go to the kitchen. Before we begin though, I just wanted you to know..." He glanced away, his chest rising and falling. I braced, waiting for the bad news...

Then his eyes changed, and heat radiated from him. I leaned back, was he going to turn?

Instead, he reached out. I placed my coffee on the side as he took my hand in his. If I thought werewolves were warm to the touch, dragon shifters

were next level. Like heating your hands in front of the hearth. His voice was deep and soft as he said, “Elsa, I know what it is to think you’ve found love, then lose it again. The same happened to me, though it was through my own stupid behaviour that I pushed the woman I loved away. But you should know all shifters have a tendency to be jealous and protective. In her case, my behaviour drove her into the arms of the very demon who I was jealous of, ironic huh? Knowing this, I doubt Lycaon will let you go. If he does, he’s a fool and you dodged a bullet.”

I didn't know what to say. Swallowing hard, I said, “Thanks. I really can't think about it right now. It's stupid that I feel so much, I don't know him. I guess it's because I gave him my blood. I need to concentrate on saving Marrock right now. And, if we can, bring down this violent society. I'm not sure there's much we can do for Zale, he's too wrapped up in his own hatred. But if I, we, can free Loren's soul, and save others from Adara, that would make everyone safer.”

He let go of my hands and pulled out a chair. “Well, sometimes these things happen fast. Still, we've got your back. Let me tell you what I've found out. These sigils on the trees where Austin, Grace, Marrock and Hakon were darted? The marks were Svefnthorn, a Norse sleeping spell. From my research some of Marrock's pack have a lineage dating back to Norse, so it stands to reason that members of Adara have that, too.” He grimaced, his shoulders lifting, as he frowned. “I think it's safe to conclude that there could be members from the Savernake pack in this secret society. So, what did you find at Ellsworth? You tell me and I'll select what I think will help, then you can check.”

Luke pointed to the cupboards, strode over and opened them. Shelves packed with jars of herbs, bottles with green, blue and crimson liquids. Strange masks, poppets, feathers and various skulls adorned with silver runes. I felt a rush of energy wash over me, and he grinned. “Not bad for a rookie, huh?”

Brushing my hair away from my face, I got up and went over to it. “So Adara are using a combination of magic, perhaps Norse witchcraft. So when you arrived after Hakon, Austin, Marrock and Grace had been drugged,” I paused realising the consequences. “Then no doubt they would’ve taken them and,” a lump formed in the back of my throat, “sacrificed them if you hadn’t arrived when you did.”

He glanced down at me, still frowning. “Possibly. Timing, it seems, is everything.”

My chest tightened with fear. “We know their ritual will be held on the anniversary of Loren’s death and that’s tonight. We have a lot to pack in. I suspect it’ll begin at midnight. I’m surprised you need magic though. Why the interest, I mean obviously you’re no rookie. You put me to shame, and I’m meant to be in a coven.”

“Haven’t you wondered about that?” Shaking his head, he leaned against the cupboard, eyeing me. “Firstly, I got into magic because for most of my life, I thought I was the only dragon shifter and I needed to protect myself. It won’t surprise you to know how many supernaturals, or mortals for that fact, want my blood. I’ve already been held hostage to one pagan god who bled me.”

I winced.

Gesturing, he continued, “Secondly, eternity is a long time, I wanted to learn. The occult challenges your mind. It forces you to think about subjects, philosophies, in a different way. It changes how you think, how you see life, the world. Thirdly, I suspect Mattie was holding you back. It’s clear your intentions are pure, you don’t lack power, Elsa. Just confidence in yourself and that power. But you have courage. Anthony and I were talking when you were sleeping. We’re just going to nudge you. You don’t even know your potential. So?”

Whoa. Another rush flowed through me, my cheeks burned.

People helping me... I know I’d had some encouragement in the coven,

but these were virtual strangers. Helping me! Potential? Before all of this, I'd contented myself with working with Luna and being an average witch. *Potential!*

To mask my embarrassment and bewilderment, I scanned the contents of the cupboards and told him everything I could remember from Ellsworth Manor.

As I was talking, I heard voices downstairs, then Austin hollered, "We're on our way up. Luke, you'd better be decent, old chap."

Trampling their feet, Austin, Grace and Anthony arrived.

"I brought the book, Elsa, *The Secrets of Magic*. We've had a look through it. I had to nab a copy from Lucius. He was going to help, but I told him we don't need him."

Luke's face wrinkled. "Are you mad? He was your teacher... oh, you think you're smarter? Arrogant mage."

Now Austin's boyish face turned scarlet. "Lucius himself told me I exceeded him. I don't want him involved, he's risked his life too many times. He's married now, leave him be." Austin paused, holding Luke's angry stare. "I am arrogant anyway, but only in jest. You're a bit slow if you don't know that already."

With a wry grin, Anthony pushed past Austin and chided, "Now, now children. So this witch's grimoire, what have you got?"

Austin handed it over and I opened it on the desk. We all stood around it. "Well, I was thinking, Adara is killing witches and werewolves. They're using Loren's soul, they have control over it, as they have control over the souls of those they've killed, right? *We take* control of those souls, but not by force, but by pleading with them. Think about it, we're trying to establish right against wrong, to give others freedom of choice. Adara is suppressing that, and annihilating all and any who disagree with them. If we can convince these tortured souls to help us, we could, in theory, deflect Adara's evil back

onto them?”

Grace smiled. “Quite genius. How do we do that though? Tortured souls, how the heck can we convince them to help?”

“We’ll bless them. At Stanton Drew stone circle, now. With your power of transporting, gather the artefacts from Ellsworth. They had werewolf skulls, vampire and witches’ skulls. They will be, Ill-gotten. Then we’ll send them to the stone circle. A blessing plea and a spell. Then go directly to Savernake, call Adara and deflect their magic back at them.”

“Huh, that might work,” Austin huffed. “But it’s the best we got. I like it, it’s simple. What if their magic is stronger?”

Luke chided him, “You said you’re the best.”

Austin glared at Luke. “I was asking hypothetically.”

Luke grunted.

“It doesn’t matter,” I added. “We deflect it back, in fact, I hope their magic is powerful and destructive. It’ll destroy them quicker.”

Austin smirked, looking at Anthony, then Luke. “I agree. She’s smart. I wouldn’t have thought to deflect their destruction back onto them. Luke, you, me and Grace will go to Ellsworth now, collect what we can. Anthony, you and Elsa ok to get the tools ready for the spell? But Elsa?”

“Yes?”

“I insist we use wands. I know we don’t need them, but I, well, I just have a fondness for them, that’s all.”

Luke mumbled, “Not the wand in your trousers, Anthony.”

“Well, imbue it with magic, that could work, it would certainly shock Adara,” I added, staring at Anthony.

I’d never seen a vampire blush before. But at least the blood was running to his face!

Slapping Austin’s shoulder, Luke smiled. “Lucky for you, I’m a fan of wands, too. Old school magic. You’ll find wands in the top drawer of the desk, on the left. Don’t use the one in the gilded box, that’s mine.”



As they left, Anthony and I went over to the cupboards.

“Henbane is a no-brainer, sage, mugwort, mandrake. Lavender for purification, what else?” he asked, rooting through the jars.

“Looks like you’ve got it covered. Are you sure you’re not a witch?”

He threw me a lopsided grin. “Nah, but since I was turned into this,” he gestured to his body, “this thing, trouble seems to follow me around. That and having to drink blood. At least now I’m part demon, I get to eat and drink again. My first meal was a curry, pure heaven I can tell you.”

“I didn’t know that. Are many vampires part-demon?”

“Certainly not. Most are too predatory for that, they’d use it against mortals, hiding in plain sight.”

“You sound like you hate being immortal?”

He sighed, turned around and looked wistfully across the room. “I didn’t choose it. I live every day, every hour with guilt. Guilt of those who I’ve killed. Drained. I make the most of life,” he glanced at me, “such as it is. Everyone needs purpose. Mine is to help.”

“But you still drink blood?”

“And Marrock’s pack still eats people, much like Lycaon I hear?”

I nodded. “Yes, well, that’s nothing to do with me now. Most vampires drink from evil people, I hear. And don’t completely drain their victims.”

He chuckled. “That’s what we want you to believe. But yes, evil. Keeping them alive, perhaps... Elsa, regardless of what I, or Hakon tell you, no matter how comfortable you are around us, remember. Vampires are hunters. It’s hard for us to stop thinking about blood. Your blood. This isn’t meant to scare you, I have mastered self-control. But if I was drained of blood, or if I was in a feeding frenzy, much like a werewolf, you’d better keep your distance. In those circumstances, we may not have control.”

“Lycaon said the same. Good to know.”

He carried the jars of herbs to the desk, put them down, then, sucking in his cheeks, eyed the room before his gaze settled on me. “The reason I’m

telling you now is that I haven't fed. I thought it might be useful facing this secret society."

"Ok. Thanks for the heads up. I'll remember to stay out of your way."

He shot me a smile, fangs and all.

"So what spell from this grimoire are we using? And I have the Malum athame."

I poured over the grimoire whilst he gathered the rest of the herbs.

"Where did you get this Malum athame? In Hell, I mean is it yours?"

He shrugged. "Heck no. It's Paimon's, another king of Hell. You can feel its dark power. Fight evil with evil..."

Even before I picked it up, my fingers hovering over it, power pumped through my hands, snaking up my arms. Unable to repress a shudder, I wrapped my fingers around it. So this was an energy from a king of Hell!

"Be careful, it is potent!" he grinned.

"I can feel that. You work with this power?"

Anthony did a mock bow. "I'm the king of Hell. Would you expect less?" he chuckled.

Sheathing it in my belt, I said, "I guess not. Thank you!"

We busied ourselves mixing the herbs together.

Anthony broke the silence. "I'm sorry if I scared you earlier. That was not my intention. You're quite safe."

"Thanks, I understand. I feel a bit left out, I never have to warn anyone about anything."

Although maybe I should warn others after I used the blood magic, then gave my blood to the father of wolves!

Engrossed in the spell, Anthony offered, "We need a chalice, candles, something to make a pentacle and crystals wouldn't go amiss."

As I turned looking for tools, Anthony edged closer. "Elsa?"

I met his gaze. His scent was heady, spicy, sweet and musky. Like Hakon, he was impeccably dressed. His eyes, pure white with a hint of

crimson were menacing and alluring at the same time. Or maybe alluring because he was, well dangerous. And charming as hell. I sighed, "Look, until this week my experience of vampires was Hakon and his therapy. And I'd never met a werewolf. I realise I seem naive, I was, and I'm learning fast." I let out a pent-up breath, his lashes lowered, he nodded.

"You're doing great. Luke filled me in, it's a lot." He looked up at me. "Adara, you said, had feral werewolves and vampires. When we face Adara, Luke, Austin and Grace and you should all form a circle, back to back. Things could get... bloody. And I don't think you're naive, I think you're handling everything remarkably well. Mattie should be proud of you."

Before I could speak, a loud shouting, a yell as Luke, Austin and Grace came falling through a portal, literally falling at our feet, skulls tumbling from their hands, rolling across the floor.

"Bloody hell!" Grace yelled. She was bleeding, as was Luke who gagged violently, and Austin who rasped, coughing. "Seal it. Bloody hell!"

I have to hand it to Anthony, he moved faster than I could see, both his arms raised and shouting so loud that my eardrums stung, screaming a spell but not before a werewolf broke through.

Holy hell. The creature's head nearly hit the rafters, its fore limbs lashing out, curved claws split open the vampire's hands. Yelling in pain, Anthony crumbled to the floor, blood pouring from his palms as he smacked down hard on his knees. Fear gripped my limbs. But something pulsed through me and I found myself pushing the vampire to one side and chanting a spell in Latin, forcing the beast back with magic. It recoiled, snarling and from my mouth I spat more Latin. The portal sealed shut.

Suddenly drained of energy I put out my hands, my legs like jelly as I fought the urge to puke. Seemingly possessed by something, Anthony lunged at me, his white eyes staring right through me as he opened his mouth.

Again I shouted, in a voice that wasn't my own. Raising my hand, I flung him into the cupboard. He bounced off it, jars shattering around him.

“Whoa, what a ride!” Austin whistled.

Luke was getting up, Grace helping Austin who appeared drunk. Frowning hard, his forehead wrinkled, the dragon shifter's voice was deep, full of concern. “What was that voice, Elsa, that wasn't you?”

Dizzy, I put my hand out, walking over to the desk and perched on the edge.

Anthony stood up, brushing himself off. “Who cares, whatever, she saved us. All of us. So, you brought company back with you? That was nice of you! Is everyone ok? We'd better have a drink, something strong. Then I think we'd better get this ritual done as soon as possible.”

Anthony did a mock bow. “Apologies, Elsa, I wasn't myself. Something was in my head, too. With the blood loss, I was compelled to-”

My voice raised as I said, “You're still bleeding.” I rushed over, pulling his arms before him and muttered a simple healing enchantment. Violently he sucked in air, wheezing.

One more fierce outburst and then the vampire collapsed at my feet.

As Luke chained Anthony up, all of us jittery, we carefully gathered the skulls and bones.

“I hate to put him in chains, but we can't wait around. Otherwise I'd offer him some of my blood.”

Startled, I stared at Luke. “Really? Why chain him and you'd give him dragon's blood?”

Lowering his voice, Luke replied, looking from Anthony to me. “Something's possessed him. And yes, of course I'd share blood with him. He's a good friend.”

Austin almost squeaked, “Friend? Is that what you're calling it now?”

Grace frowned at the mage, his fingers danced before him. A slow deep breath, Austin snapped out of his stupor. “Ohh, that was... weird.”

Frowning, Luke padded to the door. “There’s a large box downstairs in the garage. You can place the werewolf's remains in there. Austin?”

Blinking rapidly Austin nodded. “Sorry mate, I still feel queasy, like I’m smashed. Their magic is weird. And potent. Phew!”

Luke cocked his head. “Well, whatever possessed Anthony, we can’t take the chance. Even if he breaks the chains, they’ll slow him down. And he doesn’t know where Savernake forest is. If we go to the stone circle first, call on the spirits, then we can transport to Savernake.”

I shuddered looking at Anthony, whose face was looking more emaciated by the minute. His skin looked stretched, thin across his high cheekbones. His lips, instead of blood red were pale. His limp frame hung from the chains like a skeleton, arms above his head.

“We can’t leave Anthony like that. Look at him, he’s decaying,” I pleaded with them.

“I’ll... I’ll leave him a drop of my blood, but honestly, I’m not sure if it’s the right thing. Grace, Elsa, can you do something, too? I think he’s still possessed.”

Grace was still getting her breathe back, she glanced at me. “A vampire’s prayer? They have their own grimoire.”

I didn’t mean for my voice to be so high pitched, “Who the heck do vampires pray to?”

Luke shrugged. “I have no idea. Here...” He strode over to the cupboards, stepping over the shattered jars and glass on the floor.

“Elsa, we’ll mix some herbs, a sleeping spell?”

I nodded and we gathered a few basics. White sage, basil for grounding, lavender for purity, though for a vampire- who knew with that one. As I dropped some dried ingredients into the mortar, Luke ground them up with the pestle.

“Salt,” Grace offered.

Luke walked back to the cupboard, opened a cabinet door, and handed

Grace a bag. “Here, you do this. A good idea. Elsa, you cast a blessing, or whatever for Anthony. I’ll leave him a drop of blood.”

I calmed my mind, or least attempted to, the bowl of herbs in my hand. The magic in me was fainter, weaker. I didn’t know any vampire specific spells, so I improvised.

I chanted softly, scattering him with the herbs as I went.

“A vampires spell for a tortured spirit

Let your soul find peace and quiet

Banish the evil that lies within

Let your kind nature

Arise, within

With the power of light, of good from witches

Restore Anthony to all he wishes.”

I sighed, standing back. Eyeing him, I saw no change straight away, but then I’d never done spell work for a vampire.

Luke touched my shoulder. “I like it, simple spells are usually the most potent. Plus, it’s all in the intention.” He placed a small phial of his blood next to Anthony.

Grace smiled. “Well, he might turn back into a human if you want him to be all good.”

Rolling my lips as I watched him, I thought, he’d probably want that.

A shadow seemed to pass over my soul. My limbs felt heavy. Part of me, a large part if I’m honest, longed for the comfort of my life before this. Of log fires, the simple spells and cake. I had no idea how I was coping and the fact that some freaky energy, or entity seemed to be using me as a vessel scared the living daylights out of me. My only solace, don’t think about it. Yeah, not much, huh. After this mess was done, I’d get Austin to perform an exorcism or something. Maybe make me forget. I felt like any courage I had was draining away. I took a deep breath.

We gathered our tools, the herbs and stood facing each other as Austin transported us to the stone circle.



In the field, pale shards of moonlight reflected and danced over the stone circle, making the monoliths look like they were moving. Beneath our feet, the grass squelched, aromas of sweet rotten leaves and rain.

Placing crystals inside the stone circle in the shape of a pentacle, I shivered as the wind nipped at my fingers. Luke busied himself by sprinkling salt in a circle outside the pentacle, whilst Austin and Grace placed the skulls and bones inside the circle of salt. In the centre I put the chalice, dropping the herbs into it. The chalice gleamed a golden hue, and as I whispered a blessing, a plea for help, warmth flooded through me.

Frazzled from his expedition to Ellsworth Manor, Austin pulled out his wand but his smile was dulled.

“Alright bitches, we ready?”

“Yeah, enough of that language, Spike. The first incantation has to be really positive. I’m not sure using ‘bitches’ in a ceremony to bless and ask condemned souls to help us is what we’re after?” I shrugged.

“I was kidding.”

“I’m not. We haven’t got much time and we cannot afford to be anything less than one hundred percent positive, we have to assume this works.”

He rolled his eyes. “Ok. Law of assumption it is then.”

I love Austin, I really do. I knew he didn’t mean harm, but words carry power and energy. And we were on thin ice here.

“I scanned the grimoire, I’m going to interpret one of the spells, make it our own.”

Luke shuffled restlessly, nodding. Grace composed herself, Austin shot me a grin.

“Shall I light the herbs?”

“Thanks, yes.”

Pointing to the chalice, Austin muttered and I watched as a string of electric blue light shot from his wand and whipped to the herbs. The flames were instant, snaking up, giving an copper hue that glowed before us. Elongated shadows from the stones cast an eerie atmosphere.

Taking a deep breath, I raised my arms up to harken to the souls.

“Mages and witches, we call on thee,  
With wands and cauldrons  
Be here with me  
Tooth and claw  
And fire bright  
Help bless the souls that are here, this night  
Muster your courage, your power and join with us  
No more killing of witches, werewolves, creatures of night  
Lend us your magic so we can stop  
The travesty of the killings  
From Adara, now end.”

Puffing as I felt my body weaken, drained, I watched as the flames from the chalice rise higher, brighter. I shuddered as a breeze whisked around us and whispers sounded in the wind.

I couldn't make out what the voices were saying. Luke walked towards me, his chest puffed up as he eyed the fire.

Above us the moon disappeared for a moment as clouds swept over it, as if hiding it from the forces that grew around us. I trembled again, part in fear, part with cold as the breeze picked up pace.

He stood beside me, arm touching mine, as Austin did the same with Grace. Enlarging more, the flames licked high above us from the small



vessel. I gasped, stepping back as the roar of a beast echoed through us and in the flames the face, the head of a werewolf appeared, snarling, with fangs dripping in blood.

Unconsciously I gripped Luke's arm, transfixed on the sight before us. Bending he whispered in my ear, "Look around the stones... You did it. Look, see."

Peeling myself away from Luke but still clutching his arm, I stole a glance. Apparitions of witches, werewolves, vampires, even angels and demons appeared, watching us in ghostly silence.

Dozens of them stood around the stones. Diaphanous faces, their clothes were from another time. Frock coats, boots, breeches to corsets, long skirts and bonnets. It seemed we'd raised the dead, the persecuted from every bygone age and now they watched, waiting with faces full of pain.

A musty scent filled the air, like old death and the werewolf face in the flames roared louder, its mouth exposing its fangs.

Silver fingers of moonlight reached down as the clouds parted, the faces reflected skulls. A crack of lightning illuminated the stones and the ghosts. Then the lightning burst, flooding the sky in a haze of purple shards that grew brighter, stronger and shot like an arrow heading straight towards me.

I tried to move, my mouth opening to scream but no words came. Luke grunted, but he couldn't move me. Fixated to the spot, I felt an icy spear plunge through my head, my body.

Convulsing, my body rocked and then that terrifying fear of something inhabiting my body, my voice, my mind.

I bellowed, arms wide as purple and silver light radiated from me, blinding my friends around me.

"The anger and the sorrow from the persecuted, the souls of those sacrificed now flows through my veins, through my blood,

A power fuelled by darkness

Now I am bonded in a shadow that haunts my spirit

And the vengeance of the accused, of the cursed  
Will be wrought upon Adara  
I will not rest until they are all bleeding from my craft  
I will not deny that part of me has desired this  
For even the just  
Can succumb to the darkness,  
it tempts even the pure of heart..."

My throat was raw as I tried to swallow. I staggered back watching Luke waver before helping me. The light radiating from me faded and as the dragon shifter held me up, I caught the spark of fear in his eyes. I knew that fear, it was in my heart, too.

The faces, the apparitions had vanished and the moon shone with a brilliance that lit up every detail around us. Sparkling frost on the blades of grass, runes carved into the standing stones and the steam from everyone's breath in the bitter night air. Grace wrapped her arms around herself, gently stomping to keep warm whilst Austin nodded to her then paced over to me.

He shot a look and nod to Luke, then took my hands. His face was wrought with concern, furrowed brows, his eyes narrow.

"The witches, werewolves, all who have been sacrificed by Adara, their power now resides in you. I will help you to master this darkness. A cliché perhaps but it can be both a blessing and a curse. There are those of us who've been touched by evil. Now we will fight evil with evil, but this malevolent magic was birthed by Adara. It is only fitting that, as you said, we reflect it back. In the end, they will be destroyed by their own misuse of magic, by their own power. Come, we don't have a moment to lose."

I could feel the weight of Grace and Luke's stare burn into me.

My voice hoarse, I asked, "What just happened, what did I say?"

Luke glanced at Grace, then back to me. "The accused, those sacrificed

spoke through you. As Austin said, their power, their wrath now resides in you. We'll help, Elsa, but you should tread with care. Malevolent magic is addictive, seductive. It can change you. Steal your soul. Just... *be careful.*"

## THE FACELESS

They were already waiting for us when we arrived. Even fuelled by this wrathful power, fear still stuck in the back of my throat and churned in the pit of my stomach.

Chained up, a curved blade caught the cold rays of the moon as it was pressed to his throat. Lycaon was on his knees.

Beside him, lifeless, grey skin, lay Zale. His throat ruined by the dagger, blood had pooled around him and was drying on the frosty grass.

Lycaon's eyes met mine, widening, imploring. The palest blue I ever saw, now my heart raced, filled with dread as I held his gaze. The leader stepped forward, his mask hiding his cowardly face, just as the others. As I looked up, their masks reflected us back. His voice was cutting.

“Just as we planned, you acted straight from the rule book. Come to seek vengeance? But the power I can feel from you, it won't help you now. You see, we've amassed magic over the centuries, from every pack, every coven. The blood of angels and vampires flows through us. And now, on this anniversary, we shall make the ultimate sacrifice, *I* shall make the ultimate sacrifice, killing you Ms. Brandt!”

*What?*

He gestured. “Lycaon will add to this, obviously. His blood and the blood of the dragon's will make for a powerful spell. It will aid us to rid all of those

who don't believe in keeping our species pure, keeping away outsiders." He lifted his chin, sniffing the air. "You're defiled by this monstrous thing, giving him your blood, the blood of a witch to a werewolf, the first wolf. Who is to say how this will affect him? As for your bloodline, it is ravaged now."

He nodded and his feral pets howled, pulling on their shackles. The henchmen who we'd seen before, burly shifters strained to hold them on their chains as the vampires and werewolves tugged, snarling towards me.

The vampires were almost emaciated. Dressed in rags, their skin stretched like latex, charging forwards. They halted as they reached a foot away from us.

My throat tightened. A mixture of faeces and blood, these creatures stank. I prayed to the goddess, to any goddess as fear froze me to the spot. I couldn't swallow, I could hardly breathe, which next to these fiends was probably a blessing. I heard Luke shuffle beside me. It took all my energy not to turn and look at him and Austin.

Happy with the sound of his own voice and his well thought out trap that we'd walked into, the Adara leader droned on.

"One wrong move and Lycaon is dead. Even your blood won't help him if we slit his throat. However immortal or powerful, when the neck is severed, you're as dead as a mortal. You must offer yourself freely, Elsa. Make no mistake, we will bleed your shifter lover, but we will keep him alive. Just as we did Zale one hundred years ago. Lycaon's blood is more useful to us fresh. And," he tipped his head, "we *will* spare the lives of your friends. So, what will it be?"

Trying not to shake I said, "I'm nothing special, why me? If you knew me, you know I'd give my life for theirs."

One of the other masked members stepped forward, but the leader shot out his arm. "You're either incredibly brave, or incredibly stupid, I'm not

sure which, Elsa. Why you thought to get mixed up in this is a wonder, I believe you're touched. Ill in the head. And that makes you dangerous. Not just to us, but to all immortals."

"I'm scared, there's no shame in that. Only a fool wouldn't be scared. I don't want to die. But if it means they live," I indicated to Lycaon who widened his eyes at me, still pleading, "if it means he lives, then so be it. You will stop killing others."

"No, we will not. And you're not in a position to make any stipulations. As it is, Adara demands you all die. As this is my turn, my sacrifice, I went to great pains to negotiate saving your friends over you."

"Who the hell are *you* to kill me? Take off your mask, coward!"

His laugh cut right through me.

"Masks are the least of your worries. We don't hide from you, our masks protect others, packs, covens, nests of vampires. You'd be surprised how many members we have, Elsa. Hundreds? Thousands? Hundreds of thousands? Come, the moon is almost at its apex. Your time has arrived."

He stepped towards me, and his underlings edged forwards. Like ice in my blood, cold swept through me and I found I was unable to move. I locked eyes with Lycaon, the blade from a masked member still pressed close to his throat.

With Lycaon at their mercy, it was leaving me no choice. And though fear flooded every cell of my body, I couldn't let this group slaughter my friends.

Not even staring death in the face, as the leader laughed, a deep rumble from his stomach, his mask mirrored myself. Where was this force, this entity now when I needed it most? I was left without power, alone, without options.

Glancing over his shoulder, the leader shouted, "Bring the others. We shall, I shall honour my word. We are savages without honour."

The society cleared a space, and a handcuffed Marrock was brought forward.

One of the members, perhaps the woman who had challenged the leader from the last time, shouted, “You cannot let them all go. We need their blood. Kill her and be done with this nonsense.”

A moment of silence stretched before us. Her voice seemed familiar, but honestly the fear was so tightly bound up in me, I wasn’t even sure if this was real. Then a feral vampire snarled, and its stench brought me right back to the present moment. I heard Austin and Grace move, slightly.

Spinning, my mind was unable to process this. I wasn’t a brave fighter. I was an average witch at best, coming from a line of witches and mages who had never been involved in anything spectacular. I’d never known my dad, and my mum, as me, we were happy normally plodding through life. My only drama was found in books and movies.

As the leader strode closer, time slowed even more and colours around me faded to grey.

Trembling, fear turned to anger, bubbling up like boiling water. I narrowed my eyes at Lycaon whose stare pressed into mine. The slightest movement in his lips, they parted, the masked leader stepped even closer.

Then, as if exploding through me, a torrent of silver light flared out from me. Spots appeared before my eyes, I was blinded for a few seconds. Sweat broke out on the back of my neck from the heat and I heard their cries as my skin grew hotter, burning.

Like a tidal wave of fire rushing through me, pouring out from my hands, rasping I wanted it to stop. I tried to cry out, to yell but everything was consumed by silver flames, like molten silver.

They screamed, shouting around me. I felt a grip of a hand on my arm, the scent of old flames. Luke. He gasped, pulling his hand back and shouted to Austin but my mind was too consumed in the process to know what he was saying.

But then I saw it. The light swelled above me, forming, changing almost

like a cloud of light. Slow at first, a blob, the legs, a body, a tail... a head.

My mouth hung open, still this energy flooded from me and I could just make out the wolf's jaw as it opened before the fleeing Adara members, its snarl cutting through my ears.

The leader crouched, his hands weaving frantically before sending a stream of scarlet magic that bolted into it. It shattered, sending thousands of shards of glass like material, impaling on the feral beasts and some of the secret society.

Just as suddenly, like a tap being switched off, the power radiating from me stopped. Doubling over, sickness curdled in my stomach. Pain smarted through my limbs, clenching at the nerves running down my back. My knees weakened.

Again I felt a hand grab me. But it wasn't Luke.

Swearing, I was snatched, pulled away then thrown backwards.

My eyes felt like they'd been burned by a red hot poker. As I thudded on the ground, the leader stomping towards me, Grace lunged before him, shooting blue light. He matched her without trying, the magic whipping from his fingers smashed into her, thrusting her away. He grunted at the inconvenience.

Now above me, his hand went to grab my neck. I fought back but was as weak as a kitten. I tried to muster magic, any magic but I was defeated. I didn't even know if Lycaon lived. Something told me to surrender. To give up. This was it.

I couldn't meet death on my feet.

"I should've killed you long ago, so like your mother. An abomination." As he weaved his fingers above my face, I smelt it. So did he.

He spun around fast, the wolf snarled, its paw outstretched and sliced right through this leader's neck.

Like a fountain, his artery sprayed blood as his body caught up with his



death. He staggered for a few seconds before thudding to the ground in a crimson splatter of his blood. I lay there, confused, slightly concussed, I think, exhausted.

Cracking and splitting of bones had me push myself up to my knees, to see the beast change back to the man. A slice on his neck, but Lycaon's head was attached. Then frantically looking past him, I saw Austin, and Grace chasing the rest of the members, whilst Marrock and Hakon roared, brutally murdering the feral beasts.

His lips curved slightly, Lycaon bent next to me, then looked at the dead leader.

“Do you want to see who that is, or was?”

“Not really. But I suppose we need to know.”

He nodded, eyes narrowed as he pulled the mask away from the leader intent on killing me. His sacrifice.

I was lost for words. I hadn't seen him in forever, but I knew the face.

I'd seen it many times in an old album that was kept at my mum's home in her loft. His face hadn't changed for twenty-years. He was a mage, after all.

It was my father...



In shock, I stood up with the help of Lycaon. He said nothing verbally, his eyes said everything.

My father? I hadn't even seen him in forever. I needed to run, hide... to warn my mum. I'd only heard snippets of their turbulent marriage, but she was adamant not to bad-mouth anyone. If I wanted to know, she said I could find him myself. I guess she never thought he'd go this psycho though.

His arm wrapped around me, now Lycaon spoke, his voice soothing, “Dark magic consumes the mind, twists it, tortures the soul. He was a product

of his own creation. In the end, his own magic destroyed him. We can become that which we most fear. And that fear will destroy us.”

I let my head fall onto his chest as we walked, picking our way through the carnage. I swallowed hard, trying not to gag.

“Well, you helped. The claws...”

Lycaon’s voice was deep, calming. “I said I would kill for you. I was nearly too late. What a bloody mess this all is.”

Taking a lungful of air I said, “I guess this is why you stay isolated a lot. I understand that now. A remote cabin in the woods, that sounds like absolute bliss right now.”

Pulling me in tighter, he replied with a small chuckle, “Well, according to Conor, when I stayed with him, a remote cabin with bathroom facilities and internet are a must in this modern age.”

Nervously I laughed.

The first werewolf, as old as Zeus himself...

## BITE OF THE WEREWOLF

Casting fire, Austin and Grace burned as many of the corpses as possible, then lumbered over. Their faces were pale, drawn from exhaustion.

The rest of Adara had scattered to the wind.

I felt unease trickle down my back, something still didn't feel right.

His voice croaky, Austin narrowed his eyes. "We're off in a bit, Elsa, I'm assuming you'll want a transport home?"

"More than you can imagine. I know this is like your day job, but I'm very under qualified for this line of work."

"Nope, you passed with flying colours. It does take getting used to. And it can make you cranky... especially when you don't get a holiday," Austin gasped.

I looked at Luke. "You'll check on Anthony? I hope he's alright?"

"Well, he's chained up in my home, so I'll soon find out. You two go, have a rest. We all need a rest. Looks like everyone else has run away. I don't know how you pulled that off Elsa, that was something else! Hakon will be pissed he missed it though!"

Lycaon asked Austin to send him home to get some clothes. Chuckling almost hysterically from exhaustion, the mage had agreed and fifteen minutes later Lycaon had returned, so Austin, after a hug, sent me and Lycaon away.

I took my wolfman home with me.

The faint scent of lavender and sage hung in the air, he bent down. “You do know that sage isn’t enough to actually repel demons?”

“That’s why you’re here. I need to wash, and so do you. And we still, or I still need to put Loren’s soul to rest. I’m so sorry about Zale.”

Biting his lip, he turned his head. “Elsa, too much blood has been spilled tonight. I say we take a rest. Mourn the dead tomorrow, I have nothing left. Tomorrow we’ll put both their souls to rest. And,” he frowned looking at his torso, “You’re right, I stink.”

I nodded and clung to his large arms. “Thank you for saving my life. Now we’re even.”

“I didn’t protect you. I almost failed you.”

“But you didn’t. I’d be dead now if it wasn’t for you. Your wolf. We were outnumbered. Whoever they are, their magic is beyond anything I’ve come across, or even heard of.”

His shoulders relaxed a little as he edged closer to me. “Yes. Hakon has done some research on this Adara cult. A secret society, their history goes back centuries. The witch trials in the seventeenth century? They were involved. As far as we know, and we don’t know a lot, they’re obsessed with retaining order, their order on all supernaturals. Vehemently against the inter-marriage between supernaturals. You can imagine, Lucius has taken a keen interest, being a demon married to a shifter-mage. But he’s always tried to keep a low profile, now we know why. Right now, he’s in hiding with Emma. We will find a way to bring them down.”

He sighed. “Lucius is not hopeful to be honest. As for Marrock, most of his pack have fled. Austin told me that he and Hakon had been working with Luke. We need to stay away for twenty-four hours. Adara is probably even more hellbent now to sacrifice me, and you. Just because they failed on the anniversary of Loren’s death, they won’t rest.”

His lips curved, softening his worried face. “For now, you’re to rest. As

am I. I may be immortal but I do need energy.”

“I’ll shower, please make yourself at home.”

Dragging myself away, my aching legs and feet trudged up the small stairway to the bathroom.

As the water heated up, I gazed at my reflection.

I looked like crap. Dark circles under my eyes, tired, my hair in a tangled mess and showered in blood.

The hot water cleaned not only me, but my soul. I felt too weary, too heavy for answers now. What was the energy that surged through me? That was some freaky magic, my dad trying to sacrifice me... I can’t even... And Adara. So, I knew Mattie had been there then, she’d had the invitation after all. I can only surmise that Becca and Josey were there, as well. As the water washed away the blood and filth, I remembered all the times I’d felt a little odd around them. A bit uneasy. I’d never again not trust that. Call it what you want, gut instinct, intuition. And I remembered when Josey vehemently told me she’d been accused of harassing a coven member, who had in turn left, but she, Josey was innocent. I know realised that was a flag. A giant red flag. And Mattie, well, she’d obviously sided with Josey!

As I got out and wrapped a towel around me, Lycaon tapped on the door. Opening it, he stood there holding a cup, grinning.

“Hot chocolate. Conor taught me a lot. He was my mentor to the modern age! You’re tired, women like hot chocolate?”

Wrapping my fingers around the mug I replied, “You’re a godsend. Thank you. And thank you to Conor. There’s clean towels in the cupboard.”

He nodded and we swapped places whilst I went to my bedroom, sat on my bed and relaxed in the bliss of the moment. And chocolate.

I leaned over and put the drink on the bedside table. The room was airy and warm. Moonlight flooded in through the window.

Home. How I’ve missed it. I leaned back happy to be alive, at home safe with almost everyone alive. My soul panged that Zale had died, not that he

was a friend to me.

Rubbing his hair dry with a towel, Lycaon came in, pointing. “I put my cup over there. Is that alright?”

I nodded.

“Well, I guess I’m no longer in the coven. I need to contact my friends, see if they’re alright.”

He touched my arm, then ran his fingers over mine.

“Adara took our phones. Adara isn’t interested in your mortal friends. Rest, that’s an order. You really are a giver, aren’t you?”

“I worry. That’s all.”

I trembled, steadying my breathing as I noticed he had leaned towards me. I could feel his breath on my neck, warm, inviting. Dangerous. Was he attracted to danger? Was I?

“Elsa, you’re kind. Brave. Tomorrow we’ll check on your mortal friends. It’ll be light soon. I should be able to trace their scent.”

His hulking frame almost filled the bed.

Cold moonlight danced through the curtains, casting shadows that ebbed and flowed. Lycaon’s hair shielded part of his face, and for a second, he almost looked half wolf, half man.

He turned fully around, his lips curled back in a sinful grin. “You know they’ll never stop hunting us. We are, have become, the enemy. The supernatural world has divided. Even my kin are turning against me. Are you sure you want this, there’s no going back?”

“What I don’t understand is how your kin, how there are different species? Like you turn into a wolf, others a monster?”

A small nod, he rolled his lips as he sat beside me. “I am the original werewolf, part man, part wolf. Made from the curse, the wrath of Zeus. And I wonder about this power in you, is it linked somehow to me, a connection to the gods? But as for werewolves, those who came after me, well a different

kind of magic has hexed them. Their blood lines are damned, a hideous mutation. Some believe their monster was born through violence. Created from the anger inside of the men who were bitten, this dark magic festered. Like a disease that mutates and destroys.”

His shoulders dropped, he brushed my hair away from my face. “It’s something like that either way. Their anger, their savagery created their monsters, not the curse itself. But you haven’t answered my question. Or perhaps you have?”

Swiftly he was standing before me, bent over, and kissed my head.

“Do I want this, being with you? You’re sitting on my bed, mostly naked. Though naked seems to be your normal, um, whatever. Not that I mind.”

“I can’t love lightly, Elsa. Most werewolves, from my lineage anyhow, can’t. Together we will be a target. Just say the word, I’ll leave. Or I’m with you forever.” He leaned in. “We don’t have to spend every hour together. I feel uncomfortable talking about how I feel. I’ve told you more about how I feel than anyone else I’ve ever met. It makes me feel... awkward sharing that. I do, however, want to be with you. But I need to know if you feel the same way?”

“You know I do.”

I looked into his pale eyes.

The wolf was still there, something behind his eyes but it was quiet, playful. “Let them hunt us. Who are they to judge us, to dictate their beliefs on us? Not all the supernatural have abandoned us. Even if they did, I will stand with you until the end.”

His smile radiated his face. “And I, with you. Let them all burn...”

Lycaon locked his gaze with me. Then leaning in, his lips brushed mine. I kissed him back, light from the windows dancing over his chest.

As I looked into his eyes, my body softened. Falling over his face, his golden hair curtained us as he moved towards me, a swirling inside of me as our lips met. He was the man, or shifter, that I wanted to be with. A

knowing.

Even after what happened, I still felt safe with him. His arm wrapped around me, pulling me into him as we rolled around the bed, laughing.

We lay facing each other.

His touch was soft, sensual. Sending electric shivers down my spine.

Anticipation built up, a tremble of desire as I had longed for his touch, to feel his heat on me. His body on mine. I couldn't get enough of him.

"You've bewitched me, Elsa. I can't get enough of you."

As we edged closer, skin on skin, closing the gap, increasing the intimacy, a craving burned through me. His pale eyes locked with mine, mouth parted as his gaze fell to my lips.

Gently, he traced my lips with his. His tongue teasing mine. I ran my hand down his back, pulling him closer. Locked in that kiss, time didn't exist. Swooning as passion flooded me, I didn't want to let go. I wanted to surrender to him, to taste every inch of him. To breathe him in.

He nudged forward, rolling me onto my back where his hands traced my chest, my breasts and trailed down my stomach, teasing. Watching my reactions, his lips curved up. Shivers of desire ran through me, bubbling through me. My fingers lightly ran down his chest, playfully circling on his stomach before trailing further down to his groin and delicately teasing up his thighs.

He sighed, his lids lowered slightly as we explored each other.

Then moving he sat on top of me, moving my legs apart, running his tongue from my stomach between them. I bucked as he tasted me, his tongue darting, swirling. I muttered his name, and he became more fervent.

Easing himself onto me, I grabbed his hands, rolling him onto his back and took him in my mouth. Taking him inside, exploring him.

Gripping his wrists, pinning them down, he wretched, moaning, almost growling as my tongue, my mouth explored his dick.



Slick, aroused, I couldn't take anymore. I edged up, straddling him, circling my hips, feeling him hard inside. A wholeness. Blended together as one. With a firm grip on my hips, he pulled me deeper onto him, pulsing inside of me.

Then lifting his hips, plunging deeper, I arched back, head full of delirium.

“Lycaon...”

He moaned, pulsing inside of me. I clenched around him as he pulled me forward, grabbing my hair, his kiss forceful and passionate. Greedy.

Full of hope, of something more than lust. Everything we'd been through since we met had been building to this.

I felt like I was melting as he pulled me on top of him, his hot breath down my neck sending powerful shivers through me. I squeezed him more. Our bodies were one.

I groaned, my lips forming his name in between each kiss, and he responded with a wild intensity, his body writhing and bucking. As he neared climax, his body pulsed with intensity, and his groan of pleasure sent shivers down my spine. There was a moment of stillness, neither of us moving an inch. I fell onto him, and his body radiated a comforting heat that enveloped me. The intensity of our passion left us both trembling and shaking.

We slept like the dead, draped in each other's arms. His scent was so familiar, his arms so strong. We'd found and saved each other.

And... he didn't snore.



Restless, I awoke hearing something outside. Closing my eyes, I was still jumpy from everything that had happened. If I hadn't gone to Savernake,

none of this would have occurred to me. But then, I wouldn't be in the arms of my wolfman. My body relaxed as I nestled into him.

A crash had us both bolting up. Bitter wind swept through shattered glass, Lycaon was up and scanning the floor as he picked up a brick that had been hurled through me window.

Carefully, picking our way through the glass on the floor we peered out of the window and into my back garden.

A hollow voice cried on the wind, "We are everywhere. We are your closest friends. Your lovers. Your family. We will never stop hunting you. This is just the beginning."

Turning to run out of the door, I grabbed his arm.

"No." My heart smashed against my chest. "Tomorrow. Let's just have one night."



Thank you reading. I'm glad you're here. I really hope you enjoyed this. Book 2 of 4 will be released shortly, I am aiming for the end of November 2023.

You can catch updates on [www.jnmoon.com](http://www.jnmoon.com).

First chapter of Wolf Trap below and then notes on the places and mythology.

## WOLF TRAP EXCERPT

**A**ftermath.

Shadows twisted and ebbed on the walls as the pale morning light streamed in through the curtains. Nudging closer, the heat from Lycaon's body surged through me as the bitter chill bit through the shattered glass of my bedroom window.

After the threat from Adara at my home and the brick they'd sent smashing through my windowpane, I'd hardly slept.

That taunting voice repeated in my mind incessantly. If I had to guess, I'd say it was a vampire, an old vampire, but apart from Hakon and Anthony, I hadn't met many.

The message of hunting me relentlessly obviously brought the threat home, but there was something else about it. A voice lacking humanity, like it enjoyed cruelty.

For hours we lay on the bed, arm in arm, watching the moonlight chase the shadows across the ceiling. Then dozing in and out of a restless sleep.

On the one hand, I was in his blissful embrace, his scent intoxicating me like a lullaby. On the other, dread trickled and clenched at my throat.

I was about to drag myself up when a hammering on my front door made me jump. A deep, throaty voice called my name.

Leaping up, I snatched up my robe, Lycaon pulling on his jeans, as he followed me, pulling on a T-shirt.

“Miss Brandt, please open the door now. This is the police.”

Flashing a look at Lycaon, my mouth open in shock before I hollered back, “I’m coming!” Bloody hell!

As if the death of a friend wasn’t enough, the threats from Adara, now this.

Clenching my teeth, I stomped. What I would give for twenty-four hours of nothing happening. Gripping the bannister, I stopped thudding down the stairs when my foot slipped and I nearly fell.

I hadn’t even had coffee... Is this karma?

They stopped hammering before I opened the door. Lycaon grabbed at my sleeve. “Be careful. Don’t let them in without a warrant!”

I nodded, taking a deep breath.

Three officers stood outside, two men, one woman. She spoke first, “Elsa Brandt? We’d like to talk to you, and,” she stared at Lycaon, “Lycaon? About the death of your friend, Lisa Goldman. We’ve been investigating similar murders. Your friend Mattie told us where to find you. Will you cooperate, help us find the suspect?”

She glanced down and pulled a piece of paper from her jacket. “Given the severity of this incident, we possess a warrant, but your compliance will be duly recorded.”

Suddenly unable to swallow as my mouth dried up, I croaked out, “Am I a suspect? Because that would be outrageous, and I was with friends when Lisa’s body was discovered.” I hitched a breath as my heart pummelled fast. The police! Had Mattie really got them involved? One thing was for sure, they were human. I could smell it. And if I could, so could Lycaon.

The woman was tall, her white-blond hair pulled tightly back under her hat. She watched me with narrow eyes. If I hadn’t known they were mortal, I would’ve sworn the male officers were shifters. Their stab-proof vests

hugged their torsos, arms almost bulging out of their shirt sleeves. They hid their eyes behind dark glasses. One of them had short dark hair, almost a crew cut. His lips twitched as he forced a smile.

His voice was softer than his demeanour. “May we come in? Officer Hill, will you hand over the warrant?”

His companion, a younger cop holding his notebook, said, “We know this is all very upsetting. That’s why we’re here. Lycaon, we don’t have a last name.”

Lycaon pulled himself up. “You won’t. There’s no need to come in. We’re not involved. Perhaps you should look closer to Mattie’s home. She seems to know more about this than we do.”

Officer Hill smiled. It almost made me step back, obviously not something she did often.

“We’ve been to Mattie’s already. That’s why we’re here.” Her eyes flashed to me. “You knew Lisa?”

I stood aside. “Come in.”

Lycaon huffed, but what was the point? I took the piece of paper; it looked genuine, and some police worked with the supernatural community. And Mattie, it seemed, had grassed us up for something she and her cloaked clan were responsible for.

“I’m going to get washed and dressed. I’ll be five minutes. Lycaon, why not make the officers a cup of tea or coffee?”

The young male officer smiled. “That’s very kind, didn’t expect that.”

“If you’re looking to catch the killer, you can count on me to help. I didn’t know Lisa that well, but no one deserves that. I just hope you’re capable, that’s all.”

This all seemed insane. I knew it was Adara who killed Lisa. Lycaon knew it was Adara. I suspected Adara had sent these cops via Mattie.

“We are used to working with supernaturals, Miss Brandt. I’ll come up with you.”

I stopped myself from glaring at the female officer. What did she think I'd do, grab my broomstick and fly away? Instead, I just shrugged as she followed me upstairs. Lycaon slumped down on the sofa arm, his eyes narrowed as the two officers plied him with questions.

“So, Miss Brandt, how long did you know Lisa?”

“About six months, Mattie knew her longer.”

“And yet you risked your life going to Savernake Woods, alone, dragging your friends to rescue Lisa?”

That bit. I turned around, facing her. “I thought she could be in trouble. Mattie said she'd go, but I didn't want to wait. If it was your friend who was missing, what, you'd wait to find them, help them?”

Her lips tightened together before her stony eyed gaze glared at me. “Yes, I would wait. I certainly wouldn't go without back up. Tell me what happened, everything, even the smallest detail.”

“I need to use the bathroom.”

She gave a sharp nod and glanced past me at my bedroom whilst I went to wash. I'd be damned if I was going anywhere without brushing my teeth.

Feeling more alive, I dug out some fresh clothes from the airing closet, wondering what Officer Hill was rummaging through in my bedroom. But whatever. Anything private was tucked away, locked up from prying eyes. A clatter from downstairs had me moving quicker.

As I opened the door, she sat patiently on my bed doing a good job of not looking like someone who'd almost been caught snooping around.

I grabbed up my boots, pushing them on. “What was that noise?” I glanced past her. “Lycaon?”

Her voice was deadpan. “They're outside talking.” Pointing, she asked, “Your window, what happened?”

As she did that, a trickle of fear ran down my back, and before I realised it, she was up and had plunged a needle into my arm.

I swore, suddenly dizzy as hell, my eyes flickering, then my body sank,

legs like jelly as I crashed into her.

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DARKNESS SWALLOWED THE SURROUNDING ROOM. I battled to regain consciousness. The place spun. My limbs were heavy, not responsive. Cold seeped into my bones. As I moved, a sharp pain stabbed through my knees, my wrists. Pushing myself up, I grimaced at the wet stone floor beneath my hands, which stank.

The last thing I'd heard was Lycaon shouting my name...

Blue-black light dimly lit the cell, outlining the bars surrounding me. I could hear deep, gurgling breathing from somewhere, but no Lycaon. Frantically wiping my hands on my jeans, I searched my coat pockets but only found some tissues and my lip balm.

A growl that rumbled through the cells had the hairs on the back of my neck on edge. It was followed by heavy footsteps, grunting and the sound of metal being dragged along stone. I edged back, glancing through the bars, trying to see in the adjoining cells, but the dim light made everything barely visible.

From the shadows, two large shapes appeared. "That's her. Go in and grab her."

"You go, she's a witch. She might turn me into a frog."

"You mean a newt. She might turn you into a newt. Na, she ain't *that* good. Plus, they cast a spell on her so she can't do any magic. See? Now, go grab it."

"Why should I? I always have to get them. Been spat on, even pissed on. Vomited on, whilst you just stand there looking disgusted. You want her, you get her. I'll take the sword... Can we lob her head off?"

*Demons!*

They lumbered closer and, in the dim, inky light, I could see that they were like Anthony's Hell demons. Instead of teeth, they seemed to have tusks, huge over brows and beady scarlet eyes that darted over me. A mass of muscle. They looked cumbersome, but I knew from rumours that they could move extremely fast. As they peered through the grimy cell, I saw white and crimson paint adorned their bestial faces, their charred skin covered with leather armour. But really, I smelled them long before I saw them. Sweet smelling isn't a category I'd put them in.

Stifling my fear, I felt for my athame, but I already knew it was gone. Damn, if I only had longer nails, or I hadn't bitten mine. My eyes searched the filthy floor in the gloom. I just needed something, anything, to shed a little blood. Blood magic was all I had now to even stand a chance.

As I looked up, the one who'd wanted to cut off my head stood outside the bars grinning madly as he held the sword aloft. His companion rattled the keys in the rusty lock. I lowered my eyes, trying to will my body to stop shaking violently as I scanned their armour. They had daggers. I'd need one of those if I lived long enough.

"You're with us, move."

I tried to speak, but my voice caught in my throat. The stinking demon shoved me forward, whilst the other sniggered. "Any trouble, I'll take your head."

Yeah, thanks. I kind of got that part.

As I walked past more cells, head bent, I glanced in, trying to see if I could see Lycaon. But only darkness reflected back at me, and the only sound was the heavy breathing from the two monsters behind me.

My boots stuck to the ground as they marched me forward and high above us, a roar bellowed through the walls. Clenching and unclenching my fists, my stomach churned with dread.

Where was Lycaon, and where were they taking me? Probably to my death. Even though my heart pounded faster at that thought, it surprised me



that a soft, blanketing feeling of stillness wrapped around me at the thought of dying. Of nothing more. An inner calm that I'd only felt from meditation or deep spell casting. It allowed me to breathe easier, which was unfortunate in those skanky, hell ridden cells.

The rancid stench clung to me, my clothes. As we climbed the stone steps, the growling noise above grew louder.

The demon shoved past me and took his keys from his belt. They jangled as he placed them in the lock, grating until at last, the door opened and fresh air swept over me. Around me I could see stone walls.

I was inside some kind of keep, a castle of sorts and above, a clear blue sky that had the demons flinching.

Finally, I found my voice. "Where am I? Where are you taking me?" I tried to sound commanding, like I wasn't terrified.

It didn't work.

All I got was a fist between my shoulder blades. "Shut up! Another word, I'll take a finger. After that, your hand. Can't weave your spells without hands, eh? Bloody witches."

Stinking demons! Where the hell am I?

As I thought over the events that led me here, the feeling of calm lifted, replaced by fear. I swallowed hard, my throat raw as panic rippled through every fibre, every muscle, every cell before turning to anger.

But I had to rein it in. I wasn't a match for Adara or the demons.

I knew they hadn't lied about wanting to kill me. My limbs like lead, heavy, devoid of magic. A pit in my stomach. Only blood magic could reverse that. It was my secret weapon.

The fortress walls had macabre statues with wailing faces that leaned out of them. Like the guardians of death watching over me.

Something clanged underfoot. Looking down, I was walking over a metal grill, and the scent coming from it was musky, woody. In the clear blue light,

I glimpsed white from eyes as I realised beneath me, in the dungeons, werewolves were imprisoned in human form. Dozens of them, maybe more. The tiny hairs on my arms tingled. What is this place? Unable to swallow as my instinct alerted me, I felt a presence, heavy and foreboding.

The demons halted abruptly and the one who was so keen to lob off my head pointed to an old wooden table that was set off to the side of the arena.

His voice grated as he said, "You'll find tools there for your first test."

Before I could speak, footsteps above me shuffled on wood.

Glancing up on the ramparts, sounds of soft footsteps. The ledge above filled with the masked assembly of Adara. Slivers of gold from the morning sun reflected from their masks, as their staring and their silence seemed to tear at my heart.

My chest tightened more. I glanced and realised that the demons had gone, and I was alone in the middle of this fort, awaiting my fate. With no magic.

*Shit!*

Rushing to the table, I surveyed the objects. My athame, which I snatched up. A wand and tarot cards.

A thumping of feet on the ground shook behind me. I grabbed the wand, shoved it into my pocket, and shuffled through the cards. There were a few I wanted. My hands were sweaty with nerves. I dropped a few, casting a fast glance over at them. There, the Magician, the Tower, and the Knight of Swords. Putting them in my pocket, I pulled the athame back from my belt and sliced my hand as Adara watched.

They hissed a gasp as they saw me do this.

A test then? They wanted to test my magic, my skill. Alright.

Time to fight dirty. Just like them...

### **As Above, So Below.**

A trickle of ice ran down my back. The clanging of chains rang out through the stone walls and heavy footsteps drew closer.

Arched passageways surrounded me in the courtyard, and whatever was coming, it hid in the shadows.

I wanted to shout at Adara, to challenge them. Why was my death so important to them they'd go to such lengths, just because I was with Lycaon, really?

My sacrifice. For a second, I craned my neck, staring up at the masked spectators that lined the walkway above. Was Mattie here? Was she that cold-hearted, that indoctrinated?

It emerged slowly from behind an archway, metal grating on stone as it dragged a heavy sword. Towering high above me, its face looked part angel, part beast. A perversion of werewolf and angel. Twisted, broken wings hung from its shoulders in a mockery of the divine being it had been. Silver-white hair splattered with blood, a small snout-like face. But its eyes were what made the hairs on my arms stand on end.

As they stole right through me, dead, soulless. Cruel.

I sprung back as the creature immediately lunged at me with the precision of a warrior and the savagery of a beast.

My heart was in my throat. I didn't want to look. I wanted to close my eyes and realise that this was all a nightmare. But its overpowering scent of blood and earth was no dream. I barely had time to prepare. I'd shed my blood and fumbled as I ran away from it, pulling a card from my pocket.

From the card in my hand, I could feel its magic surging through me, in my blood.

This place, their power, was heavy, and the magic from the monster before me was oppressive, his ear-splitting wail.

The card was the Tower. Envisioning myself on the card, hearing the collapse of the Tower, feeling reverberations beneath my feet, the place shook. Murmurings above me, I glimpsed Adara as they whispered, some nodding, others gripped at the turret edges as they stared down from above.

From the magic in the tarot, I channelled in a gale, making it circle and sweep up around the beast. He roared and stumbled, confused. Calming my fear, I concentrated on pulling up earth energy beneath my feet, feeling it move up through my legs, my torso, an emerald light. As nature's energy flooded my body, I pulled energy down from above, imagining a golden stream of light flooding my body. The green and gold mixed. In my mind, I saw a brilliant light and felt the heat swell through me. My breathing slowed and as the light increased, it radiated from me, growing more intense as it spilled into the keep surrounding everything.

A gasp echoed. Adara stood back whilst I lowered one arm, palm facing the ground and with my fingers splayed and the other held aloft, I shouted, "As above, so below!"

Lightning bolted down just before the beast.

A surge of heat shot through me. My heart warmed. This was magic, my magic used with blood and the elements and a touch of enchantment from the cards.

Stumbling backwards, the wereangel before me fell hard. I watched as its face smacked the ground. Still with my fingers splayed, I rushed to it, crouching over, close to its ears.

I only know a little Latin. It was rough at best. But I had a hunch.

Whispering a prayer, perhaps I could reach the angel inside the monster.

Recoiling, it rolled to its side, wailing as it covered its face. I felt a dozen eyes on me, watching from behind the masks. The sect leaned over the wooden railings, some whispered amongst themselves, and I caught my face,

wrinkled, worried in their mirrored masks.

Groaning, the beast curled, drawing its knees to its chest, shaking as I continued the prayer. His cry tore through my heart as he suddenly jolted, moving onto his hands and knees, convulsing.

I edged back as an angel fought to free itself from the fur and muscle of the werewolf. The stench of blood and flesh filled my senses as his skin tore open. I grimaced at the sound of his bones snapping as the beast disappeared and the angel was free.

As his screaming continued, Adara stood deathly still. He was left shrieking, his voice hollow before the surrounding air thickened. A shimmering cloud of silver shrouded him. Then he became silent.

Standing before me, his face resembled a Renaissance statue. High, smooth cheekbones, straight nose and rounded chin. A tumble of white curls hugged his ears. His body was taut, lean like a warrior, fast on his feet. Small plump lips parted, but his eyes, the colour of spun gold, stared forward, lifeless. Soulless. Just like a statue. And what looked like hoarfrost on his lashes, on his fair brows, and twinkled in his hair. His wings were still bent and torn. He made no move. More like an automaton waiting to be plugged in.

Mesmerised by his beauty, aside from his wings, his perfection, I found I was almost frozen.

So I had unlocked the angel from the monster. What now?

I jumped as a voice shouted above me.

“Nunc!”

I knew that nunc was Latin for now and just like that, the dead angel sprung to life...

Hollow eyes bore into me. A glint of light gleamed from his blade. Wasting no time, I pulled the cards. Knight of Swords.

In seconds, I closed my eyes, visualising the power of the knight, as the sound of metal scraping on the ground screeched through me. The angel held

his sword low, dragging the blade across the stone floor. It juddered across the metal grating.

My mouth watered, frowning. I had to concentrate; I had to pull in the power. But now I couldn't stop trembling, even though I had just forced the monster back to an angel.

He strode closer. My hands trembled. I had nothing. Again, I forced the feeling, imagining I was the knight of swords. How did the knight feel? Strong, fast, relentless? My muscles stiffened as I fought, trying in vain to embody the characteristics from the tarot. Strength, power as the angel drew ever closer. It was like my magic was being blocked.

Squinting, I looked up to see him raise his sword as he drew closer to me.

I threw the card at him. It was weak, feeble. Was Adara obstructing me? They stood there, hiding behind their masks, not moving.

I landed on my backside after the floating card jolted me backwards. Unable to spring up, I felt weighed down. My wrist was grounded to the floor because in my hand I held a heavy sword.

I really should've thought harder about that card.

Pushing myself up, I lugged the sword up, then realised my error as the angel had gained on me faster than I'd realised.

His eyes seemed to glow. I pulled the weapon before me to block his sword. Forcing my arm down, his strength was ten times stronger than mine, even with magic.

It compelled me to lurch back, dart as quickly as I could with a sword behind him before my arm, animated with magic, came crashing towards his back.

But he had been a warrior in life, and even though he was animated by enchantment, he had more experience than me. He'd spun around quickly.

My blade met his in a clash of steel. I stumbled as he drove me backwards. Gritting my teeth, I widened my stance. But he was simply too

strong.

My arms were driven up, almost above my head, then he flicked his wrist, and I felt a sting on my thigh, sweat breaking on my forehead.

And the burning in my wrists and arms as my muscles cramped. Magic only took me so far. Unlike him, I wasn't trained in the art of war.

A low rumbling of a growl in the distance had my heart skip a beat, my confidence almost defeated.

I should run away. I parried for what seemed an hour, but was a matter of seconds before running back, panting, trying to catch my breath.

Then another growl came again from within the corridors that surrounded this keep, echoing through the walls. Adara stirred. Some peered, leaning over the barriers above the archways, trying to see the monster that was heading my way.

A fearful glance over my shoulder, I now saw what Adara sent to finish me.

Half man, half wolf, Lycaon stood as they unleashed his shackles. There was menace in his eyes, the usual scarlet when he was angry flared, was now a dulled white. Snarling with outstretched claws, he came running right at me.

I turned and ran towards the angel, trying to get behind it, to use the angel as a block between Lycaon and me. Barely able to breathe from shock before Lycaon sprung through the air. I stumbled to the side, dropping the sword as I rolled. Nauseous from blood loss, I felt the wet on my jeans where the angel had sliced at my leg. In my panic, I hadn't processed it, and now adrenaline and magic mixed in a heady stew. Pounding rapidly, my heart wanted to burst through my ribs. Panting, I fumbled, trying to shout his name, to shake Lycaon out of his frenzy.

But his name lodged in my throat as I realised I couldn't make any sound. Then, oddly, like before, a peace fell over me. A surrender. I couldn't do this anymore. I felt like I'd been fighting uphill all my life.

I just couldn't. I was done. So be it. I surrendered.

My mind wrestled with my tired heart, but I stood back and closed my eyes. Feeling the breeze of his claws by my face, I let my arms fall to my side. My muscles clenched, but a sudden clap echoed around the buildings.

Squinting, in case I'd died and hadn't realised, Lycaon was frozen, his fangs bared, claws a hair's breadth away.

He made no move and behind him, the angel looked like a statue again.

Backing away, I looked up.

Only three masked Adara members remained. They looked on in silence.

Then one of them nodded. Footsteps echoed from the corridors and emerging through the archways, a pack of shifters came jostling towards us.

Tense, my breathing jagged, I moved my fingers.

Perhaps I had something, anything left.

Like lava, I felt the pummelling of magic swell through my limbs. Taking a lungful of air, I sent a shield of light that exploded before them.

A shout from above. I grabbed Lycaon, my face wrinkled in fear. I could see that he was bleeding. More footsteps sounded. A bolt of fire crashed beside us.

Shouting, I shook my wolfman. Blinking, he stumbled, his face morphing back to human, but the angel suddenly swooped up his sword hand.

I sent a shock of magic into Lycaon.

Blinking rapidly, he rasped, "Elsa? Is that you?"

"No time. Hurry!"

Part of me recoiled from him, the monster, but the other part, my heart... Clenching my jaw, I dragged him along by his hand with the angel on our tail. I leaned around Lycaon. I'd used all the power from the cards, but I could feel a little magic left in my veins.

Again, a hot sensation bubbled from my heart, through my limbs as I sent



a burst of energy that had the angel stumble, but not stop.

“Get her!” echoed around me, and more shifters piled into the keep.

“Elsa... I... what happened? Where are we going?”

“No time to explain.” Grabbing his wrist, we rushed to the entrance. I glanced up. The stomping of feet above, Adara was filtering around the battlements.

The main gate was locked with a wooden drawbar. The angel and the shifters were gaining on us.

“Break it!” I gasped at Lycaon.

He ran at it, using his bulk, his shoulder smashing into the wooden door as I sent what little magic I had into it.

Crashing through it, he screamed, tumbling forward. Hot on his tail, I grabbed his hand and pulled us to one side, stumbling off a bridge and rolling down an embankment. It was steep as hell, and as we gathered momentum, a sound beneath had my heart skip a beat.

Lycaon found a handhold, a large rock peeking out from the ground, and shouted for me to reach for his hand. Instinct took over. I latched onto him as the sound sent a shiver of fear over me.

Looking up, dark shapes tread slowly on the wooden bridge, a causeway that led into the castle. We were on a cliff top. We crawled slowly through the bracken until finally our backs were against the wall.

His face, white with shock, sweat gleaming on his brow. The echo of waves crashing below, breaking onto rocks, the ebb and flow of the ocean had us edging backwards. Which ocean I didn't know. Withholding a yell as my foot slipped on rock and shingle, I held out my hands, gripping to the turret walls.

Glancing up, I could see a tower that rose high above the rest of the castle. Four spires rose from it, and the sound of whipping as each with a flag fluttered violently from the winds.

As the sun crawled higher, I could just make out a sigil on each.

A broom and black cat, a wolf's head on another, fanged teeth and, on the fourth flag, clawed wings. I guessed witches, vampires, werewolves, and demons.

The turreted wall beside me towered high. Pockets of trees and shrubs broke some of the force from the gales that now stirred faster.

Lycaon leaned into me, rasping. He yelled over the gale, "We have to find a way down, away from the sunrise perhaps. Isn't that the edge of the cliff?"

I peered around him. On the horizon, the rising sun looked like it was melting into the ocean, orange and copper mixed with the indigo sea. I jolted as shouting echoed above us, the stampeding of feet, then something else higher up stirred.

Stone grated on stone. Sweat broke on my forehead as I edged forward. Looking up, I saw the huge silhouette move. Clawed wings beating slowly, the creature tilted its head. Its huge over brow revealed hooded eyes that narrowed as it sniffed the air, smelling Lycaon's blood. Opening its massive jaw, I could see barbed teeth. I tensed, wincing as its scream pierced through the sky.

It unhooked its talons from the ledge, muscular torso and limbs flexing, and a rippling through its wings as its stare burned through me. Trying to repress a shiver as I felt my blood turn to ice, Lycaon suppressed a gasp, leaning against the wall clutching his bleeding wound on his chest.

In the seconds that followed, the memory of me, from a few weeks ago, hunkered down at home in my PJs, with a book living a quiet life seemed surreal. Had that been me? Who was I now, a fighter? I didn't feel like one.

I didn't feel brave or strong. Lucky, perhaps that I was still alive, but with every step forward I took, it seemed that my life was held in the balance.

Slowly, I edged in front of Lycaon, my heart beating faster. The beast above wouldn't smell his blood for much longer. Whipping out my athame, I sliced my fingertip, frowning as the pain nipped.

Whispering, Lycaon reached for me. “No! Elsa, I... I didn’t realise what I was doing. They put some kind of spell on me. I’m so sorry, I would never hurt you. Please don’t do this.”

His words pulled on my heart, but he had told me before that he was dangerous. And if they hadn’t stopped him, then, well, I wouldn’t be alive now. This whole situation was a nightmare. They could control either of us, especially him, it seemed.

I stepped forward.

As I moved away, Lycaon’s words were lost in the wind.

Unable to stop myself from trembling, fear rippled through me. The grinding sounds. I realised I was looking at a gargoyle. Now it honed in on me. Stone wings became looser as it flapped them. Then it launched itself off the castle turret, it came hurtling, claws extended, screeching towards me with such speed...

## WOLF MOON

*WOLF TRAP coming soon. Stay updated on my mailing list or here:  
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Want something to read in the same universe before Wolf Trap launches?  
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## WOLF SPELL NOTES

In Greek mythology, Lycaon was the king of Arcadia. He killed his son, Nyctimus, and fed him to Zeus to see if the god could tell if he was eating human flesh. He was testing Zeus's powers. Zeus was so horrified that he cursed Lycaon and turned him into a wolf, and restored Lycaon's son back to life.

Obviously in the series, Lycaon refutes this. Although he was a king who challenged Zeus, and in his anger, Zeus cursed Lycaon. Later in the series, we'll find out the reason, but for now you'll have to wonder! But it won't be sacrificing his child in my book series!

I liked the idea, however, of the first werewolf.

After research, this was the earliest record I could find of werewolves.

I also found that alongside the Witch trials, that there were werewolf trials in Europe.

These are said to have started in the late middle-ages in Switzerland.

One of the major trials involved a 50-year-old farmer from Germany in 1589, Peter Stump, who confessed to making a pact with the devil to gain the ability to transform into a wolf.

His crimes are grisly, including cannibalism! I'd advise not to look up how they executed him, unless you have a strong stomach!

Badbury Rings Coven. I got the name from the place in Dorset, England. Dorset isn't far from where I live.

Badbury is the site of an Iron age hill fort. It is said in legend, to be the site where King Arthur fought off the advancing Germanic hordes (the Saxons) in the late 5th century.

The fort rises from the ground with ledges around it.

Woodland crowns Badbury Rings, inhabited by dwarf type creatures, a disfigured knight on horseback and a large phantom dog. Britain seems to have a lot of large, black phantom dogs in folklore! I guess that arouse from people's fears of wolves and feral doges back in the dark ages...

Savernake forest. Again, not located too far from where I live in South-West England, Savernake forest was a Royal hunting ground from 1066 until 1550.

Although no one really knows how old it is, it was referenced in the Saxon charter from King Athelstan in 934AD. Set in over 4000 acres. Stories of ancient oak trees and a headless huntress and a fire-eyed hound abound, and other ghostly goings on in the forest at night!

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

What got me hooked into vampires, as a kid, I secretly watched Hammer Horror films on my tv, then reading the classics, Dracula and Frankenstein. I was always more interested in the vampires than Van Helsing. Inspiring movies, Underworld, The Lost Boys, and Blade.

My books are gritty and action-packed, taking you into the underbelly of the world of the damned, who live alongside the world of the living.

I base my stories where I live, the beautiful Georgian city of Bath, UK is minutes from my home.

The Cotswolds is where my wolves are based and Bristol my other urban fantasy series.

Being in the South West of England there are a lot of interesting sacred sites, Stonehenge, Glastonbury, Stanton Drew Stone Circle to name a few.

Vampires, werewolves, demons along with mythological creatures are all mixed into my stories. A balance of fantasy and reality, a world that takes you, the reader away from the mundane stresses of life. And sometimes a smattering of the philosophical...

Dark, Sublime, Gripping Stories.

If you want to connect, I like talking to like-minded souls so get in touch.

When not writing, I love reading. Surprise! I love spending time in nature alongside studying the occult and metaphysical studies. My dream would to be to live off-grid with all the mod-cons, near a forest. Maybe with a hot werewolf!

*[Newsletter: www.jnmoon.com](http://www.jnmoon.com)*



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Feel free to connect! Thanks for reading & stay weird.

JO x