



SECOND CHANCE

FOR THE

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MILANA
JACKS

SECOND CHANCE FOR THE LYCAN

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MILANA JACKS

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ROHAN

It's always been the three of us.
My twin, Freya, and me.

And since we both loved her and she loved us back, she was ours, and Roger and I agreed neither would marry her.

I honored my end of the deal. He didn't.

When I returned from a long trip overseas, I found them as a married couple, with her belly swollen with a child.

Naturally, I challenged my twin.

Freya got in the middle of the fight, and I almost ended her life.

To save her from the mess the three of us made, I left.

Now I'm back, and I want what he once took from me. My brother's passing means I finally get a second chance with the female who should always have been mine.

Problem is she hates me and has refused to see me ever since I told my son, Duane, I'm his father, something Freya and my twin failed to tell him. Whether Freya likes me or not, the clan Alpha has ordered a lockdown, and regardless of how she feels about me, the order has given me an excuse to face her.

During lockdown, all members of the clan must come into the den where the clan defense is strongest. Apparently, everyone except Freya.

I'm not surprised.

The rules never applied to her anyway.

She's one of only three known omega female wolves born among all the clans in the last century, and the only omega in my clan. Lenox, our Alpha, makes exceptions for her.

Who wouldn't? Freya is omega cuteness overload.

Petite, red haired, freckled, and a fireball, she would make these tiny fists and punch me in the belly whenever she'd get mad. That was when we were kids. She'd knee me in the balls later as we grew older.

She liked arguing.

With me.

Not so much with Roger.

I tap the tree trunk where Freya carved Roger's name, marking his burial site, and drop wildflowers near the base before squaring my shoulders and straightening my belt. As I step out of the cover of the trees, Freya opens the front door of my old home and pauses, her face turning toward the upcoming full moon.

Inwardly cursing, I slide behind the trunk, secretly watching her as I've done every time I've visited the clan in the past twenty-some turns.

Freya's black skirt sweeps the grass as she makes her way toward the henhouse in the back. I hear her talking to the animals, her gentle voice soothing and stroking more than just my knob. It strokes memories, those I drown in liquor while I'm sailing the seas.

When I left, I was certain I could forget her.

Forget how she smiled, laughed, begged while kneeling in her nest.

Too bad I couldn't have her before.

But I damn well can have her now.

So when Freya makes her way back toward the house, I step out from behind the tree and walk toward her. Her long red braid bounces off her shoulder as she carries several metal buckets. At the water pump, she tries to fill the buckets, but the pump handle won't budge, and Freya curses.

From right behind her, I falter in my step, not wanting to frighten her, thinking maybe I should walk away and return in the morning.

Or perhaps I shouldn't return at all.

Or perhaps Freya couldn't give three shites about me, and I'm overthinking our reunion.

The last few times I visited the den, she didn't come to meet me, even though Lenox called for a gathering. I've crept up here in the bushes and sat in trees like some sort of stalker just so I could catch a glimpse of her.

The pump seems rusted, not maintained, much like the house and majority of the farm. Freya tends to the old farm alone, choosing to live in seclusion, which means some things are left neglected.

"Duane," she calls out, likely smelling me and thinking it's our son. "I told you I'm not going in for Lenox's lockdown. Now come here and help me with this pump." She's pressing it down with both hands when I approach from behind and lay my hand over both of hers.

As I bend over her, my nose almost touches the top of her hair, and I inhale the scent of the female I've longed for for decades, one my twin and I couldn't share. One he and I each wanted all to ourselves.

"Thanks," she says as the lever is pressed down and water pours.

I can tell the moment Freya realizes I'm not Duane because her body stills and her heart starts beating loudly, the drumming frantic in my ears.

Reluctantly, I release her soft hands and step back, allowing her time to adjust should she need it.

She does. The sound of her beating heart tells me so.

Freya doesn't turn as I expected. Not right away, anyway.

She fixes her skirt and flips her braid onto her back.

"What are you doing here?" she asks in a trembling voice.

"I've come to collect you for the lockdown."

This isn't how I imagined our reunion would go. To be fair, I didn't know what to expect, because I don't know if there's anything left of what we used to have. It's been over two decades. I'm making a fool of myself.

She picked my brother.

Inviting me into her nest that one time during her heat was a mistake she's probably regretted every time she sees our son. That's not to say she regrets having him. I'm sure she's proud of him. What's there not to be proud of? Duane has grown into a fine male. An alpha next in line to lead the clan.

Freya clears her throat. "I told Duane I'm staying."

My son has already been here trying to get his mother to come in. Like I said, what's there not to be proud of? "I see."

"Lenox sent you?"

"I came on my own."

"Then you ought to leave."

"I can't."

"Why not? You're great at leaving."

She's bitter. Maybe hurt? If she's hurt, then I have a chance. Only people we care about can hurt us.

"I'm not going anywhere."

Freya snorts. "That line still works with females?"

I grit my teeth. She's bringing up my playboy past. Fine. We can do this right away and get it over with. "At least I never married another."

She spins and glares up at me. Tears spill from the corners of her eyes, but Freya wipes them away quickly, then picks up

the bucket of water, lifts it over her shoulder, and pitches it at me with a battle cry.

Soaking wet, I wipe my face as she stomps into the house and slams the door.

That went well.

FREYA

The coldness of the wood under my hand offers no reprieve from what happened outside, so I slide down the door and sit on the cold floor, rest my palms on it, and close my eyes, allowing our mother, the goddess of nature, to ground me, make me one with earth, forest, and moon.

Only Natra can help calm my heart before it ejects out of my chest and sprouts wings so it can fly back to the lycan outside.

Rohan.

My late husband's twin.

Father of my son.

And the male who once broke me. It took me many turns after my son was born to associate the scent of my son with only my boy and not the male who made him that one heat period we spent with each other.

Remembering the struggle I went through to forget the male who's now in my front yard, I growl and get up, even when I want to curl into the corner and hide from him.

He knocks on the door.

Quickly, I start walking away from it.

"It's lockdown, and you know you have to follow the orders," Rohan says.

"Tell Lenox to come and get me himself."

“He’s busy.”

“Then I’m staying.”

“You’re an omega wolf. You must come in.”

“I no longer have heats, so now I’m just a female wolf.”

My bow and arrows hang from the hooks above the bench near the door. Without thinking twice about it, I pick up the weapons.

“Freya?” Grand’s voice comes from his bedroom. Shuffling feet and the soft thud of a walking stick tell me the elderly male is approaching behind me. “Who are you talking to?”

“Nobody.” I turn toward him.

Grand is the oldest wolf in the clan. With his senses damaged during one of the conflicts with the neighboring clan, he doesn’t hear or see well.

“Oh, it’s somebody,” Grand says from the other end of the hallway. He’s wearing a long white tunic. His white hair is mussed from lying in bed, and his beard is braided and hangs down to his belly. The light blue eyes of his wolf narrow, then widen as he approaches and sees the bow and arrow I’m holding. “Who are we slaying?” He smiles, looking excited now.

“Alpha sent a wolf to bring us in for lockdown.”

“I’m not going anywhere.” Grand proceeds to the kitchen just to the right.

From the other side of the door, Rohan knocks again. “I’m not returning without you, Freya.”

Damn him.

Grand halts in his steps, his ears twitching. He spins on his heel, and as if he’s in his twenties, he practically marches to the door. He swings it wide open. There’s a moment of recognition that passes between the two males, and Grand spreads his arms. “My boy!”

Long ago Rohan's dad, then Alpha of our clan, killed my parents and brought me into his clan for breeding. That's how I ended up being raised by Grand, who is Rohan's grandpa. I have no blood relatives that I know of, and this family is the only one I've ever had.

It's complicated.

And I don't have a choice now but to hang the bow and arrow above the bench and retreat into the kitchen. I sit at the table and cross my arms over my chest while the two wolves exchange hugs. Sure enough, Grand invites Rohan into the house, and they go straight for the kitchen because this is the heart of our home.

"Sit down, sit down," Grand says. I haven't seen him this excited in many turns. With a bounce in his step, he approaches the cooktop and throws wood in the fire below it. He moves over to the counter and grabs a box of tea.

Rohan sits down opposite me, and Grand opens the box, offering him bags I've prepackaged with various teas.

I can feel Rohan's gaze on me and not on what Grand's offering him, and my traitorous heart's still racing, especially now that he's entered my kitchen. It feels like an invasion.

"You look well, Freya," he says.

I just want him to leave as quickly as he arrived. "He'll have any black tea."

Grand grunts. "Maybe he's changed over the turns."

"He hasn't," I bite out and snatch the box so I can hurry up and get the tea going. The sooner I make it, the sooner Rohan will leave us alone. Not that Grand wants to be left alone. Oh, no. He sits down at the table and says, "It's good to see you, my boy."

"You too, Grand."

"How long are staying?"

"I've returned."

I fill the kettle and put it on the cooktop and stare at it, not daring to turn toward the table.

“Returned,” Grand repeats. “Returned for Freya?”

I spin around and glare at Grand.

“That’s right,” Rohan says.

Goddess help me! Instead of panicking, I manage to square my shoulders. “You can turn back, Rohan, because I’m staying where I am.” Our eyes lock again, and I dare to take in his face. The decades away have been kind to him, much kinder than they were to his twin. The playful tilt to his mouth is still present, the slight lift to his eyes as well. He’s grown a beard and groomed it short and neat, and his long dark hair is pulled back and away from his face.

The kettle whistles, and I nearly jump out of my skin.

Tending to it, I pour Rohan and Grand tea and excuse myself.

I stride past Rohan, but his hand flies out, and he grabs my wrist.

The contact makes me stop, and all I can think about is those long strong fingers wrapped around my slender wrist. My entire body flares to life, and I whine, quietly begging him to leave.

Because I can’t control my nature.

I can’t control my heart.

I rely on the alpha to do what’s best for me.

In the past, and even though it hurt, Rohan left when I needed him to leave. I hated him for it, but he did it because it was for the best. Now I need him to leave me alone again so that I can live out my life in solitude and heal from the loss of his brother, my husband.

His thumb brushes the inside of my wrist.

I stare ahead while I feel his gaze on me.

“I presume my old room is kept well.”

“It is,” Grand answers. “And while I love you, my boy, Freya is free to do whatever she wills. Now let her go about her chores, and perhaps she will speak with you in a decade or so.”

It’s hard not to smile.

Rohan chuckles and releases me.

I dare a glance his way, and sure enough, he’s smiling in that sexy one-side-of-his-mouth-turned-up way that takes me back three decades into my twenties, to the evening in the shed when he pinned me against the wall and kissed me.

Before I lose my resolve, I leave the kitchen and head for the stables with the memories I’ve buried during my marriage to Rohan’s brother. I kept them buried deeply, and now that he’s back and staying at my house, which is also his house, I fear he’ll dig up everything from deep inside me. The memory of our first kiss, for starters.

We returned home from my twentieth birthday party at the den where we drank and danced as if tomorrow wasn’t a working span. Rohan and I left a passed-out Roger in a room in the den, and we returned home alone on horseback.

In the stables, I run a hand over Shelby’s mane and stroke his shiny black coat, trying to bring myself back to the present and bury the night in the past where it belongs.

But I fail.

On horseback, we returned home and in the stables, right where I’m standing now, I dismounted with Rohan following behind me.

When I turned to leave, I ran into Rohan, and when I asked him what was wrong, he said nothing. But then he started walking so that I had no choice but to walk back until my spine hit the wall. The way his eyes blazed imprinted on me somehow, and he lowered his head, brushed his cheek against mine, and said, “I want you all to myself.”

I held him to those words.

Until I realized he didn’t mean them.

And if he hadn't meant them when I was in my twenties, optimistic, joyful, and going into heats the likes of which only an omega wolf can have, then he surely doesn't mean it now. I'm fifty-two, and while I still look younger than my age because of my lycan nature, I have loved and lost both Roger and Rohan and a baby girl who never made it past a span of her life. My soul is old, tired, and jaded, and if Rohan thinks he can just walk in and swing his alpha knob at me and that I'll fall right onto it, he'll leave the moment he figures out he can't.

An idea hits me. "He'll leave the moment he figures out he can't, so all I have to do is keep rejecting his advances."

Resolved, I finish my chores and return to the house.

ROHAN

Roger and Freya expanded the old house Grand built, and as he retires to his bedroom on the ground floor, I climb the steps, which creak under my weight, hoping the stairs hold and I don't fall through.

Upstairs, an open space with a decorative light brown rug made of cow hide and a door to what I presume is a main bedroom ahead greet me. My parents' bedroom is to the left and on its own, while our childhood rooms are down the hallway to the right.

I take a right and enter my room, expecting to find two soft duck-feather-filled mattresses on the floor and a white wild boar rug between them. Instead, the room has a single neatly made bed with a handmade dark brown headboard carved into intricate designs. I recognize the strokes of Lenox's hand.

As a part elf, our clan's Alpha male crafts some of the finest furniture we own. It has something to do with elven magic being tied to the earth and forest.

By scent, I can tell nobody's been here in a while, and then sit on the bed, my gaze instantly finding the plank under the window.

The markings are still there.

Three slices of a knife.

Back when we were younger, Roger and Lenox would hang out and craft. While Lenox carved wood and made little

figurines, Roger wrote and drew on them. Musings, he called his art.

They were drawings and writing in cursive styles even the fairies would envy.

After pummeling my brother once and burning all the figurines Roger would proudly display at the window, our father forbade Lenox to come around for a while, sequestering him to the den for several cycles and punishing Roger and me that way.

It didn't work.

Mainly because Lenox was a force not to be fucked with even back then, and he would sneak out and come visit. Once, three of us went to the docks and found an elf who spelled a plank so that we could use it as a key to hide something behind it. We ripped out a plank from the floor, and this was where Roger would later hide his new figurines.

Under the window was one of the places where he'd hide them. The second hiding place was inside my dad's room and in plain sight so that Father would never suspect anything. I wonder if it's still there.

I leave my old room and cross the hallway, hand poised to open Father's bedroom door, when something, likely my dick, pulls me away and toward the room that used to belong to Freya when she was a kid.

It's right next to the one that had been ours.

Roger and I used to argue which one would sleep on the bed that shares a wall with Freya's room, because if one slept near the wall, when Freya would touch herself, she would make little noises that would feel like she was inside our room.

I stretch my hearing to outside, and when I don't hear her steps, I enter her old room.

A mistake I immediately rectify by slamming the door to her bedroom closed and practically running away. I had forgotten what Freya's scent is like in the raw, in the room where she's comfortable, where she would touch herself under

the sheets, where she made an omega nest, something most male werewolves won't visit in their long lifetimes.

Back in my room, I scratch my nose, but it's no use. My body's set to fuck, my cock's hard, my balls drawn up and so full of seed, they're causing cramps in my stomach. I unsnap my kilt, and my knob bobs and hits my navel, spurting seed on my chest.

I grip my dick with one hand and open the window with the other. I give it a few jerks, thinking that'll be enough, but the cock wants what it wants.

The omega pussy my wolf scented.

But I can't have that pussy yet. It's not like other pussy, or a pussy at all. This one is attached to a female I care about, and I'm going to win her over this time. I will do right by her and myself this time.

Still, I can't walk around with an erect cock and omega scent stuffed inside my nose.

Because I'm hoping her scent will leave me soon, I'll take care of my knob right now. One hand resting above the window, I hang my head and watch my hand as I slide it over my cock, which is spurting cum as if it's trying to impregnate Freya with a litter of pups.

The thought of her pregnancy paves the way for the fantasy of her swollen belly hanging down as she leans over and lifts up her skirts so I can fuck her from behind. I stroke myself harder, faster, my breathing becoming more erratic as I bring back memories of what her omega pussy feels like in heat. It's a slick, moist opening that grips my knob like a vise and undulates, milking the knob for seed while I move inside her.

My knob shoots out so much cum, one would think I turned twenty last night and have never smelled a female before.

Breathing heavily, I lift my head.

Down below is Freya, caught watching me.

She stares, and her eyes flash hazel, those of an omega wolf. It's brief, fleeting, but I caught it. The flash of hazel in the otherwise blue eyes of a wolf is what we call the stirring or the start of the omega heat cycle, one she claims she no longer has. If I can stir up some more interest from Freya, her omega nature will take care of the rest.

It's unfortunate I don't just want to fuck her.

I also want her heart.

And soul.

And if the goddess is inclined to forgive me and gift me with Freya, I not so humbly would also ask for a mating.

ROHAN

Since Freya returned home, I stayed in my room, resigned to tour the house tomorrow.

Technically, it already is tomorrow, and I've spent the better part of the night lying on my back, hand tucked under my head, eyes wide open and staring at the ceiling, thinking about everything that's happened and will happen while sharing a wall with Freya again.

She sleeps in her old room, not in one of the large rooms where she and Roger slept.

As the full moon approaches, my senses heighten and my energy rises, and I cannot sleep.

I've always had trouble sleeping and being on the ship, removed from the land and my wolf nature, made me into an insomniac.

But I'd rather have that than live on land, where the moment I transition into wolf, I'd run back here to tear my brother apart and ruin any good graces I ever had with the only two people I want in my life: Freya and my son.

Groaning, I get up and stare out the window.

The moon shines above the trees, the forest is still and cold, welcoming predators to roam freely inside her dark belly. Since the stairs creak, and I don't want to wake up either Freya or Grand, I jump out the window, landing on four feet.

The soft ground cushions my paws, and I sprint through the forest, zipping between the trees, leaping over thick bushes

and fallen branches lying along the wet forest floor. I see mist rising, so I know I'm nearing the lake I want to swim in, but the scent of another lycan makes me snap my head to the right.

A brief flash of a gray wolf head emerges from under the bush before the lycan sprints away. I give chase, inhaling the scent of a strong alpha male I haven't met before.

The moment my wolf recognizes another alpha in the forest, the territorial instinct rises, and my upper lip peels away from my teeth as I give the pursuit even more effort.

I chase him through the trees until the sun rises.

He's fast.

And before I know it, other scents assault me.

Slowing down in wolf, I sniff a small patch of wildflowers and wrinkle my nose. It's Lenox's scent marking the boundary. If I cross it, I'm entering the Ott clan's grounds. Whining, I stand in place, waiting for a large gray wolf to emerge from the rising mist on the other side of a narrow river bank.

He wants me to see him.

He wants me to know he's not from my clan.

What the hell was an Ott doing on my clan's grounds and near my house?

I contemplate shifting and asking him, but he disappears into the fog.

FREYA

Needless to say, I slept like shite.

Sitting at my armoire, I brush my hair, my thoughts on Rohan and what he intends. Does he really mean to stay?

I drop my brush as if it's a hot iron.

He doesn't mean to stay, I tell myself. Don't be a gullible idiot. I'm too old for naivete and believing in tales males tell me only so they can get under my skirts. Even if the male is one with a body and looks that haven't faded from my memory in decades. But a lass can want and not touch now, can't she?

Yes, she can.

Mmhm.

Nodding to my train of thought, I start braiding my hair, and once done, I tie a pink ribbon at the end that matches my pale pink corset over my black work skirt. Before leaving, I pinch my cheeks so I'm not looking so pale.

Are those wrinkles at the corners of my eyes?

I lean in closer to the mirror.

Why, they are. When did that happen?

Snorting, I make my way downstairs, and my heart does a flip as I pass the "boys' room" where Rohan's staying. We've always just called it what Grand called it. The boys' room. I have my room. There's the main room that Roger and I shared where I clean, but can't sleep, and there's the Father's room

where I don't clean but once every blue moon when I feel like it.

The hot water for the teas is already brewing, and I pause at the bottom of the stairs before entering the kitchen. Inhaling deeply, I sort out the male scents.

"It's just me for now," Grand says.

I walk in with a smile. "Good morning."

He's sitting with his back to the entrance, and I peck him on the cheek, inhaling the scent that I associate with kindness and home. Not like Rohan's scent. One I associate with...

Well, never mind that.

It's too early for Rohan right now.

I pour a *tinter* black tea—my favorite—and open the blinds, sighing at the sight of the deep green forest under the bright blue sky. Morning mist is starting to accumulate at the edge of the woods, and I'm thinking I'll go for a run, but then a dark gray wolf walks out of the trees.

Because it's morning and my brain hasn't quite caught up yet, for a moment, I think it's my late husband.

I think it's Roger before yellow magic flares and reveals an inked alpha male body.

Rohan strides out of the mist and into the open field before the house as if he owns it. His body is large, with broad shoulders and powerful thighs, and his eyes are blazing blue, his knob fully erect, bobbing between his legs. Like last night, when our eyes met as I caught him jerking off at the window, our gazes join again.

This time, he looks determined, aggressive, like he might chase me, pin me against the tree, fuck me into it. My heart starts thudding in my ears and makes my breathing erratic. I press a palm over my cheek, feeling my temperature rising.

Oh, no.

Oh, hell no.

I haven't *stirred* in so many turns.

Am I really stirring?

Grand clears his throat.

I snap my head his way.

Wise blue eyes regard me with kindness. “You just don’t let that boy walk over you.”

“I won’t.”

Rohan barges into the house and walks right into the kitchen. All naked, pissed off, and hard.

In my belly, I feel the spark and wish to douse it instantly. “Put something on,” I snap.

At the table, he pauses and shocks me by returning to the door and coming back in wearing the loose black cotton pants we keep in a basket under the bench.

Him dressing, I realize, doesn’t help. The spark in my belly has been ignited, and I need to find a way to douse it before it flares into heat.

Rohan grabs a cup of black tea and pours milk in it, then leans his amazing arse (with dimples) on the sink. Eyes narrowed, he watches the forest. A good thing, because I sit down and watch him.

Rohan is a pirate.

A rebel.

Every inch of his torso, back, left arm and right leg are completely covered in his brother’s drawings and writings. One such drawing is a large portrait of a red-haired wolf with bright hazel eyes. Me. I’m that wolf. The image stretches over his left pectoral and ends with my tail wrapping around his left thigh.

Roger took half a cycle drawing that.

He didn’t want to.

I asked him to because I wanted Rohan to remember me every time he left for the seas.

I guess I’ve always known he would need a reminder.

And even with the reminder, that one time he left, he never came back.

The scraping of the chair brings me back to the present.

“Where are you going?” I ask Grand, who normally stays in the kitchen and eats his breakfast slowly. He spends the morning at the table until right before midday mark, when it’s time for his first nap.

“I’ll get the eggs for us,” he says.

That’s my job. I put down the tea and straighten my skirts. “I’ll do it.”

“Not this morning,” he says, and slowly turns.

“Particularly this morning.” I need to leave Rohan before I start crawling around him.

“Stay, Freya,” Rohan says with a firm voice that makes me obey.

Grand is exiting the kitchen. If I go after him, Rohan will stop me by grabbing my hand, and that’s even worse. His touch could possibly ignite my heat, and that would be a disaster. My resolve to refuse him melts under my heat.

Once before, my heat destroyed the three of us, and I can’t go through what I went through with Rohan again. It’s a matter of survival.

The door closes behind Grand, and now, we’re alone. The kitchen feels like a tiny box where Rohan’s presence lives and engulfs me. His scent is so strong that my breasts start weighing heavily, my nipples shrinking, anticipating his touch.

This is bad.

Very, very bad.

He walks over with the kettle and pours some more water over my bag of tea, bending too close and sniffing my hair. I hear the tiny rumble in his chest and swallow against whining, which he would interpret as an answer to his subtle mating call.

Lycan courting starts with scents.

If a male likes what he smells, he has several ways of telling the female, and one of them is by releasing a satisfied rumble from his chest. An omega female then responds with whining, which is interpreted as her begging.

Alpha males like begging.

I like to please.

Nature matches us.

I need to unmatch us.

“How did you sleep?” he asks, voice growly and seductive and with an unfamiliar edge to it.

“Like a cub.”

“I smell lies.”

Under the table, I fist my hands. I cannot show any interest in Rohan. I cannot. If I keep refusing his advances, he’ll give up and leave. This alpha male has no need to chase after females. The females have always chased after him.

“Whatever,” I say.

“You’re not seven anymore and can’t use ‘whatever’ as an answer.”

“I can ‘whatever’ whenever I want.”

Grunting, he steps away to lean against the sink again. “I’m not seeing any lumberjacks. Did we quit the business when Roger died?”

The casual way he brings up his brother’s death makes my blood boil. I approach him, look up, and have to strain my neck because Rohan is two and a half heads taller than I. “We? No, Rohan. There is us as in Grand, Duane, and me.” I show him a hand with three fingers. “And then there is you.” I lift the middle finger of my right hand. “That’s how it is.”

Rohan smirks. “You want to play with me, Omega?”

“Don’t call me omega.”

Rohan fists my hair, yanks it back, and the heat in my belly flares. He bends so he can whisper in my ear. “I will call you

anything I know you want to hear, and you will like it. Now, what's a good little omega say? And if you lip me, I'll presume you want me to bend you over my knee."

The spark in my belly starts to grow, and worst of all, like a fireball, it's heating up my body, readying to drop into my lower belly and spill out in the form of liquid heat. I can't have my omega heat turn into liquid heat. That's an offering for the alpha male, an open and bold invitation.

When I remain quiet, Rohan sniffs my neck, running his nose from my jaw to my shoulder. The rumbling in his chest intensifies, and so does the heat in my belly. If it spills, I fear he'll bend me over the sink and fuck me.

The front door opens, and Grand says, "I got eggs."

ROHAN

Having Freya this close makes my balls fill with seed and my knob harden, and even as I release her so she can pretend nothing is happening between us, and even as Grand makes his way slowly back into the kitchen, my knob won't go down.

I might be perpetually aroused now. It is something that often happens around an omega. Most wolves have never experienced an omega in heat, but I have, and I know what Freya smells like, feels like, and what her omega pussy can do with my knob.

My body is preparing.

I am ready.

I have never been more ready to fuck her in my life.

But I can't.

Not yet.

Because she's not ready. Not even in the body. She's supposed to stir for me and leak the fluid outward so as an alpha I can smell it, and only then is it okay to fuck her. These are the rules of the clan, and they're there to protect the omega females, the weakest members of our pack.

Grand pretends as if he can't scent my arousal. He's carrying a basket full of eggs.

"I left the white basket outside," he says.

“That was fast.” Freya’s cheeks are red while she grabs the pan and starts on the meal.

“I’ll make breakfast,” I announce.

“No, you won’t,” she says.

“Yes, I will.” She knows what I’m doing, namely trying to feed her. An omega who accepts food accepts the alpha’s courting.

“Nuh-uh.”

“Ah-ha.” I bump her with my hip and move her out of the way.

Resigned, she sighs and sits down behind me. I make her and Grand eggs, and because I hunted in the woods, I’m full of fresh rabbit and content to feed my people.

I bring the plates and sit with them.

Freya stares down at her plate before eating. Unless her tastes changed, I know everything about her, including how she likes her eggs. I haven’t forgotten. I don’t have memory problems. Unfortunately.

Seven months at seas makes a wolf crazy to return home to his omega. Carrying two sacks full of gifts for my family, mainly for my omega, I climb the mountain. At the edge of the forest, I hear her laughter, and so I hurry, sweat from carrying the heavy sacks dripping down my nose.

The house comes into view, as does the pair of them.

Two of my favorite people.

My twin and my omega.

She’s laughing at something he said as his hands rest on her belly.

I stop dead in my tracks and do the math, pretty sure that’s my cub she is carrying. Even that doesn’t deter me from seeing a thin brown marriage collar around her neck.

It takes me what feels like an eternity to step out of the trees and come out into the meadow. Freya stops laughing and

stares as if seeing a ghost, and Roger doesn't even turn.

At first.

I can almost feel the tension in his shoulders as he faces me, cold malice in his blue eyes.

I drop the sacks and storm to him.

Chest to chest, nose to nose, I ask, "What did you do?"

"I married her."

"We had a deal."

"You got her pregnant."

"I didn't mean to," flies out of my mouth.

Freya snorts. "It just happened. Kind of like our marriage."

I step back. "What? What the fuck is going on here?"

"You should leave," my brother says.

I pull back my fist and sock him.

He returns the blow, and we start out fighting as males, but soon transition into battle forms and slash at each other's bodies. Freya screams and gets between us just as I lash out, claws extended...

Her remembered scream of pain jolts me out of my memory, and my breath hitches.

I sip the tea, noticing that they're not chatting, but eating quietly, which I'm pretty sure isn't the norm.

"So, the lumber business. What happened?"

"Your brother died," Grand says.

Right. They lost the business that made us one of the wealthiest members of the pack. This also means the clan lost a source of income. I doubt others took over the business. "I would have come sooner."

Freya snorts.

Grand glances at me. "He died almost three turns ago."

“I know. I know. But I’m here now, and I’ll make it right.”

“Too late.” Freya swipes her plate from the table and drops it into the sink before leaving. As the door closes behind her, I push my plate away and slam my forehead on the table.

Grand pats my head. “She’ll come around.”

“When?”

“Soon.”

“Unless she hates me.”

When Grand doesn’t comfort me by saying, “Freya doesn’t hate you,” I look up.

The old male winks. “I won’t make it easier on you. You don’t deserve her. Neither of you boys did.”

“Truth.”

“There’s another lycan.”

The hair on the back of my neck stands on end, and I wanna kill the male before I even know what Grand means.

“He’s looking for a breeder.” In the old spans, an omega was often called a breeder.

“How does he know Freya is a breeder?”

Grand shrugs. “He might’ve stirred her heat.”

Okay, so I must kill him. One can’t tell that a wolf is an omega unless they show themselves as omegas. Freya stirring for another male and fighting the urge to stir for me makes me crazy. “I need a name and location.”

“He’ll come around.”

“Even better.”

“You can’t kill him.”

“Why not?”

“He’s the Ott clan enforcer.”

Fuck. I really can’t kill him or I’ll start another territorial war. Not that we’ve ever stopped warring. “I chased a wolf in

the forest this morning.”

“Chased?”

“Mhm. Was running from me like a little bitch.”

“Was it the enforcer?”

“Couldn’t tell.”

Grand taps his nose. “Did you sniff him?”

“Not well enough.”

“Coat color?”

“Dark gray and white.”

“Could be him, but then I doubt he’d run away.”

It occurs to me that the male could’ve been luring me into his territory so he could say I left my boundary, in which case he could kill me if I got aggressive with him. And I would have. Especially now that I know he wants to breed my omega.

Fuck no.

Never.

Freya is mine. She’s always been mine. Even when she was my brother’s, she was mine. And it’s about damn time she knows that.

FREYA

On the way to the stables, I've counted the eggs five times, and as I'm about to stop counting and put the basket down and grab another, I feel Rohan behind me.

Resisting the urge to fling the basket at him, I step away from the eggs before turning.

"What do you want?" I'm in the stables. Alone. And the heat in my belly is churning and churning.

"You."

I laugh hysterically. "I've heard that before."

"Then why do you ask?" He pins me against the wall, his chest in my face, his muscles pressing against my soft breasts. The ball of heat in my belly flares, becoming an unmanageable inferno.

I press my hands against his chest and try to push him away, but Rohan closes his palms over mine. He holds me in place, his head dipping dangerously low, mouth approaching not my neck or shoulder, but my lips.

Drawn by his scent, that of a sweaty wolf who ran through the evergreen forest, I rise on my toes. He lifts me up with one hand under my bottom so that we're at eye level. The heat in my belly spreads all through my body. I'm sure patches of red show on my neck and arms.

"You can't avoid me. I've come back, and I've come for you, and I'm not going anywhere until I have you."

“Same old story, different decade. You’d think I’d have learned better. Well, I have. I learned. It was a hard lesson, but one I learned nonetheless and I am not making the same mistake twice.”

He touches his nose to mine. “Which is?”

“You take off once you have me.”

He frowns as if he has no idea what I mean. Oh please! I hit his chest. “Let me go.”

“No.”

“Yes.”

“No.” He caresses my lips, and a moan escapes me. My arms, as if I have no brain telling me to stop, encircle his neck. Desperate not to run my fingers through his thick hair, I make fists, letting my claws dig into my skin.

Rohan kisses me again.

With our lips touching, he speaks. “You’ve always been mine.”

“No,” I whisper, fighting the ugly truth of my life.

“You have always been mine,” he repeats. “Not his, only mine, but I fucked up, and we paid for it. It’s taken decades for our time to come. It’s not too late for us, Freya. If only you would accept that.”

“Go back to the sea.”

He presses his lips against mine and opens his mouth, drawing out my kisses, swirling his tongue slowly and seductively, in the way his brother would do. Unlike his twin, Rohan is a more forward lover, and this tenderness is unexpected yet familiar, as it reminds me of the loss of my partner. And now I am confused and happy and sad, and I don’t know what else to do besides push against him.

He drops me on my feet and stares.

“Get out of here, Rohan.”

For a moment, I think he might not leave, and since my feelings for him have always confused me, I'm not entirely sure I want him to walk out. I do. But I also don't, and I hope he does walk out only because I asked him to.

Nodding, Rohan heads out, and the worst possible thing that could happen happens.

The fireball of heat residing in my lower belly drops, and liquid gushes out of me, trailing down my thigh. Under my skirt, I press my legs together as I pinch my lips against making a sound.

Rohan has almost left the stable.

I think I'm safe.

He hasn't smelled it.

I'll wash up.

At the exit, Rohan stops and looks to the side, showing his profile.

Flaring his nostrils, he turns up his nose, wrinkles it, then chuckles. He tucks the latch into the stable lock, dimming the light coming from outside, and comes back.

A big alpha arsehole smile lights up his face. Even his eyes are twinkling with the magic of his wolf. "I smell something cute and omega. It wants a lick." He swipes his tongue over his lips. "Doesn't it?"

I hate it when he gets this playful. I really do. Mmhm. "No."

"I also smell lies." He stalks toward me and pins me against the wall again.

I want to lick his neck, torso, the length of his large knob.

Rohan sniffs my hair, and the rumble from his chest vibrates over my palms, making me tilt back my head and whine like an omega bitch in heat. I open my mouth to refuse him again, but he starts nibbling my lower lip, a claw trailing down the front of my corset, slowly slicing the ties one by one,

releasing my breasts until they spill out and the corset falls to my hips.

I have large breasts, hence the corset, so when I work, they're nicely tucked in.

He kisses my jaw, neck, chest, making his way down my body. He lifts my left breast and puts it into his mouth, his tongue under the nipple and drawing out the clear fluid an omega female makes for the alpha male she finds attractive.

I hope nothing comes out.

But I know something will, because I can feel my breasts growing heavier as Rohan sucks harder, making the heat in my lower belly unbearable. It's been...it's been over two decades since I've felt this way. Aroused to the point of pain, feeling that if I don't have his knob inside me, I'll die.

When I saw him here, this was exactly what I feared most.

His suction makes noise, and a pop when he detaches from one breast and moves on to the other while also growling and making my breasts vibrate.

Trying not to enjoy this, I allow my fingers to grip his coarse dark hair and pull. It only makes him growl louder.

"Lift your skirt," he orders.

Biting my tongue against telling him no, because that would just make me sound stupid, I fist the material and lift. I need him to get me off, or this heat will churn and churn until I'm mad with lust and willing to crawl around his feet begging for scraps of his attention.

I'd rather preserve some dignity.

The alpha drops to his knees.

As he looks at my body in a way that makes me think he still finds me sexy, it's hard not to feel wanted and loved.

Does he love me?

My breath hitches, and I think back to when we flirted and I was crazy about him and I wondered if he loved me. I would ask myself that question almost every night, and it'd drive me

crazy that he never said it, even though I knew Rohan was a male of action, not words. He's the kind of male who, when asked, would do whatever it took to help the people he cared for.

I knew he cared for me.

Bright blue eyes stare up at me. "You look beautiful, Freya."

He drops a kiss above my mound before sticking out his fat tongue and licking a path over it and between my legs, which are pressed together as if I'm trying to lock them in place.

He leans back on his heels and smirks. "You want me to force your legs to open?"

Yes, I do. I'm such a mess when it comes to this male. The heat of embarrassment is crawling up my face.

"What's a good little omega do when she wants something from her alpha?"

"She begs."

"Or?"

"She consents to play."

"And how does my omega like to play?"

"Pretend forcing. She likes..." I swallow, "to pretend he's forcing her."

"That a girl." Rohan grips my knees and starts prying them apart while I fight to keep my legs together.

We're really going to do this.

How will I ever recover from Rohan again?

This is a mistake.

Bigger than the one I made twenty-some years ago when I invited him into my nest. I didn't know better then, and I know better now, and yet reason cannot fight my lust.

He slaps the back of my left knee, and it folds, making me stumble. I yelp and curse him when he throws the limb over

his shoulder and his large palm grips the back of my other thigh to hold me in place.

He licks my clit.

I jerk back his head and start grinding on his face.

Rohan snarls and keeps me in place, not letting me use his mouth to get myself off.

“Look at you,” he says. “Omega wolf through and through. You are most beautiful when you’re with your alpha, the one you really want to fuck. Isn’t that right, lass?”

“Fuck you, Rohan.” I try straddling his face again, but he holds me away and pinches my clit.

I scream at the pain at the same time as heat trickles out of my channel.

Rohan’s nostrils flare, and he watches the clear liquid trail down my thigh.

With a swipe of his thumb, he brings it to my lips and smears it on them.

“Go ahead,” he says, “Have some before I do.”

“Alpha always eats first,” I say.

“That he does.” Rohan sticks out his big fat tongue and swipes his thumb over the length of it. His eyes turn milky white with magic, and he zeroes in between my legs before his control snaps. With a snarl, he buries his face between my legs, and all I can do is stand there on one leg with my hands in his hair and my gaze at the ceiling, enjoying his mouth and tongue and the beard that scrapes my pussy in all the right places.

Because it’s been a while since I had an alpha between my legs, I come with force, the ball of heat in my belly dropping and gushing onto Rohan’s tongue.

His eyes flutter, and his pleasant rumbling turns into all-out growling as he laps up my heat like a starving wolf. I’m rubbing myself all over his face when another male calls out my name.

ROHAN

With my tongue deep inside Freya's omega pussy, I'm wishing I had a longer tongue or that I could detach it from my mouth and shove it inside her even more. This is how sweet she is when I lick her.

She's coming apart, her pussy throbbing, and each pulse leaking the sweet fluid an omega female makes tells me she wants me, and she will go into full omega heat soon. I can hardly wait. This treat from her is so much more than I expected when I resolved to return and ask Freya to forgive me.

I didn't count on her omega nature to allow me access to her body.

Not at first, at least.

I expected her to want to stab me, but she hasn't. Yet.

"Freya?" a male voice says from outside.

At first, I think it's Grand, but my instincts kick in and I stop eating pussy and listen.

Tension makes Freya's body freeze.

The male continues. "If you don't open this door, I'm coming in."

"I'll be right out," Freya squeaks, then looks down at me. "Please stay here." She tries to fix her corset, but I ripped the ties, so she must hold it up with her hands. Her hair is mussed,

her eyes are still hazel from lust, and she's flushed red in the cheeks.

She's fucking perfect. For me. And only for me. There's no way another male gets to see her like this. Most wolves have never seen an omega in heat, and I'm really picky with who gets to see her this way. Meaning, it's just me.

Standing, I ask, "Who is he?"

My voice sounds too low, almost a threat, as if I intend to fight him for her. But then I remember the last time I fought for her. I almost killed my brother. Freya barely survived as well.

"A male who buys our eggs."

Sounds like a lie. Even if I wanted to scent the lie, I can't because my face is covered in omega pussy juice and that's all I can smell.

Oh hey, her pussy is practically on my face. That ought to do what I need it to do, which is tell whoever this little lad is outside to fuck off and find himself another female to chase, because Freya is mine. "I'll deal with him."

Freya clamps her hands over my cheeks. "Please, Rohan. Please don't do anything. Let me sell him the eggs and send him away."

"Okay."

She narrows her eyes. "Okay?"

I nod like a good little alpha lad. "Yes, lass, I'll behave."

"You're scaring me." She flips the corset so that the closed back is in the front, and turns around so I can lace the few ties I didn't cut. It'll keep the corset on her body temporarily.

Together, Freya and I walk outside.

The lycan male wears a pair of simple gray pants and a look meant to slay me. Perhaps about my age, he is a male with short-cropped black hair and piercing blue eyes. I recognize his eyes. Same wolf I chased in the woods.

Possibly the Ott clan enforcer.

Grand said I can't kill him.

That's fine. I don't have to. I have omega pussy juice on my face, and if he wants that pussy, then we can fight, but otherwise, he should walk away. Trouble is, Freya is worth fighting for, and I can tell by the tension in his jaw and the flexing of his biceps that he could smell and hear us inside the stables. Now that he sees us, he might lose his shite and jump me.

I can't have Freya around when that happens.

I stop at the door.

"Douglas." Freya walks up to the male.

"Who's that?" He jerks his head toward me. The question tells me he probably never knew my twin. Very few people can tell us apart.

"This is Rohan, my..." Freya pauses.

I fill in, "Her alpha." Our relationship is complicated and, frankly, nobody's business. I'm the father of her son and also technically her brother-in-law. But I was once also her foster sibling, seeing as we grew up in the same house and were raised by the same people.

Whoever doesn't know our history doesn't have to.

The male grits his teeth. "I thought we had an understanding." The male is pent-up and ready to blow, but trying to rein in his temper. I hate having Freya near him, but if I walk over, he'll pounce.

"We did, Doug. But Rohan returned to town."

"He did more than return to town," the male says, and tries to move around her to get to me.

Come at me, laddie.

Freya grabs his arm. "Look at me, Doug. I have your eggs. Take them and send Kiara next time."

"You know I don't come here for eggs."

I growl.

Freya stretches her hand out toward me and presses her palm against the male's chest to push him away. I remember this moment in time well. She did the same thing when I went after Roger, and I ignored her. She stood between us and suffered our aggression.

Not this time. This time, I've come to atone and care for her.

There are other ways to get rid of the alpha sniffing around my omega.

I don't have to brawl.

Grand already said I can't kill him anyway. If he's the enforcer of the Ott clan, and I challenge him and win, Freya could suffer a horrible fate. Not to mention, it would ignite territorial wars, and wars have never brought lycans prosperity and fortune, only death, sorrow, and destruction.

I wipe a thumb over my beard and lick it, drawing the male's attention to the glistening pussy juice on my face before I walk away, throwing over my shoulder, "Say goodbye to the nice omega, lad, because this is the last time you're laying eyes on her."

"Doug, please go."

"This isn't over, Freya."

"Let it be over."

Yeah, lad, let it go.

And because the male walks away I just know in my gut this isn't over, so quite possibly, he'll invite his buddies later on. I'm fairly sure Freya has two or more alpha males sniffing around her. An omega female attracts more than one alpha male, and often, they form a small pack.

Rohan and I were one such pack.

It's just that we failed at sharing her.

We failed her in many ways.

And fixing those mistakes of the past happens now and in the future.

Freya starts walking toward the house, and I follow her. She slips inside and slams the door right in my face, leaving me outside.

“You could’ve broken my nose.” I open the door and head straight for the kitchen, where Grand sits at the table, plugging his nose.

“Boy, mind your lycan manners and wash your face.”

I grab the kitchen towel and go to wet it. He adds, “Not in the kitchen. I eat here.”

Getting scolded by Grand makes me feel like I’m eight all over again, when I walked into the kitchen with dirt on my hands and face or blood from when Roger and I got into a fight.

Often over Freya, who’s now somewhere upstairs, probably regretting what happened in the stable.

ROHAN

There are several ponds scattered around the forest and one big lake that separates the territory of the two clans that have been enemies for the better part of their existence: the Ott clan and ours. Mostly, we fight over territory and who gets to piss on which tree, and during the course of all the fights over marking our territories, we've nearly lost our female population.

Our goddess, the natural selector, started favoring male births over female births, and before we even knew it, the male-to-female ratio was twenty to one. We ignored it, and now the goddess has selected a nonlycan female for Lenox, our Alpha. He has marked and mated a Kilseleian princess.

An omega female has always been a rare kind of a female and now even rarer since females haven't been born into the pack after Lenox's baby sister, Mackenzie, who happens to be part elf, not a full-blooded wolf.

At the pond near the house, I slip into the cold water with a hiss. Lycans run hot, and our bodies compensate for harsh mountain winters, but that doesn't mean I like the chill of the water up here. I never have.

"That pleasant, huh?" a female voice asks from across the pond.

I wash my face and grab the soap, sniff out cedarwood and a spicy scent I forgot the name of. With one eye on the bushes behind which the female hides, I start washing my face, then armpits while waiting her out. She might be skittish, and I

don't wish to frighten her, but I also have no idea who she is or what she's doing here.

Perhaps we have more females in the clan. Could be. I haven't been around in a long time.

"The last bath I took was in the den, and the waters are thermal down there."

"Never been to your den."

Now truly taken aback, I frown. How could she never have been in the clan den? Even Freya, who refuses to roam around and away from the family house, has been to the den and even to the town several times.

The female chuckles, her laughter making me smile too.

"My never being to the McMar clan den surprised you."

The way she speaks of our clan as if it's foreign tells me she's not one of us. If she were a male, I would already have gone after him, questioning what he's doing here on the clan territory. We dislike lone lycans roaming the clan lands as much as we dislike the Otts.

We pretty much dislike anyone who isn't a McMar.

A thought occurs to me. Maybe she's Kilseleian, so she has no idea what the clan rules are. Everyone must pay respects to the clan Alpha if they're on his land. If she's a lycan, maybe she just arrived. I could ask, but I prefer to let her talk. She seems...curious about me and wanting to chat.

I dunk my head to wet my hair, and when I emerge, a tall brown-haired wolf female with silver instead of blue eyes stands at the edge of the pond, a pleasant smile on her young face. She looks no more than twenty turns old and wears black on black, leather boots and pants and a leather corset. Her brown hair is pulled back in a high ponytail, and she's strapped her middle with more weapons than a savage horde male.

"I'm Cara, Freya's friend."

"Freya has a friend?" I blurt out.

The female laughs, her eyes crinkling at the corners. “Why is that surprising?”

“I have no idea.” Maybe because Freya is painfully introverted and prefers the isolation of the woods to the den. In all the turns I’ve known her, she’s never had a female friend. Maybe this Cara lass is lying.

“And who are you?” she asks.

“My name is Rohan. I’m the McMar clan enforcer.”

The female walks around the pond, gaze on me, and reaches the place where I dropped my clothes. She picks them up and sniffs, makes a face, then drops them like a hot potato.

My eyebrows shoot up. “I reek?”

She nods. “Hence the bath.”

Her candor amuses me. “Where are you from, Cara?”

“Here and there. Everywhere.” She’s still walking around, and it occurs to me she’s circling me. She’s fucking circling me. There’s only one kind of lycan that exhibits this type of behavior.

“While here and there and everywhere, why haven’t you paid your respects to our Alpha?”

“What makes you think I haven’t?”

I snort and get on with soaping my body, never letting the female out of my sight. Bending she snatches up a flower, rips off the bud, and flicks it away, then sticks the stem into her mouth and chews.

Yup, that’ll do it. Without sniffing her and confirming her scent, I’m almost certain Cara is an alpha female. A million and one questions come to mind, including where does she come from?

Leaves crinkle, and I scent her before I see her.

Freya is coming for a wash as well. She carries a pair of towels and smelly female stuff in a caddy.

“I see you’ve met Cara,” she says. She drops the caddy on the old bench Grand built hundreds of turns ago. It’s nearing collapse, but somehow still stands on fragile little legs. Come to think of it, that could be said about everything around here. The house, the farm, and even Freya. If we’re to renew our life out here, we have lots of repairing to do.

I was just leaving, but now that Freya has arrived, she might join me for a bath, so I’m staying. Or maybe not, because her little friend puts her hands on her hips. “You about done?”

“Hm?”

“Done with cleaning up so we can take a turn?”

I give her a blank stare. “Wolf females bathe with males.”

Freya, still dressed, also seems to be waiting for me to leave. “Rohan,” she says slowly as if I’m dumb. “This pond is our gathering place.”

“Aaaand I’m intruding on your space.” That’s fine. I’ll eavesdrop from elsewhere and probably gather more information on the alpha puppy than I would if I asked directly.

Bending at the knees, I leap out of the pond and shake out my hair and body. Freya’s eyes flash hazel and stay that way, and the little alpha catches on, glancing from me to Freya.

“You are the brother,” she says.

“Cara!” Freya chastises her in the kind of voice I imagine she uses on our son, Duane.

The lass blushes. “Sorry. Slipped out.”

“I am the brother.” I approach slowly and stand an arm’s length from the female. Freya hands me the towel. She wants to cover my middle, a subtle sign that she likes to keep the sight of my rather nice knob to herself. It’s a subtle but monumental gesture. It tells me Freya is possessive of my knob.

It’s a fine cock. Pierced in three places and around the knob end. Freya asked for those piercings. Mmhm.

A smile splits my face, and I flash the little alpha my canines. “I’m so happy to have met you.” I take a step toward the lass so I can greet her the way a wolf might by rubbing my cheek with hers, but she steps back, palming one of the daggers strapped on her hip.

As she’s clearly skittish, I don’t press further, but inhale loudly to confirm her alpha scent. Nothing I can identify comes back. In fact, I can’t quite place her scent. Curious, yet I won’t force her to come closer when she doesn’t want to. “Freya has talked about me?”

“No,” the females say in unison.

I chuckle and lean into Freya, who tries to walk back. With Freya, I don’t stop. I place my hand on the small of her back and hold her there so I can rub my beard against her soft cheek and inhale that omega scent in blossom. It’s like smelling the most exotic flower that ever bloomed.

“They say,” I tell her, “that the fae females in heat draw out the males by releasing their scent. They say sirens sing to attract males. I’ve heard and smelled both kinds of species.” Freya pushes against me, and I step back, but continue, “They say those are the most pleasant mating scents. You know why they say that?”

Freya smiles. “I do know.”

“Why?” the other lass asks.

“Only because they’ve never smelled a lycan omega in heat.”

“I’m not in heat.”

“Yet.” I wink. “I’ll be at the house.”

FREYA

With everything that's happened since Rohan came, I needed some normalcy and a friend I can count on. Cara is that friend, and although we're several decades apart in age, growing up the way she did made her mature quickly. She's wise beyond her years, and I'm lucky she decided to hang out here when Grand offered her the old cabin nearby.

That's how she knew about Rohan.

And the cabin.

One time, she and I got drunk, and I told her Rohan and I made Duane there.

I could've nested in the house, but I didn't because old Alpha Remi, their father, had always looked at me in a way that made me feel uncomfortable. I couldn't go into heat near him for fear he would take advantage of it.

Rohan's walking away and probably feels that we're staring at his fine broad back that's inked and perfectly sculpted. He throws off his towel and lets us ogle his arse. There're dimples.

Neither Cara nor I speak until he disappears into the thick trees.

Cara whistles. "That's one of the finest lycans I've ever laid my eyes on."

"Trust me, he knows it."

“And so do you.” Cara starts removing her clothes.

I shed my ruined corset and the skirt, then jump in, the near-freezing water temperature making me shriek and shiver. “I can’t believe you told him I mentioned him.”

Cara starts laying out her weapons around the pond so that something sharp and stabby is always within arm’s reach. One never knows when danger will come, but if it does, she’ll be ready.

I wish I was as prepared for Rohan as Cara is for potential threats.

I thought I was prepared. I thought two decades and seeing each other only briefly during that time would mean I could face him when he wished to visit his brother’s grave. I didn’t think he would come back for me.

“He says he came back for me,” I tell her as she turns to give me her hair. I pull on the leather loop holding her hair together, and Cara dunks to wet her head. I apply soap and two oils.

“What’s he mean?” she asks.

“It means he intends to mate me.”

“That’s a good thing, no?”

“No.”

Cara turns. “Why not?”

I pass her the soap. My hair needs no washing right now, so I keep it pulled up and away from the surface. “Because Rohan uses me and then leaves.”

“You’re looking at this all wrong.”

“How so?”

“You should look at it as you using him. I mean, he does have a big, long knob.”

I chuckle. “You saw the piercings?”

“Oh yes.”

We laugh and swim to the edge of the pond, where we prop our elbows on the shore.

“Your eyes are turning hazel, Freya.”

“Damn.”

“They’re so pretty. Your whole face is lit up.”

“Double damn.”

“Fuck him, Freya. Fuck him the way goddess Natra fucked the pack of them.”

“She was an alpha female.”

Cara shrugs. “An omega female is said to need a pack of males. You have one male. Make him work for it.”

I shake my head. “It’s different with Rohan.”

“Because you love him.”

I press a hand over her mouth. “Don’t say that.”

Cara blinks twice, and I remove my hand.

“You’re different around him than around Doug Ott.”

I whistle now. “Who came for the eggs this morning.”

Cara’s eyes widen. “And what happened?”

“Rohan almost killed him.”

Cara nods. “Almost? Why didn’t he?”

“I asked him not to.”

Cara tsks. “You’re delaying the inevitable.”

“You think so?”

“I know so. They won’t play well together because Doug already has a pack he intends to share you with. Rohan is a threat.”

“That Doug will try to eliminate,” I conclude.

“That’s right.” Cara rips out a blade of grass and chews on the end, her gaze on the forest. “I’ve known you for two turns and you’ve never gone into heat.”

“I haven’t gone into one since we made Duane.”

“But you’ve cycled with the moon, no?”

“I have.”

“Roger and you... How...” She pauses. “I’m sorry. Didn’t mean to bring him up.”

“You know it’s okay. It’s okay to bring up Roger now.”

“Because Rohan is here?”

I swallow, feeling like I might cry. Cara senses it and keeps the conversation about Rohan.

“Will you need the cabin to nest?”

“Oh no. It’s your cabin, Cara.”

“Nothing is really mine.”

Cara hides a lot. I don’t pry, figuring she’ll tell me when she’s ready. She says she likes me because I don’t ask many questions, and so I don’t. We’re friends. I’ve never had a girl friend before. It’s nice, especially when I lost Roger, who was in a way my friend too.

“Your weapons are yours.”

She smiles, a twinkle in her eye. “And I finished the cannon.”

“Congrats. You worked so hard on it.” I have no idea what a cannon is or does, but Cara’s been working on this project for several cycles now. She’s a weapons crafter.

“Your lips are blue. Let’s get out,” she says. We move out of the water and dry ourselves with the pair of towels I brought. I take Rohan’s already wet one and, before drying myself, sniff the fabric. His scent shoots an electric shock down my body and zaps my clit.

Cara tilts her head. “Your eyes flared at his scent.”

“I bet.” I wrap the towel around my shoulders. “I can’t stop smelling him.”

“And you’ve gone into heat only for him?”

“What do you mean?”

“You’ve only ever gone into heat when Rohan was around?”

I frown, my heart starting to pick up pace as I recall my entire life. “When you put it that way, the answer is yes. I haven’t gone into heat since having Duane.”

“Who is Rohan’s son.”

I nod.

“And you could never have kids with Roger?”

I shake my head. Not ones that could survive, no.

“I think you’re mates, Freya.”

I chuckle. “Omegas can’t have mates.”

“Why not?”

“Because alphas share her as a pack, and mates are marked, bitten. You know, claimed in a fated magical way. I can’t be claimed.”

“Hm. Hear my take. Rohan is an identical twin, two parts of one whole, according to our goddess. He and his brother formed a pack. A pack cannot mark an omega. The marking instinct isn’t there because it’s a sign of possession, a bond between a pair of wolves, not a pack of wolves. Now that one part of him is dead, he is...the only one.”

ROHAN

When it comes to Freya and getting what I want from her, which is her undying devotion and love forever and ever, I will do whatever it takes. This means I dropped what few morals I still have left and, instead of going home like I said I would, I hid in the bushes.

If I even so much as scratch an itch, the females will hear me, so I hide in the bushes and remain still as a statue, closing my eyes to focus on the pair in the pond. They're chatting about me. Yes! This is what I hoped for, and I send a prayer of thanks to the goddess for being on my side.

The alpha pup and Freya seem to be close, and by their conversation, I wonder if they have the sort of friendship that a mother and daughter might have.

Freya has always wanted a little lass.

I want to give her one.

What?

I don't know where that thought came from, and I dismiss it so I can listen in some more.

"I think you're mates, Freya," Cara states.

WHAT?

My heart's thudding in my ears, and they're twitching, and a bead of sweat accumulates on my forehead, and when the alpha pup says the goddess made my brother and me two parts of one whole, something about it clicks inside me. I rise and

walk slowly back to the house, where I check on Grand before walking up the stairs and right into the bedroom my brother used to share with Freya.

The giant, neatly made bed with red sheets with an imposing dark brown wooden headboard dominates the room. I search for the figurines here and there, maybe Duane's toy or two from when he was a wee lad, but the room has been cleaned, my brother's scent all gone.

Until I open the wardrobe.

His scent hits me like our father's fist.

Right in the nose. Something inside me opens and grief overwhelms me. I sit on the bed and stare, holding back emotions I associate with my brother. There's so much anger. I hated him for taking Freya from me. From us.

For not honoring our pact that said neither of us could marry her if both could not.

He kissed her first.

I saw them.

It made me mad, and I broke our pact. I serviced her in her heat and got her pregnant. And I can't for the life of me regret servicing her, because we made Duane.

Who hates me just as much as his mother does. Perhaps more.

There's pain in my chest.

Two parts of one whole.

Freya's climbing the steps. At the top of the stairs, she pauses, probably deciding if she'll walk in on me or not. She does.

I expect her to yell at me to get out. Instead, she sits on the bed next to me and covers my hand with hers. We sit there staring at the wardrobe. Half the closet is full of his shirts; the other half is empty since Freya has moved into her old room.

"I can't believe he still has those brown cutoffs," I say, speaking of Roger as if he's still around.

Freya chuckles. “I tried burning them once.”

“How did that go?”

“He wouldn’t talk to me for the span.”

I snort. “And the green kilt.”

“Don’t mention that kilt.”

“I think I’ll wear the cutoffs.” Slowly, I grab the shorts and put them on, watching Freya’s reaction. She’s looking at me like she wants to fuck me, and I’m trying hard to clear some air between us before her heat hits on the night of the full moon.

I step between her legs and run a hand through her wet hair. She shudders.

“I didn’t bring any clothes with me and I see none of my old ones are still here.”

“I burned all your clothes the moment I realized you weren’t coming back. Made a big ol’ bonfire. Invited Roger. We fucked.”

“I bet you did.” I tuck a claw under her chin and make her look at me with those mesmerizing hazel eyes. “Did you have a good life with my brother?”

“Yes, I did.”

“Good. I never want you to forget him, and I never want to replace him.”

“Then what do you want?”

“I want a new life with you.”

Freya looks away. “I don’t believe you.”

“It’s the truth.”

“You will leave again.”

“After we made Duane, I went on a short trip to bring us goods and secure better trade routes for the clan.”

“Trade routes you wanted to work.”

“That’s right.”

“Can’t you see?” Freya leans in, and her lips touch right above the base of my knob. I growl and fist her hair. She looks up, hazel flecks of magic dancing in her blue eyes. Her arousal blossoms in the bedroom she shared with my brother, and it makes what’s happening between us wrong, if not forbidden.

Too bad forbidden pussy tastes the best.

Too bad my birth broke the rules. I came out second, weaker, smaller, and dead. Then I came to life, Grand says, by the goddess’s hand.

When it comes to Freya, I don’t think there are any rules besides the ones the pair of us make. And the pair of us have no rules, and even when my brother and I had clear rules, I broke them anyhow. That night I caught her in heat and I fucked her, not only because I couldn’t resist her, but because I wanted to claim her. I deliberately blew up my knot end inside her, hoping I’d put the pup in her.

Good grief.

If she only knew I was trying to breed her.

That it wasn’t an accident or a lust-filled craze.

My brother knew.

He knew I did it on purpose, and that’s why he married her and made me think that lad inside her belly was his. Though I wonder what he told her to make her marry him. One of these spans, I will ask. Not now, though, as Freya is licking a path down my belly. She sniffs my brother’s pants.

“Does it smell like him?” I ask.

She nods and pulls out my cock, starts stroking it. I grit my teeth.

“That turns you on,” I say.

She nods and puts me into her mouth.

This is so wrong.

Freya keeps her tongue out and mouth open and doesn’t suck me. That’s because an omega female instinctively knows how to please her alpha male. I grab her head with both hands

and mouth fuck her, my gaze on the art on the wall. It's a nude portrait of Freya kneeling at the edge of the bed, nipples erect and face flushed.

He has just fucked her.

I can tell.

Then he might've gone to the same wardrobe and might've even put these same brown cutoffs on before looking over his shoulder and seeing her the way he painted her.

As she chokes on my knob, it occurs to me that her eyes in the painting are blue, not hazel.

My brother has never fully had her. Not the way I have. And as I come into her mouth, I decide nobody else will ever have her either. This means I will kill her suitors. This means I will start a war.

FREYA

Although, nearly faded, Roger's scent still lingers. It's slightly different from Rohan's, milder and more pleasant to my senses. It's calming and reassuring. It's what I associate with everyday life.

Rohan's scent is more potent, almost exotic, reminding me of places I've never been, of peoples I've never seen. Like the fairies, for example. I've never seen a fae or, heck, even a Kilseleian person such as the princess who mated our clan's Alpha.

The back of my throat feels bruised from how hard Rohan's using my mouth while his gaze is on the painting hanging above the bed. I remember the span Roger hung it on the wall. I protested, saying I'd rather look at him in the nude than myself, and he said I ought to know how beautiful an omega wolf is when aroused.

Trouble is, in heat, I look different, and though I've tried, I could never go into heat for Roger. Eventually, he resented me for it.

Eventually, we started sleeping in separate rooms.

But he was good to Duane, raised him as his own even after Duane matured and started smelling like Rohan.

Cum spills from the corners of my mouth as I swallow the rest.

Rohan hangs his head and wipes the cum from my lips, then tastes himself. Instinctively, I spread my legs, asking him

to fuck me, but then come to my senses and close them.

Shocked at what we just did in the room I shared with my late husband, grief and guilt pile up and threaten to overpower me again as they had when Roger first passed away. “We shouldn’t have done that.”

Rohan snorts and puts himself back into Roger’s shorts. I hated those shorts. I still hate them. They’re faded, with holes and paint on them, not to mention I’ve made my late husband some nice shorts that Duane ended up taking because otherwise, they would just sit in the closet untouched.

“We’ve always done the wrong thing. Why change now?” Rohan says.

“Because we’re not kids anymore.”

“We weren’t kids then.”

I don’t really care that he’s canceling out the excuses and lies I’ve told myself over the past decades. Like how it was a lust thing. An omega in heat can’t refuse an alpha who wants to service her.

Actually, she can.

Here’s another lie: an omega in heat is a mindless wolf begging for any knob.

Not true at all.

During heat, my senses are heightened, and breeding is at the forefront of my mind, but I invited Rohan into my nest and spent spans with him until I was sure I got what I wanted from him.

His seed.

Just thinking about the truth of what happened between us and what happened after he left the nest brings up bile at the back of my throat. I feel faint. I stumble outside, with Rohan trying to stop me.

“Leave me alone,” I tell him, on the brink of tears.

I enter my bedroom, drop to all fours, and allow my wolf shape to take form. I walk under the blanket fort and curl up in

the nest in the corner of the room.

Sighing, I close my eyes and lie there, taking comfort in the simple things and not those big life things my brain conjures up while on two legs.



DURING TIMES when grief would overtake me, I couldn't work. Instead, I would retreat into my room and sleep. After Roger died, I would remain in here for a long time, and if it weren't for Duane moving back during that time and coming in to check on me, I might've just resolved to stay forever.

But my son force-fed me.

Even made me bathe.

I regret having him take care of me, and I apologized for it a turn after I managed some semblance of normalcy. I'm much better now. Or so I hope.

Banging and male voices coming from outside awaken me. In wolf, I stretch my front paws, my back, my hind legs, then yawn and lick my teeth. My belly growls, and I trudge from under the blanket fort to the window. Front paws on the windowsill, I peek outside. It's twilight. I've slept most of the span.

The animals haven't been tended to.

Lunch wasn't made.

And neither is dinner.

While Rohan can hunt, I don't and Grand doesn't either. He's too old for hunting, and I'm entering heat, the moon nearing fullness bathing my face through the glass. What wouldn't I give to be taken under the moonlight and fucked into the dirt.

Eh.

Musings of a horny wolf.

The banging starts up again, but I can't see anyone outside. Magic warms my body, and, back on two legs I slip on a white tunic and a green woolen sweater and head outside. At the stairs, I stop.

Rohan looks up, a nail between his lips and a hammer in one hand. He spits the nail, catches it, and starts hammering the stairs. "Good. You're up." He nails the new stair and climbs the rest of the new stairs, then swoops me up into his arms and winks. "Don't want you stepping on anything." He sits on the railing and slides down, landing gracefully in front of the kitchen. He takes me by my shoulders and spins me around. "I baked you pies." A slap on the bottom sends me forward and into the kitchen, where there're several baked dishes on the stove and counter.

I count seven.

"Um... Are we having people over?"

"I hope not, but don't worry. I'm preparing for if they come."

I sniff the pastries. Apple, pear, two different meat ones, potato, and a mixed vegetable pie. I can't make out the last one, so I poke the middle with my finger. It's a green vegetable. We're carnivorous, but on two legs, we can eat anything. Most wolves eat anything that's not green, saving the greens for when we have nothing else to consume. I'll pass on that pie.

I lean my shoulder on the doorjamb and cross my arms over my chest. Rohan's sweating and hammering, and then he walks outside with a wink, leaving behind his strong lycan alpha scent that instantly makes me wish he would fuck me. While Cara's wrong about the mating, we don't have to be mates for me to get turned on by his scent.

He will leave me again.

Stop. Thinking.

"Grand?" I follow Rohan and stop almost immediately when the moonlight hits my face. My vision sharpens, my

breasts perk as I round the corner of the house and walk past the stables to Roger's workshop.

I haven't been here in turns.

And neither has Grand.

So when I find him inside sitting on a log holding up a magnifying glass to a parchment in his hand, I stop at the entrance. The oil lantern burns brightly and Rohan grabs a small three-legged stool with a leather saddle seat that's been in the family since the beginning of time.

"Sit," he says. I plop onto the chair like a good omega. Chuckling because so much of our dynamic feels as natural as breathing, his ordering me to sit makes me happy. Roger, though alpha, was gentler than Rohan.

Rohan has an edge to him that I find rather irresistible. Most spans, I wish it weren't so.

And while he was away, it was easy to forget about him.

Now that he's back, the attraction is impossible to ignore.

"What are you reading?" I ask Grand.

"A map." He hands me the map and then blinks, widening his eyes.

I press two fingers to my cheek and rub, then do the same with the other cheek. "What? Got snot on my face? Boogers?"

Grand keeps staring.

Rohan hooks a claw under my chin to lift my face. "All clear." He glances at Grand. "What's wrong?"

"You're an omega," Grand says.

Has he lost his mind? Oh no. "Grand," I say in a soft voice. "You've known that for a long time."

"I know what I know, but I've never seen you before. Not like this. Not with those eyes and the cheeks and..." He wrinkles his nose. "Even the scent."

My face heats up, and Rohan bends to rub his cheek against it for good measure before leaving to go outside.

Grand and I stay alone, and uncomfortable. Grand is like a father to me, a parent who raised me, and I never want him to see me in my heated-up state.

“I should go,” I say.

“And bring us some ale when you return.”

“I can stay in the kitchen. Rohan made us dinner anyway.”

“When among friends and family, you should be exactly who you are.”

I nod. “Wise words.”

“I have more wisdom. Bring me my herbs, and I’ll shift into a wise owl.”

Rohan’s brought out more than my heat. He’s also brought out Grand’s humor.

“I’ll be right back.” But as soon as I step outside, the lycans start howling all around the house.

ROHAN

As the time of the full moon approaches, lycans get restless and our energy rises, tightening our senses and making everything we are normally feeling seem larger than life. If one is grieving, that's magnified.

If one is happy, also magnified.

If one is horny....

And I am horny.

So is Freya.

Judging by the howling of at least four wolves spread out around the house, they're also turned on and putting out mating calls for the omega female.

I let them howl for a while, then walk outside and crack my neck, ready to transition and look for them so I can kill them, but Freya runs up to me and practically tackles me. She pushes me back into the house.

Once she has me inside, she slams the door behind her. "Don't go out there."

"I have to go out there."

She shakes her head. "You don't."

"You know I do." It's the way our world works. An alpha who claims or wants to claim an omega must also protect her, or another lycan will steal her. Tonight, Grand was telling me about his spans, about when he was a young lycan. The clan had more females then, and every full moon, males would

fight for the right to breed females. If the pack had an omega, she usually belonged to the clan's Alpha who would then allow other males to service his omega during heat.

Since I couldn't even share Freya with my brother, I can't share her with lads I never met.

Freya takes me by the hand and drags me into the kitchen. She stands by one of the pies with a finger hole in it. She points. "What's this?"

Outside, the howling intensifies. I wonder how many there are in Douglas's pack.

"A spinach and fresh cheese pie," I say.

"Ew."

"Have you tasted it?"

Freya makes a face. "Have you?"

I chuckle, one ear listening outside, the other with her in the kitchen. I sure hope Grand stays in the workshop. "Not yet."

"But you know how to cook it?"

"Mmhm. Learned a thing or seven when I lost a cook or seven." Using two fingers, I scoop out a piece of apple pie next to the spinach pie and offer it to her. Freya puts the fingers into her mouth and starts sucking while swallowing the entire bite. I have no idea how much of it she actually tasted without chewing, but the way her eyes flare makes me want to bend her over the table and lick her little pie hole.

"I know what you're doing." I let her taste the other fruit pie, this one made with rum Grand saved since the last time I saw him.

Freya moans at the taste.

I take pleasure in feeding my omega.

The wolves' howling approaches the house, and as I scoop out more rum pie, I glance out the window. I don't see any bright blue eyes shining against the dusk or the forest trees, but eventually, I bet I will. They've come either to kill me and

take Freya before the full moon, or they're warning me, telling me to leave. I'll find out soon enough.

"I can't hide," I tell her.

"You can."

"How many are there in the pack?"

"No less than four," she says. "Maybe more. I don't know."

"How can you not know?" I take her wrist and move her to the table, and I join her there, watching the forest. If a wolf walks onto the lawn, he is challenging me straight out. This is my territory. This is my omega.

"Douglas only recently figured out I'm on omega."

"How recent?" I grit my teeth. "Tell me."

"During the last cycle. A slip of my tongue."

My heart's beating so hard, it makes me think it wants to escape the confines of my rib cage. "Where exactly did your tongue slip?"

Freya lifts her chin. "You know where."

Since she's not being specific, I'm left to imagine my own scenarios, and they all make me murderous. "I'm going to enjoy ripping him and his pack into tiny little pieces."

Freya moves to sit on my lap. She throws her arms around my neck, and I can't help but hold her while the wolves raise hell outside.

"They're drawing you out because they know they'll win. You're outnumbered, and they will end you. What do you think they'll do with me?"

"I'm trying not to think about them and you."

"You shouldn't have returned home, Rohan."

"Don't say that." I cup her cheeks. "After all this time, we still have something. Don't deny us now, because I don't think we'll get another chance."

"I can't lose you too," she whispers.

And there it is. The reason why I stay inside even when darkness falls and several wolves appear on the lawn. If I face them, Freya will follow me.

I cannot have her follow me outside because of what happened to her the last time she got between me and a challenger.

Tonight, I will stay inside.

Tomorrow, however, is a different span.



SOMETIME DURING THE NIGHT, Douglas finally gave up on trying to draw me out for a fight. The howling stopped, and the wolves retreated. After the ordeal, I forced Freya back into her room.

I did not sleep.

I made my way back into the shop, where Grand and I crafted wolf traps, something that's been outlawed in our lands since the truce with the Ott clan. Since the Ott clan members started howling around my home, wanting to kill me and breed my omega, I opted for dealing with them in ways my alpha wouldn't approve of. The traps could hurt any and all wolves, including Cara and my son, Duane, the two wolves that might snoop around the house.

I swipe an old sack from the floor and open it so I can throw the traps inside.

A whistle comes from the door.

I look up.

A wee alpha stands there, her lips pursed. "Aren't those outlawed?"

"I'm a pirate," I explain.

"I heard them last night." She moves out of the way as I step outside, squinting in the bright, cool sunlight. The forest

is quiet except for the birds flapping their wings and calling out for each other.

“You stayed indoors right?” I wiggle my nose trying to make out her unusual scent but still can’t place it.

“Duh. I’m not stupid.”

We walk toward the forest. “How many do you think there were?”

“I counted eleven.”

I stop and stare.

“Yeah,” she says. “Used to be four, but I think Doug’s pack got bigger since you came around.”

They would tear Freya apart. I can almost taste my rage when Freya walks outside, and I force myself to regulate my temper.

“Hey, guys,” she says, shouldering a large brown sack. Grand joins her, and the pair head for the stable.

“Hey,” Cara greets them. “You going somewhere?”

Grand’s walking slowly behind Freya, who’s already inside the stable. She comes out with a pair of horses and helps Grand onto the saddled one.

“Freya?” I call out and drop the sack I’m carrying just as she mounts the horse.

The skirt of her long black dress covers the horse’s back as the animal swishes his tail, behaving rather restlessly, as if Freya intends to ride him. “Ya!” The horses take off behind the house.

What the fuck? Is she running from me?

My alpha instincts ignite like never before. Magic explodes around me, and I’m in my werewolf form in an instant. Pulling back, all my weight on my hind legs, I howl, announcing the chase to the omega wolf.

ROHAN

A lycan male can take three forms. A wolf, the one we generally use for hunting and fun. Then there's a male form, and the third is the form in between: a werewolf, part male, part wolf. When challenged, we often use this form.

I'm running in werewolf now because it's faster than my wolf form, but when I catch up to Freya's horse, I sense the animal's distress. Slowing down, I hear another lycan running behind me. Snarling, I hide in the bushes and wait, my claws flexing and relaxing. I hope it's Douglas.

I'll ambush him.

Licking my teeth, I'm anticipating the copper taste of his blood when the alpha female pup zips by me, does a double take as I stand, trips and rolls in a heap of fur and leaves, somehow straightening before hitting the tree. I laugh, and in turn, she picks up one of her knives and throws it.

I duck at the last moment. The knife snips off a strand of my hair. She almost killed me. Alpha females are crazy!

Smiling smugly, she leaps away, disappearing into the trees. I take an alternate route and cut the distance, catching up with Freya's and Grand's horses, which are galloping down a clear path. In the forest, parallel with the path, I run alongside them, catching glimpses of the alpha pup on the other side of the horses.

The alpha has healthy protective instincts, meaning the omega and the elder, two of the weaker members of our little

group of four, should move in the middle, with the alphas running on both sides of them.

She might make a fine launa if she decides to join a lycan clan.

Suddenly, Freya jumps off the galloping horse, and magic around her flashes.

In werewolf form, she leaps from the path and into the forest, then lands right in front of me. To avoid tackling her, I veer left, spot a giant tree, spin away, scrape my knee on the trunk, and trip, lunging forward, waving my arms to prevent a fall.

Omega females are crazy too!

On the other side of the path, the alpha pup is laughing as she continues to pursue Grand.

Freya steps in front of me and smiles, showing me her canines.

With bright hazel eyes and red fur, Freya is a long-haired lycan. When she wags her tail, she shows off the silky long hairs on it. My knob grows hard, and with the weight between my legs, I'm not sure I can run anymore.

I rumble, a mating call saying, *Let's do this, lass.*

She strides up to me and sniffs my chest.

I expect her to bend over with her bottom up and hands on the nearest tree, but instead, she throws a net over my head and pulls the rope. Cackling, she disappears into the trees while I'm slashing the net and the stretchy rope that's holding my thighs. The net's made of slippery elastic, and it seems like every time I slash a piece, it tightens around me more.

Freya's sprinting. If I don't hurry up, she'll slip away, and I won't find her. Just thinking about not catching her or not finding her makes me crazy. I slash at the rubber around my thighs and spring after her.

The chase goes on for the better part of the morning.

The howling of the wolves tells me we've crossed a boundary, so I must pause to howl back in a way that lets the clan know I'm a clan mate, not a random wolf. They howl again, more of them this time, and since Freya isn't answering, I'm pretty sure they'll come after her as well.

So now I'm trapped in a rubber net, chasing after my omega while trying not to kill a pack of wolves on patrol who are also chasing her. Great. This is a great morning. Not!

When Freya crosses another boundary, more wolves join the hunt, and when I cross into the immediate vicinity of the den, the wolves start to close in all around me. Most of them are young horny males who've rarely or never had a wolf female as a partner before. And I know for a fact they've never seen or smelled an omega female.

And mine is in heat.

All this makes my gums itch, my chest expand, my claws lengthen further. I'm sprinting at top speed when I burst out of the forest and into the meadow before the clan's den, looking desperately for my omega.

Hundreds of lycans live in the den, a massive structure inside Eleanor's forest.

Several lycans in the meadow stop to regard me.

I pass them by and stride toward the den, glancing left and right and not seeing my omega. Where the fuck is she?

"Freya!" I shout, but in werewolf form, it comes out as an awkward sound, something like a pissed-off rooster who lost his hen and now's he standing at the top of the fence, gazing over his flock and screaming his lungs out.

Sure enough, when laughter rings out, I transition into male, my brother's brown cutoffs ripping and dropping to the ground. I leave them behind and throw up my hands. "Freya, I am not amused! Where are you?"

A whistle sounds. Lenox, the clan Alpha and my cousin, stands in front of the den's dining hall, barely able to catch his breath from laughter.

I stalk up to him. “Where is she?”

Lenox wipes tears from the corners of his eyes. “Oh, how the mighty players chase pussy and fall.”

“Stop fucking around. We have an omega on the loose.”

Freya pokes her head out from behind Lenox.

I blink. “You’ve got to be kidding me. Are you twelve?”

She steps out from behind him, wearing a little white see-through dress, showing me the outlines of her breasts and nipples. Her hair is mussed and her eyes are completely hazel.

I stare.

Lenox stares.

I think the entire den is standing and staring behind me.

Freya swallows and wrings her hands. “I’m hungry,” she says softly. I’m certain she’s whispering because of her discomfort with being in crowds and her innate shyness, but that just makes her sexier. And her voice... Oh, the voice. When an omega goes into heat, everything about her is crafted by the goddess to attract an alpha mate.

And what better way to attract an alpha than to ask him to care for her, feed her?

There’s a moment of silence, then every wolf besides Lenox (because he’s the only mated wolf in the clan) scatters. They’re going hunting, gathering...

No. Fucking. Way.

“The omega is mine!” I shout and turn around. “I’m going to kill anyone who brings her so much as a cup of water.” Good thing I’m second only to Lenox, or I wouldn’t stand a chance. Wolves respect strength. Still, I might have to protect my claim on an omega even if I’m in my own clan.

For now, the gathered males groan in annoyance and give me a few dirty looks as they pass us to get into the dining hall. Once most of them are inside, I relax my shoulders.

Lenox picks pieces of net out of my hair, off my shoulder, my belly. He stares at the rubber between his fingers. “What the hell is this?”

“A hunting net,” Freya says.

Lenox frowns, then sobers, and I can tell his mind went the same place mine did. “What’s it hunt?”

“Nottornos.”

Lenox glances at me before asking Freya, “Where did you get this?”

“A friend gave it to me.”

“A friend,” Lenox repeats. “Eat breakfast with me and tell me all about it.”

I clear my throat, wanting to rip out Lenox’s if he thinks he’s having breakfast with my omega. My instincts don’t care that he’s a mated male. In my head, everyone wants my omega, and so I must either kill all males or lock her in a cage.

A caged omega kneeling and begging for my leaking knob immediately makes me regret I haven’t kidnapped her and put her on the ship. It’s sailing to a private island, where the only things to do are fuck and eat.

Lenox walks backward into the diner. “I’m not going to feed her.”

“Others might,” I bite out. I’m not eating with the clan. She isn’t either.

Lenox jerks his head and moves into the dark tunnel leading into the hall, where the voices of hundreds of males put me on edge.

I grab Freya’s elbow. “This is dangerous.”

“This is necessary.”

“You’re in heat.”

“Not yet.”

“Yes, but they don’t know that, and they’ve never seen you like this.”

Freya rises on her toes. I dip my head so she can whisper at my ear, “Are you afraid for my well-being, or are you being selfish, asking me not to show anyone else what I look like nearing heat?”

“Both,” I answer immediately. “Maybe weighing heavier on the second reason.”

Since we’re in the tunnel, her hazel eyes shine like beacons. I just want to pin her against the wall and slip my knob inside her.

Lenox returns. “When I walk, you two follow. Or do you need to be reeducated on how you behave in my den?”

Freya drops her gaze. “No, Alpha.”

I glare. “Pulling the Alpha card, are ye?”

Lenox winks. “Trust me.”

I trust him. Of course I do. He’s my Alpha and like a brother to me.

We walk into the diner. Hundreds of males are going about their business. At first.

It takes a moment for her scent to reach them or for them to spot her inside. Freya is petite, with large breasts and hips, a small waist, and red hair she often wears up and out of the way. Her eyes are hazel and her lips are plush. She looks and smells like a lycan breeding wet dream.

She’s an omega.

Nearing heat.

And I’m the male who wants to claim her, and not just this one time. I want her forever. My instincts force my change, and I shift into werewolf form, signaling that I’m ready to kill anyone who even so much as sniffs her out.

FREYA

Staying at home no longer seemed smart. Not since Douglas rounded up the lycans from the Ott clan and surrounded the house. We spent the entire night listening to their howling, clearly announcing their intent to claim me.

There seems to be quite a few wolves in his pack.

Perhaps even a dozen, which is too many for a single omega, especially one who's never been shared. Or who doesn't even want to be shared, but would rather be taken by this one infuriating male.

Rohan.

Who, instead of cowering inside the house and packing up our stuff so we can leave in the morning, spent the evening furthering his plans to secure the house. He'd already started with the traps and intended to set them while the pack of wolves were there. I begged him to wait till the morning, giving me enough time to think this through.

If we stayed another night, I fear Rohan would have set the traps and one of the wolves would get injured when they returned for me. The injury would be treated as a sign of aggression. Not that there needs to be more signs of aggression for the males to fight. Douglas stated his intent to mate me this coming full moon, and Rohan wouldn't let anyone touch me.

They would fight.

Since this is a challenge for an omega claiming, Douglas rightfully fights in a pack of possibly a dozen, while Rohan is

only one male. He would lose. Though he is strong, challenges involving several to one end up with the single male torn to pieces. Those kinds of fights are rare.

Perhaps because there are no omegas around.

Perhaps because the lycan males in our clan have more honor and fight one-on-one.

Or maybe I'm an optimist and reality is much different.

The hundreds of clan mates in the dining hall make me nervous, but with Rohan in his werewolf form declaring his claim on me, and Lenox climbing onto one of the tables to introduce us as a couple, I'm hoping my decision to ride out the heat inside the den is a good one.

After Lenox announces us as a couple, he hops off the table and joins us. Several clan mates in the line for the buffet of food set up on the tables to the right of the entrance move out of the way for their Alpha.

We follow him and wait for him to fill his tray.

Lenox grabs a bowl of fresh-cut apples and a cup of water, then moves out of the way. I glance at Rohan who is also frowning, finding it strange that that's all Lenox is having for breakfast.

Rohan grabs the tray with his big hand and drops it, the claws and paw-like hands intended for ripping flesh not holding objects.

"Nobody will steal me, Rohan," I say. "This isn't necessary."

He grunts.

Sighing, I fill a tray with food for the two of us and start to move toward the table, when Lenox tsks.

"This way," he says, and dutifully, we follow.

Lenox used to have a mane of dark hair on his head and, one could say, on his chest as well. He's shaved now. The look suits him well. His hair no longer hides some of his handsome

features, like his prominent, hard jaw and the dimple that appears in his cheek when he smiles.

He takes us back out of the dining hall and marches toward the residential parts of the den. As we round the corner and the residence structure appears, I pause. Although it's the same forest and the same trees, the trees seem smaller when viewed from the den than from my kitchen window.

A few males are just leaving the woodland, and the magic that happens when we change forms flashes like sparks in the chimney.

“Hey,” Rohan says. “They’re coming from the road. Don’t worry. They’ll be here.”

“Who?” I turn to see he’s abandoned his werewolf form now.

“Cara and Grand,” he says.

Oh, right. He thinks they’re making their way down. They’re not. It was just a show to get Rohan moving without reservations. Cara and Grand are probably back at the house.

“Is it really going to take discipline for two of my oldest clan mates to follow me?” Lenox shouts from around the corner.

“We’d better get going,” I say with an elaborate eye roll Rohan chuckles at.

When we reach the residence, digging near the entrance surprises me. Several males are carrying plants, some potted, some not.

“Are they gardening?” I ask.

A tall, handsome male with long braided dark hair and a black hoop piercing his bottom lip answers. “They are gardening. They”—he winks as if he’s not one of them—“used to wage wars on the seas, board ships, and steal goods, but now, they are gardening.”

Rohan rolls his eyes like I did only a moment ago. “Freya, this is Bram.”

He tips his hat.

“Bram Wattson?” I ask.

“Aye,” the lycan says. “Ye know my family?”

“A wolf named Frida Wattson taught me how to speak fae. Her husband’s name was Bram, and you look like him.”

“That’s my grandpa, and I was named after him.”

“Well, you tell them Freya McMar sends her best.”

He smiles, showing me his teeth. “So you are Freya.”

Rohan spoke about me. Not knowing what he’d said, I tense.

The young male tips his hat at Rohan, then gets back to work. In fact, all the males who are gardening no longer stop to listen, but go out of their way to work with their backs turned.

Rohan and I start walking again and bump right into Lenox.

“Are you about ready to follow me inside, or should I take you two by yer ears and drag you in?”

“We’re going,” I answer and keep moving inside.

Having been in this part of the den when Duane was a wee lad, I take the long hallway on the right toward the Alpha’s chambers. The massive wooden doors open, and a nonlycan female walks out. I stop dead in my tracks.

She does too.

We stare at each other.

Her eyes and facial features are so different from ours, and yet they’re the same. It takes me a moment to guess who this is. The princess. It must be. Who else can walk in and out of Lenox’s chambers as if she belongs there?

She wears a short simple dark blue skirt with a light red sweater, and her hair is pulled back tightly at the nape of her neck. I expected a young female dressed in fine linen wearing a pretty crown and expensive jewelry.

Lenox gives me a tiny shove at the small of my back. “Go on inside.”

“Don’t. Touch. Her,” Rohan says in a low, menacing voice.

Lenox growls. “Settle down.”

“Don’t touch her, and I won’t have to settle.”

The girl looks like she’s ready to bolt, awkwardly holding the door half-open, unsure what to do. The aggression of two alpha males makes me hornier, but I want Rohan to *settle down*. He’s overly agitated and possessive. Our Alpha is right to call him out.

“Hey, did you bring a pickle?” a female voice asks from inside the chamber.

Lenox steps back from Rohan and eyes the girl at the door, who shakes her head.

“You asked for fruit, lass.”

“Oh, did I?”

The female standing at the door pinches her lips to stop from laughing before she says, “I will get the pickle, milady.” She leans to whisper conspiratorially, “Milady is not ready to receive anyone.”

Lenox pats the lassie on the shoulder. “These are my closest friends.”

“Even more so, then. She would want to make a good impression.”

“I’m sure she will.”

Seemingly unconvinced, the lassie swings the door and stands aside, announcing, “The Alpha has brought company, milady.”

Lenox takes my hand and, eyes on Rohan, walks me inside the room.

The scent of a pregnant female hits me immediately. It spreads through my body at lighting speed, and my breasts start tingling as if anticipating nursing the wee bairn.

Across the room, leaning against a massive dark wood headboard on an imposing bed, is a pretty nonlycan female wearing a white silk nightgown, white pearls, and pretty teardrop pearl earrings. Her dark hair stops just past her jawline, and she wears bangs that make her appear even more youthful.

The metal bucket at the bedside along with a stack of cloths for wiping as well as the beads of sweat on her forehead make me think she's having pregnancy-related stomach sickness.

Lenox walks past me and places the tray on the mattress next to her.

He lingers, and when they look at each other, I can *feel* their mating bond. They say there is no closer bond than the one between a mated pair. The loyalty and love cut so deep that one becomes the other's half, the marking on the back of the submissive wolf's neck a constant reminder she's claimed.

A submissive party could also be from another species.

This is the Kilseleian princess, and not a wolf female, who Lenox claimed.

Next to me, Rohan bows at the waist.

I hold back my nurturing instinct that insists I should hug her and tell her that this trying period of pregnancy shall pass. Instead, I curtsy as best I know how.

Clearly caught off guard, and in bed, the princess starts fussing with her hair. She sits up and pinches her cheeks, then folds her hands gently in her lap. "Hello," she says, voice measured and formal. "Welcome. Please do come in." She sweeps her long, elegant hand, my gaze catching on a stack of shiny bracelets on her wrist. "Set up your breakfast on the terrace. I would rise and greet you, but I'm afraid I'm not feeling well."

"It shall pass," I say quickly.

A small smile lifts her pretty hazel eyes. They're not glowing with the magic of the omega wolf the way mine are, but they're pretty nonetheless. And I didn't even know

Kilseleians had hazel eyes. I thought the eye color was exclusive to an omega wolf in heat.

I know very little of their world.

The lass who was on her way out opens the terrace door. Brisk morning air sweeps inside, making the sheer white curtains flutter. Rohan puts our large tray on the round table for four and pulls out a chair for me to sit down. I sit, expecting the two males to join me, but Lenox heads out. “Come with me.”

Rohan swipes a piece of bacon and crunches it between his teeth. “We’ll catch up later. Don’t go anywhere.”

“As if.”

“I mean it, Freya. I have a cage with your name on it.”

The heat in my belly flares. “You do?”

Rohan’s blue eyes flash with magic before he shakes his head and walks away.

The lass moving about the room looks from me to the princess, then back to me. She hooks her thumb over her shoulder. “I was going to grab something to eat, but I can stay if you need something.”

She’s looking at me, and I don’t know what she expects me to say so I shake my head. “I’m fine.”

The lass leaves, and the awkward silence makes me feel... well, awkward. I don’t know the princess and would rather eat alone in whatever rooms Lenox assigns to me. When I ran for the den, I didn’t plan as far ahead as rooms, but Lenox will find something. He’s the alpha. I’m the omega. He’ll find a way to keep me in the den and secure me so that Rohan can breed me.

It’s in everyone’s interest.

Including mine.

ROHAN

In the dining hall, Lenox and I grab breakfast and head for his secluded table known as the “alpha table” in the clan. That’s because Lenox used to share breakfast with Kenna, but since the alpha female of the clan attacked the princess and died at Lenox’s claws, he eats alone.

Before visiting Freya, I stayed at the docks on my ship and would eat there, only coming to the den when I was certain my son, Duane, was on patrol. We’ve made an art of avoiding each other. I wonder what he’ll do when he finds out his mother arrived and I intend to breed her again. Not that he has much say in the matter, but still, he is my son, and I’m holding on to hope it’s not too late for us to repair our relationship.

Lenox scoops a pile of sausages and shoves them into his mouth. He’s eating like a starving wolf, as am I, having run in my werewolf form the better part of the morning. Not wanting to talk while stuffing out mouths, we eat quietly for a while, and once we’re almost full, I pour us some milk.

We chase down the unchewed food and wipe the mustache with the backs of our hands before speaking at the same time.

Lenox leans back. “Tell me.”

“I went to see Freya.”

“Obviously,” he states.

“The house is about to collapse on itself.”

“It’s what... Grand’s age?”

I nod. “Over three hundred, I’d say. The wood is rotting, the roof likely leaking in places. I fixed the stairs.”

Lenox purses his lips. “How did you talk her into coming here?”

“That’s the thing. I didn’t.”

His eyebrows shoot up. It’s the only hair that fully grew back after he punched through a magical blood shield that flayed his skin and muscle, in some places to the bone. Lenox is an exceptionally strong lycan. I don’t know any other creature who could’ve survived the shield’s melting temperatures and killed all his foes at the same time. He’s a clan Alpha for a reason.

“She came here on her own,” I tell him.

Lenox tilts his head. “I’ve tried to get Freya down here since... Hell, I cannot remember a time when I didn’t try to get her to live in the den.”

“Duane has been trying to talk her into coming down?” I ask.

Lenox nods. “Duane. Me. Kenna.”

Kenna is a sore subject for Lenox. The alpha pair grew up together and has led our generation through school, life, revolt, territorial wars with the Otts, peace, and now trade. Kenna disliked that Lenox had mated a Kilseleian, and she tried to eliminate the princess. Lenox killed Kenna just outside the residence part of the den.

“While at the cabin, did you visit Roger’s grave?”

“Briefly.” I didn’t get to say what I went there to say. I couldn’t. Not yet. Truth be told, I don’t quite know how to grieve my brother. It’s like a piece of me is missing, and I can never get it back. But the piece of him broke off when he married Freya and also when I bred her.

Even so, I can’t deny the void I’ve felt since I learned of his departure.

I clear my throat. “Grand should be arriving shortly.”

“How did you get that ol’ wolf to come down?”

“Again, Freya.”

“Damn. Well, it’s good to have you back, and it’s wonderful to have an omega around. My princess will need someone like Freya.”

He means the omega wolf, for omegas have a specific role in the clan. They are nurturers. They notice things neither alphas nor betas do. They notice people’s emotions and take care to ensure we come together as one. They also help with pregnant females and nurse the young. Milk from the omega wolf provides immune boosters and keeps the clan pups healthy.

But there’s one thing that the omega wolf can do that Lenox is counting on. Her presence makes females go into heats. We don’t have many females, but the ones we have should want to breed. Our future depends on it.

“About that. I don’t know if Freya is staying. She could want to breed with me in the safety of the den and return to the cabin.”

“As in she’s gonna have you service her and then go about her life on the farm?”

I nod. “She might.”

“You know her better than I do.” He pours us more milk. “Will she?”

“I used to know her. It’s been over twenty turns.”

“I know how long it’s been. I’ve raised your son.”

I lean back. “Ah. Now you’ve decided to gut me?”

“Not at all, but this is clan business. You must know that after Duane found out Roger wasn’t his real dad, he moved in with me. We are at odds with each other now. His dominance is seeking leadership in the clan.”

“What do you want me to do about it?”

“I want you to give him your fleet.”

I blink. “Repeat that?”

“Your fleet. Give it to your son.”

A dozen thoughts assail me at once. While sorting through them all, I ask, “So he can leave the pack?”

“For now. I am not ready to pass on the torch, and he is ready to take it. I would hate myself if I did to Duane what I have done to Kenna.” He leans in when the dining hall quiets. The clan’s listening. I lean in too and let him whisper in my ear. “There are only so many kills an alpha can carry out before it becomes ordinary, and I don’t want to be that alpha. I don’t want to be my uncle.”

He means my father, who killed all his brothers and beat my brother and me so that we would never rise against him. Lenox, however, rose that one time. My brother was there for him. I had already sailed. And because my brother showed Lenox loyalty while I couldn’t be bothered with clan politics, Lenox granted him a favor with Duane.

He took on Duane and taught him everything he knows. He developed my son into one of the strongest alphas this pack’s ever had. And now he wants him gone.

“I have to think about it, Lenox.”

“He wants to see the world. It’s not just me wanting what is best for everyone.”

“Not to mention our new trade deal with the Summer Court.”

After the savages conquered the Kingdom of Kilselei and removed the ruler who had enslaved and mined their magic for centuries, the Kilseleian princess escaped Lenox’s mating claim and hid inside the Summer Court. When Lenox found out, he sought me out, and we sailed there on my pirate ships.

He picked up the princess and claimed her.

While Lenox kept himself occupied (obsessed) with his mate, I started negotiating the trade deal with the Summer princess, a deliberately deceptive royal who enjoys being overlooked and perceived as a pretty blonde play toy. She’s a

savvy negotiator, and we laid out the terms of the trade Lenox and her brother, the Summer king, signed.

Now, we must deliver the goods, meaning we must secure the trade routes. My ships weren't the only pirate ships threatening the goods on those routes, and the fae hired our muscle. "We will deliver on our end," I tell him.

"Will we?"

"Damn you!" I slap my palms on the table. "I need more time!"

Lenox stands slowly, cracks his neck, shakes out his shoulders. "Outside?"

"I'll race you there, pup."

"Oooo," sounds throughout the dining hall.

Lenox bitch slaps me and sprints outside. Cursing, I sprint after him and jump him just beyond the entrance. Horses grazing in the pasture scatter while the males pour out to watch the fight.

On the ground, Lenox and I wrestle, and in the midst of teeth and claws and grunting under the alpha not trying to kill me, all I can think about is the life I gave up so that my brother could live the life he wanted. And how much I missed the simple things, like Lenox pinning me under him.

Me cheating and jabbing his side with a claw.

Him yelping like a donkey's arse.

When we were young, Grand would shout at us, calling for us to quit behaving like wee lads. Truth is, wee lads express their feelings freely and without boundaries. When we grow up, we shut up, somehow training ourselves to hold back and say only parts of what we mean until the emotions and things left unsaid overwhelm us and eventually shatter us into pieces we must hurry up and collect, because time stops for no one.

I spent twenty turns away from the love of my life so that the other part of me could live out his short life with her. As I lie bleeding from a split lip next to Lenox, who's bleeding from a broken nose and a few scratches here and there, I

realize I no longer regret leaving for the seas. Had I stayed, my brother would not have had the life he had with Freya.

That was his time.

My time is now.

FREYA

The terrace offers a wonderful view of the mountainous forest, and it makes me feel like I'm still at home, sitting on the roof, waiting for the night to fall so that the moon will shine brighter, and I can enter my heat.

I haven't felt my heat in over two hundred moons. Like a cup of hot water, it churns in my lower belly, raising my body temperature in case the alpha decides to take me in the middle of the night on the cold forest floor, so I won't freeze to death.

The increased temperature also makes my blood circulate faster, which shows in my cheeks, making my entire complexion appear healthier, my scent stronger. Since females in the clan tend to adjust to each other's cycles, my presence should ease the princess's pregnancy and make other females go into heats.

"Your breakfast is getting cold," the princess says from inside her chamber.

Blinking away my contemplative thoughts so I can return to the present moment with her, I glance inside the room. The wind lifts the curtains, and through them, I see that the princess is sitting up at the edge of the bed.

I rush to her side. "Oh no, please don't feel obligated to sit with me. Stay in bed."

"I'm fine, really." She smiles and holds up her bucket. "My new accessory."

I help her walk outside and retrieve blankets when she shivers as she sits with me. I cover her shoulders and ask, "How old are you?" The moment I say it, I gasp, horrified I asked. "Didn't mean to ask you that out loud," I self-correct. "Forgive my manners." I sit down and close my hand over hers, noting that she runs colder than I.

"I'll tell you my age if you tell me yours," she says.

"Deal." I eat my breakfast.

"I'm nineteen," she states.

I almost drop my fork. She looked young, but I thought twenties at the very least.

"Your turn," she reminds me.

"Fifty-two."

Her eyes widen, and now I don't feel so bad for thinking her too young. She must think I'm ancient. Granted, some spans I feel ancient, but not this span, not when I'm in heat.

"But you look no older than thirty."

"Lycan perks."

"Yeah, I guess so. Lenox is the same way. Young looking, I mean."

"He's twice my age," I say.

"Pretty hot for a grandpa," she says, and I laugh. I like a female who can make and take a joke. Humor has been missing in my life. It's good to laugh again.

A gust of wind blows strands of her hair into her face. She lets it, doesn't put it behind her ear or try to move it as she watches me eat. I finish the entire plate and push it away, wishing I had a jug of milk to go with it.

"Can I bring you tea?" she asks.

"I'm fine. Do you happen to know if Lenox's sister is around?"

"Oh yes, Mackenzie. She should be downstairs in the nursery. She and Lenox are renovating. Marybell too." The

princess clears her throat. “Marybell is my lady-in-attendance, whom you met when you first came in.”

The brunette. Lady-in-attendance. What an odd title. I have no idea what it means, and, although curious, I hate prying. Besides, I’m painfully awkward in the company of strangers, though I have to say, the princess makes the conversation more pleasant than I expected it would be when Rohan and Lenox left us together.

I think she might know I have nothing to say and so many things to say at the same time, because she says, “You are Duane’s mother?”

“I am.”

“He’s very friendly.”

“My son flirted with you?”

She swallows, a red blush spreading over her face. “He’s just friendly.”

Oh no. I hope my son doesn’t like Lenox’s princess, because Lenox will surely kill him the way Rohan almost killed Roger.

“I will speak with Duane about this.”

The princess frowns. “There’s nothing to say. I was only trying to make conversation.”

Oh. Oh! “I’m being weird, aren’t I?”

“Not at all. Shall I go lie down and leave you alone?”

Standing, I help the princess back into bed and then sit with her there the way I wanted to when I first came in. I tap my lap and let her lay her head on it. She smiles as if I’ve offered her jewelry, and I run my hand over the silky curls of her dark hair.

“Your staying here is comforting,” she says. “My queasiness is easing.”

“I’m happy to hear that.”

“Are you a healer?” she asks.

“I’m an omega wolf.”

She looks up. “What’s that mean?”

“It means I bring together the females of the pack.”
Among other things.

“I thought the alpha wolves did that.”

I shake my head. “Alpha females protect and enforce rules. Omegas nurture and procreate.”

She swallows. “Like mothers?”

“Something like that.”

“I wouldn’t know anything about motherhood, and if my mother is any indication of how I’ll parent, I’ll make a terrible mom.”

“You will make a great m^athair.” I want to add that I will help her, but I can’t because I have no idea what will come of Rohan and me. We will breed and then what? I will return to the cabin, and since Douglas wanted a breeder, when I’m already bred by another, he will back off as he will have no use for me.

“My mother never did this with me,” the princess says.

This, meaning sitting with her and playing with her hair. “Mine didn’t either,” I tell her. “Mine was an alpha female and not particularly affectionate.” But she was fierce and died trying to keep me when Rohan’s dad came for me. It’s a terrible story I was too wee to remember in detail.

“You cured my sickness. You must stay with me.”

I chuckle.

She lifts her head and sits up, her eyes wide and pleading. “Promise.”

“I can’t promise that.”

“Why not? Aren’t you and Rohan a thing?”

“We’re not a thing.”

“But...but he’s crazy about you.”

“He is?” I fish for more.

She nods vehemently. “He brought his entire fleet here for you.”

“His fleet?”

“Oh yes. He commands hundreds of males who live on over seventy ships. It’s almost like a clan of his own.”

“I had no idea.”

“Ask me, and I’ll tell you what I’ve heard in the Summer Court.”

“You were in the fae court?” I squeak out.

“Many times. Have you been?”

I shake my head. “Haven’t been places, no.”

“We can visit whenever you want, you know.”

“I don’t think I would like boats too much. I fear being stranded in the middle of the ocean. I can’t even swim well.”

The princess lies back in my lap, and I cover her with a fluffy feather comforter I want for my nest. My nest. I have so much work to do and only a few nights before the full moon.

“There’s a portal in the woods,” she says.

“What do you mean?”

She turns on her back and blows her bangs out of her eyes. When they return to the previous position, I move them away from her forehead. Those bangs need a trim. I make a mental note to give her a haircut later.

No, no. She isn’t my child. I won’t parent her. Not more than I already am while coddling her now. One would think I’ve known her for fifty turns, not a few moments, but I can feel she needs this. Besides, the princess is lovely.

“Freya?”

“Hm?”

“Where did you go?”

“I’m sorry. What did you say?”

“I said there’s a portal in the woods. Prince El’jah uses it.”

Odd. “Lenox is aware of the portal?”

“Mmhm.”

Fae portals on our lands are outlawed. I pour a cup of water for myself and sip. “We didn’t used to be so friendly with the fae.”

“Because of their wars and what they did to the lycans during their wars. How they used the portals in the lycan forests.”

I nod.

“The Summer Court are our allies now. We even have a trade deal with them.”

“I had no idea.”

“The point is, I’m feeling much better now, and we could visit the fae court if you’d like.”

“I wish we could go, but you are pregnant with our Alpha’s bairn, and I’m an omega wolf approaching heat.”

“And?”

“And I would presume Lenox would not permit you to leave the den, and I have a nest to make.”

The princess sits up so quickly, she startles me. “What?” I screech.

“A nest!” Her eyes widen, and she leans in. “You nest?”

I give her a side-eye and a nod.

“Like the fae females?”

I smile. “The fae nesting practice comes from lycan omegas.”

“It does?”

“Mmhm. Have you never heard the story of the fae king and the omega wolf?”

She shakes her head at the same time as the door opens and Marybell walks in quietly. When she sees us on the bed,

she pauses. "I can come back."

The princess pats the bed. "Come hear the nesting story about a fae king and an omega wolf."

Marybell climbs on the bed, and the princess adds, "The fae didn't start the nesting practice."

The lass gasps. "But I thought with the way they glamorize it, it's their own tradition."

I shake my head. "It's a lycan story as old as time..."

ROHAN

After the brawl, Lenox and I sit on the grass while healing. My lip's still bleeding, and when he bit me, his tongue got caught between his canine and my thigh, so it's swollen now, leaving Lenox's speech slurred.

Since the males have already gathered for the fight, they hang around, chatting up Lenox, who shakes his head while they make fun of him. For as long as they do so respectfully and in good humor, he lets them jab. I mean, he did fail to withdraw his tongue before he pierced my flesh with his canine.

He's an exceptional alpha male for the clan, and they love him, would die for him, and if Duane won the challenge (which I don't think he can), I'm unsure what would happen with the clan. The males seem loyal to Lenox.

When Kenna left, I expected more males would follow her and leave the clan with her, since the female alpha can also promise her pussy, but they didn't.

Some of the other alphas in the clan are here, sitting with us. Betas are bringing in the booze now, starting to build fires, and soon enough, it's lunchtime and also a shift change. Males whine about the patrols, and Lenox shakes his head, telling them he won't listen to their sorry-arse excuses even if it appears we're having a spontaneous party.

Duane is absent.

He's avoiding me.

Been avoiding me since I arrived at the den.

Maybe that's better than the alternative. I think he might want to take a swipe at me. It would devastate Freya if we fought with fists and claws.

Lenox and I, on the other hand, make an art out of clawing at each other.

He enjoys it, and he needs it. Being the strongest male in the pack does have its downsides. During the full moon or when his mate is pregnant, it's difficult for Lenox to purge some of the aggressive energy coursing through his body. The easiest way is to find a sparring partner who can take him on. I'm always up for a brawl, and Lenox knows it.

Across the meadow, Bram and the others are putting away the tools and cleaning up.

"Bram, join us," I shout, but they walk away.

Most of those males are lone wolves I picked up on land during various stops, or they bargained for their lives when my crew boarded their ships. Some have painful pasts as they'd been traded as goods for many turns, thus have lost all sense of lycan community and what it means to be a member of a clan.

Most of the pirates didn't want to dock at home. Last time I docked here, some of the crew left the fleet, reminding me I promised them we would forever live upon the sea.

Before the group leaves, I jog after them. Bram pauses so I can catch up, but the rest of the males keep moving as if they can't get out of here fast enough.

"Have you eaten yet?" I ask Bram.

"We're heading back to town. Job finished and all." He's looking at me as if seeking words that'll say we're leaving soon, but I can't say them yet.

"You could have lunch in the common hall," I try again.

He shakes his head. "Clan dinna like outsiders."

"You're a Wattson according to my omega, so not an outsider. How come you never told me that?"

The male shrugs. “Dinna ken.”

“I’ll see you at the docks later this evening.”

“Same thing you said about last night and the night before.”

“You my mommy now?” I ask.

“Nay, but the males are getting restless. We’re no’ meant for land.”

A wolf is definitely a land creature, but I know what he means. Spend enough time on the seas and you start needing the endless freedom of the blue on the horizon the way a clan wolf needs dirt under his claws.

I clap him on the shoulder. “I have some unfinished business.”

“Ye might wanna finish it fast before the royal wedding. Hell, way before, so that when we deliver on the deal, the fairies still have time to make the dresses or whatever the heck they need seventeen ships’ worth of textiles for.”

“We will set sail soon.”

Bram scratches the back of his neck and spits to the side. “Problem is, yer *business* is more serious than I thought.”

I tilt my head. “What do you know?”

“That bonnie omega, Freya, her name is?”

“Mmhm.”

“Down at the docks, males are talking about her.”

My fist might sail right into his nose. “Saying what exactly?”

“She’s with a pack.”

“Who’s pack?”

“Douglas Ott’s.”

“She’s mine.”

Bram lifts his arms. “Hey, I’m not arguing with ye.”

“Keep an ear out for me, would ye?”

“Aye-aye, Captain.” Before leaving, the male salutes, pretending to take off his sailor hat. We don’t wear our uniforms off the ship. Or on the ship, for that matter, but there was a period where I fancied myself a real sailor and made everyone wear a red-and-black uniform with thin white ropes woven as buttons. When we boarded the ships, we looked like a patrol nobody’s ever heard of, not dirty lycan pirates out for gold and riches.

Lenox joins me. “Your crew wants to leave.”

“They do.”

“Train your son, and everyone gets what they want.”

“Everyone means Duane too. Does Duane want to sail?”

Lenox drops a hand over my shoulder and steers us back toward the residences. “Duane wants to live and have a chance to prove himself. He also wants to strike out on his own, where nobody tells him what to do. Make it happen, my friend.” At his door, we knock softly, but when nobody replies, he pokes his head inside and glances back at me, amusement coloring his eyes.

“Come see this.”

We step inside his chambers.

Freya, Gloriana, and Marybell are all napping in a pile on the bed, folded over each other like wolf cubs.

“Took her no time to gather the younger females around her,” Lenox says. “I wonder where my sister is.”

Seeing how Freya fits into the clan inside the den makes me wish the clan had more omegas. She arrived, and within a single span, the males have already responded by gathering on the meadow, and the females, even nonwolf ones, have grouped around her like pups around the tit.

“She is so good for the clan,” Lenox says as if reading my thoughts. “Don’t fuck it up.”

“Eh.”

“You will fuck it up.”

“Probably.” Definitely.

FREYA

The light trickles through the curtains and the strong cold wind whips my face. I gather up the soft fluffy comforter and bring it to my face. The scent of my Alpha making me scrunch up my nose and push the comforter off my body.

Wait... Since when do I think of Lenox's scent as unwanted?

The doors close, and the wind stops beating my face. I hear sparks of fire, and when I completely come to my senses from the deep sleep, I scent two alpha males in the room. One of them is not welcome. I peel back my upper lip and growl low in my throat.

Wait a moment... Where am I?

I snap open my eyes. In wolf, I'm curled up in the bed with two females. Clarity comes slowly, and I remember we are in the den inside Lenox's chambers, and this is his Kilseleian princess mate and her attendant Marybell.

I shake my head.

The scents are all wrong.

I'm in wolf.

Why would I transition while sleeping?

"Easy, girl," Lenox says as he approaches the bed.

The hair on my back stands on end, and I peel back my lips. *Stay away from me!*

No, no. That's not right. This is my Alpha. I should submit, and yet I can't let him near me. I don't want him to breed me. Not him.

I snap my head to the fireplace, where Rohan stokes the wood and blows on it to make the flame grow. I whine to get his attention. He puts away the poker and nears the bed. When he arrives, he strokes behind my ear. "You're in heat."

I am not in heat. The full moon is in two nights.

Lenox frowns. "The moon is not full yet."

Exactly.

Oh, yes, right there. I nudge Rohan's hand as he scratches *the spot* behind my ear. I nuzzle at his other hand, and he gets the hint and pets me with both hands. I rub against his torso, give it a lick. My tongue in wolf is coarse, and Rohan's ticklish, so he steps away.

The females are rising from sleep, seemingly as dazed as I am.

The princess covers her yawn with the back of her hand. "Is it tomorrow yet?"

"Same span," Lenox says, and gathers her into his arms.

She rubs her face. "Marybell, I think we napped the morning away."

"You have," Lenox says.

The other girl grunts. "I feel weird, milady."

The princess blinks, more awake now. "How do you mean weird?"

Marybell's sweating, and her red cheeks might show she's feverish. She's holding her middle. "I think I'm sick." Marybell curls up in a fetal position. "With cramps."

My wolf finally decides to let me transition back into a female. I fix my clothes and ask, "Is your cycle due?"

She shakes her head.

I crawl over the bed and sniff her. She smells...like a wolf female in heat. "Impossible."

"What?" the princess asks, leaning over, looking terrified. "What is wrong with her?"

I glance at Lenox, who's standing behind the princess. also looking at me for answers. If I say what I smell on the female, they'll think I'm crazy. It's not possible. She isn't a lycan.

Standing, I fix the strap of my shirt, and my own heat gushes out of my channel, wetting my thighs and dripping on the floor.

Lenox's nostrils flare, his eyes fluttering, then rolling to the back of his head. Instantly, they glow blue-white and his gaze lands on me.

Rohan starts growling. "Don't you fucking move, my friend."

The princess looks from one male to the other. "What is going on?" She can't smell my heat or hear the drops of it landing on the floor.

Lenox swallows hard and scoops up the princess. "We're out of here."

"Marybell," the princess says.

"You too. Come on, Marybell."

Marybell tries to stand, but sits down again on the bed. Her hair is mussed and her cheeks are red. Even her brown eyes are brighter. Not the hazel of the omega wolf, but brighter.

"I don't think I can walk," she says, then yelps and bends over. "Ouch, the cramps are terrible."

"I'm scared for her, Lenox," the princess says. "Let's get her to the healer."

We have healers? Perhaps now that we have Kilseleian people in the den and in the town, but we never had to have them since wolves self-heal. It's part of our natural-born magic. As are female heats, and there is no way other species can smell the way we do, so I'm probably wrong about

Marybell, my judgment clouded by my own heat. Yes, that must be it. I went into a fever two nights before the full moon, so clearly my senses are also whacky.

Lenox puts down his princess and walks to Marybell, but stops when a knock comes on the door.

“Great timing,” Lenox says, already smelling who that is. “Come in.”

In walks my son Duane.

Duane is a dark-haired male who is taller and wider in the shoulders than his father and, if you ask me, is the handsomest wolf in the clan. He’s also the strongest (again, if you ask me) and currently looks like he can barely contain his rage.

To Rohan, he says, “The fuck you doing here?”

“Greet your mother with that mouth?” Rohan replies.

Lenox curses. “Easy, lads.”

“Fuc—” Duane steps toward Rohan, but Lenox gets in his way.

“The female needs a healer.” Lenox points at Marybell, who’s curled up on the bed, looking miserable.

Duane stares at Marybell. “What’s wrong with you?”

Lenox growls. “Take her to the healer and find out.”

Duane’s not stretching out his hands, but he looks down at the girl as if debating whether he’s going to take her.

“Son,” I say. “Please take the poor lass to the healer in town, and I’ll come have breakfast with you after...”

“After you fuck him again?”

Rohan snarls and moves toward Duane, but I jump on him, lock my legs around his waist, and hang on so that if he wants to fight our son, he’ll injure me. Rohan won’t let that happen again. My near-death experience at his claws broke him. Broke us. I think he wants to put us back together, and sadly, Duane is the glue. It’s not only about the two of us. It’s the

three of us, and I must save the two males in my life one at a time.

“Take the lass,” Lenox orders in his Alpha voice that Duane can’t refuse.

My son scoops up Marybell, who immediately buries her face into the crook of his neck. “Oh boy,” I hear her mumble.

“Mother,” Duane says. “Come with me to town.”

“I can’t.”

“You can. You just don’t want to.”

“And what if she doesn’t?” Rohan says.

Lenox snaps, “Quiet.”

The snap of an Alpha feels like a whip. Everyone falls silent, and the two other males stop growling.

“Good,” Lenox says. He grabs Duane by his shoulders, spins him, and pushes him outside. The princess follows Duane, and I hear their footsteps moving away and down the hall.

Lenox stays at the door. “You two will use my chambers.”

“We can’t.” I slide off Rohan’s body, even though all I want to do is rub myself on the male wolf.

“You have no choice.”

“I can nest in the stables. There’s hay, and in a pinch, hay makes for a great nest.”

Lenox shakes his head. “By the way, I know about the Ott lads you escaped from.”

“I didn’t think you knew,” Rohan says.

“Why do you think I urged you to get up to Freya’s? If the Ott was after her, they must think she can be bred, and I’ll be damned if she won’t have an opportunity to breed with one of my males first.”

He urged him? Rohan didn’t come for the lockdown. “There was no lockdown,” I conclude.

“There was, but earlier in the cycle, and it was the excuse he needed to get up there. But the time for games is over, Freya. This clan needs you. The clan needs the pair of you. I’ll put an omega male on duty here to fetch you what you need. Happy heat, and may our goddess bless us with more of your strong cubs.” Lenox softly closes the door.

An awkward silence blankets the chambers.

It shouldn’t feel awkward.

But Lenox has a way of dropping truth bombs whether people are ready to hear them spoken out loud or not. One of those truth bombs is that I want a cub. Lenox knows all about Roger and me struggling to conceive, and he knows about the lass that I carried and lost right after birth. Rohan doesn’t. I won’t tell him.

The loss changed me.

It changed Roger.

We grew apart.

So how is it that Rohan and I didn’t grow apart? I feel about him the way I’ve always felt about him.

“Freya?”

“Hm?”

“Do you want to nest?”

I nod.

He turns toward me and lifts my chin. I can tell he wants to say something, but instead, he pecks my lips. “I need to hunt and gather.”

“No time.”

“We must eat. We have no idea how long the heat will last.”

Excitement runs through me.

Rohan wags his eyebrows. “I will fuck you in every hole and on every surface of this bedchamber.”

“It’s a nice big bedchamber.”

“See you soon.”

ROHAN

I walk down the hallway and fill my lungs with air. When I round the corner, step outside, and shift into a wolf, I throw my head back and howl until my lungs burn. I'm announcing I'm going out for the hunt and gather.

I'm telling the clan we have a breeder.

And I am also inviting them to compete with me for the prey.

Grand would tell us stories of how lycans bred omegas when he was young. He said that when omegas would go into heats, the clan males would form packs during hunting, competing as smaller packs. It used to be a sport in the clan, one everyone enjoyed and got to be a part of.

Hunting, challenges, and breeding used to be the lycan way, as natural to us as breathing. Now, it's military training and patrols, and let us not forget the whores in town. Since we lack lycan females to breed, and since the territorial wars don't interest most females, my people have been stripped of what made them who they are. We put aside the good stuff in favor of fighting for the land.

While I understand the need to protect and provide territory for our clan, it's come at a steep price. Hence, having an omega in the clan, nesting in the Alpha male's room, even though she's not his to breed, is a big deal.

My paws step on wet grass, denting the soft ground under my weight. In case the fairies over in the Summer Court across the seas haven't heard me howl, I wiggle my arse as I fill my

lungs again and empty them screaming into the skies. The clan mates howl back, most of them already in the forest getting a head start.

A massive wolf with bright blue eyes and obsidian fur tipped in silver strides up to me. It's Lenox. He rubs his bulky frame against mine, growling playfully and slapping me with his tail.

Twice.

I nip at his side when he tries to tail-slap me again.

Nose to nose, we lock eyes, and I see the moment he decides to race me into the forest. I shove him and sprint, my claws ripping into the dirt, throwing chunks of grass around me. With the speed of an arrow, I burst into the forest, propelling the clan mates forward into the race until there's at least five dozen of us sprinting together as one.

And it feels like coming home.

I forgot how wolves do it.

When I'm in wolf, the world becomes simple again, and the sense of being part of the clan makes me happy. That might be because the hunt is fun and games for them, but a more serious matter to me. I must gather the food, and I have only a single span in which to do it, because when night falls, I'll have Freya.



Freya

THE MOMENT ROHAN leaves the chambers, I start with the nest, my instincts drawing me back to the bed. Part of the reason I joined Gloriana in the bed is the scent of the clan Alpha male. It makes me feel safe and taken care of. Protected.

Lenox's protection has never been more apparent than now. He gave up his mating chamber for me and Rohan to use during my heat. Lenox knows Rohan well, and while Rohan

loves my omega dynamic, he is a possessive male who would kill for the right to breed me exclusively.

I know this only too well.

It's the reason I'm in the den and not at home.

It's the reason we couldn't come together as a pair.

Omegas take packs of males, not a single male. But our attraction breaks all the rules, and Rohan and I destroy everything.

In the spirit of destruction, I start stripping the sheets off the bed. Once I have the bedding bundled, I drop it off outside right next to the biggest chest I've ever seen. It has a strange foreign marking on it, almost like a magical inscription. Circular. They call these things something...

Ah! A sigil.

And judging by the colors of it, it's Kilseleian.

"Thank you!" I shout, thinking maybe Gloriana is still within earshot.

At the end of the hall, I hear steps ascending the stairs before she pokes her head around the corner. "Welcome! All of it is new. Clothes and bedding sets from the finest shops in the Summer Court's market, which you and I shall be visiting soon."

"Okay!" That puts a smile on my face as I drag the trunk inside the room.

I open it and start pulling out clothing, some made from silk, and even the ones that are made of simple cotton are thick threaded and soft to the touch. Near the bottom, I find new bedding. "Oh my." This is some of the finest fabric I've ever touched. And so pretty. Peach sheets with a navy feather comforter. As I dig toward the bottom, I uncover a treasure.

A rug made of red fur. Not a skinned wolf, so it's fine.

It's bigger than I am and coarse to the touch. What kind of animal is this? No matter, it's a gorgeous piece and a favorite.

I'm keeping it. I make the bed first and neatly tuck in the bedding, then leave it alone so I can make a nest in the corner.

The red fur is thicker than any elven carpet I've ever seen, so I put that at the bottom. From my sack, I retrieve then pitch the tent from my room and place two old blankets inside. I arrange the carved goddess figurines around the nest, creating a boundary, and then throw all but two fluffy pillows from the bed into the nest.

Almost done.

Candles are next.

I'm sure there are some around. I search by the fireplace and find none, then open the wardrobe.

"Oh my." The scent of a pregnant female hits me again and goes straight into my belly. I bend over in pain as the cramps start, my body craving Rohan's knob end to blow up inside me after he's seeded me.

I breathe in and out, trying to chase away the mental fog that comes with the heat.

The princess's gowns are glorious. I'm tempted to dress in one and pretend I'm a princess. Her tiara rests on a small velvet purple pillow too. It's so pretty.

Curious, I place it atop my head and turn toward the mirror that's nailed to the wardrobe's doors. Smiling, I fold my hands in front of me and pull back my shoulders the way Gloriana had when I first walked into her chamber. "You may come into my nest, Alpha," I say in my most formal voice.

Giggling, I return the tiara to where I found it and touch the sleeve of a blue silk gown. It feels wonderful. How glorious would it be to visit a place where such clothing can be worn?

ROHAN

Wild boar swung over my shoulder, a pair of rabbits and a duck hanging by the feet from my hands, I walk out of the forest like a male who's caught a dragon. I feel pretty damn great about the catch considering Lenox shadowed me the entire hunt and even stole a few bunnies right out from under my nose.

On my way to the kitchen in the back, I spot my son Duane across the meadow.

He's coming at me.

But he's on two legs, and although looking pissed off, he won't come at me right now. Lenox starts jogging out of the forest, also heading toward me. He's carrying the bunnies he stole from me.

Duane walks by me and nudges my shoulder.

I snort and follow him into the kitchen, Lenox on my heels. Several younger males earning their ranks in the clan, are working in the kitchen, and I throw the animals onto the metal tables in the middle of the room. "Those are all for the omega. Clean 'em up. Served raw."

"She prefers lightly cooked meat," Duane comments and looks at me, clearly challenging me to a verbal if not a physical fight. The youngsters look from me to him.

"Serve the meat raw. We will have seven meals per span and fresh water." I grab several already-filled jugs.

Duane snorts. "Sear it lightly."

“Duane...” I growl.

He starts walking up to me, but Lenox intercepts and throws a hand over Duane’s shoulder while dropping the bunnies he stole from me on the table.

“Here’s my kill,” he announces, gaze on Duane. The threat is clear. My son better start behaving and listening to his Alpha.

I try to lighten the mood. “The kill you stole after I caught it.”

“Did not.” Lenox walks outside, practically hauling Duane with him. The lycans around us stare, likely sensing something’s wrong, but they can’t quite pinpoint what it is. I presume most of the clan think I’m Duane’s uncle. I’m not. He is mine, and I love him, and I want to do right by him. But that doesn’t mean he gets to tell me what his mother likes or dislikes when she’s in heat.

There is so much about Freya only I know.

And so much I still don’t know and cannot wait to uncover.

With a bounce in my step, I proceed toward the residence part of the den, where I get ambushed by the Kilseleian princess. She hands me a box wrapped in soft pink paper with a pretty pink bow on top. “So last moment, I know, but this is the best I could do.”

I stare at the box. “What is it?”

“A care package for her heat. It comes standard when you room at the Summer Fae Court during mating season, and I got one when I was there, but since I don’t have heats nor did I use it before Lenox...” She pauses, clearly seeking the proper words for how Lenox came about bringing his mate to the clan.

I help. “Grabbed you.”

“I was searching for a less creepy term.”

“No need. You’re among family here.”

“Right. In the box, there are candles, soaps, masks, and also—and I realize you don’t do this in the den—but I have ordered a private barrel with warm water to be delivered as soon possible.”

“Why would I want a barrel of water?” If she said ale, I’d understand.

“For bathing during the heat.”

“Why would I want to bathe?”

She cocks her head. “To keep yourself clean.”

“Bathing will remove my scent. That’s the last thing on my mind.”

“Oh!” Gloriana’s eyes widen. “That’s right. The scent.” She blushes. “I’ll cancel the barrel delivery.”

“I know you mean well, but I have to say this so we’re clear. Nobody goes inside the room at any point. Nobody, especially not a male.”

“But how will you eat?”

“The clan mates leave trays outside.”

“I see. Best wishes, Rohan.” She taps my shoulder, and I cringe. Freya will smell another female on me, and now I must bathe. At the rate people are getting in my way, I’ll never make it to her nest.

We say our goodbyes, and I head in the opposite direction from the room now, the box with the pink bow completely forgotten until I reach the baths filled with the males who’d hunted.

I drop the box on one of the benches and wash up quickly, regretting I’m not going to smell like the forest and the hunt. The wild smell of an alpha who has gathered for the omega is enticing, but it’s best if I wash off any traces of the strong scent Lenox’s princess is throwing around.

Having avoided everyone on the way to the room, I pick up the tray holding a pile of raw meat and enter on quiet feet.

The scent of my omega in heat enters my nose and erects my knob. If my hands were free, I'd stroke it a few times and gather up the precum collecting at the tip, but since I'm carrying a box and a tray, I let the precum drip to the floor.

The fire crackling in the fireplace and a tall stack of wood on the side tells me my clan mates have already been dropping off supplies by the door, and Freya gathered some of it. I put the box and the tray on the table so I can get the fire poker. I stroke the fire and throw in a large log that'll burn for a while.

I don't plan on doing much of anything besides doing Freya.

She drew the curtains to block out the sun, but twilight has settled and the moon shines, though it's not yet full. I take a moment to appreciate the night and where it will take me before I sit on the floor and whistle. "Come out, lassie. Daddy wolf is home."

Freya crawls out of her nest and around the bed. When I lay eyes on her, cum leaks from the tip of my knob. She shaped her hair into wolf ears, and the burning amber of her eyes makes her appear ethereal. She's crawling, her large breasts bouncing between her arms, her ample butt cheeks jiggling with the swinging of her hips.

She pauses at the trail of precum I left.

Eyes on me, she sticks out her tongue and licks it off the floor.

I chuckle. "That's a good lassie. Come get your treat."

Freya kneels between my legs, her knees parted, her hands resting on her thighs with her palms facing up. A submissive pose telling me I can do what I will with her.

Gently, I take her wrist and kiss her palm, making sure our eyes stay locked.

While I love the glow of her hazel eyes, I'm still a male presented with a stunning female omega, my omega. My gaze strays toward her swollen breasts, which I cannot wait to suck.

Freya shimmies.

I kiss her cheek, lingering there to inhale her scent while I drop her wrist back to her thigh and trail my claw over the inside of her leg to reach her dripping pussy. This close to Freya, I can hear and feel her breath hitch, a tiny whine escaping her.

Without stimulating her core too much, I cup her and swipe gently. She shudders and whines as I collect the liquid heat only an omega female makes and rub it onto her breasts so that later when I'm sucking on them, I can get some of the nectar too.

Leaning back, I collect myself lest I lose control and start breeding her immediately. Between my claws, I take the piece of meat from the tray and dangle it above her nose. Freya tilts her head up and opens her mouth so I can drop the meat inside.

She chews and swallows. "Duck."

"Your favorite."

"You remember."

Like I said to my son, I know his mother, what she likes, dislikes, how she behaves during her most vulnerable times. And I'm blessed for having Freya choose me as her partner during her heat.

FREYA

It feels surreal that I'm in the den during heat and being serviced by Rohan.

After Roger passed away, if someone told me I would get a second chance with Rohan, that Rohan would return and send me into heat, I would tell him to muzzle it.

Even though I question her motives since it's not a full moon, I send a grateful thought to our goddess for putting me on the floor this evening. Here I am, in my fifties, kneeling between a male's strong thighs, begging him to fuck me well and hard. It's not a bad place to be.

Rohan feeds me what he'd hunted with the clan mates, a tradition that lycans have preserved from the time when we roamed the forests wild and free, instead of tending farms, building bridges over rivers, and constructing entire dens.

He's very careful not to let me suck on his fingers, but teases me slowly and deliberately. I'm hungry both for the delicious meat of his prey animal and the knob between his legs that spurts cum occasionally, signaling to me that Rohan is a strong breeder.

I know he is. He's the one my wolf picked to grace her nest. It's in the omega nature to gravitate toward the breeder that's most likely to produce strong offspring. We made Duane. The best thing the pair of us ever did.

Rohan takes my face between his palms. "Let go of everything you're holding back or inside your head and let me take you."

He wants control, a power exchange between an alpha and an omega wolf. I crave it, and I cannot refuse. Better yet, I want it, and I know Rohan can give it to me.

“You’re such a good lass.”

I smile, loving his praise.

Rohan runs a palm over the top of my breast, moving toward my throat. Once there, he wraps his fingers around it and squeezes, holding my breath. In response, the heat churning in my belly turns to liquid, and my needy, empty pussy starts undulating.

He gives his knob a few jerks, and it’s enough to spurt cum onto my breasts. I spread the cum all over them as Rohan lowers his lips to mine and whispers, “Be a dirty lass, Freya, and bring me that old flogger you have hiding inside your nest.”



ROHAN

Floggers are Freya’s favorite. I can make it sting, yet not hurt. I release her, and she lifts her large breasts into her small hands, offering me a taste of omega nectar. It’s clear and leaking from the right breast. I stick out my tongue and lick, my knob instantly spurting cum at her, my instinct to take her so great that my control nearly snaps.

That’s what the omega wants.

For my control to snap and for me to sate her heat quickly. At the last moment, I sit back and shake my head.

“Clever move. But it won’t work. I’ll fuck you whenever I please. Get the flogger. Meet me by the bed.”

Standing, I leave her there and walk to the bed, where I check the leather straps I nailed to Lenox’s bedposts on each side of the footboard. Not long ago, I brought my alpha to the Summer Court so he could claim his princess. We were sitting at the bar, shooting the shite, and I finally asked about Freya.

That was when Lenox informed me of my brother's death that happened almost three turns ago.

He thought I knew.

I had no idea.

That night, we drank. Or, rather, I drank, mourning my brother and dealing with the feelings I have always had for his wife. His beautiful wife, the love of my life, the female I tried to forget by sailing away and drowning myself in liquor. And yet, the moment Lenox delivered the news, the only thing on my mind was that I had to reclaim her.

As I watch her now sitting by my leg with a flogger between her teeth, I can't help but think our mother of nature is trying to give this clan life, and that she's somehow ensured Freya and I, the alpha and the omega pairing with a history of breeding a strong alpha male, are mating again.

Crouching, I take the flogger and stroke her cheek with the thongs. "The goddess has given us a second chance so you can have that little lass you've always wanted."

Freya stares at me. "You can't promise me that."

"But if I could, I would, because the truth is I want to give you everything you ever wished for. Including the good times we're about to have. Are you ready?"

Freya nods. "Yes, Alpha."

"That's a good lass. Let's get you on your back, legs spread."

Freya crawls up on the bed while I swing the flogger a few times to get a feel for it. The leather is smooth and worn, soft to the touch.

On her back with her legs spread, Freya's showing me her pussy. It's cute.

I swipe up some of the omega liquid heat and use it to lubricate her small hole. When Freya's eyes flutter, I push my middle finger inside the pucker hole, and her gasp tells me she likes it.

I play with her hole a bit longer before placing her ankles into the bedpost straps and stepping away.

“What’s the count?”

“Fifteen, Alpha.”

“Let’s begin.” I land the soft leather straps on her clit. And on her clit again, making her pussy swell and redden from impact before moving onto her thigh then back at the pussy, my figure-eight movement lacking practice. This is our thing. The flogger, the heat, the submission, and it feels so right that I wonder how it is that this single omega who should by nature want a pack of those twelve lycans picked me.

She picked me and ran from the house, knowing I’d chase after her.

She came to the den, where she could surrender to me. And she surrenders so well. While I flog her, not a peep comes out of her mouth. Rewards are in order.

Placing the flogger aside, I fist my cock and tap it over her swollen core. It releases liquid the moment my cock taps it, and in turn, my seed spurts out. The fluids mix outside us, on her lower belly, while I unstrap her ankles.

“Scoot up on the bed.”

She moves, and I kneel between her legs, then lower my body on top of hers, aiming the tip of my knob at her small back fuck hole. Slowly, I push inside as Freya whines. I shush her with my kisses while moving in and out of this space that’s tight and unwelcoming, yet all mine to ram.

As I move slowly, I watch her beautiful eyes fill with tears. I know not to ask her anything, not even if she’s okay, mostly because I know she’s overwhelmed with all the things we are and have been. We are complicated. And wrong. But also terribly right for each other, and it’s never been more obvious than it is now. When we fuck.

Making love to Freya is like a dance of pleasure.

So when I withdraw from her and leave her unsatisfied, she knows what to do. Stay as she is while I grab a clean cloth

from her supplies in the sack she'd brought from the house and pour some of the water on it that I brought for drinking.

I clean up my knob and kneel on the bed, flip her onto her belly, and mount her the way a lycan ought to mount his bitch in heat.

FREYA

Behind me, Rohan positions himself at my core, which is pulsing with need and preparing my channel for my alpha's cock and the pain of its penetration. Rohan is a large male with a massive knob. I wiggle my bottom, tempting him to hurry up and enter me already.

He lays a few spanks on my bottom.

I yelp and bite the pillow, growling into it to muffle my scream at the same time as he enters me with force. Rohan slips a hand over my mouth, the other hand holding me down while he rides me into the bed better than I ride my horse. My eyes roll to the back of my head at the feel of his large member inside me. I cum almost immediately, my pussy convulsing, milking his cock for seed.

Above me, Rohan's growling and grunting and finally releases my mouth in favor of positioning his fists on the bed and resting his weight on them so he can pound me into the bed in earnest. The headboard beats against the wall, the entire bed shakes, and I spread my arse cheeks with my hands to give him better access, as if that'll somehow make him penetrate me deeper.

He's balls-deep inside me already, and when he comes, his body freezes, his teeth snap together as he inhales, then howls so loudly that the windows rattle, all the while emptying inside me. Jets of cum shoot out and keep shooting. Rohan howls, and my omega pussy keeps milking his alpha knob for semen.

Once he empties the ball sacs entirely, and the wolves outside return the howl, I smile, sated, and wiggle my bottom again, reminding him to blow up his knob end inside me so that all the healthy cum stays inside, ensuring I'm bred. To be fair, that's not the only reason I want that. It's also because I love the feeling that comes with the knob end, specifically Rohan's. It's pierced, and when I'm in heat, the metal piercings are cold, soothing my inflamed channel.

Not to mention, they feel fantastic inside it.

The knob end staying firmly deflated, I wiggle my bottom again, but Rohan's unmoving behind me. I hear him breathing heavily, and I turn to see his head is hanging low, his dark hair curtaining his face. With a groan, he slips out of me and lets the seed trickle out.

I flip onto my back and make a sad pouty face by rolling my lower lip.

Rohan lifts his head. His eyes blaze, his canines protruding past his lip, his gums swollen as if he wants to transition.

“Um... We've never done it *that* way, but we could.”

Rohan's eyes widen, and he rolls onto his back, pulling me with him. I lean my elbows on his chest. “What?”

“You're a freaky lass.”

“And proud of it.”

He chuckles, a boyish smile on his face that reminds me of a younger Rohan I remember coming home from the patrol with Lenox, our alpha, plotting the next move against the neighboring clans.

Rohan worked at the docks, patrolled on first or second shift, and would come home late for supper, while Roger only worked the docks, leaving him with more time spent at home with me.

Rohan also hung out with Lenox more.

Got beat by his dad more.

Worked more.

Took on more responsibility for our welfare and has always been the alpha of our small three-pack.

Even though he was the responsible one, he has always been as playful as Roger.

“You look handsome when you smile,” I say, moving strands of his black hair away from his face.

“I always look handsome.” He winks.

“I see the turns that have kept you away haven’t defeated your good humor.”

“But they have defeated yours.”

I shrug. “It’s not been easy.”

“It will be better now.”

“Because you’re here?”

“That’s right.”

I open my mouth to argue, but Rohan presses a claw over my lips. “Don’t. Let’s not talk, Freya. Let’s not. I fuck up everything when I talk, and you always catch me in the act, and the next thing we know, we’ve said things we can’t unsay for another two decades. I want to share silence and fluids with you.”

He removes the claw, and I smile. “Silence and fluids, you say?” I straddle him, positioning myself over his knob.

Rohan groans and grabs my hips. I lift off him long enough to reach behind me and grab his shaft and put it at my entrance. I lower myself onto him and throw my head back at the same time that Rohan grunts and grabs my breast. He sits up and puts my breast into his mouth and starts sucking.

Tongue under the nipple, he’s milking the nectar while I’m milking him for seed. We start out slow, but soon I ride him frantically, and then he breaks the vow of silence and asks, “Did you miss me?”

I don’t answer him.

“Did you think of me when you were with him? Ever? Even for a moment?”

I jab my claws into his back, and he yanks my hair and leaves my neck exposed. The aggression turns me on even more. As I near orgasm, the heat in my lower belly burns like molten lava.

“Because I missed you. I missed you every span, every moment, and it’s been a long two decades without you.” He releases my hair, and I chase my orgasm while tears spill from the corners of my eyes, the overwhelming emotions of sharing my heat with the male my heart longed for drowning my ability to bottle up my feelings and not be vulnerable in front of him.

But he’s exposing himself to me too, telling me he missed me, telling me he’s loved me all along.

A sob rips out of me when I come, and I try to push him away so he won’t see how he breaks me.

Did I miss him?

How dare he even ask me that?

I push again when he holds me, and I beat his chest when his arms come around me, and I want to lift off him at the same time, when he blows up the knob end inside me, forcing our proximity.

“I’ve got you, Freya.”

I sob.

“I got you, lass.”

“He asked Grand for a tea he knew would make him sleep and never wake up. I gathered the herbs,” I say between sobs. “Grand put the tea on the tray and left it on Roger’s nightstand, and he finally slept in peace without pain.” And that’s how Roger passed.

ROHAN

Freya's tears wet my chest, and my heart breaks for what she had to do.

My brother suffered from lycanotrophia, a disease that causes the body to stop producing the fluids required to lubricate the joints so that we can shift into our animals. Even if he never shifted again to preserve his life, the disease progresses, eventually causing pain and paralysis. The ones who suffer from it choose when and how they depart.

Roger chose.

"I wish I knew."

She lifts her head, eyes puffy and sad. My lovely omega wolf. I kiss her on the mouth. "I want to put the past to rest and start over."

Freya's eyes brighten. "I guess we could start over."

"We can."

"What of our son?"

"What of him?"

"He will hate this. Us."

I scrub my face, then lay us down on our sides.

Freya covers us with a soft blanket from head to toe.

The room is a breeding ground, but her nest is the tent she brought with her. Only she comes in or goes out of it. As an alpha male, I know not to step inside the boundaries she set up

around the nest. It's instinctual, the need to make her feel like she has a space that's entirely her own.

Under the covers, we stare at each other and share intimacy while remaining connected with my knob still firmly swollen inside her.

“I promise to repair my relationship with Duane.”

Lenox wants me as his second, which leaves Duane with the ships. I know my brother showed my son the ropes, and my son has been working on the docks since a young age, but captaining a fleet during their transition from a pirate fleet to one that serves just our clan will be a different matter.

Rebellion is certain.

Hell, an uprising is certain whenever a new captain takes over.

While I want to tell her about Lenox's proposition, I'm having a moment with Freya and will bring it up another time. Lenox would love nothing more than to command me to do what he wants, but he knows better than that. If I'm not happy with what he wants, I'll take off on my own. Both the Summer Court and the clan are in my pocket now, my crew the only ones who can guarantee a safe passage for the trade.

It was not a coincidence that the Summer princess and I worked out a deal like the one we agreed on. She secured a piece of trade profit for herself, apart from the profit the court will make. I don't blame her, and I didn't ask questions. A female ought to take care of herself.

Freya took care of herself and our son. “You've done a great job raising our boy.”

She blushes prettily. “Roger was a good father too.”

“I bet he was. Probably why Duane is so angry with me. He wanted to be more like my brother.”

Freya sighs, “When you told him he's not Roger's, he was angrier with Roger and me for not telling him.”

“Did you explain you didn't know before he hit puberty?”

Freya sucks in a breath, then pinches her lips before answering, “Yes, but at that point, it didn’t matter.”

She paused. I know her. She’s hiding something... Did she...? “You’ve got to be kidding me.” I deflate my knob end.

She’s frozen, waiting on my reaction, and I’m reeling. “You knew he was mine from the inception?”

“Rohan, let me explain.” She props herself on her elbow, red hair falling over her shoulder.

Fuck! I sit up and stare at the fireplace. “You knew he was mine. You married my brother, and you knew Duane was mine. Why? Why would you do that?” Freya’s eyes fill with tears again, but I have to know. I can’t let it go now.

“Because it was the only way I could think of to keep you both.”

I scratch my head. “You lied to both of us.”

“Because you wouldn’t share!” she screams, then kneels on the bed. “You would not share me. I am an omega wolf, and you...” Flustered, she slides off the bed and wraps a blanket around herself. “The rules of nature say that omegas are shared. We had a pack of three, and Roger would’ve shared, but you...” She marches up to me and jabs a finger into my chest. “You would not share. *Mine mine mine*,” she imitates me. “And you bred me without him present, so Roger was hurt and left out, and he asked that I make it up to him by marrying him. I said yes.”

“Duane was mine. You were mine. Even back then, you were fucking mine!”

“I was his too!”

“Liar,” I bark.

She slaps me. “Don’t you dare question my love for Roger.”

I smirk. “That’s what this is about. You’ve always loved me more, and you feel bad about it.” I make a fist and hit my chest. “Mine.”

I grab the back of her neck and bring her closer to me. The blanket slips off, leaving her soft breast on my chest. “Admit it, Freya.”

I turn her around and bend her over the bed, holding her down by folding my body over hers. Her skin burns with heat, and she groans, knowing she won’t resist my advances again.

I kiss her cheek and tease her with my knob at her entrance. “You don’t have to admit it. I know it and you know it. And Roger knew it.” I enter her from behind and fuck her hard, moving the entire bed, making it bang against the wall, shaking the picture of Lenox in wolf form above the headboard.

Freya’s hair falls over the bed, and as I near my orgasm, she props herself up on her elbows and hangs her head, hair parting at her nape, leaving it exposed. While fucking her, I lick across the back of her neck, my gums swelling, my teeth extending, my jaw wanting to expand into a muzzle.

I lick and lick, and my growling escalates, and then I bite her. I bite down, and I don’t want to let go.

I must let go.

Omegas aren’t supposed to be bitten in a way that signifies a marking. This type of sexual play, when a male bites a female on the back of her neck, signals a possessive intent.

Omegas aren’t supposed to be claimed, and certainly not by a single male. And as I have no self-restraint, and perhaps I don’t when it comes to Freya, I release her and utter, “Mine.”

FREYA

We're lying like stacked spoons in the drawer, fitting each other perfectly while I'm wondering what in the goddess's name has just occurred. I knew Rohan was a possessive male, but I didn't think he'd go as far as trying to mark me as his.

He can't. The goddess picks a mated pair. It is not up to us, and marking plays are exclusive to the mated wolf pair. He knows this!

"What..." I lick my dry lips. "What happened?"

Rohan remains quiet.

I whisper, "An omega can't be claimed."

Is this what he really wants? Oh no... Oh no... I feel as if a veil has been lifted from my eyes, and I see Rohan clearly. How could I have been so blind and stupid? This male, this wonderful male, wants a mate for himself, but he fell in love with an omega who can never mate. For over twenty turns, he's sailed the world in search of the female for him, but I keep pulling him back home where he could never be happy because I can never be only his. The omega female doesn't get a single mate.

It's the law of nature.

Confused, I rub my neck and feel the indentations on the back of it.

Peering behind me, I look at Rohan, and even he seems surprised at what he's done.

It's a big deal. Huge. What does he mean by it? He kept saying *mine mine*, but I didn't think he'd try to mark me. He really means for me to be his, and he wants what he can never have, what I can never give him. Unsure what to make of this, of us, and not for the first time, I wait for him to say something. Anything.

In a single span, we burned and froze. Our relationship has always been a whiplash of emotions and twisted moods swinging from anger to tears. But one thing we shared is our bodies. The one thing we had that is now taken away with his bite.

The weight of his body lifts, and he pulls out of me, his seed spilling onto the mattress.

The door closes behind him, and I'm alone.

Sitting up, I stare at the door, still a bit disoriented, though grateful he left so I can collect my thoughts. Rohan is really great at leaving. Both when he should and when he shouldn't.

With a groan, I fall back on the mattress, and something hits the ground. I scream at the top of my lungs as I scramble off the bed and hide inside my nest.

The door bursts open, and Rohan barges inside with a snarl.

I don't move.

His claws click over the floor, so I know he's in the battle form, and this is confirmed when I see his furry legs standing on the other side of the boundary. He doesn't cross inside, but crouches and peeks into my nest.

Magic flashes, and Rohan blinks. "The painting fell off the wall."

"Hm?"

"It was the painting that hit the ground and scared you."

"The one of Lenox in the strange forest?"

He nods.

"It's a nice painting."

“The princess did it.”

“Wow, she’s very good.”

Rohan nods and, eyes averted, scrubs his face. “About the bite...”

“You’re a one-female kind of wolf, Rohan. You don’t have to explain.”

“I do have to explain. I know omegas don’t mate, but here’s the thing. I don’t regret biting you. Not one bit.”

“You can’t have me the way you want me. I realize this has been your problem all along.”

“It’s really not a problem, Freya.”

“It is. You must leave the nest.”

All kindness or playfulness or, heck, personality leaves Rohan, and a dangerous expression comes over his face, the same one I saw directed at Roger that one span when our lives changed forever. It’s a scary expression. I look away, though I don’t back down. “Leave the nest.”

“You will suffer if you are not serviced, and in case my intentions were unclear, let me clarify, I’m the only male you’ll ever breed with.”

“Rohan...”

“I mean it.”

“I’m asking you to leave.”

He narrows his eyes. “Is this about the bite? Do you hate it that much?”

I crawl out and face him. He’s still crouched, but rises slowly, eyes straying to my breasts before snapping up to my head. Such a male.

With my palm on his handsome face, I tell him, “I can’t be that which you need. I am not your mate.” Omegas do not get mates. Even if I weren’t an omega, the mating is so rare, a blessing completely out of our control that we don’t even know when or how it happens. Some mating happens instantly,

at first sight, the way Lenox's was. Others take turns to snap into place.

The elders tell us stories they've seen or heard or, if lucky, like our alpha, experienced, but in the end, every single story is unique. Apart from one thing.

The alphas often say they knew their mate, but they cannot explain the "knowing."

Well, we all know that omegas don't get mates.

And this alpha male wants one. "Go."

ROHAN

Most creatures have some form of marking rituals. For example, fairies bite and bruise during their matings, and the submissive parties, often female, wear revealing clothing the next span to showcase the markings.

Lycans have similar coupling traditions and when a male bites a female at the back of her neck, he is stating great fondness for her, wishing she would be his mate. Wishing because a lycan recognizes and marks his mate in wolf form. My bite will heal, whereas the bite Lenox left on his princess won't. She is a claimed lycan mate.

Freya is... Well, Freya is mine.

And I must honor her wish and leave the nest.

After slamming the door behind me, I spin and bang my forehead against it. I messed up. I knew better than to bite Freya anywhere on her body and especially not on the back of her neck.

Still, if she thinks I'm leaving her alone in the den full of alpha males just waiting for me to fuck it up so they can take my place, she is mistaken. "I'm not going anywhere," I say and plop on the floor, back to the door, one knee up, elbow resting on it. "Gonna rest here like a dumped old dog."

Freya hears me, but chooses not to respond. After a few moments of waiting for her to change her mind and open the door, I scoot over to the trunk with the Kilseleian sigil imprinted on top of it. This used to be Gloriana's father's sigil. His crown and country now belong to the savage hordes, but

before the hordes killed him, her father wanted to secure a safe passage and a trade with my clan, a similar deal to the one I worked out with the fairy princess.

I wonder if he and Lenox secured it and, if he had lived, if I would ever have found out about Roger's death and Freya being single again.

It's fate that I'm here.

And heck, I don't even believe in fate. Although, I did meet a fate while in the fae court. She was cute and creepy at the same time. Kind of like Freya. Cute most of the time. Really creepy when she's mad.

I knock. "I'm still here." How long has it been? "You need to be serviced. Come on, lass, open up." I open the trunk and peek inside. It's full of fancy clothes and bedding. "Did you see the trunk Gloriana left outside for you? It's got..." I pull out a piece of flimsy see-through golden cloth I think might be a shirt that will in no way cover Freya's large breasts. If she manages to fit them inside this thing, every male in the country will want to breed her.

"Never mind. Nothing to see out here." I pick up a sturdy blue textile sewn into a skirt. It would barely cover her arse. Gloriana couldn't have sent this. This must be a gift from someone from the Summer Court. Fleur. I bet the Summer princess filled this trunk for Gloriana and Gloriana is paying it forward, having nothing else to give since Lenox is keeping her in the den instead of allowing her to shop in the town.

"Let me in." I knock and put my lips on the crack of the door and beg like a horny dog. "Let me in. I will not bite you again, I swear it."

"Go away," she says.

She talked back, so that's something.

Smiling, I sit back down, prop my knee again, and wait. I can wait. I have waited twenty-some turns for Freya's pussy, so what's another two spans? The full moon won't let her sleep, and she'll need my knob. Won't be able to resist. I'll be right here, ready for round two.

A wooden cart on large wheels rounds the corner, followed by a lycan lad we picked up on the ship before sailing out of Kilslei in search of Gloriana.

The lad has had a rough life, and tends to keep to himself, while also taking care of Lenox's chambers. If he's tending Lenox's chambers, then he's probably a weak beta or an omega male. Alphas dislike other alphas sniffing around their females.

The lad must be Duane's age, with light brown hair and the blue eyes of his wolf. He parks the cart next to me, scratches the top of his tightly cropped head.

"You okay?" he asks.

"Mmhm." Sitting at Lenox's door is not at all weird.

"Is the omega okay?"

I growl, but try covering it up with a cough. "The omega's fine."

He flips the large lid covering all the plates on the cart, revealing my fresh catch. Duck and rabbit tonight. Tomorrow, they'll serve the boar.

"I'll push it inside," I say at the same time that the door swings open. I nearly fall on my back from suddenly losing the support of the door.

"Hey, lass, look what else I caught." I stand and go to push the cart, but Freya smiles sweetly at the lad and yanks the cart inside. She slams the door.

I'm outside again.

With the lad who is witnessing my family drama.

"I'll be going, then," the lad says. "Good luck, Rohan."

"Mmhm."

The lad leaves, and I sit back down, listening to Freya chewing. My belly starts growling, and saliva pools in my mouth.

“Better go grab something to eat,” she says through the closed door.

“I’m not going anywhere.”

“You will starve, then.”

“If that’s what you want.”

“Oh, don’t put this on me.”

“I’m not.”

From the other end of the hallway, probably on his way to the nursery, Lenox marches by. He looks my way, looks away, then does a double take.

I wave.

He changes his trajectory and walks up to me. Hands on his hips, he hovers above me, glaring. “What did you do?”

“What makes you think I did anything?”

“Bitch, please.”

I shrug. “I’m innocent.”

“He bit me,” comes from inside the chambers.

Lenox rises an eyebrow. “You bit an omega wolf?”

“It’ll heal.”

“But you bit her?”

I nod.

Lenox shakes his head.

“He bit me on my nape, Lenox,” Freya says.

“Tattletale,” I bark.

“That’s right,” she says.

Lenox strokes his clean-shaven jaw. This male used to grow a beard so long, the clan would make jokes about omegas nesting inside it. But not anymore, and not only because the blood mages he fought one night in the tavern at the docks burned him almost to death, causing his hair to grow more slowly, but also because he’s changed.

I've changed.

Freya has too, and yet, when Lenox sits down next to me I'm taken back to times when my father (his uncle) would beat us and put us in animal trap holes underground. Beaten and feeling defeated, we'd sit like this, our backs leaning against cold, wet dirt with our faces turned away from each other so that when the pain and shame of feeling weak and defenseless overwhelmed us, we could, if we wanted to, cry without being seen by the other.

Neither of us ever cried.

We endured my father's fists as if the beatings were gonna make us stronger.

They did.

The abuse also bonded us for life, which was why I felt Lenox's betrayal down to my core when he chose to defend Roger and Freya's decision not to tell Duane he's mine. Since Roger and I were born identical, our scents are extremely similar, with only a handful of people able to tell them apart.

Lenox said nothing to my son, even though he knew Duane was mine. He had to have known.

"Should I get a board game?" Lenox asks.

"No," I say at the same time as Freya says, "I would. You'll be out there for a while."

"Omega," I bark, "you will let me in when you start hurting."

"I'll use my fingers."

Lenox is grinning from ear to ear.

"I'm happy my family drama brings you joy." Arsehole.

Lenox hops to his feet. "I'll be back with food and a game."

"I'm telling you it's not necessary because Freya will let me back in. Won't you, my sweet lass?"

"No."

Lenox laughs on his way down the hall.

As soon as he's out of sight, I turn toward the door crack and whisper, "Come on, lass. You know you want this big fat knot again. And I'll tell you what. As an apology for biting you, I'll let you ride my face until my tongue and mouth cramp."

Freya snorts. "You like eating my pussy, you dirty ol' bastard, so that's not an apology. Try something else."

"Okay. Okay. I'll buy you a new horse."

"Don't need one."

"I'll bring you a trunk full of pretty garments like the ones Gloriana left for you."

"You're moving in the right direction."

I hear amusement in her voice. "Open the door."

"I can't."

"You can, Freya."

"No, Rohan, you need to leave."

"How many times do I have to tell you I'm not leaving?"

"You can say it as many times as you like, but you have to go. There's nothing for you here."

I leap to my feet, disliking where this conversation is going. I can tell Freya means serious business.

"You're here, and so I'm staying."

"I'm not yours to stay for." It's barely a whisper, but I heard it.

"You can't go back to that. You can't. Not after we spent the span together."

"I can do what I want."

"Not this. You can't throw away the time we spent inside the chambers. Not again. I won't let you."

When she doesn't respond, I bang on the door. "Freya?"

She remains quiet. “Freya!”

Nothing.

“Freya!” I backpedal, intent on kicking in the door, when a strong hand grabs my shoulder. Lenox spins me around and holds me in place. “There’s trouble at the docks. Come with me.”

“Deal with it alone,” I bite out.

Lenox’s gaze darkens, and his upper lip peels back, a loud, deep growl sending me a clear message saying this is not my friend Lenox asking me to come with him to the docks. This is the Alpha Lenox, and I must go.

FREYA

Lenox returned not with the board game, but with a problem Rohan can solve. Likely only Rohan can solve it, or Lenox wouldn't have taken him away from me during heat.

On the other side of the door, their footsteps disappear, and I press a hand over my lower belly, feeling for the signature flare of heat. Puzzled about why I'm not as hot as a furnace by now, I frown.

My last heat lasted for three spans, during which hot flashes came and went, so another flare may or may not come.

However, I know my body fairly well. If I'm already cooling off with only a spasm in my lower belly, my heat might have been sated. It's possible I'm already seeded, but I dare not hope and shove the thought away as fast as it came.

It's a good thing too, because I need to get moving back to the cabin, where I can get away from the den so I'm not around when Lenox returns and delivers the news that Rohan has set sail. Rohan can't stay in one place. It's not in him, and sailing is in his bones, always has been.

In addition, I am not a female for him.

I'm not, because clearly, he needs a female who is his mate in every way, and an omega wolf can't be mated. If he remains, eventually, he'll come to regret staying with me in the cabin, wasting his life instead of riding the waves with his fated lycan mate.

She might not even be a wolf.

She might be on the other side of the world.

Lenox found a mate in another country, and she's from another nation. I used to think mating was a lycan-lycan fate, but not anymore.

After quickly packing my nest into the sack, as I leave the chambers, intent on sneaking out of the den as fast as possible, I pause by the door to stare longingly at the trunk full of fine linen, thinking perhaps Gloriana would send some of the stuff she's gifted me via Duane when he comes to see me.

Or perhaps the princess will pay me a visit herself.

I'll miss her if she doesn't, even though I just met her. There aren't very many females in the clan, and she seemed lovely.

Leaving the trunk, I hurry down the hall and slam right into a body. We bounce off each other. I flail my arms to prevent a fall, but a hand reaches out and grabs my elbow.

It's my son, Duane, and there's a smile on his face. "I was coming to rescue you."

"Oh, I don't—"

Magic flares, and Duane assumes his werewolf form.

He's grown, my boy, standing almost twice my size and covered in obsidian fur with patches of red on his belly. His long muzzle exposes a full set of terrifying sharp teeth as he smiles.

He turns and bends one leg so I can climb onto his back.

I chew my lip, thinking about hitching a ride on his back or running on my own, but since my son won't let me go on my own anyway and we can't stand here and argue, risking discovery, I climb on his back and hold on tightly.

Duane jogs over the meadow, picking up the pace when he hits the trees. He sprints between the trees while the wolves on patrol run alongside him, showing him solidarity. It occurs to me as we race to the cabin as if our tails are on fire that Duane

might've planned to kidnap me. There're far too many young wolves running with us, escorting us to the cabin and away from the den, away from his father, for this to be a coincidence.



MEANWHILE

Rohan

LENOX and I race through the forest to get to the docks in our wolf form, and yet it feels like the trip is taking forever. Has it always taken this long to get to the bottom of the mountain?

We pause just before stepping into the town that now also has Kilseleian folk and not just lycans. Some of the Kilseleians escaped Gloriana's father's taxes and came to live here, some docked after the hordes took over their country, and now all of them are ruled by the princess and Lenox's mate, Gloriana.

Who is a gentle female showing up among her people in fine garments, not in wolf fur.

They're terrified of our lycan forms, especially the wolf and werewolf, so we try to be sensible in town and walk on two legs. There's a guard post near where we exit the forest and enter the town, so we visit it to get the latest news. Nobody is here. Likely because the guard is needed in town to deal with whatever is happening.

I can guess.

The smell of fire permeates the air. Thick black smoke makes me breathe harder already.

We dress in soft gray pants and walk down the street to get to the marina. It seems as if everyone, young and old, is also walking that way, and at the bottom of the street, the gathered crowds are many. We round the corner and stop at the sight of the sea.

Several of my ships are sailing away. Seven of them to be exact. Three more are on their way out of the marina, and my males are fighting on the decks, their claws clashing, the blowing horns calling males to the decks for battle blaring in my ears.

“Fuck.” I push through the crowd, but I can’t get past them all fast enough, so I’m snarling and elbowing people, shouting at them to get the fuck out of my way when suddenly, people scatter as if I’d parted them by hand.

Lenox walks by in his werewolf form. He winks at me.

“Nice job, Alpha.” I follow behind him as he clears the path to a rowboat. We climb in and row it over to one of the ships where my males are fighting, the journey painfully slow.

As I heave at the oars, I consider the last time I was in this very boat with Lenox. “Do you remember when you made me scale the cliff so you could impress your mate?” I ask.

When we were in the Summer Court and Lenox found out his mate was going to a luncheon held at the top of a steep cliff that protruded out over the water, instead of using a portal to arrive at the luncheon, Lenox and I scaled the cliff. In our werewolf form. Which meant we burned the energy it takes to hold a form that’s half male and half wolf while climbing a steep cliff.

We made it then, just like we’re gonna make it to the ship now.

I don’t wait for Lenox to reply because I’m sure he remembers, and since he’s staying in his werewolf form, he’s telling me he doesn’t want to speak, but brawl with whomever we encounter on the ship’s deck.

When we arrive at the hull, Lenox leaps from the dinghy and jabs his claws into the ship’s side, then climbs like a giant insect. Once he arrives at the top, he stands there and throws back his head. The howl that rips out of his chest is a call to end the fighting. It also instantly triggers my transition. Quickly, I scale the boat and materialize next to him as if by portal.

Some of the brawling stopped, but others are still engaging with each other, so I throw back my head and howl, a sign that I've arrived, and I'm pissed, and the next asshole who throws a punch or tosses anyone off my ship is gonna get my claw in their eye.

There're at least sixty males on the deck, tattered clothing clinging to their bodies, blood dripping from their claws. This is good. This is good because it tells me we're still fighting in male forms and not trying to kill each other. Which is kind of important considering seven of my ships are currently sailing away without me giving orders they can leave.

I transition back into male, but Lenox doesn't, which tells the lycans the Alpha is not in the mood for their bullshit. If his warrior form isn't enough indication he's pissed, then him pacing along the railing of the ship clues them in. The clan Alpha is circling them.

I hop onto the podium where I normally make announcements, and spread my arms, opening my mouth to ask what's going on, just as Bram steps forward, others gathering behind him. I have a feeling he'll speak for the group. When he became the spokesperson for the crew, I don't recall, but it's never a good thing when there's a change in leadership of any sort and I don't notice.

Power swipes are dangerous, and they happen all the time in the pirate world. Or anywhere, for that matter, but more frequently among the pirates, where the crew consists of a bunch of rebels and loners, each with their own agenda.

I've managed to lead my crew for a long time, and I have no intention of giving up my helm to Bram. I like the lad fine, but he won't last at the top.

"They sailed," he says. "I warned ye, and ye stayed behind in the den."

"What happened?"

"Polo formed a crew and took seven ships. Was gonna take these three too."

"I see. And you all stepped in?"

“Nay,” Bram says. “We almost joined him.”

I grit my teeth. “Why didn’t ye?”

“Figured that cute little omega will dump ye and ye’ll get your head out of your arse and come back to us.”

Damn. Did everyone foresee Freya would dump me except me? To be fair, I knew I’d mess things up with her again, but I had no idea everyone else knew. I cross my arms over my chest, a smile tugging at my lips.

Bram catches it and snorts, points at me, and speaks to the crew. “She dumped him.”

The crew, still uneasy because they’re unsure what I’ll do and, more importantly, what the alpha circling them will do, stays on guard, even when Bram chuckles.

“She dumped me,” I admit.

“Five golds!” Bram shouts. “Pay up, losers.”

“You had a bet going?”

“Seemed like a sure win,” Moren, one of the cooks, says as he starts collecting money from only a few crewmen.

I rest my fists on my hips. “Most of ye bet on me to fail with Freya?”

“Mmhm.” Bram claps me on the shoulder. “Don’t take it personally.” He locks eyes with mine, and I have a feeling he’s talking about more than just the bet. “Some ships have already sailed.”

“What do ye mean?”

“Lycan pirates don’t get to sail into the sunset with our ladies. We sail alone or with a bunch of lads.”

The crew draws closer, anticipating my response. Bram is telling me the crew is ready to pursue the missing ships and they want me to captain the retrieval. If they wanted Polo as their captain, they’d have left with him. These males are loyal to me.

I stroke my beard and glance at Lenox, who transitions back into the male and slowly descends to the lower deck. He's returning to the den, leaving the decision of whether to sail or not to me.

I must tell them.

FREYA

Arriving at the cabin feels like coming home, but at the same time also as if I left a piece of me back at the den. It's a feeling similar to the one I felt when Rohan sailed after he serviced me those many turns ago.

I remember standing at the docks with Roger and waving at Rohan, who climbed all the way up the ship's mainmast and kept waving at us until the vessel appeared as but a dot in the sky.

Duane drops me off at the cabin's front door and opens it for me. I walk inside and smell the herbs Grand smokes during the full moon. Inhaling a lungful, I pad to the kitchen and find the elder sitting at the table with Cara, the pair of them smoking up the house.

I wave my hand to ward off the smoke before me and open the back kitchen door.

"Duane, leave the front door open to air out the house."

He does, then walks in and pours himself some ale while Grand and Cara stare at me. I'm not sure what they expect me to say or maybe explain, because I need time to figure out what I'm going to do with my life now.

Duane looks around. "Is there something to eat?"

I pull out the pies Rohan made before we left and heat them up. Duane sits up on the counter. "Didn't know we made pies around here."

"Your father made them," Grand says.

Silence falls as Duane pushes away the hot food. “I’m not hungry.”

“Don’t be a whiny little bitch and eat what your mother serves you,” Cara says.

Duane raises his middle finger.

Cara throws up her hands. “I’m not here for the food, so I’ll come right out and ask. Did you breed with Rohan?”

Duane covers his ears. “Hold up. I want to eat something, and then I’ll leave to set up a perimeter. While I’m doing that, you all can talk about my mother’s heat.”

“I thought you weren’t hungry,” Grand says with a smirk.

Duane picks up a meat pie and tastes it, then puts it back, but keeps eyeing it. Rohan bakes a great pie, and I can tell Duane wants more, but he’s proud. Like his father.

I pour myself a jug of dark ale. “Set up a perimeter?”

Duane picks up the pie and starts eating, speaking with a mouth full of food. “In case he didn’t take off after his ships.”

“Duane,” I say slowly, “what do you know about the ships?”

“His crew split. Seven ships sailed.” He swallows and chokes, then strikes his chest for a hearty burp before hopping off the kitchen counter and pouring a glass of milk from the pitcher. He drinks before continuing. “He’s still got the majority of the crew, but if he stays, he’ll lose them all. So he has no choice. He has to set sail. Besides, the deadline for delivering the goods has passed already, and it’s possible the fae will withdraw their funds and cancel the deal altogether.”

“You’re saying Rohan is gone?” Cara asks. She covers my hand with hers and holds it tightly, the way I wish she could hold together my shattering heart.

“Probably. I would be.” Duane kisses the top of my head. “Nothing left for him here, mother. You don’t need him. I’ll protect you, I swear it on my life.”

That’s exactly what I’m afraid of.



TWO SPANS later on the night of the full moon.

ROHAN

A part of the crew separating from the main fleet and going out on their own is fine by me. Sometimes people fall into my fold just to survive, and once they have the tools to survive on their own, they ask to leave, and I help them. Polo could've asked for ships. He knows I would have said yes.

Well, I would have said yes after we delivered the first shipment to the Summer Court. Not before. Not only did he not wait, he stole seven of my ships and all the merchandise inside them. Which is substantial and valuable, seeing as those textiles will be used to make the dresses of some of the most prominent citizens of our world who are attending the Summer king's wedding.

Hell, if any of those sailing textiles were ordered to create a dress for his future queen, I think the Summer king might burn me along with the crew and the ships. The fae are vain and have declared wars over much less than a wedding dress. Or lack thereof.

Therefore, the remaining crew and I took the rest of the ships and chased down Polo and his males. Once we caught up with them, we boarded the ships and preserved whatever lives we could. Most of the males with Polo fought bravely, but pirates won't die for a losing cause or a loser captain so they capitulated the moment I stuck Polo's head on a spike.

Then Bram insisted that we take the seven ships we seized and the three we arrived on and continue on the journey, but I feared we'd get ambushed and made everyone return.

I have enough experience with the trade routes to learn that when ten ships separate from the fleet, they'll be targeted by pirates on the route. Besides, the fairies didn't hire us to fail.

They hired us because we always deliver on the promised goods.

Washed, clean-shaven, and smelling good, I strap on my finest black leather kilt and my clan-colored green-and-red belt before I step onto the deck of my ship. The males hoot as I pick up a barrel-sized basket full of gifts and top it with a bouquet of flowers before disembarking the ship, double-checking I have the marriage collar in my pocket.

I shall ask Freya to marry me.

Since I had time to think while I was away on the sea again, I realized Freya is correct. An omega wolf can't be mated, and even if I love breaking the rules, the rules of nature can't be broken. Not even by me. Not even if I tried harder or begged the goddess or killed dragons as sacrifices to said goddess, all of which I may or may not have done in the past when I tried gaining the goddess's favor.

Since the omega can't be marked as a mate, she will be married.

My brother knew that, and that's why he did it. He's always had more brains and I had the brawn.

So once we dealt with the Polo situation, and my males agreed to dock back at the Port of Eleanor, the parties on the ships resumed. To keep the males happily docked for a while longer, I secured music and entertainment straight from the Summer Court. The parties on the ships docked at the Port of Eleanor are in full swing as I emerge onto the upper deck seeking the Summer fae princess. She's flirting with three lycan males, two of whom are giving her a foot rub.

With her suntanned tones against her long golden hair and those large sea-colored eyes framed in long dark lashes, Princess Fleur of the Summer Court is a stunning beauty among the fairies, and that's saying something since the fairies obsess over beauty and power. Their breeding revolves around those two things, and the three poor lycan souls with the princess have no clue that an affection for Fleur could destroy them.

Our eyes meet, and she excuses herself, then practically glides to the bar. I pour her a champagne flute and grab an ale for myself.

“Did you bring what I asked?” I drink the ale. By my big ol’ knobster, this is some great ale. I slam the glass on the bar and hold back a burp.

Fleur’s lashes flutter as she leans in.

I lean back. The fae are in mating season, and I’m not interested.

Her pretty blue eyes narrow. “If you don’t want me to sniff you, you shouldn’t emit the mating scent. Instead, you should do what your alpha has done before. Douse it in oil.”

“I’m not emitting a scent.” I do not have a mate. Still, I sniff my left biceps. Is it the fancy soap I’ve had forever and never thought of using until now?

The princess rolls her eyes. “You are lycan. Trust me to know these things, hm?”

“I did shave and soak my body for a while this evening.” That’s all she’s smelling.

Fleur purses her lips, yellow flecks of magic dancing in her eyes. “I want to meet the lady who tamed you.”

Smirking, I feel heat flaring on my cheeks. Wait a moment. Am I blushing? What the fuck? This can’t be right. Fleur is doing something to me. These damned fairies, I swear... Better get on with the pleasantries and finish up the business I have with the female. “I must bring her to the court, then.”

“For my brother’s wedding?”

“Deal.” I extend a hand, and Fleur drops a purple velvet pouch into my palm.

I check inside and pocket it the moment I see Fleur has delivered as promised.

She pours two shooters and offers me both. “You look nervous.”

I chug both drinks in rapid succession. “I have never proposed to anyone before.”

She reaches behind the bar and hands me a bottle. “Here you go.” I chug a bit more before stopping so I’m not drunk by the time I get up the mountain.

Bidding the princess farewell, I leave the party, turning once I’m on the street so that the sight of happy drunken pirates remains in my memory just as it is now. With a happy sigh, I leave the docks behind me.

FREYA

The night of the full moon brought the stupid hope that Rohan would return. Twenty-some turns later, yet again, I long for him to come out of the woods and tell me all the things I want to hear. *I love you, Freya. You're the only one for me, Freya.*

And Rohan would say all those things except saying them only makes everything between us more complicated. I cannot be his one and only because as an omega female, I cannot be marked. Meanwhile, as a possessive alpha wolf, Rohan yearns for a claimed mate.

The goddess of nature brought us together only during my heat so that the clan can prosper when we conceive a pup again. She didn't intend for us to mate as fated mates would. If she had, I would not be an omega female, but a beta, and if I were a beta, my life would be so much easier.

If I were beta, I would mate and marry Rohan.

I hitch a breath at that thought and cover my mouth as if someone might have heard me. Nobody has, but hearing myself think such things hurts and makes me feel guilty for marrying his brother. Roger was a good male. I loved him. I did.

Just maybe not as much as I love Rohan.

And now that they're both gone again, one dead and the other sailing away, I will move on, hopefully with another pup on the way that will, once born, occupy my time.

Outside in my wolf form, I turn up my nose and let the moon bathe my face before going out for a run with Duane and a few of his friends. They're waiting for me in the woods, howling at the moon and likely competing for Cara's attention.

Not only is she a fresh new toy Duane has kept secret from Kenna, a former alpha of our clan Lenox put to rest recently, she's also an alpha female, a rarity in the lycan clans. The males want her attention. All besides Duane. Alpha and alpha pairings repel.

Strolling into the forest, I ground myself within the present. The feel of the damp ground on my paws, the smell of the evergreens, the rustling of leaves, and the scents of alpha wolves nearby. I reach the tree I marked as Roger's and sniff. His scent is long gone, I brush my flank against the trunk and dig a little in the dirt, paying my respects to him.

A wolf with black fur and a patch of red on his chest strides up to me. He whines before rubbing his flank against mine, eyeing the burial site. As an alpha male, Duane's territorial instincts have grown stronger, and I know he wants to lift his leg and mark the tree. Lenox would forgive him, but he wouldn't like it. No alpha wants other males marking up his territory.

Duane walks away, throwing his head back and motioning for me to follow him. Oh, the irony. Not too long ago, when he was a wee lad, I used to take him out for a run in the forest, where he would follow me. Now he's twice my size and telling me what to do.

Cara emerges from behind the bush and nips at Duane.

He shows her his big canines by lifting his upper lip. They growl at each other, trying to establish dominance over me (the omega wolf) at the same time as the group of Duane's friends joins us. They start circling the pair of alphas as the two playfully start sparring, nipping at each other here and there, but not drawing blood.

The betas and I snarl and encourage the sparring match, and when the alphas have had enough and Cara flips onto her belly, Duane starts the race deep into the forest. The rest of us

follow with Cara closing behind us so that our small pack is covered with an alpha at the front and at the back.

The forest is too dense for the moon to illuminate the paths, and the energy of the young wolves coupled with the lunar has ignited the sexual pheromones Cara is emitting, making me more excited than usual.

I am grateful for it.

I needed a distraction.

After I heard Rohan had left again, I couldn't rise out of the nest this morning, had spent the entire span under the tent. Cara dragged me out for the run this evening, knowing that I've spent enough spans lying in bed. If I'm seeded again, and I think I might be since my heat ended abruptly after Rohan and I mated, I will need to get better at dealing with emotional withdrawals over my codependency on an alpha male.

On the left, a prey animal yelps when one of the males snags it. We all turn toward the sound and rush there, only to slow down and pad cautiously toward a wolf that's not from our small running pack. He's hovering over a dead boar.

It's a dark gray wolf.

An alpha male with pheromones that call my name.

Rohan.

What the hell is he doing here?

Before I get to ask, Duane lunges.

On instinct, I lunge too, meeting Duane midleap. I manage to hit his flank, and we tumble to the ground. Duane stands up first, showing me his terrifying canines. With a snarl, he's telling me to get out of his way.

I get up and hang my head, but lock eyes with his and shake my head no.

Over my dead body would I let Duane fight his father. I don't care what Rohan has done or what he hasn't done for us, more accurately, these two are equally important to me, and I would die inside if either of them got killed. And if they

fought, it would be to death. There's too much bad blood between them for a nonfatal outcome.

Duane tries maneuvering around me, but I jump in his way. The pack circles us, Cara staying a bit of a distance away, observing for now. I think she might jump Duane if she thinks I'm in danger. An alpha female looks after the other females in the pack.

Behind me, Rohan growls, and the hair running down my spine stands on end.

I snap my head back and show him my teeth, telling him to stay back, but there's magic in his eyes. It's bright and alluring and makes me want to submit. My knees fold as if of their own volition, and I wag my tail, inviting him to play.

What in the world?

Rohan approaches and sniffs under my tail before snarling and jumping on me.

I howl in pain as his teeth close at the nape of my neck, marking me. Struggling under him, I try to move, but the wolf lays his weight on me and bites down harder, tongue lapping at my blood, his growling both sexy and a warning to me not to move.

Magic starts bleeding from the ground, golden glowing magic that makes Duane and the pack freeze in place. Like mist, the magic caresses Rohan and me, calming my senses and allowing me to recognize the moment for what it is. It is a mating of two wolves.

However unlikely, it is unmistakably a mating.

When the magic wanes and settles back into the forest floor, Rohan moves away before turning into his male form.

Duane stares from me to Rohan. It takes him a few moments to process what he'd witnessed. He can't fight his father over me now. No lycan can stand between another lycan and his mating claim. Not even our son.

Not Roger.

Not anyone.

For the goddess has spoken and given us her blessing.

“Son,” Rohan says, “I have loved your mother ever since I can remember, and I almost killed my twin for her. She jumped between us like she did tonight. I almost killed her that night. And so I left. I left because my brother deserved to live. And also because she married him. Now, I love you, my lad, but if you’re looking for a fight, look elsewhere, because I’ll be damned if I’ll let you get in the way of me and your mother again.”

Duane growls and walks away, taking the pack with him. Cara disappears too, and it’s just Rohan and me in the woods.

Rohan seemed to have come prepared with more than just a speech for Duane. From the sack he dropped near the animal, he retrieves a black leather kilt and adorns it with a green-and-red belt, making his attire look formal. I note he’s clean-shaven, and with his hair pulled back at his nape, he looks younger.

Still, I stay in wolf while he shoulders the animal he caught and walks toward the house, scratching behind my ears as he walks by me.

“So cute,” he says, complimenting my wolf form.

I follow behind him, trying and failing not to wag my tail like a pet on a leash with an owner who’s dangling bacon before her. We walk into a vacant kitchen. Grand’s already sleeping. The moment I transition to two legs, Rohan grabs me by the hips, lifts me, and plops me onto the counter.

He fits between my legs, his cold leather kilt touching my soft nude skin, his blue eyes ablaze with heat and magic, his scent undeniably that of a male who’s calling his mate. I lean in and sniff, my eyes rolling to the back of my head. “How is it possible?” I ask, half-dazed, half-horny, and feeling strangely complete and satisfied.

“I don’t know,” he says. “But I won’t look a gift horse in the mouth. Tonight, you’re mine.”

Behind his shoulder, my gaze catches on the tree under which I buried Roger, and I ask forgiveness, for it is true what

Rohan said. I've always been his, but the timing was wrong for us. Now the timing is right.

ROHAN

S stories about omega females have been spreading through the lycan clans for as long as lycans existed. Since our goddess is an alpha instead of an omega, we don't have as much guidance about our omegas as we do about our alpha females.

However, the elders say omegas can't be mated. They are breeders, meant for a pack of males, not a single alpha. But what if all the stories about omegas were spread by alphas who couldn't find mates and wanted to preserve the dynamic of the pack by sharing one female, or worse yet, what if it's all folklore?

I canna tell. I only know that I do not share, never could, never will, and the goddess understood and gifted me the omega my heart wanted.

I run a claw down her soft cheek, and she leans into my palm, rubbing her face in it as a cub might when she wants to be petted. I kiss her cheek, down her neckline, and when she throws her arms around my neck, I carry her up the stairs.

Which squeak, and I pray we don't break them.

One cracks, and I skip it, nearly getting my foot caught in the hole.

"Freya, is that you?" Grand shouts from his room. We woke him up. Shite.

"Yes, it's me."

“You sound like a herd of stomping mules. Get on with yourself upstairs so I can sleep.”

Freya giggles, and I carry her the rest of the way up the stairs. Once finally there, I stand at the top, deciding which room to take her to. There’s my parents’ old room, Roger and Freya’s room, and then our old bedrooms.

Freya says, “You can come to my nest.”

I blink. “Are you sure?”

She nods. “Certain, for I don’t think this mark at the back of my neck will heal.”

“It won’t.” Before I walk into her old bedroom, I put her down. Freya opens the door and motions with her hand.

I enter the space I haven’t been in since I snuck in here when I was much younger and jerked off on her blanket, got caught doing it, and took a whipping from Grand for it while Roger laughed and laughed. We washed the blanket and never told Freya about my desecration of her secret space, but I learned a lesson. Grand guilt-tripped me into thinking I’d desecrated a place of worship.

At the time, I thought he was exaggerating.

Now I know he wasn’t.

An omega’s nest is where she feels most secure, a space that nobody should enter unless invited. The boundary is not enforced since the omega is the weakest wolf in the clan, unable to enforce anything. But the alpha lycan, given that he is the protector of the clan’s weak, respects her boundary, allowing the omega to feel safe.

An invitation to come inside the nest is special.

“Thank you,” I tell her. “I want you to know I consider it an acceptance of the mating claim.”

Freya smiles. “A mate can never cheat. A mate can never leave. A mate promises to stay with me till death do us part and for better or worse.”

“I do,” I say.

“Then,” she goes around lighting the candles, “you can spend the night in the nest.”

I want to dance around like a deranged chicken celebrating the laying of twelve eggs, but I don't. Maybe tomorrow I'll do the chicken dance.

Having finished setting the room aglow with vanilla-scented candles, Freya walks up to me and unsnaps my kilt. It thumps to the floor while my knob stands erect like a Stenan guard at the royal gate. She gives it a few strokes, her eyes flaring with magic.

A pleasant scent enters my nose, and I inhale a lungful of Freya's mating scent, so different from the scent she emitted before.

“Your scent has changed,” I tell her.

“Does it please you?”

I lick her neck. “Fuck yes. I could eat you.”

Freya walks backward, holding my knob and pulling me along with her. At the old beige tent that marks the entrance to her nest, she sits down, then disappears inside. I drop to my knees and poke my head in.

Freya is lying on a bed of light blue and orange pillows and red furs, her large breasts leaking nectar, her legs spread, bare pussy exposed like an offering.

Saliva pools in my mouth, and I swallow the way I'll swallow her heat. I dive straight between her legs, lapping at her like the starving wolf I am. Freya moans and holds her breasts, milking them for the nectar I'm gonna get to as soon as I eat up everything this dirty little pussy gives me.

I'm growling at it as I lap, and Freya's moaning, dropping her breasts in favor of grabbing fistfuls of my hair and practically fucking herself with my tongue.

I dislike when she takes control of how I eat her pussy, but Freya can do whatever she will with me. I am hers, body and soul.

When her eyes roll back and the leg tremors start, telling me she's ready to come, I lie next to her and start rubbing her clit fast. She's moaning loudly now, our eyes meeting in the heat of the moment. I press one palm over her mouth and lift my other palm, poising it above her pussy.

As her body starts releasing the orgasm, I slap her clit several times in quick succession, then jab three fingers inside her and start pumping.

Freya screams into my palm and comes so hard, her body shakes. This lasts for several moments, and I acknowledge she's surrendered so completely to me that's she's never been more vulnerable than now. Completely uninhibited in her passion, in releasing the heat, the liquid the omega female accumulates inside her channel and then at the right moment, allows it to gush out on the alpha's knob.

Or on his hand.

Freya's eyes are closed and her knees fall to the sides, her breaths coming in pants. I remove the palm over her mouth and arrange her on her side. At her ear, I whisper the dirty things she likes to hear while I enter her small pucker hole and make love to it again and again.

FREYA

Rohan lies atop me, and inside me, his knob end is blown up again. It's been swelling and deflating during an entire night. The blue eyes of his wolf blaze with heat as he watches me, and for the millionth time, he says, "Mine."

I've heard of these types of alpha males that are so possessive, they can't seem to stop claiming their female, but because I'm an omega, I never really paid attention to such stories. Why bother with something I could never have? Well, I am having one such alpha now and for the rest of my life, and I find the assertion of his possession both sexy and endearing.

Rohan flips us so that I'm draped over him. On his chest, I prop my head on my folded arms and squint as the sun drifts through the tent's tiny rear opening. Reaching over, I block the opening from the sun. We've been up all night, and I want to get some sleep. I like sleeping in the dark.

But we have livestock, and I would hate for Grand to have to care for them.

Rohan rubs my back. "Don't even think about getting up right now."

I chuckle and lay my cheek on his chest. His strong heart is calming down, the rhythm slowing after he fucked me all night.

Rohan is an amazing lover, able to take me to heights of pleasure and take care of me when my adrenaline wanes and my emotions start to overwhelm me.

During the night, I've laughed, and I've cried.

He held me, and he fucked me.

He's been everything to me. "I love you, Rohan."

Under me, he stills, his heart skipping a beat. Swallowing, I still as well, not knowing if that's a bit much or not enough or what's going on. There's never a bad time to say those words, and they kind of came out of me on their own.

I wait for him to respond, and when he doesn't, I just feel stupid. "Do you not have anything to say?"

"Not yet," he says with a wink. "Only that I have some unfinished business to attend to before...before. The wait will be worth your while."

I rest my chin on his chest, my eyes closing. I'm so sleepy and comfy. I mean, there's an alpha male mountain of hard muscle in my nest and a swollen knob inside me. My back is covered with three heavy blankets. Those poor chickens are going to have to feed themselves. I can hear them stirring with the rising of the sun.

"You can't tell me you love me yet?"

Rohan nods.

"It's really not that hard."

He smiles and deflates, then grunts as he flips us over to hover above me.

He slides a palm under my neck and feels the marking at the back. Once he's done double-checking that it's still there, I touch it too. Mmhm, there're tooth marks that have not healed. If they weren't a mate mark, they'd have started healing already.

"You are mine," he says again for the hundredth time.

"And you're mine," I reassure him.

"I will ask a favor of you, mate," he says.

This sounds serious. "Sure. Anything."

“If Duane ever comes after me again, you won’t come between us.”

I shake my head. “Rohan, I can—“

“Promise me,” he orders in his alpha voice, and I pinch my lips, but give in.

“I promise.”

“If I fight, you don’t jump in. You stay in the house or you run or you hide behind Cara. Is that clear?”

“Are you planning to fight?”

There’s a pause, and then he says, “No.”

He paused. Though I don’t think he’s lying. He won’t fight, but if challenged, he won’t back down either, and I can’t keep jumping between him and other males. Alpha wolves are controlling males, their teeth and claws used as shows of dominance. I don’t have a sliver of dominance in me. Every bone in my body wants to submit, and my ideal span would be one where I get to curl up and sleep on Rohan’s lap. Or at his feet.

“Did you leave because you were afraid of hurting me again?” I ask.

“When I saw you with my brother and you got between us, I almost killed you, Freya.”

“I hate thinking about that morning,” I say. “But I do think about it, have thought about it more often than I wished. You coming out of the woods, anger etched on your face when you saw my belly and the collar around my neck. The speed with which you confronted Roger, not giving either of us time to explain—”

“It was self-explanatory.”

I nod. “Then you lashed out. I couldn’t let you kill him.”

He traces a claw over the tiny scar across my jugular. “We barely sewed the wound back together.”

“*You* sewed it together,” I correct him. “Roger froze.”

Rohan scrubs his jaw, his dark facial hair already growing out. “Gonna bathe and shave, get ready for my big span.”

My turn to frown. “A big span?”

“Nothing you have to worry about. Sleep.” He pecks my nose. “My omega.”

“Yours,” I tell him as sleep knocks me out.

ROHAN

Whistling a tune that the runt pirates whistle on the ship as they scrub the decks in the morning, I walk out of Freya's nest and stop at the top of the stairs to assess the damage we might have done last night as I carried her upstairs.

The new stairs I installed held under our combined weight, but the old ones that have been here since Grand (or maybe even before him) broke. Bending at the knees, I leap and land at the bottom of the staircase, my partially erect knob slapping against my belly, my balls, empty of seed, slapping my thighs.

The great night of mighty fuckery is over.

As an omega wolf, Freya is insatiable.

There is a reason omegas are thought of as pack females, but the goddess figured I could fuck like a pack of males and then she let me prove it. I did fuck Freya's brains out, and she'll sleep the span away, giving me plenty of time to prepare the people and myself for my big span where I shall ask her to marry me.

First order of things is to howl at the moon that's still visible in the daylight. Scratching my balls, I open the door to Grand standing there.

He gives me a once-over and says, "Lad, put some clothes on."

I move out of his way and reach for the sweatpants by the door before striding out and pausing in the middle of the lawn.

Throwing back my head, I release a howl so loud, I know the secret patrol Duane still keeps around the house hears me.

Before striding back inside the house, I slip into the pants and meet Grand again. He rears back and howls, acknowledging my mating claim. Wrinkled old hands grab me and pull me into a hug. “Congratulations, my lad.”

“Thank you.”

He releases me and smiles. “We should celebrate.”

“We will.”

“We should celebrate right now.” He pulls out a large pouch full of elven herbs known for inducing euphoria.

“It’s a bit early for that, don’t you think, Grand?”

“Not at all.”

“You go on and celebrate, and I’ll feed the chickens.”

“I fed the chickens, got eggs, made breakfast, and picked up the herbs. Not everyone got to lie in late and behave lazy this morning.” He winks before making his way into the kitchen.

“Where’s your cane?” I ask him.

“Oh.” He pauses. “I must’ve left it somewhere.”

“Can you remember where?”

“Not now, but as soon as I smoke some of this, I will.”

Ha! “I’ll be at the pond if you need me.” I grab my grooming kit from beside the door and leave for the pond to take care of my hair. Once done, I return and grab a few things I need, and double-check that the collar and the pendant are still in my sack from last night.

The walk to my brother’s tree takes little time, and I kind of wish it took longer so that I could think some more, though about what, I have no idea. Perhaps I fear I won’t say all I have to say to Roger. Perhaps I fear I will say too much.

Not that he can hear me.

Not that he can hear anyone.

I sit beside the tree and play with the little figurine I've kept beside my bunk on the ship for over twenty turns. It's a wolf with two heads Roger painted when he was only five turns old. The first figurine he'd ever colored. Before we met Freya.

Before Mother died.

Before Father started beating us.

Back when it was just him and me running around these woods, naked and wild, with no care in the world of the dangers that lie in the shadows.

"I'm sorry," I tell him. I clear my throat, the grief I never expressed welling up in my chest, threatening to choke me. I suppress it and continue. "I'm sorry you had to be the weaker twin, the one who got sick. I'm sorry if I wronged you. Ever."

I let out a long breath, releasing some of the pressure in my chest. "Looking back, I no longer regret leaving her to you, but I only wish I left on better terms. You got to spend two decades with Freya, and I envy that, but I don't regret I left you two alone."

I dig a small hole and place the two-headed wolf there, bury that with Roger, for I never got to give him a parting gift. "About my son." This is the hardest, and I rise to my feet, prop a palm on the tree, and hang my head. "You raised a helluva male. I'm proud of him. I have no right to be, but I am. Thank you, brother. Thank you and goodbye."

I push away from the tree and head back to the house, expecting the weight of my brother's death to lift off my chest and disappear into the world, and while some of it lifts, not all is gone. I think I might carry Roger with me in my heart wherever I go, no matter if he's here or not.

As I make my way back, I get this...this feeling in the pit of my stomach. Someone is watching me. Slowing down, I turn and tuck my hands into my pockets, absolutely hating that another person (whoever they are) saw the moment I shared with my twin, the other part of my soul. It feels invasive, and I dislike it.

“It is rude to eavesdrop on people.” It could be Duane.

A gray-and-white wolf followed by three white wolves show themselves, and my instincts prick, hair standing on end. A low warning growl rips out of my chest, and if I had a tail right now, I’d tuck it neatly between my legs while I back myself into a tree. Since this is what’s going through my head, my instincts are telling me I’m being ambushed.

The Ott family is known for the white fur of their wolf. They live higher in the mountains than us, and their fur is camouflage for the almost constantly snow-covered Mount Olivera they inhabit. But that’s not to say that all white wolves are Otts. We have white-furred wolves too in Clan McMar, and these could be Duane’s friends.

Either way, a lycan in wolf doesn’t stalk a lycan male on two legs unless he’s after his guts and flesh.

Magic courses through my body, and I build it up so that when I transition, it’ll be a quick moment, because these wolves will pounce faster than a flying arrow. If that happens, I’ll die right on my brother’s grave.

Poetic.

But unfortunately for them, I’ve decided I can’t die and leave Freya to any of them, so I better fight fiercely and quietly.

Magic buzzes through me, and I explode in an array of gray-black fur and sharp werewolf teeth, slashing at the wolves, whirling and twisting inside their circle. They come at me from all sides, some in wolf form, some in werewolf dropping from trees, and the first sign that I’m going down is when my leg buckles from a gash behind my knee that sliced across my tendons.

Covered in my blood, three white wolves attack and take me down, biting my shoulders and chest, trying to get to my throat. I fight them off, but there’re too many. One entire pack, I bet, and they’re not showing their faces, so I can’t identify them, though if I survive I might smell them, their alpha

stench stuck in my nose, irritating me, spurring me to survive and defend what's mine.

Even to the death.

I can't give up Freya.

I lie on my back and fend them off, but I know I'm going to die here.

A wolf yelps and looks behind him. I use the distraction to grab his head and twist. His neck snaps with a pop, and my hand lands on something hard. I think it's a rock. I pick it up and crash it over the head of the wolf that's ripping into my side with his teeth. It crushes his skull, and the wolf yelps, releasing my side.

Fighting and snarling comes from behind me. I can't see what's going on, but I know there's a fight.

It's not Grand out here, is it?

Oh no.

Oh no. I tilt my head and try to see the house's entrance, but can't from my position. I scoot a little to the side, my guts spilling out beside me. I think one of my eyes is torn too. They've shredded me to pieces. It's hard to pinpoint everywhere I'm hurt.

I manage to scoot a bit to peek behind the tree and spot the door of the house. It's open.

"Freya," I shout, but it's just a whisper.

They will take my mate.

They will take her and use her horribly, and since she is mated, they will discard her as useless, maybe even kill her.

So much for our happy ending.

ROHAN

I don't know how long I lie on the wet forest floor, coming in and out of consciousness. It could be only moments of darkness closing in at the edges of my vision or it could be an entire morning, but a face appears above me, the blue eyes of a werewolf almost white from aggression.

At first, I snort and transition back to male. "Finish me off already, you fucking pussy, coming after me with an entire pack." But as I stare into those eyes and that face, and as my vision clears a fraction while he takes on his human form, I recognize my son, Duane.

"Hey there," I tell him.

He takes stock of my body. I can only imagine the carnage he sees.

"You can't die," he says.

That's what I said! But from Duane, it sounds like an order, and it's funny how he thinks he can command death. Or me.

"You sound like Lenox," I say. Blood gushes out of my mouth. I cough and turn my face to the side so I don't choke and die before I speak with Duane.

I'm glad he's here. "I have so much to say to you," I say, but it's a whisper, and my vision is starting to blur. "But first, don't let your mother see me like this."

Duane grabs my face between his palms. "You won't be dying on me. Not you too, old male. You hear me?"

“Shhh, you’ll wake her up.”

“I’m not worried about her nap,” he hisses.

“Tell her I love her.” Should’ve said it back when I had the chance.

“You will tell her.”

“Promise me.”

“Fuck. Fuck. I don’t know what to do, Dad.”

Dad. I’m a dad. “Nothing really. I can die now.”

He slaps me. Gently, but a bitch slap is still a bitch slap. “Wake up, asshole, and tell me how to save you.”

“I’m injured beyond healing.”

“There must be a way to heal you. Do you have elves on your ships?”

“Just dig me a hole under that tree and bury me. Don’t let her see.”

“No fucking way. You’ll live. Tell me!”

He’s so stubborn. I wonder whose personality trait that is. Not mine. For sure. Nope.

“The docks,” I whisper.



MANY TURNS AGO, when I was young and stupid, I followed a school of sirens into a secluded channel surrounded by forests and beautiful waterfalls. We sailed the channel in circles for seven turns while they tortured us and fed on our sexuality, using us span in and span out, until our bodies were so dry that they had to give us *notturmo* blood to keep us alive and going.

After a while, we grew addicted to said blood, so we craved it, begged for it. I remember the cravings started with a parched mouth and cramps in the belly. And that’s how I know the tangy sweet drops of *notturmo* life force are settled in my belly now.

Snarling, I jolt upright in bed and take a look around the room. There're worn-out wooden planks, maps all around, and a desk larger than the bed, covered in more maps and plans of world domination. It's my cabin on my ship. How the heck did I get here?

I swing my legs out of bed and take stock of my belly wound. It's closed, so my guts aren't showing, but angry red claw marks and jagged puncture wounds from savage teeth are everywhere. I look as if an army of furious alpha males tried to kill me. They did. But then my son found me.

I stand and sit the fuck down immediately because the pain in my head makes me think someone's stabbing my brain. Bending over with a groan, I reach for a goblet near the table. It's wine. Eh, I drink it.

"Never took you for a wine drinker," a male voice says in the room.

I pitch the goblet in the direction of the voice, and Lenox catches it, flips it in his hand, and puts it down on my table.

"Where the hell did you come from?" Has he been here all along? What?

The space shimmers as if a portal is in the cabin, and the hair at the back of my neck stands on end. The Summer princess and Duane appear on the two previously empty chairs at my table. I blink.

The princess snaps her fingers. "And here we are."

Glamour. I hate it, and what's worse, I should've sensed and smelled them in the cabin with me. "I didn't smell you."

Lenox nods. "You died, my friend. Believe me, your senses will take time to return." He sighs and slumps in the chair as if relieved. "If my hair grew back from my own brush with death, it would all fall out now with how much I worried you wouldn't make it."

"Awww," Fleur says, batting her eyelashes at Lenox. "I need a lycan of my own."

My son smiles so wide, you'd think she slapped him with her pussy.

“Do ye now?” he drawls.

Fleur giggles, and since the Summer fae are in heat, her voice feels like a soft brush of lips over the tip of my knob. Lenox groans, probably feeling much the same, and my son's eyes flare with magic. He leans forward, toward Fleur, his claws extending, his teeth showing as if he'll bite her, but males have tried forcing themselves or throwing themselves at the princess all her life and she knows how to deal with us.

Gently too.

Fleur presses a finger over Duane's lips and says, “Your father needs you now.”

Duane blinks and sits back, obeying her instantly.

Lenox shakes his head and rubs the back of his neck. “Do you mind?” We have no idea what kind of power she wields. That whole family creeps me out.

“I was just leaving.” Fleur opens the door and quietly departs.

The three of us sigh in relief and squeeze our testicles so the pain of arousal will subside.

Duane scrubs his eyes. “Holy shite, I can't wait for the Seelie king's wedding. When do we leave?”

Lenox is watching me.

“Tonight.”

Duane frowns. “The wedding isn't until the summer solstice. Why tonight?”

“Because you're taking the ships.”

Duane looks even more confused. “I am?” He looks from Lenox to me, then back. “What did you two cook up?”

“You will captain the fleet to the Summer Court,” Lenox tells him. “It's yours. Your father will stay with me.”

Lenox and I both stare at Duane, awaiting his response. This could go either way. He could get upset and feel rejected by both his uncle and his father with whom he just started a relationship. Or he could rejoice because Lenox is saving his life and entrusting him with a huge responsibility.

Now that I've seen Duane fight, I can see how strong the lad has become. I took out only three of no fewer than twelve males that attacked me. Duane either killed the rest or at least enough of them so that the others fled. He might even be able to take on Lenox, which is very bad for the clan since Lenox has a loyal following. The time for Duane to lead the clan will come. Just not right now.

“Wow,” he says. “I don't know what to say.”

Lenox claps him on the back. “Thank you?”

“Nah.” I try standing and wobble, but Duane catches me under my elbow and walks me over to the desk so I can sit down.

I cover his hand with mine and tap it. “I want to give you the world, son. All the fleet is yours. Everything. Males who will follow you, a fleet of seventy-two ships, three islands we discovered, and a treasure cave on Mount Havensi in the Kingdom of Kilselei.”

“There's a treasure cave?” he asks.

I nod. “But it's in Kilselei.”

“So?”

“So it's under horde rule, and they love gold and treasures. If you stake a claim on it, they'll raid it.”

“I'm not afraid.”

“That's only because you've never seen a horde member.”

“Oh yeah? I bet I could take him.” Duane is competitive. Good for him.

“There's also a sleeping dragon guarding the treasure.”

“Well, how the heck are you giving me treasure that's not even yours?”

“Technically, I discovered it, and I’m giving you the location of it.” I rummage through the papers and maps. “Here you go.” I find the map of Kilselei and point at the mountain.

“I’ve run through that forest,” Lenox says.

We hover over the map, leaving lots of things unsaid, but not for long. Alpha males hate bottlenecks and things that are left unsaid. We like to say what’s on our minds and let the pieces fall where they may.

“I’m sorry I wasn’t around for you, Duane.”

When Duane doesn’t say anything, I look up.

He shrugs. “Roger loved me like I was his, so I didn’t miss out much.”

Lenox whistles. “That’s a hammer over Rohan’s heart.”

“I deserve it.”

“No, you don’t,” Lenox says. “And I’m sorry for supporting Roger’s decision and blessing their marriage.”

I shake my head. “No, no, those were all the right decisions at the time. And since we can’t change them, we must look ahead and control the future we can control. With that said, who cleaned up the bodies?”

“Me and my friends.”

“Will they be following you when you sail?” Lenox asks.

“Maybe. If you let them.”

Lenox nods, but doesn’t answer. Duane has a crew already inside the clan.

“Does your mother know I was attacked?”

“I don’t think so, but Cara does.”

“Who’s Cara?” Lenox asks.

Duane snaps his mouth closed, and I realize he slipped. If Lenox doesn’t know about the alpha female, then the alpha female doesn’t want it known.

“A friend of Freya’s.”

Lenox narrows his eyes. I push onward so he stops asking about the female. “And Grand?”

“He’s fine. Killed one with an arrow.”

“Still got those flexible archer fingers, that old bastard.” Lenox chuckles, then sobers up and pours three shooters and drinks one, not waiting for us to catch up. He refills his glass, then passes on the shooters. We click the glasses and drink up. Bourbon burns down my throat and settles like lead in my empty belly, which screams louder than a rooster at sunrise. I pat my stomach. “How long have I been out?”

“Two spans.”

“Two spans!” I make a beeline for the door, even with my head spinning.

Duane catches me as I start falling and practically throws me back on the bed. I try to get up, but Lenox joins him and hovers over me.

“I will chain you to the bed again. I swear it.”

“Freya is alone and has been unprotected for two spans.”

“Freya is better protected than the Summer queen. I’ve initiated a wartime protocol patrol, which means tighter security on our borders and a swarm of wolves around the cabin.”

The weight of what he means settles in. We might go to war again. At least Duane will be spared and at sea.

“I must see her.”

“You will.”

“If she doesn’t know what happened, what did you tell her of my absence?”

“You sailed,” Duane says.

“Fucking A, son. Are you trying to get your mother to kill me?” I sit up again.

Lenox presses a palm over my chest and pushes me back down. I think I’ll throw up. Too much excitement. The alcohol

rises, but I swallow the nasty shite back down. Several times.

Lenox taps my shoulder. “That a lad.”

“She’ll be mad at me.”

“What’s new?” Duane says and laughs.

Lenox is smiling too.

“Fuck the pair of ye.” I grab my blanket and turn away from them and toward the wall to get some more shut-eye.

“Hey, Alpha?”

“Duane?” Lenox answers.

“You’ve chained my dad to a bed before?”

“Mmhm.”

A pause and then my son says, “I’m having a very awkward moment now.”

ROHAN

It's a beautiful span to propose marriage to the beautiful female our goddess blessed me with. If she would be willing to forgive me for leaving her for five spans while I healed completely so that she has no idea about what occurred while she napped.

Lenox and I agreed that the fewer people know about the attack, the better, because the Alpha of the Ott clan hasn't said anything or called a meeting. If people don't know a McMar killed a bunch of Otts, they won't ask for retribution, leaving the clan Alphas to settle the matter between them.

Sometimes, matters can't be settled, in which case, Freya will find out what occurred, and other times, these matters can be settled. I won't worry too much about it because it's on Lenox to handle. Another reason why I think Lenox is the best leader for the clan at this time. Duane would go to war.

He's young and restless.

Lenox is older and experienced, with a pup on the way. He wants to live in peace and see his pup grow.

Voices drift from beside the cabin while I'm sneaking around the forest, collar hanging from my finger, wondering when and how I'm going to approach Freya now.

It's nighttime, and I thought she'd be with Grand playing a board game in the kitchen, but we have people over. Lenox and his princess, along with Marybell, Duane, and several more pack mates I don't recognize.

Grand's packing the herbs for everyone around the fire to smoke while Marybell strokes a stringed instrument I've seen in the Stenan court. Her voice is pretty and inviting of intimacy. Freya walks around serving everyone food and drinks before returning to the house for something she said she forgot.

I come into the clearing just as she walks inside.

Marybell stops playing, and everyone stares.

So much for stealth. The plan was to catch Freya alone inside the house and propose to her, but that changes when the door opens and Freya steps outside. The moment she sees me, she narrows her eyes. "There you are, lycan."

Someone in the group chokes. I bet it's Lenox, and he's suppressing laughter.

"Here I am, lass."

"Don't lass me, Rohan. I thought you were done running away from your responsibilities." She marches toward me. I brace for the slap.

She walks over and looks up, craning her neck all the way because I'm two and a half heads taller than she, and jabs a finger into my chest, fury almost steaming out of her ears. "You sailed and said nothing again. Hm? *Hm?* What do you want back here now? I'm not raising a pup with an absent father, I'll tell you that. I'll have Lenox adopt me and the pup."

Lenox chokes again. "I have nothing to do with this."

She snaps her head his way. "I'm the only omega you have, so you will adopt me!"

Lenox stares, wide-eyed.

"Freya, I've come to ask ye to marry me."

She opens her mouth to yell at me more, but shuts it with a snap. "Marry you?"

I show her the collar and go to stand behind her. In the lycan lands, the submissive wolf, often a female, will now

kneel so that the alpha can collar her. If she doesn't kneel, there is no marriage.

I wait.

Freya does too.

Eyes locked with my son's, I glare, wondering if he set me up to fail with his mother. It's possible. Did Lenox set me up to fail, maybe? Or was it all my fault from the start? From twenty turns ago. From the span I met her when she was a wee lass wrapped in a blanket. I thought she'd forgiven me. What do I do with my life if she says no?

But she doesn't say no.

With grace and her head held high, Freya kneels, and I tie a thin black leather collar around her slender neck.



FREYA

WHILE I'M KNEELING in front of my house, I'm wondering if Rohan's marriage proposal is nothing but a dream. But then I reach up and touch the clear star-shaped diamond as bright as the moon, and the contact with the object grounds me. Still, I dare not stand for fear my knees will fold again.

My friends remain quiet, I guess waiting for me to stand, and when I don't, Rohan crouches in front of me. The blue eyes of his wolf stare as I clutch the pendant.

"I love you, Freya."

With an excited shout, I throw my arms around him and drape myself over him, locking my legs around his waist, clawing at his back, trying to get him closer to me. Meanwhile, Rohan grunts and balances on his feet so we don't tip backward. Finally, he stands with me clinging to him while our circle of family and friends cheers.

We join them, and he sits on the blanket across from Lenox. Finally, I detach from him, but not before I kiss him. “You’ve made me so happy.”

Rohan pecks my cheek, then whispers, “What’s a good little omega do when her wolf makes her that happy?”

If I could purr like a kitten, I would.

Duane huffs. “Mother, please don’t answer that.”

Everyone laughs, and Lenox starts pouring the shooters. He raises a glass and looks from me to Rohan. “For the ones we’ve known and the ones we’re yet to meet.” I think of Roger and hope to meet my new baby soon. For that reason and because I’m unsure if I am pregnant, I sip the booze slowly and lean back into Rohan’s chest. With the scent of my alpha mate and the sounds of a stringed instrument Marybell plays so well surrounding me, I almost miss the moment when Lenox excuses himself to go for a quick run.

He just wants to restore the boundaries, I’m sure. Pissing around my house is his favorite pastime when he’s all the way up here and away from the den. Rohan kisses my temple while my son watches me, a twinkle in his eye.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” I ask.

“You look pretty.”

“Awww. Thank you, Duane.”

“Try to hide your surprise that your mother looks pretty,” Grand adds, smoke from the herbs he’s enjoying curling around him like shadows around the Unseelie fae.

Gloriana comes to sit next to me, her gaze on the star-shaped pendant. “It’s so pretty. I’ve never seen a star-shaped diamond before.”

I stroke the pendant again. “Me either.” The only diamonds I’ve seen before were the ones on her tiara I secretly wore, but I’ll keep that to myself.

She blows her bangs out of her eyes. “Okay, so do you want a small and cozy wedding or an event to remember?”

“Neither.”

“Oh, but we must celebrate,” Marybell adds, and puts down her instrument to join us on my blanket. “Milady loves parties, and weddings are the best parties.”

Gloriana nods. “Seeing as how Lenox didn’t mention a ceremony and the receiving of pretty gifts and I did not get to plan my wedding,” she practically shouts, no doubt for Lenox to hear, “I would love to plan yours.”

“Now, now, ladies, lycans adopted their marriage customs from Stenans,” Grand says. “It’s not our way, but when mated pairs became scarce, then completely disappeared, we did what we could. Lenox is an alpha who is expected to follow tradition.”

“And I am an outlaw who breaks tradition,” Rohan says, “and sets his own rules.”

“Hence the male who mated an omega wolf,” Grand says.

Gloriana seems unconvinced.

I chuckle. “I’d love to be the light on the wall when you ask Lenox about your wedding.”

“I’m sure milady will get a wedding,” Marybell says. “Lenox very much does whatever she asks.”

Duane snorts. “Mating sounds horrible.”

Rohan groans as he stands and stretches his muscles. “Son, no need to make this harder on Lenox.”

Duane flattens his lips.

Rohan adds, “But if Lenox is interested, all he has to do is ask me where he could find jewelry of similar quality to the one I got for Freya.”

“You’re a gem, Rohan,” Gloriana says, a big smile on her pretty face. “Because we can’t very well attend a wedding with no fine jewels. So first thing tomorrow morning, we shall visit the town for dress fittings. When my people see me shopping for formal wear, they’ll want to know why and voilà, we have enough people for the small wedding.”

“Small?” I nearly screech.

Rohan’s retreating toward the forest, probably intent on joining Lenox. It reminds me so much of what he used to do when I was a kid.

“Mmhm. Unless you want a major event.”

I think her idea of small and mine aren’t the same. “No big event. Um, small will do. Um, how many invitations is small?”

She glances at Marybell, who purses her lips, eyes on the moon as if recalling a memory. “A thousand at the very least.”

I gape.

“Mmhm.” Gloriana reassures me I heard correctly. “It’s a lycan wedding, and I’m tagging along, so it will be two weddings.”

Marybell squeals. “This will be so much fun!”

“Yay!” I say, completely uncomfortable with that many people around, but going with it because the princess is practically glowing.

And so I spend the night as a mated omega in the company of my closest friends while my mate and my clan’s Alpha secure the perimeter around my home so that I can be safe.

EPILOGUE

Freya

Size matters.

Oh yes, it does, and I'm not even talking about the size of what's dangling between Rohan's legs, because that's hardly the size that's an issue. I'm talking about the size of my wedding. The thousand invitations predicted by Marybell was a gross understatement, and I will never let her live that down. If I can even find her on this blessed span.

At my table for two that sits on a tall wooden stage, complete with special lighting pointing right at me, I sit up in my chair and look for Marybell among the people mingling in the meadow. Most are dancing around one of the thirteen firepits. I don't see Marybell, but spot Rohan chugging ale with Lenox while Lenox leans against him, one hand on Rohan's shoulder, the other holding a mug of ale.

Neither of them can be trusted with finding Marybell this evening. It's their wedding night just as much (if not more) as it is a night for Gloriana and me.

The two of us ladies ate breakfast with Marybell this morning. If "ate breakfast" is the appropriate term. While Gloriana ate, I tapped my fork on the bacon the entire time, nervous about tonight's event. And now that Rohan and I are married, I finally get to take off my shoes.

Ah yes, oh goddess, yes. At the feel of wood beneath my feet, I curl my toes and slump back in the chair. With a sigh, I lean my head back and smile up at the almost-full moon, wondering if I'll go into heat this coming moon or if I'm with pup already. In either case, I hope we're blessed with a girl.

I tune out the music and drift away, mentally leaving, until a pleasant scent enters my nostrils. I sniff, then inhale a lungful. The light breezy scent of the ocean makes my breasts tingle with the telltale sign of impending arousal. Except it's not a scent I associate with Rohan, his being the scent of a lycan, heavy and earthy.

Confused, I frown and look up, then sit up straight as if someone grabbed my shoulders and pulled them back. Gloriana's etiquette lessons rush at me: *A lady doesn't slump*. I'm no lady, but the dignity of the fae couple approaching my table makes me stand to greet them and fold my hands in front of me.

The male wears black on black, with a deep neckline showing the sculpted muscles of his torso. Rohan and lycans in general are hairy males, so this male's hairless chest catches my attention. What he lacks in hair on his chest he makes up for with a headful of gorgeous long raven hair that's pulled back tightly into a high ponytail and held fast with an elaborate band of gold on his head. I think it might be a crown.

The lady walking with him wears a golden dress and a matching golden veil over her face that stops right at the chin.

They're holding hands and walk with grace as if gliding on water all the way up the stairs of the platform.

"Gloriana is dancing over there," I blurt and point at the third bonfire from here. Since I wouldn't have a huge wedding on my own, I asked Gloriana to marry Lenox on this span, so this way, most of the attention would be on them and not on me. Even though I like people, I really do prefer smaller gatherings, and surely this fae couple is looking for Gloriana and Lenox.

"Actually," the male says, his voice deep and raspy, his mating scent so strong that I can almost taste it in the back of

my throat, “we came for you.”

Good goodness. This male shouldn't be allowed to say the word “came” or “come” out loud. At all. Ever. To anyone besides the fine lady next to him. Sweat breaks out on my brow.

His lips tilt into a smirk.

“What do you want to do with me?” I ask in a husky voice, and immediately blush profusely. What in the world is wrong with me? Where is my husband when I need to bang him, hm? I look around and spot Rohan practically running toward me. As soon as he arrives, he bows deeply and doesn't straighten until the lady offers him her hand. When he looks up, his blue eyes brighten and his nostrils flare, and I know he's catching her feminine scent in the same way I'm inhaling the fae male's masculine scent.

These must be the Summer fairies in mating season. Try as one might, nobody can resist the arousal that comes with inhaling their mating scents. I've never even seen a fae before my wedding, and now I'm in the company of what I'm fairly certain is the Summer king, arguably the handsomest fae in fairyland.

Rohan comes to stand with me, his fingers capturing my elbow.

Frowning, I look down at the contact. In old lycan tongue, my husband says, “Holding you up, my omega, so you don't collapse in a swoon over the fae king.”

Jerk. I pull back my elbow and jab his ribs.

The fae female giggles, the sound as pleasant as an alpha lycan knob on the third span of heat. Rohan groans and shifts from one leg to the next. I note a bulge under his kilt.

“Freya, this is Et'enne, the Summer king, and his chosen, June, the fae fate who sees all that's come to pass.”

Through the thin and partially transparent golden veil she's wearing, the female smiles as she hands me an envelope. I open it and read the cursive writing. It's lycan, not fae, and I

know this female wrote it. The hair on the back of my neck stands on end.

“We embrace the pains of the past, for the experience has made us age beyond our age and thus understand faster than most that a life surrounded by people who make us happy is most important of all.”

It takes me a moment to understand that this is a fae fate as in the fae fate who sees the past, specifically *my* past. I stare at the note for a while before tucking it under my corset. Looking up, I clear my throat and curtsy as I should’ve done when I first met the couple. “I thought the fates wore black veils.”

“They do,” she says. “Except the other fates haven’t mated naughty kings who like to dress them.”

The fae king grins, and it feels like the sun smiled upon me.

Oh boy.

“I trust the ships have sailed for my court,” the king says, cold black eyes sliding from me to Rohan, who nods once, even though the ships are still docked while my son debates his father’s offer.

When the king narrows his eyes, I bite my lip.

“I enjoyed this evening,” June says, and just like that, the king’s eyes soften and the tension leaves the air.

“I’m happy to hear that. Will you be staying during the full moon?” I ask. There’s a large formal breakfast tomorrow and two more spans of partying before the wedding ceremony is over.

“We’re leaving now, I’m afraid. But you will come to our wedding, won’t you? I have a whole tower with many rooms. You can have one and stay as long as you like.”

I shall faint. I imagine her wedding is one hundred times the size of this one.

“Of course,” Rohan says, then he guides me back to my chair. “We are honored to receive a personal invitation.”

“Mmhm,” is all I can manage.

The couple leaves us, and I find my voice. “The fae fate invited me to her wedding.”

“She did,” Rohan says. “We can spend our honeymoon in the Summer Court if you’d like.”

Since the fae couple threw their mating pheromones at me ever so liberally, my nipples are hard, my breasts full as if I’m already swollen with milk for my young, and my pussy lips are fluttering like butterfly wings.

I lean in and sniff Rohan’s neck, then touch my lips to his skin and whisper, “You make me happy.”

When Rohan says nothing, I lean back. He takes my palms and kisses them, then rests them on his cheeks. “And you make me whole.”

A LITTLE WHILE LATER

FREYA

During our honeymoon, I met a young seer who said I shall deliver a baby girl.

She was right.

I named her Jeanne, after my mother.



*** Aww, this story made me believe in second chances. And also in the TV show that used to air when I was younger. *Jerry Springer*. =D

In any case, I hope this read brought you warm fuzzies, and that some of the more serious or angsty parts were sated with laughter and HEA thereafter.

I am unsure if I will write more lycans but I am sure to continue writing in this fantasy world that currently has Savages and Fae written and ready for your reading pleasures.

If you have not read Savages yet, I think you should and you are welcome to start right on the next page.

If you happen to guess who the young seer is that Freya met during her honeymoon, I'm happy to tell you I've started writing her story and yes, I do have a teaser available for reading now...

SAVAGE IN THE TOUCH TEASER

Seven houses hardly even counts as a village, but since our tavern, which also serves as a bed-and-breakfast, is the last stop before the mountain that travelers must scale on their journey to the capital city, Lyan, we get busy.

The inn is strategically located right at the exit to the valley, and we made sure we put up a sign that says: *No fluffy bed or pillows for another two moons*. Sixty spans is a long time to spend in the forested mountain living in tents. Not to mention, one never knows what kind of criminals lurk in the bushes and what kind of trouble awaits in the mountains.

The road to Lyan is paved with dangers.

Yet that doesn't stop the refugees passing through our little village. They escaped the horde that's been plowing through the south of the kingdom. They say the horde devours everything in its path. They say its hunger can't be tamed.

They say it's coming.

It's all a myth. The "horde" is nothing more than a gang of rebels, or at most our southern fae neighbors looking for trouble. And trouble they shall find, since half a moon ago, the king's army passed through the village on their way south. This means they must already have reached and defeated the horde and are on their way back now.

"Hey, Mag." I greet my sister as I tap my fingernails on the bar, reminding the drunk in front of me to pay up and call it a night. At thirty-seven, I've spent two decades behind this very bar, and I know when the next pint of ale will topple a man.

The man isn't chatty, and the ominous threadbare black cloak he wears obscures most of his face, which gives me an impression he came in to drown his sorrows undisturbed. Here's to hoping I won't have to carry his ass up the stairs to the third floor.

Although, if I have to, I will. Third-floor room and board runs at eleven silvers, so a little extra legwork for the guy is included in the price.

"Hey," my sister says and dumps a large bag of potatoes at my feet. "Here you go." She wipes her hands on a dirty white apron fastened to our father's old belt around her waist. Her brown pants will need a wash, as will her white shirt.

I wet a bar towel and wipe dirt from her rosy cheek and neck. "Don't tell me Mike called in again."

"It's past twilight, and I haven't seen him, so..." She shrugs. "Guess he's not coming."

I tuck her golden hair behind her ear and wipe away the dirt over her earlobe. Mag takes after her mother, who might've been a fairy because no other creature in all the lands could be this beautiful, with a pixie nose, smooth skin, perfect round eyes with long eyelashes, and shiny hair that never seems to get damaged or dry, not even in the winter winds.

"Rock, paper, scissors?" I ask. I hate peeling potatoes.

"Sure," Mag says, and we play.

I lose and will have to peel the potatoes early tomorrow.

She winks one pretty green eye. "How did we do for the night?" Mag opens the drawer that holds our coins. A few silvers slide over the wood. Not as many as we need to keep the lights on since the southern rebel problem has cut into our business. Most travelers aren't on their way to Lyan for vacation or business. Instead, they're seeking refuge there, and since most of the south is plagued by the same rebellion that's been going on for over a turn now, the king increased the taxes for the rest of us midlanders and northerners. The tavern and the few rooms we offer upstairs that make up our inn aren't covering the extra cost.

I rub her shoulder. “The soldiers will return.”

The drunk lifts his head, showing chapped lips in the shadow of his cloak. He snorts. “They did return.”

I frown. “What do you mean?”

“I’m it.”

Giggling nervously, I hold out my hand. “Pay up and go rest. Breakfast is served early.”

He snorts again. “You and I will be breakfast, and the horde serves itself after dusk.”

Mag rounds the bar and sits next to the man. She yanks back the hood of his cloak, and it falls open to reveal the tattered red uniform of a soldier. A lieutenant, judging by the stars on his pocket.

“What happened?” I ask, a tingle of fear making my heart beat faster.

The soldier downs the pale ale and wipes his mouth with a sleeve, rests one foot on the floor, and wobbles as he stands. “The question is what *will* happen.”

“What will happen?” I lean over the bar, and my sister leans in too, practically touching him.

He kisses her forehead. “The horde will come. They will consume. They will leave.”

I lean back. “What do you mean, consume?”

“They’re predators.”

My sister and I laugh. We’ve heard the myth a million times, but our father, the king’s historian, has been searching for these creatures for over ten turns, well before anyone ever mentioned them. He kept returning empty-handed, and as punishment, a few turns back, the king chopped off his head.

Now, whenever anyone talks about devastated villages, devoured corpses, and ravenous creatures, they say it’s the horde. But if our father found nothing, despite the threat to his life, they don’t exist.

“There’s no such thing as the horde or predators,” I say.

“I saw them.” He points to his bloodshot blue eye, and I note the crusted blood under his fingernails. “A creature with teeth the size of my fingers, claws, fur, bright red eyes, ripping through my buddy’s guts...and eating.”

“Gross,” Mag says.

The soldier stumbles toward the stairs. “The horde is coming.”

“If they’re coming, why are you still here?” I ask. He’s full of shit.

“Nowhere to run. The king will kill me anyway. I’d rather my family think I died in battle than have them watch my beheading in the square.”

The soldier’s footsteps echo in the now-silent bar. The last patrons, a family with a small boy, throw silvers on the table and rush out the double doors.

“Hey,” Mag shouts as she runs after them. “Hey, come back! He’s crazy. Don’t listen to him.”

“The horde is coming!” the boy yells, and with that, the refugees passing on the road before the inn scramble. Screaming and yelling ensues as people start trampling one another, surging toward the road that leads to the bridge.

Mag waves her arms. “Stop, stop! There is no horde. It’s just people like us playing dress-up.”

Grabbing the tray, I start clearing the table, knowing Mag can’t stop the madness. The word “horde” throws people into a frenzy. That’s because they don’t know the king like we do. Our father told us of the king’s ruthlessness and that the king would protect his land, if not his people. He wouldn’t allow the horde to pillage and seize his land, not after he conquered it with blood and magic.

Besides, the king commands medeisars, creatures of magic nobody can defeat. The predatory horde, even if they weren’t a myth (and they are) are no match for those creatures or for the

king, who is said to be able to kill thousands with a single sweep of his hand. Father has seen it, and so I believe it.

Despite the danger to his life, my father couldn't find the horde.

They don't exist.

"They're a myth," I say out loud into an empty tavern.

Mag returns, grabs a bottle of our cheapest whiskey, and sits at the bar. She pours a pair of shooters.

We down them, then slam the glasses on the bar top. Whiskey burns down my throat, and I chase it with water.

"Let's clean up," Mag says and starts unraveling her messy braid. "You wake up early and peel the potatoes, and I'll cook breakfast."

"For our one guest?"

She smiles. "And us."

I smile back. "And us."

She presses a warm callused palm over my cheek and pecks my nose. "Me and you, sister," she says. "We keep going no matter what. Right?"

"Right."

"The horde is a myth," she says.

"The horde is a myth. The monsters are a myth," I repeat. No, really, they are.

... until they're not. [READ MORE...](#)

BOOK II IN THE FAE SERIES TEASER

Augusta

Cecile shrugs. “The seer serves the crown, Augusta. Maybe the commander was interested in you before, but now that you’re the royal seer, he can’t touch you.”

“Why not?”

“Because...” My sister clears her throat. “June slipped and told me the king forbade anyone from so much as looking at you.”

I expel a breath, and all my hopes deflate. No wonder the commander is uninterested in me. Not only am I too young and too inexperienced and those fae at Klen’s ride him three ways from sundown, now I’m also forbidden. And while forbidden fruit sounds delicious to me, the commander would never disobey his king. He’s the most loyal, most honorable male I’ve ever met. It’s part of what makes him so appealing.

Sulking in my newly found self-pity, I prop my chin on my palm and my elbow on the railing.

“Ladies don’t sulk or slouch,” comes from behind me. I startle and spin to see El’jah, the Summer prince. He’s wearing a one-piece golden suit with black boots that reach mid-thigh and a black blazer with two tapered pieces reaching just past the back of his knees. He winks at me, and his blue eyes twinkle, setting my heart and every heart in the vicinity aflutter.

Few are immune to El'jah's charm. "One..." He lifts a finger. "The commander isn't into males. Trust me, I know these things."

Dramatically, I drop my shoulders even more as if moping.

"Awww," El'jah says as he pats my head. "You poor thing. Look up, I have number two." He lifts the second finger. "Don't be the dog who spends the few spans of heat we have left barking up the wrong tree. A male worthy of all this"—he eyes me in that sexy way of his that makes me feel both attractive and wanted—"virginal hotness will come for you."

"You think so?"

"You tell me." He pokes my forehead. "You're the seer."

Eh. The seer. On one occasion, I shared a terrible vision of my sister June that happened to randomly arise in my brain, and now the king thinks I'm a seer. Since foresight is one of, if not the most, coveted forms of magic in the world, the king proclaimed me the royal seer.

Although I tried to tell him I'd love to have magical powers I could use to predict the future, but I simply don't have enough magic to do what he needs of me and what is expected of the royal seer, King Et'enne's title stands. There's no chance he'll change his mind.

El'jah takes Julie's and Cecile's hands and walks backward, dragging them away. "I'm taking you single ladies to a party. Yes?"

"Yes, sir," they answer.

"And you, my sweet, virginal seer, must stay, I'm afraid."

Julie blows me a kiss. "Don't wait up for us."

By the time they return, I'll be sleeping. Bored and alone, I head toward the gardens at the back of the Golden Palace.

Fae of all shapes and sizes dressed in bright stand-out colors, with elaborate hairdos adorned with expensive shiny jewels, linger on the winding staircase, sipping champagne from flutes and laughing while sharing gossip of other people's misfortunes.

At the bottom of the stairs, the commander awkwardly holds a champagne flute between his large, gloved fingers. He doesn't drink while on duty, and knowing him, he's always on duty.

My heart does a nervous flutter as I walk up to him and casually greet him. I bat my eyelashes at his handsome face. "Good evening, Commander."

"Seer."

I used to be Augusta. Now I'm *seer*. The way he says it, though, is special. Crisp. Cold. And with finality that cuts off further conversation. It's too bad for him I'm not easily scared or shoved away.

"I didn't think you drank on duty."

"He doesn't," a musical voice says and joins us, plucking the flute from his hand. "Thank you." She smiles up at him and flutters her eyelashes. As I watch Fleur, the princess, and take in her beauty, it becomes obvious to me why the commander won't give me or any other female the time of span. It's not only because he's sated at Klen's, but because beautiful fae royalty surrounds him all span long, and in comparison, my appearance is average.

With his looks and station and, I bet, magical power, he can have any female he wants. He just hasn't had any. Not in the court, at least.

"Are you alone?" Fleur asks.

I nod.

"Where are your sisters?"

"With your brother."

Fleur smiles knowingly. "Ah. I'm on my way to meet the Unseelie delegation if you would care to join me."

"Um, no."

She giggles, and the commander chuckles. "Not a fan of the Unseelie?" he asks.

Holy Fates, he's talking to me.

I open my mouth to answer, but I'm too awestruck that he sparked an exchange of words with me that I manage only to blink up at him. The commander frowns, likely wondering what sort of stupid he's chatting with.

"No," I answer after an awkward silence. Both he and Fleur nod, gazes everywhere but on me. The royals of the Summer Court are polite and hospitable, so neither of these two people will point out what they must perceive to be a lack of social skills. All conversation in the court should flow naturally, not stall. That's the expectation during parties.

We all aim to have a grand time.

Tongue-tied and feeling as if I'm intruding, I see my sister welcoming a long line of guests. Next to her stands our Summer king, arguably the handsomest male in all the fae lands. Out of all the opulence in the palace, I catch him looking at June.

"That is one love history will write about," Fleur says quietly, privately to me.

"If I ever marry, I would want my king to look at me the way King Et'enne looks at June. But since I can't even answer the male I like who finally spoke to me, kings are not charted in my future. Perhaps I shall remain the virginal Summer seer for the rest of my life. It sure would make King Et'enne happy."

Fleur sips her flute.

The commander stands there in his usual silent manner.

"May I be excused?" I ask politely, not really waiting for anyone to excuse me.

The commander nods, and Fleur smiles. "Of course. I'll see you at the dinner table. We're sitting together." She leaves, and the commander's eyes stray after her retreating figure. It's brief, but I caught it, and it solidifies my fate.

Gah, I want to be more like Fleur in the sense she has all the freedom that comes from being a female fae of beauty and power. But I can never be like Fleur.

I am not a princess, and also, a little over a cycle ago, I worked at my farm, picking apples for our pig Millie. Now I'm having dinner with Fleur in the Summer Court, which is lorded over by the male who is to marry my oldest sister. There's so much the fate's have already blessed me with, and I shan't want for more.

For a little longer, I linger to give the commander a chance to ask where I'm going, or to ask if he could escort me there (in the gardens where he can kiss me in private), but the commander watches the entrance like one of his birds of prey. Always on duty.

Instead of occupying myself with "the wrong tree," perhaps I should take lessons from the commander and get on with my duty. The seer is supposed to remain alone and chaste so that her powers may grow vast. The Summer king wants to see me develop my powers and not mingle much with males. Trouble is, I was born with only a little magic, so the suffering seems unfair.

Turning away from the entrance, I walk toward the back of the palace and duck as a flock of pixies rushes out of the back service areas. The kitchens are in chaos, so nobody notices as I walk along the wall all the way to the back. I lift my skirts so I don't step on any porridge that missed the gutters and round the corner, then climb several steps to arrive at the back gardens, my favorite place in the palace.

The décor extends into the gardens as the party will move here after dinner, but for now, only the band is setting up the stage. Right before the gardens, I sit on the same wooden bench that King Et'enne likes to sit on. He says it's because the bench is positioned at a perfect angle that affords him a view of the back of the palace while also allowing him to watch the street before the bridge connecting the Golden Palace to the city.

A convoy of carriages is crossing the bridge. It's the Unseelie delegation arriving, an event everyone is eagerly waiting for.

It will mark the first time in over two centuries that Unseelie delegates have been invited to a party in the Summer Court. It's even more significant because it's our mating season, thus there's a possibility of seelie and unseelie coupling.

Not that we would ever couple with them.

“Waiting for someone?” a smooth male voice asks from behind me.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Milana Jacks grew up with tales of water fairies that seduced men, vampires that seduced women, and Babaroga who'd come to take her away if she didn't eat her bean soup. She writes sizzling fantasy romance with take charge heroes from her home on Earth she shares with Mate and their three little beasts.

• She entertains readers on her mailing list as they await for books in the series. Join other readers at <http://www.milanajacks.com/newsletter/> •

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