



A
FOREVER
MATES
TRILOGY

REDEEMED WOLF

BLACK DIAMOND ALPHA-3

TALA MOORE

REDEEMED WOLF
BLACK DIAMOND ALPHA
BOOK THREE

TALA MOORE



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CHAPTER I

LUKE



My skin brushes against Addy's and I register she's shivering from the cool wind whipping around us. My gaze moves from the goosebumps scattering up her arms to the noticeable cracks and dents in this shitty shelter.

Honestly, what more can I expect when the building materials varied from sticks to disjointed tree branches, all tucked behind a fallen tree?

It's all I could scrounge together after we ran until Addy couldn't run anymore. It's far from enough for the woman who holds my heart, but it's the best I can do considering we needed to create as much distance between us and the Blood Born pack. My father won't come after us so soon, which means we have some time.

Time for me to make sure Addy's safe.

She snuggles closer, then runs a finger down the center of my chest. "If only we could think of a way to keep warm," she murmurs.

I chuckle at the cheesy line, but it quickly dies away when her gaze lifts to mine. Smoldering desire draws me in. My own need clenches my gut. Saying no to Addy is like trying to stop the tide.

“Make me forget, Luke,” she whispers.

My eager mouth finds its way to her exposed neck, licking, kissing, and biting, relishing her taste. Instinctively, my hold on her sides tightens, keeping her in place as she moans and moves, her fingers digging into my back.

It’s been one catastrophe after another. This whole shit show has been nothing but crazy, and in more ways than one, my fault entirely.

An apology rolls off my tongue, one that blends in with the moans I whisper passionately into her ear.

“It’s not your fault.” She pushes her index finger against my lips, shushing me.

Seducing me.

My mouth dries up as I lose myself in her vivid blue eyes loaded with nothing but lust. My cock throbs in my pants, begging to be let out.

Addy realizes it too, and with a full-lipped smile, she gently kisses the side of my mouth. Her tongue slips out to taste it. With a soft moan, she explores just like I did, grazing up my cheek, over the shell of my ear, and down to my throat. Then she’s ravishing me, using her hot tongue as she draws circles on my neck, kissing and biting.

A groan escapes my mouth when her hand slides into my pants, seeking out my hard shaft. Her lips curl up when her fingers graze the tip and a load of pre-cum spills onto her fingers.

Without severing eye contact, Addy draws her wet fingers to her lips and starts sucking on each one.

Fuck.

It's time to give as good as she is.

With a rough growl, I push her back and spread her legs, exposing her already wet core. I shift her lacy panties to the side, glorying in the view of her glistening pussy, aching to be fondled.

I ram my fingers into her already moist heat. "So tight," I groan as she clamps onto me, writhing in pleasure. I put in another, spreading her wider apart, stroking and thrusting. My mouth waters at the thought of what's coming next.

Moving down and hoisting her legs over my shoulders, my tongue encircles her clit, licking and sucking.

She bucks her hips as she tosses her head back. "Luke, it feels so good!"

I grin against her moist folds. For just this moment, I can erase the agony she's suffering, the misery I inflicted on her.

Both her hands grip the back of my head, asking to be pleased more. I swap places, my fingers stroking her clit, whilst my tongue jabs deeper into her pussy. Wet sounds fill the shelter as my tongue explores her tight core.

Her hands drop from the back of my head, her gasps become heavier and lewder.

"Luke... I'm going to—"

Her hoarse cries fill the shelter as she twists her legs from side to side, flinging her head back and forth. I press down her bucking hips with an elbow, hastening my thrusting.

A moment later, her sweet juices spill onto my tongue. I groan with delight, lapping up at the evidence of her pleasure. So sweet. So pure. So Addy.

But I'm not finished yet.

Moving up her panting body, my mouth captures one of her gorgeous tits while my hand kneads the other. She flings her arm across my neck as my thumb caresses her tight nipple.

“Mm...” Addy whimpers when my stiff cock prods her sensitive pussy. She doesn’t want to wait any longer, and neither do I.

“What do you want, Adeline?” I ask with gritted teeth, rubbing my hard length against her twitching flesh. It feels like if I don’t put it in soon, it will explode.

She digs her fingers into the back of my neck and pulls me in for a steamy kiss. My tongue and hers wrestle inside the hot cave that is her mouth, our moans mixing. She furiously bucks against my cock, trying to tell me to put the goddamned thing in.

Without pulling out of the kiss, I push my shaft inside her in one swift move, using her juices as a lubricant.

“Oh god!” she moans, using her fingers to comb through my hair. “Yes, that’s what I want.”

My thrusts are slow and full, her insides molding to the shape of my dick. She tightens around me, and I groan brokenly as my control snaps. The wildfire passion propels my hips to move of their own volition, pounding her pussy, probing at her sweet spots.

The same word echoes through my mind and heart as the first time we made love.

Mine.

With one final thrust, I ejaculate a hot load inside her pulsating sex. My back arches as my hips piston without rhythm or control, the stunning pleasure that only exists with Addy roaring through my body. Beneath me, she shudders and

moans and whimpers as her second orgasm rips through her. We hold each other, riding the wave that's swept us up.

Once we're spent, I collapse and draw Addy to me. My body melts into hers completely, as though we're one person. Holding each other tightly, our breathing slows along with our heart rate. Our shared body heat keeps the cold at bay.

Just like our love has kept the hate at bay.

Addy shifts so she's looking up at me. "That was good, wasn't it?"

I chuckle, about to say it's always been mind-blowing, but the vulnerability in her eyes has me pausing. Her gaze slides away as her front teeth chew on her plump lip. There's certainly something occupying her thoughts.

Something other than being on the run, or having passionate sex in the woods.

"Addy, what's wrong?" I ask before planting a soft kiss on her forehead, drawing her focus to me.

She wriggles her body closer into my embrace, then parts her lips to break the silence. "You sure that for one second, you didn't think about picking one of those girls?"

Her words slip out in a worried tone, as though she's been dwelling on this for some time. And though I want to think that her jealousy is wholesome, I can't help but knit my brows.

Is she crazy? How could anyone in this situation even think like that?

I let out a long sigh, then stroke her arms tenderly. "Addy," I say gently.

She doesn't make any affirmative sound, remaining perfectly still.

“You’re the only girl in any pack.” I press a tender kiss to her temple. “I choose you to be my mate—no one else.”

“Okay,” she says quietly.

A small smile plays on my lips as I reach out and pull her by the elbow, locking her moist gaze to my adoring eyes. I cup her cheek in my hand, allowing my thumb to wipe away the single tear that’s escaped and as I caress her soft skin.

Without sparing a second, I crash my lips onto hers, chuckling and moaning and teasing, earning a chuckle from my mate. She runs her hand through my hair as we both end up kissing and nibbling, laughing in between passionate moans.

“Alright, Alright, I’m convinced!” She pulls away, grinning from ear to ear, a playful gleam in her eyes.

“Good,” I say, still holding her gaze. “There’s one thing I never want you to doubt, and that’s my love for you.”

She nods, her eyes luminous in the dark. “I love you, too.”

I draw her in and rest her head on my shoulder. “Now sleep,” I say tenderly. “Tomorrow we’ll move on.”

Addy snuggles in and it feels like she’s crawling straight into my heart. I relax, wanting her there. Glorifying in the sensation of having her in my arms.

She falls asleep quickly, and I know I’m holding everything pure in this world. My fingers gently stroke her silky hair as my gaze focuses on the night sky beyond our shelter.

Running away from both packs was no small feat. Addy’s pack is ruthless and my father is driven by hate. He’ll seek us out, eventually.

Which means I need to do everything I can to protect Addy.

No matter what.

CHAPTER 2

ADELINE



A sick sensation in my stomach forces me out of my slumber. I press my lips against each other and shut my eyes tight, wondering at the back of my mind why I'm feeling like this.

I realize that Luke's scent in the shelter is hardly even there. I cover my breasts in my arms as I rise to my feet, nervousness coiling through my insides. I reach out for my clothes but at first glance, notice a patch of red on the ground. My pulse jolts painfully.

Luke is nowhere to be seen, and now there's blood!

Could they have already tracked us down?

"Luke! Luke, where are you?!" I frantically call out, so afraid that I forget to slip on a shirt.

My mind can't help but envision all the gruesome things that could happen to him if he's caught. Before I know it, hot streams of tears are tracking down my cheeks.

"Addy!" he calls out.

Luke dashes forward, pulling me to himself, comforting me in an embrace filled with warmth. My heart skips a beat when he softly strokes the back of my head, assuring me of his presence.

I relax into his touch, my world right again, and that's when I register a certain dampness between my legs. My eyes widen in realization of just whose blood that is.

My fucking period.

Too embarrassed to explain, I end up pushing him away and reaching for my clothes, desperate to slap any piece of fabric on.

Luke seems to have picked up on my midmorning crisis and sends me an understanding expression.

"Shit. Now they'll pick up on my scent even faster," I lament, pinching my temples in frustration.

Living in the wild is supposed to be a norm for shifters, isn't it?

"We gotta get to my pack, see if there's anyone who can help," I tell him as I yank on my clothes. Surely not everyone back at home holds a grudge.

But after taking one glance at the conflicting look in Luke's eyes, I'd say he thinks otherwise.

"That isn't an option anymore," Luke says soberly.

I tug down my t-shirt, sensing the stillness in him. "Why not?"

His expression hardens a bit as he reaches for my hand and gives it a firm squeeze. "Earlier, I went to the nearby town to see if I could get a sense of what's happened since we've been gone." He pauses and uses his thumb to stroke the back of my hand.

I bite hard on my inner cheek. Without him saying anything, I know it's bad news.

“I’m sorry I wasn’t here when you woke up, it must have been terrifying.”

I manage a nod, drenched in too much anxiety to speak.

“After doing a bit of digging, the word floating around is you’re wanted, Addy. Your pack has sent out a warning that you should never return.”

I retract my hand and place it over my mouth. “What do you mean, never return?” I gasp. The shock of becoming an outcast is a weight too heavy.

“Addy,” he says and grips my shoulders firmly with his strong hands. I stare up at him, searching for strength to overcome this. But all I see is an all-knowing look, one that maybe saw this coming.

“You can’t go back there anymore.”

Luke’s heavy words resound in my head, the reality of how fucked we are finally starting to sink in.

I nod, despite how painful it is to be cut off from the pack that I grew up in, ostracized down by the people who raised me.

Luke pulls me in for a warm hug, murmuring words of love in my ear. Reminding me that even though both our packs have rejected us, at the very least, I’m not alone.

I have my mate with me.

“Don’t you dare leave me again, Luke.” My fingers grip tighter onto his clothes, latching onto my only redemption.

“I won’t ever let you be alone again,” he whispers softly, stroking the back of my hair.

“We have to move forward. As long as we’re together, nobody can separate us,” I tell him, nestling into his touch, embracing his warmth.

Pulling back, I try for a smile. “I really should be more prepared for when I get abducted by a bunch of psycho shifters.” We’ve had nothing to eat, and little to zero supplies. Not to mention that I need to stock up on some tampons.

“You should just tell me what you need,” Luke suggests. “I’ll run to the neighboring town and be back as quickly as I can.”

“It’ll be too suspicious if you visit twice in the same day, and equally dangerous if I stay behind,” I try to reason, not liking the idea of us splitting up.

Luke purses his lips and knits his brows. “It’s better if I go alone. Our packs will keep an eye out for a couple.”

I shake my head. It can’t be Luke risking things all the time for me. I’m a shifter too, and his mate. One who’s just as much a part of this as he is. “I’m coming too,” I say, registering the hard edge in my voice.

Luke crosses his arm. “I did not just sacrifice everything for you to risk your goddamn life like this, Addy.”

“Oh, like you just did while I was sleeping? It’s a two-way street, Luke,” I snap sharply.

I almost gasp at my own words, briefly stunned that such harsh words just came out. Especially after knowing all Luke had been through and what he had to sacrifice to be with me.

It’s the wolf within me. She’s a mate now, and unwilling to let us get babied like some pup. I want to hold my own. I want to be strong.

But that depends on whether Luke sees me that way.

He uncrosses his arms as he lets out a breath. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean for it to come out like that. You know your safety is the most important thing to me.” He extends a hand, looking at me with soulful eyes.

My heart has already melted. Taking a step forward, I cup his face, enjoying the feeling of the rough stubble against my palms. “We’re in this together, okay?”

We can’t let our tenuous position come between us.

“Okay,” he says softly, a beautiful hint of a smile playing at the edge of his lips.

We move simultaneously, ready to seal our words with a kiss, when the sound of clapping has us yanking apart.

“Love really makes one do the craziest of things,” says a familiar voice from above. “Who would have thought that the victim would end up apologizing to the attacker?”

Luke and I look up, trying to understand what’s going on, both ready to defend the other.

Stretched out comfortably on the branch of a tree and wearing an all-knowing look on her face, is none other than one of shifters who were promised to Luke.

Sienna

I look at Luke and can tell from one glance that he’s just as stunned as I am.

We’ve been found.

CHAPTER 3

LUKE



“Sienna?” The question slips out even though I don’t need her wearing a sign around her neck to know it’s her. What I’m really trying to find out is why she’s here and how she found us.

“Your knight in shining armor,” she says, swinging a foot. “I hear you two need a place to stay.”

Addy shifts her weight and I have no doubt she’s as deeply uncomfortable with this turn of events as I am. My wolf hovers close to the surface, ready to protect.

Sienna is Blood Born. And tracked us.

Not to mention she’s one of the wolves who was chosen as a mate for me.

“As much as I’d love to hang and chat, I suggest you two need something a little more than that,” Sienna says, pointing at the shelter I built. “The nights are only going to get cooler.”

She effortlessly jumps off the tree branch, landing on the fallen leaves and twigs that have settled around the large tree. She starts walking forward, leading the way.

“How come you’re here and not at the pack compound?” I point out, standing my ground.

Without looking back, she retorts, “This isn’t the time to be suspicious. If I wasn’t on your side, then you both would be dead by now.”

Still, I hesitate. Addy is silent beside me.

I quickly weigh up our options. Sienna’s right. If she wanted us dead, we would have been ambushed already. Not to mention that she now knows where our hideout is. If we don’t follow her back, then we’ll be left with no choice but to either attack her or switch locations.

Sienna looks over her shoulder. “And besides, it sounds like you both are in dire need of supplies.” She winks. “I have tampons.”

On impulse, I grab Addy by the wrist, urging her to play along. She looks everything pissed, but knows better than to argue in the open with potential enemies around.

“You have a hideout?” I ask.

“A cabin.” Sienna cocks her head. “It’s nearby and has enough supplies to get you two all cleaned up.”

I mimic her movement. “And yet I didn’t scent you,” I muse.

She grins. “I have my ways of staying hidden,” she says cryptically, making Addy tense even more.

Yet it also means that our packs won’t find the cabin either.

Hoping to hell I’m making the right call, I nod. “Thank you. Your kindness is appreciated.”

Sienna smiles even wider, then sets off among the trees. We have no choice but to follow.

Either into a chance of surviving this.

Or a trap.



Just like Sienna said, the cabin isn't far. And is as well stocked as she claimed, right down to a vegetable garden out the back and a chicken pen.

She gives a grand tour of its simple but tidy layout along with the second bedroom we'll be using. With a wink and a tap of her nose, she points to the cupboard below the shared bathroom sink for Addy, saying everything she needs for her women's issues is there.

Although Addy's still tense, she has the grace to thank Sienna, who waves away the gratitude before making a joke that she'll leave them to unpack.

The first thing Addy wants to do is shower. I'm also keen to wash away the grime of the past couple of days so we climb in together. I discover the shower is just as well stocked as the rest of the cabin with new bottles of shampoo, conditioner, and body soap. It has me wondering why Sienna has this place considering she lives with the Blood Born pack.

A snuffle snaps me out of my thoughts. Addy angles her face into the stream of water from the shower, but not before I notice the tears that mingle with the water on her face. She was here busy crying and my mind was elsewhere.

Way to go, Luke.

Turning her to face me, I press my lips on hers briefly, our foreheads together, cold droplets of water hitting my exposed

chest.

“It’s going to be okay, Addy.”

She blinks up at me. “Promise?”

“Well.” I knock on the shower door. “It can’t get any worse, right?”

Her lips twitch as her eyes crinkle. A second later, she grins from ear to ear, finally tossing one of her dazzling smiles my way. It’s a breath of fresh air to be able to ease the tension between us.

“Are you certain we can trust her, Luke?” Addy asks, her face turning serious once more.

“We don’t have that much of a choice,” I answer, rubbing her upper arms. “And it’ll only be for a short while.”

Addy doesn’t answer as she chews on her bottom lip, steam curling around us. To be honest, I can’t really blame her for being on the edge. If I were her, I’d have no reason to trust Sienna, especially after everything we’ve been through.

However, that doesn’t mean Sienna isn’t any more a victim of circumstance than the rest of us. “She wasn’t interested in mating with me, Addy. She was forced into it just as much as I was.”

She rolls her eyes. “Of course she wanted to mate with you,” she huffs, a smile hovering on her lips once more. “Have you looked in the mirror, Alpha’s son?”

I pull her against me, loving the feeling of our wet skin sliding and molding. “I only want you,” I growl, nudging her with my growing erection.

Addy’s eyes heat with a look I’m fast learning to love, but she steps back with a sigh. “We should do something for

Sienna.”

“What do you suggest?” I ask, missing the sensation of holding her.

“Let’s cook her a meal.” Addy shuts off the water, a determined look on her face. “To say thank you.”



Later that night, I wander outside to the cabin’s porch to think through our next line of action. My wolf can sense the strain on Addy’s wolf. We’re still too close to both our packs.

“Isn’t it too cold to be out here by yourself?” Sienna’s voice pulls me out of my deep-rooted thoughts. I blink twice and notice a teacup presented in front of me. “Drink up,” she says, extending the cup of tea.

I nod and take it off her hands. “Thanks, and Addy’s in bed, resting up.”

After cooking a hearty meal that had me rolling my eyes in pleasure, Addy had looked exhausted. Her strength is in her spirit, not her body, which I’d pointed out didn’t make me completely redundant. Tucking a blanket around her as she’d curled up on the bed, saying she was just laying down for a moment, had fulfilled a tender, protective streak I didn’t know existed until I met her.

I take a sip from the tea and close my eyes, savoring its taste, though I would’ve much preferred a bottle of beer right about now.

“So,” I say without looking at Sienna. “Are you going to tell me why you’re on the run, or do I just keep pretending not to notice?”

“You’re sharp. What gave me away?” Sienna pinches her chin, staring at me with expectant eyes.

“Aside from the stocked cabin in the middle of the woods, I’d say it’s the fact that you’re masking your scent. You don’t want to be found.”

Judging by the tense silence that follows, I know I hit the nail on its head. The question now is why Sienna’s doing this.

I shrug. “Did my father’s over the top expectations chase you away, too?” Perhaps he discovered that not everyone was on board with his way of exacting revenge.

“You leaving gave me the opening I needed. I tried to tell myself for years that your father didn’t mean to start all this.” Sienna’s mouth twists. “But after everything he did to you, to me, to Frena, I couldn’t pretend he’s not a monster.”

I still. “What do you mean, started all this?”

“I’m talking about the truth behind what really happened, the real reason why your family was murdered, Luke.”

I lean forward even though every part of me wants out of this conversation. We’re no longer talking about the past few weeks. “What are you talking about, Sienna?”

“Everything started with the night the High Ridge pack was attacked,” Sienna spits. “And it was all your father’s fault. He’s the one who knocked over the first domino.”

“My father’s fault? It was his pack, his family, that was ruthlessly murdered,” I say, shaking my head.

Sienna simply stares at me, a silent challenge in her eyes. She's asking me if I want to know the truth.

"Tell me what you know," I utter, gritting my teeth.

She pauses and takes a deep breath. "Your father," she corrects, rejecting my father as the Alpha. "He orchestrated vicious attacks against other packs, nitpicking their weaker members in his sick struggle for power. Ultimately, he got the short end of the stick and was slapped in the face by karma. He killed the High Ridge Alpha's mate.

He killed Addy's mother.

Sienna shrugs. "He messed with the wrong pack and got his entire pack slaughtered."

My years of blind loyalty have me instinctively rejecting Sienna's words. Except I already know she's telling the truth.

My father was never the victim.

He was the villain. He always has been.

And I followed him. Wanted to be him. Almost became him.

"It's not your fault." Sienna says from beside me as if she's reading my mind. She reaches out and clasps my hand in hers, giving it a tight squeeze. "After everything you had to put up with, you just wanted a pack that would accept and protect you."

"Just like the rest of us," she whispers to the silent forest.

CHAPTER 4

ADELINE



“L uke...” I spread my arm across the other half of the bed even though I’m still half-asleep, only to discover that it’s empty. A glance at the window, which reveals it’s night.

Worried about him, I conduct a quick search around the cabin, only to find out he isn’t inside. I pause, glancing at the closed door of Sienna’s bedroom.

I tell myself I trust him. That I trust in our love. But I can’t help but admit that Sienna feels like a threat. And it’s not only because she’s pretty. Being with her could guarantee Luke a happy life in the pack with his father. No running. No spending his life looking over his shoulder.

Before I can move, I hear muffled voices outside. Following them, I open the door, already smiling as I think of seeing Luke.

The smile dies when I register how closely Sienna’s sitting next to my mate. And that she’s holding his hand.

“Am I interrupting something?” I narrow my eyes at Sienna, my hands coming to my hips.

She lazily removes her hand from around Luke’s. “We were just...chatting,” she says, smiling at me.

The urge to claw that smile off her face takes me by surprise, but once it's here, I don't pretend it's not growing. One word growls through my mind.

Mine.

"It's pretty late," Luke announces, setting down the teacup then standing. "Let's go to bed." He plants a kiss on my forehead, interlocking our fingers together.

He mouths a goodnight to Sienna and doesn't even glance at me till we're both tucked away in our bedroom.

I retract my grip from his. I can still catch her scent on the back of his palm and it just inflames the wolf inside me even more. I sit, legs crossed on the bed, and send him a sharp glare, letting him know I'm pissed. "You two seemed like you were having fun."

He locks the door behind him and takes slow strides towards me, unfastening a button from his shirt with each step. "Jealousy is a good look on you," he purrs, reaching out to push a strand of my hair behind my ear.

I slap away his hand and scoff, "oh, you think it's funny, huh?"

Luke chuckles, the sound low and growly. All his buttons are fully undone and my narrowed eyes land on the bulge in his pants.

He's turned on by my jealousy.

Which in turn has my own desire spiking.

My hands latch onto the back of his neck and pull him in for a kiss. His tongue delves into my mouth and feeling both hot and possessive, I suck on it.

"You're so sexy," he groans against my mouth.

I pull away to catch my breath, seeing the lust glowing in his green gaze. He moves closer, the bulge in his jeans at my eye level, but I slip off the bed and push him back. He sits heavily, already panting. Curious. And clearly excited.

“Just sit there...” Using little strength, I pull him to the edge of the bed, and in one swift movement get on my knees, in between his spread legs. “And let me send you to heaven real quick,” I purr, biting on his zipper, then using my teeth to pull down on it.

His already-hard cock bulges out of his pants the moment it’s released. Looking up at him, that one word still pulsing in my mind—mine—I take him in my mouth.

“Addy,” Luke gasps, spearing his fingers through my hair and pushing it back. “Shit, you...”

He never finishes because I swirl my tongue around his throbbing length. “Mm...tastes good,” I murmur against the tip, then stick my tongue out underneath, letting him watch me lick up the entire length.

“What a tease,” he growls, his lips pulled back in satisfaction as I kiss the salty tip.

Without breaking eye contact with him, I wrap my mouth around his width then slide down as far as I can go. Then relaxing my throat, I go deeper, trying to take all of his length. I start to move up and down, faster and faster, one hand gripping the base.

“Ah! Fuck!” Luke groans as he grips my head and starts to thrust.

My moans of pleasure are muffled as I hold onto him for dear life as his hips move with more and more urgency.

“Addy,” he groans as he rapidly reaches his climax. Tears well up at the corner of my eyes as his full thrusts make me wet in between my legs.

I push his hands away and then slowly raise my head, his erect dick slapping the back of my teeth as I look at him. “Tell me...” I moan, stroking his hot cock with one hand, milking his large balls with the other.

Luke grits his teeth and flings his head back, drowning in pleasure.

“Who do you want to be with? Her?” I pause and then lap the tip of his stiff member and a deep animalistic growl escapes his throat. “Or me?”

Luke springs up from the bed and before I can catch my breath, he has me against the door, his throbbing cock prodding at my ass.

“Why don’t I show you instead?” he growls into my ear, busying himself with getting my pants off first, his shallow breaths a reminder that he’s struggling to exercise self-control. My tampon is gone, the fact I’m menstruating not bothering either of us.

I turn around so I’m facing him. He really does look like an animal about to feast on his prey. I catch a mischievous glint in his eyes, as though an idea popped into his head. He brings his head to meet mine and seizes my lips in a kiss. I gasp into it, parting my lower lip, giving him access to my tongue.

The kiss doesn’t last long though. His lips trail down my chin, his teeth grazing my sensitive skin. I arch my back as I shut my legs firmly together, trying to trap the growing heat pooling there. “So hot,” I whimper.

He nibbles down my neck, then licks my collar bone. I close my eyes and bite hard on my lower lip, my insides writhing in ecstasy.

“Tonight...” Luke’s hand snakes between my thighs, pushing them apart with just one hand. I gasp when his hungry fingers caress my thighs, stroking them sensually. “Tonight, Addy...”

“Yes?” I whisper hoarsely, surprised that I’m still able to speak fluently at this point.

He slides his free hand under my shirt and cages one of my breasts in a tight squeeze, my aroused nipple prodding at his palm.

“We’re going to be all sorts of loud,” he growls, flicking my nipple.

I wince and gasp at the same time, the pleasure and pain creating a heady cocktail. Luke lifts my shirt over my head and sucks one of my exposed breasts, his other hand parting my lower lips.

Still sucking on my nipples, he locks eyes with me. “I’m going to wind and unwind you, Addy, until you scream out my name,” he whispers while stabbing a finger into my pussy. “No one will doubt who we belong to.”

My heart nearly leaps out of my chest. Luke doesn’t waste a single moment. He brings his erect rod to the entrance of my cave, only squeezing in the tip then holding it there.

“Ah fuck!” The words melt together like butter as I fling my head back against the door, ignoring the pain.

“Your insides are twitching in anticipation, love.” Luke says, withdrawing the inch then thrusting it back in, building the pleasure. The frustration.

I want all of him. Now.

I try to buck my hips and thrust it in myself, but he holds my sides firmly, preventing me. “If you want it, Addy, then you’ll have to say it.”

“Yes! Please! Give it to me!”

“Give you what?” He pushes another excruciating inch inside me.

“Aah!” I moan, a wave of pleasure coursing through my body. Every cell in my body is centered on that place we’re making contact, telling me it’s not enough. “Fuck me! Please,” I cry out, the words part demand, part begging. I’ve gone from claiming him to being claimed.

Luke fully thrusts his cock into me, plunging deep into my pussy. And that’s all it takes. My eyes roll into the back of my head as the pleasure crests, taking me with it. Luke pounds into me hard, my back thudding against the door, impossibly drawing out the kaleidoscope of sensations gripping me. I hold on for dear life as I writhe and whine and will this to never stop.

Luke’s thrusts slow and I return to reality. Out of breath, I grip his shoulders, noting they’re covered in a fine sheen of sweat. One thrust and I came. That’s the power this wolf has over me.

He grins as if he can read my mind. “It’s too early to tap out now, love,” he teases, one hand fondling my nipple.

Grinning back, I stun him when I sink my teeth into his neck, biting hard enough to leave my mark. I kiss the reddish spot and whisper, “we’re just getting started, baby.”

Sienna will definitely know who Luke belongs to before the night is out.

CHAPTER 5

LUKE



The past few days in the cabin had been peaceful. Addy's busied herself with the chores, and Sienna is often out. My guess is, she's giving us privacy, considering Addy and I are making up for lost time. After the first night when her jealousy was such a turn on, it unleashed something inside me. I'm insatiable, needing to experience it all.

Addy beneath me.

Addy on top.

Addy bent over and gripping the doorknob, the bed, the chair as I pound her from behind.

The wonder of it all is that Addy's just as ravenous. Just as hungry to touch and taste and explore exactly how endless this passion is. Our love is only growing.

Tonight however, is a full moon, and the three of us decided it would be best to go out hunting for meat. There's no telling when we'll run into either of our packs, so getting meat is easier this way.

"Are you ready?" I ask Addy, helping her take off her shirt and placing it next to mine beside a tree. She nods, styling her hair into a ponytail. I can sense a bit of hesitation but it's

probably because it's been a while since she last went for a hunt.

Sienna walks up to us wearing nothing but a proud smirk on her face. "Try not to fall behind," she says, staring at us both, Addy in particular.

She dashes into the wood and shifts from a two-legged human to a gray four-legged wolf with tinted yellow eyes. Not wanting to lag behind Addy and I both chase after her. I shift first and Addy shifts next. I almost trip over myself. She's a coal-colored wolf, sleek and stunning, and I wish I had the time to really appreciate her. She's the most beautiful wolf I've ever laid eyes on.

But Sienna's already streaking ahead.

'*Stay close*' I tell Addy through the mind link before we're off at full speed, the cool night caressing our fur.

The moonlight is all our animal senses need to navigate through the forest. Addy struggles to keep up with me so I slow as we weave through trunks and over fallen logs. By the time we catch up with Sienna, she's already engaged in an active hunt. She's crouched low, focused on something in a small clearing.

I scent the prey before I see her. Standing off to the side in a defensive stance is a young doe. Her ears twitch as the white flashes in her eyes, but for some reason, she doesn't run.

'*Stay low and don't engage,*' I tell Addy. Something isn't quite right with this scene.

I make a move to creep towards the clearing, but Sienna's already launching forward. Yet not toward the doe. She leaps over her, angled toward the bush behind her.

I blink, realizing I've been too slow. Maybe Sienna's scent was too strong or perhaps their scent wasn't strong enough. Whichever the case, what happens next is solely because I didn't pick up on things faster.

Addy growls low in her throat. She must have picked up on the new scent as well.

The scent of young fawns.

Before either of us can dash forward, Sienna strikes out. Her claws slash at the twins, instantly slashing their throats. Blood splatters the leaves around them as the doe dashes away, knowing her babies are lost to her.

Addy freezes at the gruesome sight, and I quickly stand in front of her, blocking her view of Sienna murdering the fawns who couldn't run to save themselves. With a warning glance our way, she crouches down to devour what little meat they have to offer.

The sound of crunching bone and tearing flesh fills the air.

Addy steps around me, her hackles raised as she stalks toward Sienna. She's vibrating with fury.

I leap to join her, unsure of what I'll do if a fight breaks out. I can't blame Addy for her anger. But Sienna is no doubt a strong fighter. You don't spend time with the Blood Borne and not learn to protect yourself.

Sienna turns, and to my surprise, shifts to her human form. She wipes her mouth, then stretches languorously. She looks satisfied and well fed.

Addy shifts too, throwing her arms out wide. "They were babies! How could you?"

Sienna arches an eyebrow. “We were on a hunt in case you didn’t notice. It’s kill or be killed.” She goes to pick up the remains of the carcasses, but Addy steps in between them.

“I’m not done talking to you!” she growls as her hands clench into fists. “Why didn’t you kill the mother instead?”

“I didn’t even see her,” Sienna says curtly. She steps around Addy and hoists the two half-eaten fawns, one on each shoulder. With a glare at both of us, she stalks back toward the cabin.

I reach out to grab Addy’s arm, worried she’s going to follow her, but Addy remains where she is. “How could she...” she whispers.

I wrap my arms around her, registering that she’s trembling. Either in anger or pain at the loss of the two fawns, possibly both.

“She was probably just caught up in the hunt,” I murmur, pressing a kiss to her temple. “I’m sure it’s not the first time you’ve seen it happen.” Blood lust is a primal emotion wolves have to fight when they’re hunting.

Addy frowns. “I never really hunted. We didn’t have to and my brothers never let me...”

I pull back, studying her in the moonlight. I’d forgotten about her life before we met. It was stifled, but also protected.

“It was different for us, with my dad and our pack growing up,” I say carefully. “Life was different.”

Addy turns in my arms, looking up at me. “Different how?”

I can see she’s genuinely curious. I also know I don’t have to hide my dark past from Addy anymore. “My first hunt

wasn't some ceremonial rite of passage. Dad took me and the rest of the pack hunting because we were low on food. The family of swans were the only thing we came across. We butchered the whole lot."

Addy's soft gaze stays on me, full of nothing but compassion and understanding. The words tumble out, describing the memories as fast as they come. Of the hunts where the only win was the death of those weaker than us. Of strength being power, no matter what. And of the fleeting moments of fun and laughter with my brother, Joel.

The entire time, Addy's still as she listens. She nods, occasionally brushes my arm. When I'm spent, she actually smiles. "You endured that, and yet weren't tainted by it. That's why I love you, Luke. With every shred of my being."

"Adeline," I breathe, unable to do anything but brush my lips against hers.

This woman is my heart. My soul. The reason my fate was changed.

She pulls back, smiling softly as she caresses my cheek. "Let's get back to the cabin."

As much as I'd love to be out here with her, I know she's right. It's too dangerous. We're too open and exposed.

When we return to the cabin, Sienna's nowhere to be seen. The scent of fresh blood is heavy in the air, suggesting she either finished her tender meal, or has butchered it and stashed it in the freezer.

Addy and I climb into bed, for the first time since we arrived, content to just hold each other. As her breathing evens out, so does my heart rate. Having Addy in my arms is all I'll ever need.

Yet sleep eludes me. All throughout the night, the image of Sienna brutally attacking those fawns continues to replay in my head, keeping me wide awake.

There was something about the murderous look in her eyes that has me doubting the assurances I gave Addy. I saw those looks too many times growing up.

Which is why I make a promise to myself.

Tomorrow, I'll find out exactly who our savior is.

CHAPTER 6

ADELINE



When I get out of bed, Luke is nowhere to be found. On a normal day I would be upset by this, but for today I'm glad he isn't around.

The events from yesterday have stuck like a sore thumb in my memory. I don't even take a shower before rushing out of our bedroom towards Sienna's. A part of me feels guilty for wanting to search her room without discussing this with Luke first. But then, someone who can brutally attack defenseless fawns is, in my opinion, capable of doing anything.

I need to know who exactly Sienna is. Friend or foe.

However, I'm left stunned the second I push open the door. Turns out, I'm not the only one harboring suspicion.

"Oh, thank god you don't trust her either," I say as Luke shoots up from where he was looking under the bed.

He breathes a sigh of relief, placing his hand on his chest. "I thought you were her."

I want to ask him when he suddenly had a change of heart, but now's not the time. There's no telling when she'll return from wherever she went.

We both comb through the room, searching every nook and cranny. I take the closet while Luke searches the high shelves.

“Any luck?” I ask, poking my fingers into Sienna’s winter jacket pockets, not completely sure of what I should be looking for.

“She left her wallet behind, and that’s about it,” Luke says, tossing it on the bed.

I sigh. We haven’t found anything to implicate Sienna. If anything, it seems like she’s on our side.

And is someone who likes to eat baby deer.

“I don’t think we’ll find anything here,” Luke says, placing everything exactly where he found it.

“That could mean she’s just good at cleaning up her tracks,” I grumble, closing the closet door.

I wince once the words are out, conscious I still sound like a jealous she-wolf. I don’t want to pick a fight with Luke. I just can’t bring myself to trust Sienna.

“Come here, Addy,” Luke says softly.

There’s something in his voice, the need, the gentle demand, that I can’t refuse. I stop in front of him and look up, my breath disintegrating.

Luke’s green eyes are smoldering with a potent mix of passion and tenderness.

“There’s two things you need to know,” he says, his voice gravelly. “I like it that you’re mine.”

I struggle to find my breath. I want to tell him I like it, too. I love it.

He steps closer so our bodies are brushing. “And I fucking love being yours.”

Luke cups my cheeks in his palms and then crashes his lips onto mine. I wrap my arms around his shoulders, losing myself to the hungry kiss. Then my legs wrap around his waist, wanting more of the heat that's combusting between us. His erection nestles into the juncture of my thighs and I moan. He's as ready for this as I am.

He carries me out of the room without once breaking the kiss, running his palms down my back all the way to my ass and firmly squeezing it. His large hand slips into my pants and begins to paw and massage my cheeks, while his other hand snakes up my shirt, caressing my skin.

My head spins with the sensations. We reach the bed and I release my legs, wanting to draw him down to the bed. I want him. Now.

Except he steps back. Undoing his jeans, a slow, primal smile climbs up his gorgeous face. "Let's do something else today."

All I can do is stand there and wait. His lustful eyes alone are burning me up. The scent of his arousal makes my head spin. He pulls out his cock and my mouth waters as my pussy flares with excitement..

"Take it off," he growls at me, stroking the length of his dick.

I obey, turned on just by the Alpha in him, naked within seconds. Luke takes off his pants and then lays flat on his back, his member standing erect. He slaps his chest in a suggestive gesture, telling me to get on.

Curious, excited, and a trembling mess of desire, I comply again. But as I move up, he spins me around so my ass faces him. "Suck on it," he orders, his voice low and gravelly.

Sweet heavens, I'm going to expire just from thinking about what's about to happen. Lowering my body, I rest both elbows on his thighs, his cock on full display. I caress its long shaft, kissing the tip over and over. Luke's stomach tenses beneath me each time I make contact, sending a thrill through me. He's just as hot for me as I am for him.

Not sparing another playful second, I squeeze his heavy balls, kneading them as they tighten more and more.

Luke groans in pleasure. "Can't let you have all the fun," he says a second before he parts my lobes and then blows on my exposed pussy.

I gasp, mouth wide open, everything forgotten but the cool breath on my hot flesh. Luke doesn't stop there. He inserts his meaty tongue into my hole and starts thrusting it in and out. Then his fingers are delving into me, spreading my juices over my folds, fondling my clit. A ragged moan climbs up my throat as I push my ass back, wanting more. Deeper.

"Fucking mine," Luke says in muffled moans, his face full of my pussy. Soft, wet sounds fill my ears as his tongue becomes my new center of gravity.

I whimper in response, grinding my pussy against his face. "Aah...yes! Oh fuck!"

Luke sways his hips from side to side, reminding me that I'm meant to be busy.

I set to work immediately, stroking his stiff cock, using both my spit and his pre-cum as a lubricant. With each stroke, I feel myself getting closer to my climax, as if my pleasure is drawn just as much from giving it as receiving it. Luke must sense it, because his slippery tongue strokes my walls faster while his hands massage my folds and clit.

Not wanting to leave him out, I widen my jaw and gobble his entire cock in one go. Luke gasps and stills for an instant, lost in the pleasure of my warm mouth. Encouraged, my head bobs up and down as I take his cock deeper and deeper, its broad head jabbing at the back of my throat. Tears well up in my eyes as I suck on him quicker, my tongue running along his shaft in a repeated motion, occasionally licking the tip.

Luke recovers with a throaty groan and continues to suck on my pussy, both of us yearning to satisfy the other and not be left behind.

“Luke,” I gasp. “I’m going to...”

“Me, too,” he grits out, his cock rigid and bulging. He lightly slaps my ass and motions to stand up. “But I need to be inside you, Addy.”

I comply swiftly, breathing heavily, in dying need of his touch just as much.

He sits on the nearest seat, his cock fully erect. “What do you say?” he asks suggestively, then sensually licks his moist lower lip, his emerald eyes dark with passion.

I pull my lips back and smirk, always prepared for a challenge. Luke places both hands on my waist, holding me up as I slowly lower my pussy onto his dick. At first it’s just the tip, but as I continue to take in his length, my mouth forms into an ‘O’ shape.

“Fuck,” he groans, flinging his head back, his grip on my sides tightening. I bite my lower lip, waves of pleasure course throughout my body, down to my toes, up to the crown of my head.

With a sharp slam, I swallow his cock perfectly.

“So deep,” I moan, digging my fingers into his back, eyes rolled to the back of my head.

All it takes are a few strokes and we both climax together. Luke’s hands firmly grip my ass, kneading it as he pants heavily, loads of his cum pouring into my pussy. I grind and pump and grind some more, his pleasure only heightening mine. The room fills with the sounds of us crying out each other’s names as the force of our love sweeps us away.

As I return to Earth, I collapse on his shoulder with his dick still inside me, gasping for breath after coming so hard.

“You’re so perfect,” Luke whispers into my ear, then plants a kiss on the side of my neck, his hands still moving over my ass.

I moan a response, my body tingling both inside and out. His mouth continues to graze over my skin, teasing, nibbling, licking. I feel a jab inside and my eyes widen in realization. Luke is already hard again.

I lean back a little, enjoying the way he draws a breath in through his teeth at the movement. “You want to go again?” I whisper, pressing my breasts against his chest, prodding him with my erect nipples.

Luke rests his forehead against mine, his lustful orbs piercing my soul, sending shivers running down my spine.

“I want you to ride my hard cock with your wet pussy again. I want to watch you come. And I want you to milk every last drop of my cum, till it spills out from between your thighs.”

I lick my upper teeth at the mental image he just painted. My heart is already thundering. Blood is already rushing to all the spots that were just thoroughly loved.

I bring my lips to his ear and whisper. “We are gonna have to wipe the chairs when we’re done.”

CHAPTER 7

LUKE



I t's not until later that evening that Sienna returns to the cabin. I try to ascertain where she's been from her scent, but that proves futile. The only smell I can pick up on her is that of trees and shrubs. And frankly speaking, it seems unlikely that Sienna would spend half the entire day running around the forest when we're on the run.

Sienna sniffs the air in the living room and winks at us. "I see you two had fun."

On cue, Addy strides in from our bedroom, her hair wet from her shower. She must have caught Sienna's scent. She doesn't bother to hide the scowl on her face when her gaze settles on Sienna. She relaxes beside me and locks her arm in mine, possessively asserting her claim.

Unfazed, Sienna sits across us with one leg casually crossed over the other. "You know, I'm delighted for you two. Being together and all that," she remarks, sniffing delicately. It's like the scent of our lovemaking still hangs in the air.

Addy rests her head on my chest, nestling into my side. "Thank you," she says with a forced half smile.

I wrap my arm around her waist, happy for her to be territorial. It's later, when we're alone, that I'll remind her that she has a right to be. She owns me, heart and soul.

“I mean, you’ve totally overcome the fact that Addy’s father is the reason for your mother’s death, Luke,” Sienna spits out, with eyes full of amusement. “It’s commendable.”

Addy tenses and I growl. Sienna has once again stepped over the line.

She throws her hands up in a conciliatory gesture. “Oh come on, I meant that as a compliment,” she huffs.

“We’re going for a walk,” I snarl, taking Addy’s hand and exiting the cabin.

Outside, I breathe in the twilight, trying to calm myself. Sienna was trying to get under my skin. It’s fucking annoying that it worked.

Turning to Addy, I’m determined that Sienna won’t dictate my mood. “Let’s go for a run,” I suggest.

Her face lights up, but then she frowns. “We shouldn’t shift again so soon. Isn’t it harder to mask our scent?”

To her surprise, I grin. “There’s only one solution.” She sends me a puzzled look as I squat down, my back facing her. “Get on, I’ll carry you.”

Addy’s lips twitch as she gives me a square look. “Aren’t we a bit too old for this?”

“You bring out a playful side in me,” I tell her, realizing it’s the truth. “I like making you smile.”

Addy’s giggle is the reward I was looking for. She climbs onto my back, hooking both legs around each of my sides. After I’ve confirmed we’re in a tight lock, I rise to my feet without warning, causing her to wrap her hands around my neck.

“Woah!” she exclaims, latching tightly, her breasts pressed against my back. “I thought you said I was safe!”

“Alright my bad, but now you’re safe,” I reassure her. With my arms firmly gripping both her thighs, we’re finally ready to take our first step.

“Ready?”

“Yes.”

I run forward into the orange painted sky, a cool evening breeze brushing our faces, carrying the sound of our playful laughter through the woods. I weave through the trunks, even leaping over a fallen tree or two. Each time Addy squeals and holds on tighter, making me laugh even more.

Knowing we can’t go far, I slow when I see a thick trunk again. Stopping, I let her slide down my back. We’re both panting and grinning as I turn to face her, pressing her against the rough bark as I tuck a strand of hair behind her ear.

“Don’t let what Sienna said get to you,” I tell her, pulling her in for a warm embrace.

Addy hugs me back. “I just...” she whispers. “I hate that our love has been deemed wrong.”

I curl my fingers into a tight fist. A part of me knows Addy’s life would’ve been better off if we never even met.

Pulling back, I cup her face. “I know. I wish it was different. I wish we didn’t have to keep running. You deserve the entire world and everything it has to offer, Adeline.”

Her eyes mist over, filled with an aching mix of joy and sadness. We found each other.

And lost everything as a result.

“Which is why I brought you out here,” I say. “You were right. Even if Sienna doesn’t work for my dad, there’s something off about her. We can’t stay.”

The way Addy’s body unwinds, as if she’s relieved, convinces me that this wasn’t the only decision, but the best course of action to take.

I press a kiss to her forehead. “We’ll gather some supplies and leave in a few days.”

CHAPTER 8

ADELINE



The white silk gown I wear clings to my skin, despite the rush of cool air in the field as I walk down the aisle, towards my mate, my love, my future.

Hum of approvals rent the area, the wolves eager for the true ceremony to begin. Music and raucous laughter fill the air, but I pay no heed to them because my eyes and all my senses are fixed on the man waiting for me at the end of the aisle, his hungry gaze set on me, always on me.

My brothers and some of Luke's pack mates surround him, forming a crescent shape around the altar where we are to make our vows official to each other. The obsidian slab shines beneath the glow of the full moon, red rose petals cascading down from the beam they were hanging from.

It's beautiful, nothing short of what I have imagined my mating ceremony with Luke would be.

Werewolves dot the audience, some in human form while some in their wolf form as they engage in the revelry of the festival.

Luke steps forward when I stop just shy of reaching the gathered males, his eyes perusing my body, just like I was shamelessly ogling his.

Unlike me, Luke only has on his boxer briefs, and his physique is on display for all to see.

I shouldn't be bothered by it—wolves change in front of their pack mates all the time, I've seen so many wolves naked—but I feel a strange possessiveness, thinking about all the female wolves in attendance, seeing what is mine, wishing he could be theirs.

A soft growl escapes my lips, and I watch as Luke's lips curl in amusement, making me roll my eyes.

I know that my jealousy turns him on, and though I'm perturbed by the idea of the females in attendance, I don't let that get to me.

For tonight, and all of eternity, Luke is mine alone.

The laughter stops, the music dying down as chants begin, marking the beginning of our mating ceremony. My parents take their position on either side of me, silencing the chants.

My father takes my hand, and announces proudly, "I present to you my daughter Adeline of High Ridge pack, mate to Luke of Black Diamond pack."

Luke steps forward again, the gold fringes of his eyes glowing, just like mine are—the wolves within eager to be let out to play with each other. He takes my hand in his, before he leans down to brush his lips over mine, in a chaste kiss that leaves me wanting for more.

The kiss earns multiple growls of approval from the audience.

They want a show.

They want us to mate in front of them.

I can feel it in the wind. Taste their eagerness on my tongue.

But I'm not about to let our first claiming be in front of all these people—half of which I don't know—no matter what tradition dictates.

Luke runs his nose along my cheek, my lips, and down to the hollowness of my throat. Scenting me, marking his territory.

He continues his journey down to the space between my breasts, along the lines of my stomach, and down towards the apex between my thighs, his gaze never leaving mine.

The look in his eyes as he kisses a path down my body before the pack makes me think that he wants to give the audience the show they're craving. And as his lips meet the wetness slicking down my thighs, he growls in hunger at scenting himself on me, from our recent love making.

His tongue slips from his lips, tasting me deeply, causing my knees to grow weak, before I feel his teeth biting into my flesh, making me cry out in surprise.

Loud jeers from the audience signals their approval of his territorial marking.

Smoldering heat banks in his eyes as he slowly rises to his full height above me, his fingers clasping my chin, and tilting my head up so he can brush his bloody lips over mine.

I part my lips to allow his tongue entry, and I growl in need as I taste the intoxicating mix of the evidence of our last lovemaking, my new arousal and the coppery tinge of my blood.

The heat of his body lights an ember inside me that refuses to cool, even as our kiss deepens and joyous growls fill the air.

I took back what I said earlier.

I want us to mate here, and now, audience be damned.

I need him.

But I need to mark him first, in front of our pack mates, my family, and the moon itself.

I slowly pull away, and run my nose along his body, just like he did to me before, breathing in his rich masculine scent.

I still can't believe that this male is going to be mine for all eternity.

My teeth sink into his thigh, our connection snapping into place with an energy that knocks the breath out of my lungs as our thoughts, emotions, and senses merge into one, our hearts and souls forever bonded.

The overwhelming sense of love and rightness that blossoms into my soul is unlike anything I've ever felt before.

I jump straight into his arms, fusing my lips with his as our desire for each other sizzles and burns, scorching my insides with its potency.

I begin to tear off my dress, wanting to get rid of the barrier between us, wanting him, needing him inside me, when a sharp bang fills the air, halting my movements.

A burning sensation spreads through my entire abdomen, wetness making my silk gown cling onto my body.

I look down, unable to comprehend what is happening. Blood seeps from an open wound in my gut, and I look up at Luke, tears slipping down my cheeks as chaos descends on what's supposed to be the happiest day of my life.

Luke lets out a mournful growl that turns into one filled with rage, making my knees knock against each other with its ferocity.

I try to turn and look for my attacker, but darkness overtakes me, and I find myself lying on the altar, the coldness of the slab biting into my body which is unable to heal due to the silver circulating in my blood.

All around me, a battle rages on. I close my eyes and let the darkness take me, Luke's name on my lips.



I wake up with a start, my heart hammering against my chest as I frantically search my stomach for the gunshot wound that led to my death.

Except, there's nothing. No pain, no blood, and definitely no battle raging on.

It takes a while for my heart to calm, and for me to realize that it was only a dream, and that I'm still alive, and Luke and I are safe for now.

The iciness that grips my heart begins to slowly fade away.

Despite the macabre dream I just woke up from, I feel like a weight has been lifted from my chest, and a renewed sense of hope washes over me as I stare at Luke's sleeping face.

The both of us have come a long way from our non-accidental meeting at the bar. Luke's deception, pretending we weren't mates in front of his pack members, watching Luke being forced to mate someone else by his father, it all seems

like a distant memory, one I no longer want to dwell on. We've been through a lot, and through it all, Luke's chosen me time and again and I know that with him by my side, it will always be the two of us against the world.

But even with hope rejuvenating me, I can't help but feel like that these feelings are fragile. That we need to be careful, despite the lack of evidence against Sienna showing that she's on our side.

Luke's right, we have to leave before his pack reaches us before Sienna turns her back on us.

She might be safe for now, but I know if push comes to shove, she'll side with her pack members against us, and I don't want Luke to lose someone again because of me, even if I don't like or trust her. It helps that Luke doesn't trust her either, even though she's helped us the last couple of days, making it hard to know what her angle is.

Slowly, I rise from the bed so I don't wake up Luke and walk towards the open window.

Outside, the sun is shining brightly, the birds are chirping, and the air smells crisp and warm. I take a deep inhale of the fresh air, my lips curling into a smile as I turn and steal yet another glance at my sleeping mate before I venture outside, deciding to distract myself by making breakfast before he wakes up.

There isn't much to go by in terms of food but at least Sienna has a chicken coop that I can collect some eggs from and a garden I can pick fresh vegetables from too.

I hum a tune as I bend down and begin to pick up the eggs, gently placing them in the basket I took from Sienna's kitchen.

Just as my fingers brush over the shell of another freshly laid egg, the disturbing sound of dirt being crushed beneath filters from behind me. I stop mid-verse and turn slowly, heart leaping in my throat, thinking Luke's pack have finally caught up to us.

I don't get the chance to see the intruder, nor do I have the opportunity to scream, because a hand clamps over my mouth and the scent of wolfsbane attacks my senses, fumes spearing into my lungs and overwhelming my mind.

Panic begins to set in as I struggle against my captor, trying to break free, even as my body gives up the fight, the poison too strong for my weak body to heal.

As darkness clouds my mind, I think of Luke, and the night we met, how easily I fell in love with him, and how his betrayal had gutted me. My mate, my love, my first everything.

Before I can think of anything else, my mind goes blank, the wolfsbane completely in my system now.

Just as I begin to lose consciousness, I catch a whiff of Sienna's scent, and I know without a doubt that she has been playing us all along.

I wish I could warn Luke of her treachery but all too soon, I lose sense of everything around me.

Then, there's nothing.

CHAPTER 9

LUKE



I wake up alone with Addy's side of the bed cold to my touch.

Up so early today, little wolf? I wonder, my lips twitching with amusement as I note the rumpled sheets that indicate her side's been slept in. *Or have I slept longer than usual?*

I slip out of the bed and wander towards the open window, surveying the position of the sun. *Huh, I've definitely slept in today.*

I stretch my arms over my head, snapping my eyes closed as I engage my wolf senses, trying to locate my mate's whereabouts. An alarming sense of dread and emptiness hits me square in the chest when the only scent of Addy's I catch is the one in the bedroom we share.

My brows knot in confusion as I cast out my senses again, my nostrils tickling with the scent of wolfsbane, mixed with the scent of Addy and Sienna. I walk out of our room and head towards Sienna's, hoping what I'm dreading hasn't occurred while I was sleeping.

My heart sinks into the pit of my stomach when I find the sheets on Sienna's bed neatly tucked in, like she hadn't slept there the night before. My mind still can't comprehend what my eyes are seeing. When I search all corners of the cabin,

finding neither Addy nor Sienna, I know something bad has happened.

A deep sense of loss hit me. Addy's been taken. She was right not to trust Sienna.

My blood boils with fury, knowing that my father had a hand in her kidnapping. Rage builds inside me until my hands begin to shake, my heartbeat pounding wildly in my ears.

Why can't he just leave us alone?

And Sienna, why pretend to help us when she was planning to betray us all along?

I leave the cabin and head in the direction where their scent is the strongest, trying to find clues. How could I have slept through her kidnapping? I pace the chicken coop, noting the broken eggs on the dirt floor, the signs of disturbed earth, and the heightened scent of wolfsbane.

Sienna will pay for this.

She and everyone else involved.

And if a hair on Addy's head has been harmed, then may the moon have mercy on them, because I won't.

I stop my pacing and walk back into the cabin, knowing that if I want to save Addy then I need to act quickly and efficiently. I don't have the time to waste on feeling the pain and grief of her absence. Time is of the essence.

I gather the few weapons I managed to escape with when we left the camp, readying myself for what I'm about to do. The last time Addy was taken by my father, I was able to save her before something irreparable occurred, but she didn't escape unscathed.

Her body is still healing from their damage.

Will I be able to get there in time?

Will I be able to save her before it's too late?

I shake my head to rid myself of the thoughts that plague my mind. Addy has to be safe. She needs to be alive, because the entire shifter world isn't ready for who I will become if she stops breathing.

I inhale a lungful of air, centering myself before I cast out my wolf senses once again, trying to see if I can pick up any clue I might have missed earlier before I venture into Sienna's room, hoping to find something there too. My search is futile once again. Her room is as clean as it had been when Addy and I went snooping days ago.

I don't wait to think about whether my father is innocent, and that Addy and Sienna have been taken by another unknown enemy. My gut tells me he had a hand in this, and my gut has never proven me wrong.

I leave the cabin without a second thought, taking the general direction that will lead me towards the pack's camp. The more distance I cover between the cabin and the camp, the more thinking about Sienna's treachery fills my heart with righteous anger. It's so visceral, I half expect it to manifest into an entity of its own.

Time and again, my father has underestimated the lengths I will go to ensure Addy is safe and unharmed. This time around, I don't plan on just saving her and leaving. No, I plan to show them exactly what it means to cross me. Although there's a part of me that still feels a sense of compassion for my former pack mates who have been brainwashed by his ideals, I no longer care about the familial bonds between us.

Sean has gone too far. And this will be the last time he goes after Addy.

When there's enough foliage to cover me, I stop walking and tie the knapsack containing my weapons around my neck, securing it safely before I shift into my wolf, knowing that it's the fastest way to reach Addy and the easiest way to catch their scents.

Enough time has gone by. I don't want to waste more walking in human form.

I let the wind tell me the direction they've gone, even though I know Sienna must have taken Addy back to the camp, letting my wolf guide the way as I see the internally, happy to give up control to my animal.

I leap over a fallen log, landing on my paws in the grass, pausing every now and again to inhale the air, searching for Addy with my nose. Although my focus is on reaching the camp and finding her, my senses are still on high alert for potential intruders. Hunters like to lurk within the forests, hoping to catch a wolf or two to cut down the population, so I have to be cautious.

I pause once again, catching a new scent in the wind.

Hunters! My wolf snarls as I bare my teeth in defense.

Fuck.

The last thing I need when I'm literally racing against time is to have hunters on my tail.

I cannot let them catch me, but neither can I shift back to human form now. Not with a chance that I'm seen. The truth that werewolves exist is protected by all means. Even death.

And if I continue, they'll just follow me, and will eventually find the camp.

Although a part of me thinks I should lead them straight into the camp so they can take care of my problems for me, the other part of me which is still loyal to my pack knows that it's not the best option.

I cannot intentionally lead these murderous humans to the camp where there are women and children. Innocent lives will be lost, and I cannot have that on my conscience.

I slow my run before I pivot, knowing that I have to shake them off if I want to still make it to Addy in time. Three armed men emerge from the thick bushes, aiming long rifles at me. I can feel the tension rising between us as we stare at each other, men to wolf, each waiting for the other to strike first.

I don't attack, knowing that one sudden movement will be an invitation to have my body riddled with bullets, though my hackles rise in warning, my body lowering to the ground as I ready myself to leap at any slight movement from either of them.

I sense the moment the heart rate of the man on my left changes, and I know he's about to shoot. Before he gets the chance to twitch his finger on the trigger, I leap. Zigzagging as I run like lightning, I attack, my sharp canines sinking into his shoulder blade.

Blood floods my mouth as three gunshots fire in quick succession.

CHAPTER 10

ADELINE



The first thought that crosses my mind as awareness slowly trickles into my being is that I should have seen this coming.

Sienna's actions never hinted at her being trustworthy, but I've been so confident in our safety and Luke's trust in her that I never thought she would pull something like this so soon after she helped us.

Irritation at being blindsided courses through me as I find myself slipping in and out of consciousness, my body struggling to fight against the wolfsbane that's still circulating through my blood.

When I rise from the thick haze in my mind once more, there's a searing pain in my head, darkness greeting me as I try to blink my eyes open. Fuzziness clouds my brain, and it takes a moment for me to realize that I'm gagged and blindfolded.

Panic tries to seize me, but I focus on staying calm. I try to move either my arms or legs, but I'm unable to. I'm bound tightly to a metal chair. Even if I wasn't, I wouldn't be able to run away; my already recovering body feels weak and lethargic from trying to heal and eject the poison inside it.

Without my eyesight, I can't truly tell if I'm alone or not, so I try to cast out my wolf senses to get a feel of where I am

and who is with me. My body riots as bile rises up in my throat.

Every muscle aches, my insides burning something fierce. It feels like I've been put on fire from the inside out. A part of me wishes I was still unconscious because this pain is unlike anything I've ever experienced.

On and on the burning sensations go, increasing in intensity, until finally it subsides. It feels like hours have passed, though I'm not sure how much time has actually gone by. Sweat dots my eyebrows, my body shuddering, and for once, I'm grateful that I'm bound. If it wasn't for the ropes securing me to the chair, I would have been writhing on the floor by now.

I'm left alone for so long that I'm able to pass out again, sleeping off the rest of the effects of the wolfsbane.

When I come to again, everything has calmed down, and my insides no longer feel like they're being incinerated. I take a measured breath, revitalizing my insides with oxygen while also trying to get a sense of where I am. The air smells dry and dusty, like the place I'm being held at hasn't been used for decades. And if that's the case, it will be hard for Luke to find me, so I have to muster the strength to save myself. But how? When I have no idea where I am, nor have the strength to escape from captivity.

My internal musing is interrupted when I hear the shuffling of boots on sand and I know my time is up.

Fear ricochets through me.

Whoever this person is, they have the power to hurt me. To do irreparable damage.

Will I survive?

Tears begin to leak from my eyes as memories of the moments I've shared with Luke slam into my mind with enough force that it almost knocks the breath out of my lungs. I remember the love, the longing, the lust, the anguish, the betrayal, everything we've been through in the past, all the obstacles we've overcome, and the dreams we were yet to achieve.

I think of how we haven't truly bonded as mates because we've been fighting for the chance to be allowed to love freely, and how our time will be cut too short because my body no longer has the fight in it.

The first slice of blade on my exposed thighs has me screaming out in pain, the sound muffled through the gag over my mouth. The burning sensation the silver leaves in its wake as it mixes with my blood almost rivals that of the wolfsbane.

Tears burn my eyes, my breaths coming out in shallow puffs as I try to push through the pain. It only lasted for seconds, but it felt like ages have passed before the pain has disappeared, leaving me with a wound that refuses to heal and blood that slowly trails down my thighs, hitting the floor and creating a puddle at my feet.

My torturer allows me the reprieve to recover before he nicks another part of my skin with the silver blade again. He repeats the motions several times; slicing me up, moving away until the burn disappears before carrying on, never saying a word, never letting me get a sense of who it is.

It's a dance he's perfected.

No doubt from sessions of endless torture with other victims.

I know it's just part of the torture, depriving me of one of my senses through the blindfold, gagging me so I don't have the reprieve to release my screams, but it's hard not to fight against it.

I'm clearly back at Black Diamond pack's camp. I can't fathom where else Sienna would've taken me or if there's someone out there who thirsts for my blood and wants to torture me to death apart from Luke's father.

Why he opted for these theatrics, I'll never be able to tell.

By the time my torturer moves away, I'm a bloody, weak mess, dried tears caking my face, my eyes no longer able to produce any moisture.

The silver has taken its toll on me. I have no idea how much longer I can hold on.

I just want it to be over with.

Dizziness overtakes me.

Just as my eyes begin to droop low, I hear Sean's vile voice mocking me, talking about my mother, abusing her memories.

I'm not even surprised that it's him.

"You know why you're here, Adeline," he says, his voice cold and unemotional as he looms over me once again, slashing his blade over my arm.

I have half a mind to scream at him, claw out his eyes, or hurt him in some way, just like he's hurt me, but my body is too weak. I'm unable to muster anything other than a weak protest.

I just want him to stop.

A lump appears in my throat as I listen to him talk about my mother. Tears prickle at the back of my ears but I'm done crying for him so I grit my teeth instead, and try to block out his taunts and the pain I am feeling.

The time I've spent at this camp has taught me how to endure it, to not give him the satisfaction of hearing me beg for mercy. Sean's mention of my mother, however, makes my blood boil with grief and anger, the rage eclipsing the pain I'm experiencing.

His blade slices my face, the burn of the silver making my eyes water even through the blindfold, and for a second panic ensues when I think he's about to carve me up.

He trails its sharp tip over my lips, to my cheeks, then up towards the blindfold. I wait with bated breath, forcing myself to remain calm. One wrong move and I'll have silver in my eyes, something I don't think I'll ever be able to heal from.

I wait. Terrified. Furious.

And ultimately, helpless.

Sean pulls away without hurting me. Mercifully, the blindfold loosens a bit, and I'm able to partially see him through the opening.

"Do not talk about my mother!" I scream through the gag, my voice shaking with venomous rage. "She was brave and kind, and everything that is good in this world, unlike you!"

I know my words are muffled, but I'm also hoping that with his werewolf senses, he'll be able to pick up on my anger and the silent vow I'm promising to make him pay for this, and for taking my mother's life.

A moment of silence passes before I feel a sharp sting on my cheek as he slaps me hard across the face. "You insolent

little brat!” he seethes as he points at me. There’s a manic gleam in his eyes, and for a moment I wonder if I am dealing with a deranged man.

“You know, your mother begged for her life. It was pathetic. I’m surprised you aren’t. I guess it’s not true what they say, like mother like daughter, hmm?”

I don’t answer. I always suspected Sean was the one who killed my mother. Now I have proof.

“I have half a mind to kill you now, you know? But I won’t. I want you to suffer. I want you to know what it feels like to be at the mercy of someone else, just like your mother was. And maybe I’ll get to test the theory of whether or not you’re just like her.”

I close my eyes and try to mask my fear, refusing to acknowledge his threat or let him know just how terrified of him I am. I try to find a shred of strength or hope in my situation, but the longer he talks about how much he loathes my family and all the various ways he plans on torturing me, the more convinced I am that I’m never seeing Luke again.

The torture session begins all over again. But this time around, Sean’s voice along with other voices join the fray and I find myself wishing I had the ability to take my life.

I take back what I said earlier.

I no longer care about making him pay. I just want this to end.

CHAPTER II

LUKE



I run through the dark forest as fast as I can, the wind rushing through my fur, my heart racing with fear and adrenaline. The sound of gunshots still echoes in my ears as I dodge trees and fallen logs.

I managed to escape unscathed, the silver bullets missing me by mere inches.

Fucking amateurs, I think with a snarl as I push my body to its limits. I need to get to Addy in time. I don't stop to think about what would have happened if the hunters who were on my tail were professionals, instead of the fools I came across.

Even though I escaped without a single graze, I know I can't let my guard down yet.

They're still after me. I can taste their thirst for my blood, their eagerness to kill me is a pungent smell that tinges the air. They might be amateurs, but they are also hunters, and in their eyes, I am prey.

Killing my kind is what they've been trained to do their whole lives, but I won't let them catch me.

Not now, not ever.

Certainly not when Addy's life depends on me getting to the camp alive and unharmed.

As my claws dig into the soil trying to gain speed, my mind races with thoughts of Addy and what condition I'll find her in once I reach the camp. Fear is my steady companion as I imagine the worst has happened to her between the time Sienna has taken her and now. I push myself to run faster, my breaths sawing in and out of my throat as I try to put as much distance between me and the hunters.

A bullet snaps past my ear, making me instinctively duck. The crack of the gunshot is less than a heartbeat behind. Followed by three more. My pulse is a freight train careening through my veins as I wait for one to lodge in my shoulder. My chest.

No matter what happens, I'll drag myself back to Addy. I will not let her die at the hands of my father.

When there's nothing, I veer right, soil spitting out behind me at the sudden turn, glancing back as I do.

The hunters haven't given up.

They're still running after me, their guns in their hands, their thirst for blood stamped on their faces.

"I'll fucking put his head on my wall!" one shouts.

"I'll wipe my boots on his fur rug," another growls.

Nostrils flaring, I slip behind a wide trunk. Waiting. If they keep following me, I'll lead them straight to camp.

My body goes still even as my heart races with the urgency of the situation. I have to get to Addy. And these fools are slowing me down.

Their boots thud softly on the forest floor as they try to approach silently, now cautious. They'd be on high alert seeing as they've lost sight of their target. They may have

guns and stealth, but they're at a disadvantage. They assume I'm a wild animal.

And I'm far more than that.

The moment they're close enough, I leap out of the shadows and land in front of them. They raise their guns but I'm already in motion, determined to end this. I pounce on the first hunter and knock him to the ground. The other two fire their guns, but I evade the panicked shots, fueled by the urgent need to get to my mate and rage that these humans are picking off my kind one after the other.

With one leap, my teeth sink into the second hunter's arm and I fling him against a nearby tree. His cry is cut off when he hits the ground. The third breaks into a run, his bandaged arm where I bit him flailing in the air.

Not. Fucking. Happening.

Growling, I catch up to him and tackle him from behind.

He plows into the ground with a terrified cry, rolling over and desperately scratching and punching. I pin him to the ground with my paws, claws flexing with the need to pierce his skin. Instead, I lean down, my muzzle close to his face. His eyes seem to swallow his face.

I let out a guttural growl. A warning for him and his friends to never cross my path again.

The hunter becomes a mass of trembling nerves and the scent of urine stings my nose. Releasing him, I step back and watch with satisfaction as all three scramble to their feet and run into the forest. My sensitive hearing picks up their pounding hearts and adrenaline-soaked breathing.

They disappear among the trees before I turn and resume my quest to save my mate.

It's almost twilight when I finally reach my father's camp. I sneak around the back and try to catch my breath as I shift back into human form and stand behind a tree, hoping to find Addy while also avoiding detection. A feeling of revulsion washes over me as I scan the familiar space. This used to be my home. I should feel safe here, but I don't. I never will again. This has been a place of horror for Addy time and again.

Now, it's just a pile of tents and bricks holding my mate captive.

My hands clench and unclench at my sides as energy fires up and down my nerves. I wish I had more time to prepare for the fight ahead. I wish I had more weapons on me, more tricks up my sleeve, but I don't. I have to rely on my wits to get Addy and myself to safety.

I'm about to enter when I sense someone behind me. One subtle inhale and I know exactly who it is.

I turn around sharply, glaring at Sienna.

She clamps her hand over my mouth, and I see the fear in her eyes as she urges me to not make a sound.

She nods her head towards the forest, and I silently follow her, every sense on high alert. I have no idea what this traitor is up to, but she's also a way in. Whatever mistrust or rage I feel towards her is eclipsed by my need to see Addy.

"Luke, you can't just walk in," she whispers urgently once we're out of earshot. "We need to figure out what to do next."

My mind blanks as I stare at her, wondering if she's lost her goddamn mind.

"Why the fuck do you care? You're the one who brought Addy here!" I snap back as I take a step away, fury scorching

me from the inside out. “You’ve been working with my father all this time. I was an idiot to think you were on my side.”

“I am on your side, can’t you see? I brought her here to keep you safe.”

She sounds so earnest that I wonder if she actually believes her own words. The thought makes me sick.

“Where is she?” I bite out, getting tired of this. I’ve wasted enough time fighting off the hunters. I don’t want to waste more arguing with Sienna when Addy is in danger.

“Oh, come on Luke,” she taunts, sliding her hand over my chest seductively. “You can’t get to her. She’s heavily guarded.”

Gone is the terrified woman who’s trying to get me to trust her and see that she’s trying to help me. In her place is a woman on a mission, a woman who knows how to get what she wants.

“What do you want with her, anyway? She’s trash, just like her mom,” Sienna spits venomously.

In that moment, I see what Addy saw all those nights ago.

I never should have let my guard down around Sienna. She’s just like the rest of the women here, an opportunist who seeks to work her way to the top.

“You disgust me!” I growl, pushing her away.

She growls right back at me as she leaps and lands on top of me, shoving me down on the ground. My breath is knocked out of me as we start grappling for purchase, each fighting to gain the upper hand and dominate the other.

When I finally manage to land on top of her and pin her hands over her head, I let out a growl of warning. “Stay still.”

Instead of cowering, something else glints in Sienna's eyes. Lust. Before the shock can wear off, she pushes her head up and presses her lips to mine.

Disgust explodes through me as I rear back. "What the fuck, Sienna!"

I push off her and scramble to my feet, glaring at her as she rises. I wipe the back of my hand over my mouth, wishing I had a double shot of something strong to wash away the lingering sensation of her mouth on mine.

"Take me to Addy right now," I snarl. "I don't know what my dad promised you but I know he'll want me delivered to him anyway, so take me to him!"

Sienna purses her lips and my hands become hot lumps of lead. If she doesn't...

"Fine, then," she huffs. "But it's your funeral."

She spins on her heel and I follow a wary foot behind. She's only taken a few steps when she glances over her shoulder. "I'm not what you think I am," she says softly. "Sean promised me things if I helped him capture Addy..."

She leaves the words hanging but I only stare ahead as if she's not even there. I don't want to know what price Sienna was willing to be paid in order to do what she did. I'm not even going to give her the satisfaction of knowing that I'm listening to her.

She doesn't deserve my sympathy, even though my father's been manipulating her, just like the rest of the pack. Beneath it all, Sienna's hatred for Addy and the High Ridge wolves is why Sean was able to manipulate her in the first place.

She's just as driven by hatred as my father.

I clench my jaw. All that matters to me is reuniting with my stolen mate.

CHAPTER 12

ADELINE



I try to block out their words as they continue to torment me, but I can't.

My body is trembling, the pain has become unbearable, every nerve feels like it's about to explode. But I refuse to give them the satisfaction of hearing me scream. I stare ahead, my gaze fixed unseeingly on a point on the blank wall across from me as I try to shut out the reality of what's happening to me.

Luke's father is gone now, leaving me at the mercy of his lieutenants. He wants me to beg for my life, but I won't do that. I will not give him the satisfaction of knowing that he has broken me, just like he did my mother, before he ended her life. I struggle against my restraints, but it's no use. I'm still here, still trapped in this godforsaken place, with these monsters looming over me.

They've taken off the blindfold and gag, so I can see them clearly now. They're grinning, like they're enjoying this. Like they're taking pleasure in my pain.

“So weak...”

“Look at her. She's barely hanging on.”

“Stupid bitch thought she could be one of us.”

Their words are like knives, cutting deeper and deeper into my already broken spirit, hurting more than the sharp silver blades they're using to torment me. They know exactly what to say, exactly how to dig deep, and hurt me where it pains me the most.

Fucking sadists!

I don't know how long I've been here. It feels like an eternity, but time has become a blur, a never-ending cycle of pain, humiliation, and fear. I know I should try to escape, but my body is too weak, my mind too broken.

Escape seems impossible.

Even if I do manage to get away, I won't be able to get far. The cuts crisscrossing the bottom of my feet will make it impossible to run and the blood I'll be trailing will be like a beacon, calling them. Leading them straight to me.

The men surrounding me laugh and jeer as they continue to inflict their sadistic torments. Cuts slash my skin at random moments. Fists plow into my chest, abdomen, arms and legs. I can hear their breathing become faster with exertion and excitement, feel it on my skin, and it makes my skin crawl with revulsion. I try to fight, but my body is restrained, my mind is numb.

As my ability to block out the pain fades, I try to remember Luke's face, his smile, and his love for me, hoping it will give me the strength I need to hold on a little longer.

But all I can see is this nightmare. All I can feel is the touch of their hands, the weight of their weapons on me.

And the hatred in their voices.

"Let me go," I whisper, my voice hoarse and weak, giving them what they want. I'm broken, body and soul. "Please..."

But no one listens. My plea falls on deaf ears.

They continue their torture, their hands moving over my body with increasing violence, cutting into my skin with the vengeance of scorned men. I try to muster some courage to fight back, but it's useless. They're too strong, too ruthless.

"Looks like sweet Luke is never coming back to you," one of them sneers. "Word around the camp is that he's made a deal that we get to play with you, a nice...used...toy while he's away."

The words hit me hard, and I feel the cold moisture of a tear slip down my cheek.

I shake my head as I think of Luke, of how he would never give up on me, on us, not after everything we've been through. I remember his promise the morning after he helped me escape, and I can't reconcile that Luke with the one they are trying to make me envision. I can't believe this, can't accept that he'll allow something like this to happen to me, not after telling me he loved me.

This has to be a trick, another form of their manipulation devised to torture me more.

Please let it be a trick.

A new scent hits my nostrils, spearing through the agony. It has my head snapping up as I open my swollen eyes. A small spark of anger ignites inside me when I catch sight of Sienna's smug face as she watches these men torture me. The way her chest inflates triumphantly fuels the fury. How dare they treat me like this? How dare they say all these things about my mother, about me, about Luke? How dare they try to taint my relationship with him?

They want to see me beg, see me cry, see me broken, and they came so close, but no more. I will not go down without a fight.

The rage builds inside me until it's an inferno, and I gather the last remaining threads of my strength and explode everything outward. The cable ties strapped around my wrists cut in, then snap. Then the ones around my ankles. I launch myself at the nearest man, my body moving faster than my mind can process. I throw punches, kicks, anything to fight back against these monsters, trying to get to Sienna. She's the reason I'm here, suffering.

The men are taken aback by my ferocity, but they quickly close in, the knowledge they outnumber and overpower me making them grin. One of them grabs me and throws me to the ground, his weight crushing me. I gasp, my head spinning from the impact and lack of air as he crushes my windpipe beneath his large palms.

Sienna slips away as I thrash and kick on the floor, trying to throw the massive man off me. Another moves in close, a syringe catching the low light. There's a prick of pain in my arm, then a searing pain slices through my whole body, unlike anything I've ever experienced before.

I thought I knew what pain is, but this, whatever they've injected me with, makes getting cut with a silver blade over and over seem like child's play. Wolfsbane couldn't hold a candle to it.

I try to move, but my limbs are unresponsive. My lips part in an endless scream that I never get the chance to release.

"That will do for now," one of them says. "The boss wants to keep her alive."

The world around me fades to black as someone lifts me like a sack of potatoes and takes me away. I'm too weak to fight, too broken to resist, this pain diluting each of my senses. But as they take me to a new location, I vow to myself that I will not let them win.

I will not let them break me.

I will escape, and I will come after them.

This time around, they've gone too far.

I will find a way to escape this place, to find Sienna and make her pay for her part in this. I will fight back against these monsters and the hatred they're spreading.

Because I am not a used toy. I am not a pawn in someone else's game.

I am Adeline of High Ridge, and I will survive this, no matter what it takes.



When I come to again, I find myself in a holding cell much smaller than the one I was kept in before.

Night has fallen, the crescent moon casting an eerie glow through the small window in the door. My head lolls against the hard floor. For the first time since I was captured, I'm not tied up. Yet I don't have the strength to move. Every cell in my body is crying with pain.

The hazy yellow light in the cell flickers and my gaze flies to the window, my pulse now out of control. My tormentors

are back for their pound of flesh. And I don't have the strength to fight.

A dark figure fills the window, and if I could scream, I would. My skin prickles and I'm aware of just how beaten, dehydrated, and famished I really am. Every cut on my body makes itself known as my skin slowly knitting itself back together.

But not quickly enough. Not enough for me to rush at the door the moment it opens.

I have no idea how long I've been out, but I wish that whoever it was had given me more time to recover. I blink, struggling to focus, and for a moment, I'm not even sure if the shadow is real.

After everything I've been through, I don't think hallucinations are exactly out of the question.

But then the door opens, letting in a cool rush of air. The figure draws closer, all too real. And then I hear it—a voice that sends a shiver down my spine.

But not one of terror.

Relief and disbelief wash through me, and I let out a broken mewl that sounds pathetic even to my own ears. "Jake," I croak.

My brother is here.

"It's okay. I'm here, Addy."

The sound of my name on his tongue feels foreign, as if I've forgotten what it feels like to hear it spoken by someone who isn't an enemy.

A long moment passes, and I wonder whether I truly have hallucinated it. But the shadow morphs, gains substance. I

watch transfixed as Jake appears above me, his silhouette barely visible in the dim light. I feel a surge of hope in my chest, but it's quickly replaced by a wave of fear.

How did he find me? Does he know what I've been through? And most importantly, is he here to get me out?

Or is he another part of the sick mind games Luke's father is playing with me?

I don't want to believe that Jake is in league with Luke's father, but after everything I've been through, I don't know what to believe in, or who to trust.

My throat feels parched as I try to speak, but all that comes out is a faint croak. "Jake?" I whisper, my voice barely audible. "Is it really you?"

He nods, and for a moment, I think I might cry with relief. But I force myself to stay calm, to keep my emotions in check. I still don't know whether he can help me escape.

"Come on," Jake says as he bends down and scoops me up. "We need to get moving."

I struggle to get to my feet, my body aching with every step. But I don't dare complain. I don't want to say anything that might tip Jake off to how weak I really am, not when I still don't know what his game plan is.

I hate that I'm having these doubts about my brother. But I don't know what else to think. My family hates me almost as much as the Blood Borns do. All I know is that for the first time since Sienna took me, I have hope.

Jake leads me through the dark and I have no choice but to follow him blindly. The deeper shadows of trees encompass us and I realize we're making our way into the forest. With each

step, the pain flares as I can feel my body simultaneously heal. Each step weakens me and strengthens me at the same time.

Finally, we come to a stop, and Jake helps me sit against a tree to catch my breath before he motions for me to stay put. “I just want to check something.”

I open my mouth, confused, but he presses his hand over my lips.

“We didn’t know they were doing to you, Addy. When we come back, we’re going to hit them hard and fast,” he says, his voice low and filled with barely restrained anger. “But first, I need to get you out of here.”

He slips away into the darkness, leaving me alone with my thoughts. My pack is planning to wage war against Luke’s. My mind spins. I’m finally close to freedom. And closer to war.

Unless...I have a sudden thought that Jake’s has left me to be attacked by Luke’s park.

And that’s when the fear sets in. What if Jake doesn’t come back? What if this is really a ploy to get me to let my guard down so they can hurt me again? What if I never get to see Luke again?

A sob rises in my throat as the panic builds, only to be cut short by the sound of footsteps approaching. Jake takes my hand. “There are quite a few guards around. We’re going to have to be careful.”

He hauls me up and I refuse to let myself sway as relief courses through me.

Relief that’s short-lived as his words sink in.

I’m not free yet.

CHAPTER 13

LUKE



I'm greeted by sneers and disgust from my ex-pack mates as I walk towards my father's cabin, Sienna having left the moment we reached camp, no doubt to warn every one of my intentions. Their disapproval of my relationship with Addy is clear in their silent judgment.

None of them try to make a move against me, and I'm grateful for that because my fight is not with them; it's with my father. He's the one who orchestrated the whole kidnapping, thanks to Sienna's help.

I can feel their judgment. Their anger. But I pay them no heed, because all that matters is getting to Addy.

Getting her away from her.

So I continue to walk with steady steps, my spine straight, gaze straight ahead and every sense on high alert. One wrong move will change all of that in the blink of an eye.

When we arrive outside his cabin, I'm faced with a row of guards. They stand in line, facing me, their eyes once again trained on me, their faces neutral as if they don't know me, as if we didn't grow up alongside each other.

Behind me is a circle of werewolves who stare at me with cold, dead eyes. These used to be my friends, my allies, my

confidantes, but now they treat me like an outsider. Even as they're here to bear witness to my return.

“Welcome back, Luke,” Arthur says politely, bowing down his head slightly in a show of reverence. “Please wait while your father prepares for your meeting. He will be with you shortly.”

Is he trying to mock me? The politeness is all so disgustingly cordial.

The sudden coldness in his eyes as he raises his head sends a chill down my spine. These wolves are here to welcome me back with open arms, but I know why they're doing this. Why they haven't attacked yet.

Addy is still alive. Which also means my father wants something from me.

I clench my jaw, stopping my hands from doing the same. If Addy's still alive, then I have a reason to fight.

I nod, trying to keep my frustration under control. I'll learn what my father wants soon enough. Then I'll end this.

Long moments pass before Arthur and two of the guards motion for me to follow them. I don't say a word, just do as they say and follow behind as they lead me into a small building at the far side of the camp.

The walls are made entirely of stone, and the air smells humid, the temperature so cold it nips at my skin. I glance around the bare room, taking in the sight of the two chairs and the table holding an assortment of torture tools.

So, this is how they want to play?

They take away my bag of weapons and force me into one of the chairs. I watch as they shackle my legs and hands to the

manacles on the floor without a word. The touch of the cold metal is unmistakable, sending shivers down my body.

With the click of the locks, I feel more and more helpless. I know that resisting will only make things worse so I don't fight them, but my wolf is not so easily restrained. He thrashes inside, wanting to break free and take them down, but I draw in a deep breath, holding back the wolf's rage. I need to stay focused if I want to save Addy. Fighting back now when I'm so close will only bring more trouble.

They take a step back and circle around me, their aura one of menace and disgust, the cordial politeness they showed me before nowhere to be seen.

I know they're testing me, waiting for me to say or do something. They want to know if I'll break or fight them. But I won't give them the satisfaction. I'll be damned if I let them see how their treatment is affecting me.

"I hope you understand, Luke," Arthur says with a smirk. "We're just following the Alpha's orders."

I don't say a word. I let him see the rage inside me as I allow my wolf a chance to flash through my eyes. I smirk when he flinches and takes a step back before I fix my gaze elsewhere. I didn't come for them.

I'm here for my father.

He's the one who had Addy kidnapped, my mate, the woman I'm in love with. He's the one who's behind all of this, and the one who is going to pay.

As I wait for him, I try to come up with some semblance of a plan. I'm chained, my weapons have been taken from me, and I still have no idea where Addy is, what condition she might be in, or what my father wants from me.

I'm not sure how I'm going to get out of this situation without getting myself hurt or killed. But I have to try for Addy.

The door opens, and my father walks in. He looks older than the last time I saw him, but he still holds himself with the same authority and confidence of an Alpha. His mere presence instantly fills me up with dread as I think about how close, yet far, Addy is from me.

Her life depends on how this plays out. A word from him, and I'll lose her forever.

"Luke," he says, his voice deep and commanding. "It's been too long."

I grunt in response, unwilling to give him the satisfaction of a reply.

"It's good to have you back, son," he says as he takes in the manacles I'm chained to, his gaze cold and devoid of all emotions.

I meet his gaze, trying to maintain a placid expression. The last time I saw him, Addy was on the brink of death, and I've now chosen her over him and the pack.

"Father," I reply, my voice low.

He regards me for a moment, then nods his head towards one of the guards. The werewolf nods in response and steps forward, unchaining my hands from my bindings, but leaving the leg shackles on.

I grit my teeth, but don't say a word, clenching my fists. Addy is my mate, the one I've fought for, the one I'm here to save, the only reason I haven't razed this camp to the ground.

He sits down opposite me, his expression neutral. “I’m sorry about the theatrics, but you understand that after everything that’s happened, I can’t trust you.”

“What’s the point of kidnapping her?” I burst out. “You know she’s my mate!”

He leans back in his chair, looking smug. “Adeline is not your mate, Luke. She’s just someone you’re infatuated with.”

My blood boils at his words, and I struggle against keeping my anger in check. “I want her back,” I say, my voice barely above a whisper.

My father leans forward, his eyes boring into mine. “Too bad we don’t always get what we want.”

“Let her go,” I demand, my voice shaking with fury. “Or else—”

“Or else what?” he sneers, cutting me off. “You’re chained up like an animal. You have no power here.”

I grit my teeth, trying to hold back my emotions. He’s right, but I can’t give up. I have to keep fighting.

“Why am I here?” I ask, trying to keep my voice even. “What do you want from me?”

He leans forward, his eyes fixed on me. “I have a proposition for you. Work with me, and I’ll let both you and your so-called mate live.”

“And if I refuse?”

“Then she dies,” he says, his voice cold and final.

A sense of despair washes over me because I know that he’ll kill her without breaking a sweat. He’s always been

ruthless, but when it comes to Addy and her pack, the lengths he would go to annihilate them still surprises me.

I glare at him, hating him more than I ever have for forcing this choice upon me. “You will pay for this!” I tell him, my words dripping with venom. “You and your whole pack.”

Sean rises from his seat, picks up his chair and throws it against the wall above my head. I don’t wince when it shatters. Or when splinters of wood rain down on me like tears. Or when he pushes his face close to mine.

It’s his words that are a freight train through my chest, forcing me to draw in a sharp, painful breath. “What will you choose, Luke? Join me or Adeline dies.”

CHAPTER 14

ADELINE



Ever since Sienna abducted me, my life has been a whirl of pain and confusion. Everything seems too surreal to be true.

It all feels so murky, so muddled, I can't separate truth from lies, reality from fantasy.

I know it can't have been more than a day since I was taken, but the toll the torture has taken on my body makes it feel like it's been a lifetime. One filled with fear and pain, hurt and humiliation.

But also rage as I think of how this pack has taken everything from me. Of how heartless they are as they've stripped me of my self-respect, layer by layer. And my mother suffered the same fate.

It has to change.

It has to stop.

Which means Sean needs to die.

Thinking about ending someone's life has never been something I indulge in. But as I remember his words about how he killed my mother, and the pain that makes itself known through the aches in my body, it's the only solution. When Sean's gone, the root of all the hatred he's spawned will be gone, too.

Jake tugs my hand, drawing me out of my whirling thoughts. “We have to get to the other side of the camp. From there, we’ll make a run for it straight back to High Ridge.”

I nod, even though it sounds overwhelming. I haven’t seen my family in weeks. Despite Jake’s assurances, I don’t know what my reception will be now that I’ve fallen in love with Luke. The son of the Blood Born Alpha.

Silently, Jake and I make our way around the camp, weaving our way through the trees as we skirt the tents and cabins. We haven’t gone far when my wolf picks up faint whispers.

Whispers that make me stop dead in my tracks, my heart racing a mile a minute.

Even though it hurts, I concentrate all of my energy on listening to the harsh words that send ice shooting straight to my heart.

“Yeah, Luke’s back. Can’t believe the Alpha’s giving him another chance.”

A man chuckles low in his throat. “Not sure chaining him up and telling him he doesn’t have a choice by joining us is a chance...”

“That’ll teach him to come back, thinking he can bargain for that bitch’s release. She won’t be leaving here alive.”

I don’t even realize I’m crying until I feel Jake’s hand cupping my cheek.

I turn to him with tears in my eyes and whisper, “I can’t leave without Luke.”

A muscle ticks in his jaw, and I know without him opening his mouth to speak that was exactly what he was going to do.

But I can't leave without Luke. He's my mate, and I'm the reason he's chained up somewhere like an animal. I'm the reason his pack have turned their backs on him. I can't abandon him. Not now. Not ever.

Jake's hand tightens around mine. "We stay here and we all die," he hisses.

But I don't move. I'm not going anywhere without my mate.

Jake curses, now tugging my arm. "Come on, Addy, we have to go!"

"I can't leave without Luke!" I hiss, trying to free myself from his grip. "If you won't help me find him, then leave without me. I'll stay and do this on my own."

Tension rises between us as we stare each down, neither refusing to budge in their stance. Finally, after a long moment of tense, silent stare down, Jake releases a sigh of defeat.

"Fine, we'll try to find him," he says, his voice heavy with resignation. "But you have to promise me you'll follow everything that I say without question."

I nod eagerly, relief washing over me because I know I can't free Luke on my own, not when my body is still recovering from all the abuse I suffered. Not when any wolf here will kill me on sight.

We move closer to camp, slipping behind tents and hiding behind cabins. The progress is slow as we stop often to listen. The hint of dawn is gracing the horizon, meaning people are starting to wake. Each update chills me to my marrow.

"Yeah, the Alpha's meeting with him now," a woman says. "Some of the guards are going to that whore's cell to get her."

Word is, the Alpha wants to shred her to bits right in front of him.”

A grumble of anticipation ripples through the wolves listening. They’re looking forward to it.

My knees give out and I have to reach out to Jake to steady myself. Why do they hate me so much? How can they want that?

Jake’s arms tighten around me, his voice low and urgent. “We have to get out of here. Before they find out that you aren’t in your cell.”

I freeze, finding myself torn between running away with Jake and staying to find Luke, no matter the obstacle.

I don’t get to make a choice though because a scream rips through the pale dawn. “She’s gone! She’s gone!”

My pulse bursts into a gallop as Jake and I share a look of alarm.

In that moment, I know what I need to do.

“We have to find him,” I tell my brother, my voice barely audible through the roaring in my ears.

Luke is as good as dead.

Jake hesitates, and I prepare to leave him. To find Luke and stop this on my own.

But his face hardens. “I know,” he replies, his eyes scanning the tents.

He glances around the side of the cabin we’re tucked behind, then quickly pulls back in. The sound of footsteps is growing closer. Jake and I press ourselves against the rough timber, barely breathing.

Please don't let them see us.

The footsteps take a turn, possibly heading toward the kitchen tent where I was forced to work, and recede.

Jake peeks around the corner of the cabin. “Okay, the coast is clear,” he whispers after moments of careful surveillance. He grabs my hand and pulls me forward.

My brother leads me through the camp, his gait steady and sure as we dart between tents and duck under bushes. I can feel his strength giving me the courage I need to keep moving forward.

But the fear is still there, twisting my gut like a living thing.

The chances of finding Luke are slim. The chances of coming out of this alive are even lower.

I try to push those thoughts aside and focus on the present moment; my brother's hand around mine, my feet padding over the dusty ground, and the feel of the air rushing past my face as we run. We've traversed most of the camp when we see a stone cabin sitting at the edge of the compound. It's the last place we haven't searched.

Luke has to be in there.

The area around the cabin is open and exposed. The only way to find out is to traverse it so we can be close enough to listen whether there's anyone inside.

Jake pulls in a steadying breath and I do the same. I wish there was time to tell him how grateful I am that he came for me. Not only that, he's here, helping me rescue Luke, his sworn enemy. His willingness to risk his life is a testament to the deep bonds of family. Ties that I'd lost hope existed.

We dart across the dusty expanse, trying to stay low. The cabin draws nearer, and I notice a window on the western side. I gasp as a whiff of Luke's scent is pulled into my lungs. We've found him!

"Stop!" a man roars.

It's a voice I recognize. The voice of one of my torturers. Terror and adrenaline flood my veins, screaming at me to run.

But Luke—

"Run!" my brother cries, pulling me along.

We race across the camp, my weak body protesting every movement even as I know I can't stop. Being caught means certain death.

The pounding footsteps behind us gain in strength, like thunder. More Blood Borns are joining the chase and they're getting closer and closer. Their growls echo through the camp as we duck and weave, heading for the safety of the forest.

The trees come into sight as my breath heaves in and out of my lungs. My legs feel like they're going to give out. I struggle to keep up with my brother, but he's pulling me along with him, urging me to go faster. I only allow myself one thought.

We're almost there.

Except the Blood Borns are getting closer, their panting breaths feeling like they're brushing the back of my neck. Their hatred reaches out, trying to wrap clawed fingers around my throat. There's no way I can outrun them.

I let Jake's hand go. He needs to get away. Maybe the wolf we overhead was right. I was never destined to leave this camp alive.

Jake suddenly twists, the morning light glinting off the handgun he just yanked out of the back of his jeans. He fires several shots in quick succession, making me duck instinctively. Someone cries out as Jake takes my hand again, yanking me along even faster.

Then we're diving into the tree line, shade and the scent of pine closing in around us.

Protecting us.

And taking me further away from Luke.

For endless minutes, Jake and I continue to run, changing direction often, never slowing. The sounds of our pursuers fade, leaving behind only our harsh breathing and rapid footsteps.

We reach a stand of rocks and Jake rounds it, then finally stops. We lean back against a rough boulder, breathing hard. I pant, astounded that I'm here, breathing. We escaped. We made it.

Although I have no idea what that means for me or Luke, all I do know is that I'm alive. And that means there's a still chance for Luke to be, too.

Except then we hear something that makes us both freeze.

A low growl, coming from above. We leap back, looking up frantically, trying to spot the source of the sound. And then we see her—a she wolf standing just a few feet away from us. Her low hanging teats suggest she's a mother. And that her den is nearby.

Jake is as unmoving as I am. The wolf is staring right at us, her nostrils flaring as she sniffs the air. We don't have the energy to outrun her. If we shift and fight her, the scent of blood will lead the others straight to us.

But one howl from her, and the whole pack will descend on us in a matter of seconds.

We watch as the wolf starts to move towards us, her lips curling back to reveal glistening teeth. I try to swallow, only to find my throat is too tight. It feels like my frenzied heart is lodged in there. We're in serious trouble.

But then, almost miraculously, the wolf stops. Her head snaps around, and a soft mewl comes from somewhere deep amongst the boulders. One of the wolf's cubs.

The wolf hesitates, torn between attacking us and remaining where she is to protect her young. And that's all the time we need.

Without another word, Jake and I take off running again, darting deeper into the woods. We can hear the wolf howl growl us, still angry and confused, but we don't stop. We keep moving, creating as much distance between us and the wolf. Us and the Blood Borns.

Yet, the more we run, the more my heart hurts. The more my soul feels like it's shredding. Every cell in my body knows I'm going the wrong way.

When my foot catches on a protruding root and I trip, I don't bother to fight it. I tumble to the ground, my body collapsing beneath me, hot tears tracking down my cheeks.

Jake is instantly there, pulling me into arms, holding me tight. "It's okay," he whispers. "You're safe now. They'll never hurt you again."

But that's not why I'm crying. Guilt settles in my chest, thick and oppressive. I saved myself.

And left Luke behind.

How can I live, knowing that?

I slip out of Jake's arms and stand, pressing my feet into the hard soil. "I'm going back."

He shoots to his feet. "What? You can't, Addy. Luke's pack will be on high alert from now on. We barely escaped alive this time."

Turning on my heel, I communicate without words what I've decided. In fact, it's better if he doesn't come.

I'm going back.

I'm going to save my mate.

Even if it means risking my own life.

CHAPTER 15

LUKE



The cold metal of the chains bites into my legs as I strain against them, trying to free myself from this chair. My heart is racing, my breath coming out in short gasps as I listen to the commotion outside.

Addy is gone, and I can't help but feel a sense of relief mixed with fear wash over me. Relief because she's now out of this hellhole, and fear because I know my father will not take her escape lightly. It will only fuel his rage.

I can hear him outside, his tone angry and threatening as he orders the guards to hunt them down. It's a tone I've heard countless times before. But this time it is different. This time, it's about my mate.

He walks into the room, his gait commanding as he steps closer to me, his eyes glinting with pure malice. "She will die along with every last High Ridge wolf," he snarls. "And you will help me."

I shake my head, holding his gaze so he can see how serious I am. "Never. I will never do that."

My father barks out a laugh. "Oh yes, you will. You see Luke, you don't have a choice."

I glare at my father, no longer the son who used to cower or crumble under his threats. All I feel is disgust. Anger. And determination for this all to end.

Sean leans back, his lip curling. “So be it,” he growls.

He barks out an order to his guards, and dread weaves through my insides as Sienna is brought in, her hands bound by silver chains.

The woman who’s been loyal to my father for as long as I can remember looks dirty and scared. Yet, she’s the reason why Addy and I have found ourselves in this situation. I can’t fathom what my father has planned next. All I can do is hope he’s bluffing. That this is another of their lies.

Except Sienna’s always looked cocky and confident, even in the face of adversity. Now she looks frightened and confused, like she doesn’t understand why she’s been chained and dragged here like this.

“Join the Blood Borne in the war against the High Ridge scum or she dies,” my father states flatly.

His eyes are cold and hard. Full of intent.

Horror wars with denial. Surely he can’t mean it. Surely he wouldn’t kill his loyal follower in his sick bid to have me bow to his will.

Sienna whimpers as he steps behind her, grabbing her hair and wrapping it around his wrist. I draw in a sharp breath when his other hand slowly lifts, a silver dagger clasped tightly within it, bringing it to rest against her throat.

No...

The blood drains from Sienna’s face, leaving her deathly white. The look on her face tells me all I need to know—she’s

beyond terrified.

My father smiles at me. “I’ll only offer one more time, Luke. Will you join us when we attack the High Ridge pack?”

I stare at Sienna, noting that even her lips lack color. Guilt washes through me that she’s here, enduring this. Even as it tries to weigh on me, though, I push it away. I’m not responsible for her involvement in this. She’s the one who aligned with my father.

I try to stay strong, try to remember Addy and our love as I look away. His plan is disgusting and barbaric, and it goes against everything I stand for.

I clench my fists, the chains on my wrists rattling. “I’m not helping you attack innocent people.”

“They’re not innocent,” he hisses. “They’re a threat to us. They’ll take everything we’ve struggled to build.”

I grit my teeth, trying to control my anger. I can’t be a part of the attack on Addy’s pack, but I can’t risk my father being serious. He’ll kill Sienna. Then he’ll kill me and move ahead with his plans to attack the High Ridge pack.

“Very well,” my father snarls even though I haven’t spoken.

“No!” Sienna screams.

She struggles against her bonds, trying to break free, but it’s no use. My father’s face is cold and emotionless as he raises the dagger high above his head. Sienna screams and thrashes, but there’s no escape. I can see the fear in her eyes, the knowledge that what’s coming is inevitable.

“No! Stop!” I roar, throwing myself forward, only to be yanked back by my chains.

It means I'm forced to watch what happens. To have it forever branded into my mind as a brutal, horrible memory.

My father brings the dagger down with deadly force, plunging it into her chest. She arches with a garbled groan, blood gushing from the wound. The dagger slips back out as she crumples to the ground, lying motionless on the floor. Her blank eyes staring unseeingly up at the ceiling.

I sit there for what feels like an eternity, watching as my father wipes the blood from the silver blade, a strange mix of satisfaction and disgust twisting his features. He turns to me, that hellfire burning in his eyes.

"She will be the first," he says coldly. "The elderly will be next. Then the women and the weak. I doubt I'll have to consider actually killing any of my fighters before you change your mind."

Horror is like ice in my veins. Regret is a rock in my chest. Despair is black cloak closing around me. I close my eyes, feeling tears prick at the corners, even as I refuse to let them fall.

"What is your choice, Luke? Each time you refuse me, someone else will lose their life."

I can't let my pack die. They shouldn't pay the price for my father's madness and hatred any more than the High Ridge wolves..

"I'll stay," I say, looking at my father with defiance in my eyes. "I'll fight for you."

My heart thuds, heavy and hurting, as I stare at my father, the man who raised me and who has now become my greatest enemy. It's hard to believe that just weeks ago, we were laughing and joking around like we used to when I was a kid.

But now everything has changed. Sean's eyes are cold and calculating, and his voice is filled with malice as he talks about attacking Addy's pack. I hate the fact that he wants to do this. I hate the fact that he's willing to risk so many lives just to satisfy his own drive for power and control.

Sean smiles, a cruel twist of his lips that makes me sick to my stomach. "I knew you'd come around eventually, son," he says, patting my shoulder. "You're a true member of Blood Born, after all."

I want to spit in his face, tell him that I'm nothing like him and never will be. But I keep my mouth shut, my gaze down. My hatred deep inside me.

"There are preparations to make," my father announces, then leaves the room.

The moment the door slams shut, my shoulders sag. My head drops back and a low moan climbs up my throat. As I sink into the depths of despair, my mind turns to Addy. The image of her beautiful face framed by her dark hair brings me both solace and has me doubling over in pain.

Strangely, I can feel her presence, as if she's not far away. I don't know how it's possible since she's gone, but it almost has me smiling. The knowledge that she'd understand brings me comfort in ways nothing else could.

She understands my decision, the one that's changed everything.

By staying, I get to keep Addy safe, as well as those of the Blood Borns. If I can fight for that, then I'll risk my life a thousand times over.

And maybe even those of the High Ridge wolves.

"Goodbye, Addy," I whisper. "Stay safe."

I close my eyes, pretending she can hear me. Sean's been allowed to rule for so long, poisoning the minds of the pack members against other packs as he sought power.

It's time to take him down. It won't be easy, but I'm determined to succeed, for Addy, for Fena and Sienna, and for those he thirsts to add to his list.

By becoming part of this war, I have the chance to save Addy.

And everyone else.

CHAPTER 16

ADELINE



I stand frozen in the shadows as I listen to the conversation between Luke and his father. I know it's dangerous for me to stay here when Sean has his people actively searching for me.

But as Jake pointed out, the last place they'll think to look for me right now would be in their camp. I keep reminding myself of that as my heart batters my ribs, making me feel bruised all over again.

All I got was a brief glimpse through the window before I ducked out of sight, my hand clamped over my mouth to keep in the cry of distress. Sienna lies dead on the floor, her blood pooling around her. Luke's chained to a chair, forced to make a decision.

"She will be the first," Sean says coldly. "The elderly will be next. Then the women and the weak. I doubt I'll have to consider actually killing any of my fighters before you change your mind."

The cold, malicious bastard.

"What is your choice, Luke? Each time you refuse me, someone else will lose their life."

My heart pounds in my chest as I wait to hear Luke's response to his father's ultimatum with bated breath. He would

never want to be a part of this. But if he agrees to stay and fight, he'll be safe for now.

Please stay alive, Luke.

The metallic scent of Sienna's blood reaches me and a wave of hatred and revulsion wash over me. How could Sean kill her in cold blood without remorse, without so much as batting an eyelash when she'd been so loyal to him?

The silence stretches out and I feel like I'm frozen in time. Beside me, Jake reaches out and grabs my arm. He already knows that I'm a heartbeat away from running in there and telling Sean he's a hateful monster.

Even if it means it'll be the last thing I do.

"I'll stay," Luke says, his voice gritty. "I'll fight for you."

Relief floods through me, and I sink back against the brick wall outside. At least for now, he's safe. Even if it means aligning himself with everything he hates.

Jake tugs on my arm, indicating with his head that we need to leave. This time, I go without an argument, even though it feels like I'm walking away from any chance of happiness.

From ever seeing Luke again.

Jake and I slip into the forest, staying to the shadows as we make our way back to our pack. Each step cements my determination.

It's now up to me to stop the war that's going to break out between our two packs.

Luke and I can be the bridge that forges peace. Our love has proven that the word enemy ceases to exist in the face of something greater than us and them.

I have no idea how I'll be able to do that. But I'll use every means at my disposal to ensure that no more innocent lives are lost. I'll stop Sean.

And save Luke.



I stand before my family and fellow pack members as I recount my time with Luke's pack, my heart heavy with the weight of a decision that could mean life or death for us all.

They actually welcomed me with open arms, making sure I had everything I needed. Any talk of my disloyalty has been forgotten. Not when one of their own has been hurt by the Blood Borns.

Yet, I quickly realize why. I'm just as much of a pawn as I've always been.

The air is thick with tension as I glance at Lance and Damien on the other side of the table. The more I talk, the need for revenge is etching deeper and deeper into the lines of my brothers' faces. Jake shifts a little closer to me, supporting me just like he has since he rescued me.

Lance slams a fist onto the table. "They will pay for what they did to you."

I don't point out that he also imprisoned me and threatened to kill me. It will only inflame him, and I'm not here to add fuel to the fire of war. I'm here to douse it.

To find the way to peace.

Damien leans forward. “And they will pay with blood,” he vows.

I stop my hands from making fists of their own. Two words keep being murmured in the context of death and destruction.

Blood Born.

The pack who are just as determined to destroy us as we are them. I’ve seen it. Lived it. Luke’s father is ruthless.

But that doesn’t mean he gets to define how this turns out.

I take a deep breath, steadying myself as I address my father, brothers, and their most trusted advisors. “We cannot keep fighting like this,” I say, keeping my voice strong. “Too many lives have been lost already, too much blood has been shed. We need to speak of peace, not war.”

My father, a stern old wolf with deep scars etched into his skin, snarls in response. “There is no other option, Adeline,” he growls. “Blood Born has declared war on us, and we must fight. It’s the only way to protect our territory and our people.”

I know my father is right. Our pack has always been fierce and unwavering in the face of danger, and we’ve survived countless battles against enemies, both human and animal. But something about this conflict is different, more dangerous, because Luke’s father is determined to annihilate us all. I can’t shake the feeling that there’s a better way to end this once and for all.

That I’m here to stop this.

“How many more of our pack do we have to lose?” I ask, desperation creeping into my voice. “How many more mothers will have to watch their pups die? How many more families will we allow to be torn apart by this senseless violence?”

My words hang in the air, heavy with emotion. I can see the pain and sadness in the eyes of my fellow wolves, and for a moment, it feels like we're all united in our grief.

But then my father stands, his gaze cold and hard. "We will fight until the end," he says firmly. "The Blood Borne killed my mate. I will not let them take what is rightfully ours. We will defend our territory with all our might, and we will win."

The weight of his words press down on me, crushing me. My father is being stoic and strong, but I can't help but wonder if his unwavering determination will be our downfall.

That revenge meeting revenge will only feed more revenge.

Fine tremors ripple up my arms, my heart feeling like it's about to burst out of my chest. Why do things have to be this way? Why can't fellow shifter packs coexist with each other? Why do we all have to suffer because of one wolf's ruthless ambitions for more power?

Luke and I tried our best to avert this. We really did. But this war is like trying to stop a boulder from rolling down a hill. The momentum is already there, and there's nothing we can do to stop it.

And now, here we are. Two packs on the brink of war, and I'm terrified. Too many lives will be lost, possibly mine and Luke's, too. I can't remember the last time I felt fear like this, not even when I thought I would lose my life at the hands of Luke's father, time and again.

I thought I was tough. I thought I could handle anything that comes my way. But this...this is different. This is life or

death. This is my family, my pack, my home. Everything I've ever known, everyone that I love is at stake here.

What am I supposed to do? I don't think I can fight. I don't think I can hurt anyone. The thought of actually fighting makes me sick to my stomach. It goes against everything I believe in.

I thought I wanted to destroy Luke's father and his pack, but I don't want that anymore. I can't just stand by and watch this unfold. Violence only begets more violence. It doesn't solve anything.

But how do I convince everyone else of that? How do I get them to see reason, to see that there is another way? Right now, we're all just going to destroy each other. Yet I don't know what to do. I feel completely helpless. I'm not a leader. I'm not even sure I'm a good follower. I'm just...me. Just Addy, the girl who likes to take long walks in the woods, the one who dreams of happily ever after. I'm not cut out for this kind of thing.

I try to calm myself down. I close my eyes and take deep breaths. I never wanted to be part of this. I've always felt like I'm nothing but a pawn. Too weak but to do anything but watch as my heart breaks. The naive, innocent Addy that my brothers always told me I was.

Except I've survived. I've thrived.

And despite the odds, I found love.

I square my shoulders and lift my chin. I take one last deep breath as my gaze falls on my father, my resolve strong even as my doubts continue to swirl inside me. "You're wrong," I say, my voice ringing with determination. "There is no honor

in war. Only hatred and blood and death. I will fight for peace and forgiveness and love. Die for it if I must.”

Silence is my only response. Lance looks furious, as does Damien. My father looks bitterly disappointed. Only Jake is blinking at me like he was just hit by a thunderbolt.

Keeping my chin high, I exit the room. There’s nothing left to say. Nothing else I can do.

As I head outside into the forest, I ready myself for what is about to come.

War against the Blood Borns.

I take a deep breath, making my way around the perimeter of our home, allowing my lungs to fill with the scent of fresh air. I tell myself that I can do this. That I have to do this, for the sake of the lives that will be lost, and for the sake of Luke.

And I pray. I pray to the moon for guidance. I pray for strength, for courage, for wisdom. I pray that somehow, someday, we’ll survive this and find a way forward, free of hatred and revenge. Because if we don’t...well, I don’t even want to think about that. I don’t want to imagine a world where that can’t exist.

Because that’s a world without Luke.

My hands press against my chest, trying to stem the pain the thought triggers. I realize I can’t give up. That there will always be hope. If I didn’t believe that, I never would’ve tasted life with Luke.

Maybe if I talk to my family again, they’ll see reason—

I freeze as I round the rear stables, registering movement amongst the tree line several yards away. Bodies materialize from the shadows. Men and women I recognize.

Blood Borne.

My stomach painfully bottoms out as I hastily let out a warning cry. I'm out of time.

War is here.

CHAPTER 17

LUKE



I stand at the edge of High Ridge Pack's territory, staring across the invisible boundary that separates us from Addy's pack. My father has made it clear that we need to eliminate any competition in our way, and Addy's pack is the biggest threat to his dominance.

We're here to wage war.

"Never forget," my father says as he walks up behind me, his voice laced with anger. "These wolves killed your mother. Your brother. Your mate. That will not go unpunished."

I shake my head, feeling sick to my stomach. I haven't forgotten about what happened in the past, but I also know killing innocent people isn't going to bring them back. "You killed the Alpha's mate." Addy's mother. "You started this."

Sean's eyes flash with dark fire. "I showed her the price for rebuffing me."

I clamp my mouth shut. Tired of feeling shocked and disgusted. Of course my father started this pack war because of his ego. It's been about that all along. "We should try to talk first," I say. "Come to an agreement so no blood will be shed."

"Talk? You think talking is going to solve this?" My father sneers, his lip curling in disgust. "You're weak, Luke. You

always have been.”

I look away, realizing that his words no longer sting. The kind of strength my father values isn't what I believe in. Power isn't meant to be amassed by any means.

“I'm not weak,” I say, quietly but with force. “There's a better way to handle this.”

“There is no other way.” My father steps closer, his breath hot on my face. “And if you don't fight with us, then my wrath will know no bounds.”

The truth is there in his blazing gaze. My father will pick the Blood Borns off, one by one. Starting with the older members, the women. Anyone who is weak and vulnerable. He'd prefer to have no pack than the shame of a son who turned his back on him.

A cruel smile twists his lips when I don't respond. He believes my hands are tied. Without another word, he walks away and joins the rest of the pack.

What he doesn't know is that although I'm here, although I'll be fighting, it won't be to kill. Or win.

I follow him back to the clearing, my heart racing even as I try to remain calm. The Blood Borns are there, seething with anger and amped up with years of misguided animosity towards Addy's pack. It's like they're more wolf than human, animals driven by primal instincts, unable to control their actions. The tension builds as they pace and growl, itching for the fight, ready to spill blood in the name of the pack.

Nausea is a writhing serpent in my gut. I'm about to attack my mate's pack. And it will be a massacre, no matter who calls themselves victor.

We move through the trees, my chest feeling tighter and tighter with each step. Long before I'm ready, I'm standing at the front of my father's pack as we approach Addy's territory. We exit the tree line and I can see the pack in the distance, gathered and ready for our arrival. My heart sinks as I think about the fight that's about to ensue. How did it come to this? I can't help feeling sickened by it all.

As we finally reach Addy's territory, I take a deep breath and try to calm my nerves. Across the stretch of farmland the High Ridge pack stand together, ready to defend their land.

The Blood Borns spread out, some clenching their hands reflexively, others bouncing on the balls of their feet. It's my last chance to avert this.

I turn to them, my gaze roaming over each of their faces. "Wrongs have been committed," I say, keeping my voice low but full of conviction. "On both sides. We can choose to stop that here. Today. There's no need for this. Let us return to our territory and leave them alone."

Sean shoves me out of the way. "Do not listen to him! He's scared! Weak!" he snarls, his fingers already stretching into claws. "Retreating is for cowards, and we are not cowards!"

My pack mates continue to snarl and bare their teeth, acting as if I didn't speak. It's like they're in a trance, consumed by an uncontrollable rage. My father turns to me, triumph lighting up his face.

"You change your mind now and they'll kill you."

Which means I won't have a chance to alter where this is heading. Even though I'm starting to believe there's nothing I can say or do to stop this, I nod. "Very well. We fight."

I turn to face the High Ridge estate in the distance. The rest of the Blood Borns twitch and wait, ready to attack the moment the word is given. We're a formidable force, with over twenty wolves on our side. But I know that Addy's pack is equally strong, and they won't go down without a fight.

The seconds stretch out, straining my nerves. My heart doesn't know whether to riot in my chest or fail to beat, as if that will hold off the inevitable. The trees behind us rustle, creating an ominous whispering sound. I can already smell the blood that's about to be spilled.

The High Ridge wolves spread out just like we have. Strong. Silent. Ready to defend themselves. Fighting them is the last thing I'd ever want to do. My eyes scan the line, looking for Addy, hoping against hope that she's not there.

I spot her almost instantly, her dark hair framing her pale face. She looks heart-breakingly beautiful. And heart-breakingly terrified. All I want to do is take her away from all of this.

“Attack!” Sean roars.

Gavin is the first to surge forward, the most keen for bloodshed. He leaps over a low fence, shifting mid-air. The rest follow suit, my father at the helm, and I have no choice but to join them as I release my own wolf.

It's four paws that grip the soft soil and take me forward. To the High Ridge wolves. To Addy.

So that we can try and kill each other.

Sean powers forward, making himself the tip of the deadly arrow aimed at the enemy and I do my best to keep up. My ultimate fear is that he'll target Addy first. He's wanted to kill her from the beginning, and her escape would only have fueled

that wish. Just as I expected, he subtly changes angle as the distance between the two packs shrink.

He subtly angles toward Addy.

No! I go to follow, determined to protect her, only to realize a wolf is heading straight toward me, another right behind him.

I instantly recognize Lance and Damien, Addy's two eldest brothers and the most hate-filled ones. They fall in side by side, their yellow gazes zeroed in on me, sharp canines bared as their muzzles ripple.

Growling with fury that they're stopping me from protecting Addy, I prepare to face them. Their intent to kill is clear in their manic eyes.

Somewhere to my left, the first clash rips through the field and it sounds brutal. Growls echo, jaw snap, a yelp pierces the air, the scent of coppery blood quickly follows. I don't get a chance to see who was just hurt, possibly killed.

Lance is leaping, revealing razor-sharp teeth, exposing long, dark claws. And I meet him with the same ferocity and violence.

Addy's life depends on it.

Our bodies collide, jaws snapping and paws swiping. My claws slash his shoulder, but Lance twists so all I shred is fur. His massive head snaps to the side, his jaws trying to clamp around my throat. I knock him away, deflecting the deadly attack, only for it to affect my center of gravity.

I go to right myself, preparing to leap and slash, only to yelp in pain when teeth sink into my rear leg. I kick, feeling razor-like daggers tear at my flesh, but manage to dislodge the wolf who attacked from behind. Leaping back, I'm not

surprised to find Damien snarling at me, revealing blood-streaked teeth.

My blood.

Although there's too much adrenaline for me to feel the pain, I can feel the thick fluid trickling down my hindquarter and seeping into my paw. It's a substantial injury.

They leap simultaneously, Lance going for my jugular, Damien for my chest. I try to launch at them, to meet them head on, but my rear leg gives out, making me stumble. Satisfaction flashes in Lance's feral eyes. Damien even yips in excitement.

They know I'm at a double disadvantage. I'm injured. And there are two of them.

A mournful howl tears at my heart and I lock eyes with Addy. For a moment, time seems to stand still. Pain flashes in her eyes, echoing the same agony that's slicing through me even before her brother's reach me.

Lance's body collides with mine, his open jaw ready to rip my throat out. Damien is right behind him, raising a paw, claws extended, ready for any fleshy part to be open and vulnerable.

A large gray body powers past me, taking Lance with it. I draw in a sharp breath as I recognize Jack, the guard for the Blood Borns. The old wolf doesn't let the fact he's blind be a hindrance as he pins Lance to the ground, his own jaws now wrapped around his throat. Lance whimpers, but the sound is sharply cut off as Jack twists his head and snaps his neck.

Lance instantly goes still. Dead.

Damien lets out a pained howl and attacks Jack. I leap, knocking him before he can make contact with the wolf who

just saved my life. Jack spins around, unerringly aiming for Damien as he slashes him across the muzzle. Blood gushes down his face, staining his teeth, but the pain only infuriates him. This time, he stops, then circles slowly. He's figured out Jack's eyes are sightless. That as long as he's stealthy, Jack may not hear him coming.

Jack goes very still, listening intently, and I coil my muscles, ready to leap before Damien does. I just have to hope my injured leg doesn't give out again.

Except Damien is so focused that he never registers the threat to himself. A deep russet wolf slams into him from his left, sending them both tumbling. I run toward them, watching as Ryan, my old neighbor, and Damien come to a stop. But it's only Ryan who stands. Damien remains on the ground, his head at an unnatural angle.

Jack joins me as I realize two Blood Born wolves just saved two lives, one of them mine.

Thank you, I say through our wolf link.

Ryan turns away, running back into the fray. *You're the Alpha's son. I will always be loyal to the pack.*

Jack simply nods, turning away from the fight and trotting back to the protection of the trees. *I've lost my sight. Not my heart.*

I spin back to assess the battle and my heart bottoms out in my heaving chest.

We're winning. My father's pack is stronger, more experienced, and better organized. Addy's pack is retreating, slowly but surely, leaving a trail of dead bodies behind, both wolf and human. Some are Blood Borns, but most are High Ridge. The smell of blood is thick in the air.

Then I catch sight of Addy and my heart stops.

She's at the opposite edge of the fight, head snapping from side to side in panic. She knows she's not a fighter, yet she's refusing to run.

It's exactly what the wolf creeping up to her—Gavin—has no doubt ascertained. He's taking his time, looking as if he's relishing building up to the moment.

I let out an agonized howl as I break into a run, ignoring the hot pain that shoots up my injured leg. I have to get to her in time.

I have to.

We may be winning, but I've never felt more like I'm about to lose everything I hold dear.

CHAPTER 18

ADELINE



The air crackles with electricity as the sounds of angry growls and pained howls echo around the battleground. I try to keep the panic under control, but I'm failing. The sounds of pain. The scent of death. The taste of blood in the air.

It's overwhelming.

And so wrong.

My pack are dying. So are the Blood Borns. How is anyone winning in this massacre?

A howl pierces my growing fear. A howl I recognize. I turn to look for Luke, wanting to see him. Needing him at this moment. He's the only reminder I have that my world isn't defined by death and destruction.

Yet it's not him I see, but the shifter stalking toward me. The moment our gazes meet, he breaks into a run, then leaps.

I try to escape, try to dodge his cannonball attack, but I'm not quick enough. He knocks me over, forcing the air out of my lungs as he lands on top, his claws digging into my skin.

Pain lances through me, hot and sharp. I yelp, struggling to get free, but he's too strong. He has me pinned to the ground with both his size and strength. I struggle for breath as the shifter's claws dig deeper into my flesh, his paw on my throat.

Pain shoots through me, blurring my vision as I continue to fight, knowing my life is on the line.

But he's too strong, too fast, and my grip on consciousness loosens.

He stares down at me, his eyes flashing with menace and excitement. His breath caresses my face, hot and fetid. I close my eyes, not wanting him to be the last thing I see. I don't want my death to be defined by hatred.

I think of Luke. Hope that he'll survive this and go on to fight for peace. For the love we found to have made a difference.

The wolf above me presses down, crushing my neck. I'm going to die. It's just a matter of time. The shifter is playing with me, taunting me, enjoying the terror in my eyes.

Suddenly, there's a blur of motion from my right, a growl that feels like it trembles the very soil, and the shifter is flying through the air. I draw precious air into my lungs in large gulps as I angle my head to the side, wanting to see who has saved me.

Luke stands over me, breathing hard, looking magnificent in the darkening air.

The wolf who attacked me digs his claws into the soil as he turns and launches right back at Luke. He leaps with a snarl that reveals blood-stained teeth and Luke meets him midair. My heart lodges high in my throat as I watch them fight, their movements fast and vicious. I see an opening and go to leap in, only to be stopped when another wolf leaps in front of me.

Jake glares at me from his pale gray face. *It's too dangerous. Luke needs to stay focused.*

I hesitate, hating that he's right.

And you're injured.

The moment Jake's words whisper through my mind, I register the pain slicing up my limbs. Blood is pouring from wounds on my chest and haunches, my muscles feel battered and bruised. I'd be nothing but a liability.

Jake scans the fighting. The battle is chaotic and violent, with bloodshed everywhere, as both packs fight each other, their fury and hatred bubbling over. *Where's Fena?*

I freeze. Jake thought he'd see Fena here. Maybe even save her. The relationship that was born years ago when she was a captive of my pack has lived on.

But that means he doesn't know.

I'm so sorry, I whisper through our link. *She was killed by Sean. Because she helped me.*

He stumbles as his knees give way. *No.*

I simply stare at him, compassion that someone else has been a casualty of this pack war flooding my chest. Fena loved him even after she left. He clearly loved her, too.

I'm so sorry.

Jake turns and runs, and I quickly lose sight of him amongst the chaos. I want to run after him, but I don't. I can't. Turning back, I see the carnage is still unfolding, making my stomach turn. Luke is watching the wolf who attacked me run away, his giant chest pumping in and out like a bellow. Blood is caked down his rear leg and I whimper.

Then I register two more dead bodies further away. Lance and Damien.

So much pain. So much cruelty.

Somehow, I have to make it stop.

I'm about to go to Luke, my soul needing to be near him as the air thickens with the sound of snarls and growls, punctuated by the occasional yelp of pain, but something in the center of the melee catches my attention.

My father is facing another wolf as they circle each other, muzzles serrated, saliva dripping onto the dusty ground their paws are compacting.

It's Sean.

I've never seen him in wolf form, but I can sense it. Practically smell it. The venomous hatred rippling through him is unmistakable.

And he's trying to kill my father.

Sean digs his claws into the dirt and leaps, jaws snapping over and over. He bites my father's legs, chest, face. My father defends himself, even gets in a few powerful bites of his own, but he's a little slower. Not as accurate.

He hasn't spent the past five years honing his fighting skills like Sean has. The Blood Born's Alpha's thirst for blood is far more insatiable.

I release a mournful howl—a sound that only a daughter who's witnessed her father getting attacked can make—that echoes through the air. It's like a primal instinct takes over my body, the wolf inside of me desperate to protect my family. Lance and Damien are dead, Jake has run off, torn apart by grief. My mother was killed because of this hatred and animosity, and my father could be next.

My gaze is locked on the eye of the chaos, the two Alpha's who will fight to the death for dominance, and run.

For the first time, I'm not afraid. I'm angry. And I charge like a bullet, straight at them.

A blur to my right reveals the wolf who attacked me is running straight at me, determined to stop me. I don't change trajectory. In fact, I barely flinch when I twist and jump at the last minute, clamping my jaws around his neck. He tries to fight back, but I shift my weight, pinning him down with my own body. I sink my teeth in, feeling them break the skin as we skid to a stop. The taste of blood floods my mouth.

The wolf struggles, but quickly stops when it causes my teeth to sink further. Blood drips onto the dirt. One clamp of my jaws and I could end him. He tried to kill me. He attacked Luke, his own pack member. This wolf was probably one of the ones who bayed for my blood when I was a prisoner of the Blood Borns. Maybe even one of the wolves who tortured me.

The muscles of my jaw tense. Bunch. I can already hear the bones crunching, feel the flesh shredding.

Except I'm no killer. I never have been. It's why I hate all of this in the first place.

So I release him and he falls to the ground, eyes wide with shock. I'm barely aware that he scampers away a second later, whining.

My focus is on my father and Sean as they circle each other. Their fur bristles and their eyes are narrowed in anger. Blood trickles from my father's shoulder, matting his fur. A gash slices across Sean's muzzle, close to his eyes.

I want to get in the fight, to help him somehow, but I need the right moment.

They leap simultaneously, biting and snarling and clawing in an attempt to hurt and maim. They become a confusing blur

of fur and teeth and blood. I go to leap only to stop, over and over. One moment Sean is in my sight, the next he's lost to the violent storm that's only growing in power.

But then they stop.

Someone has claimed victory as they pin the other down.

No! I surge forward, the denial screaming through my mind.

There's a sickening crunch and my father goes limp in Sean's jaws. My stomach bottom's out. My heart jolts painfully. Luke's father has killed my father.

A whimper climbs up my throat and Sean's gaze snaps to mine, his eyes a riot of rage and hatred. He releases my father, not even bothering to watch his lifeless body drop to the ground as he runs at me. Two words are clear in his hellish gaze.

You're next.

I try to fight back, to defend myself, but it's too late. He's too strong, and I'm hurting too bad—heart, body and soul. My family may have been part of this hatred, but they were my pack. Now, there's only Jake and me.

Sean knocks me to the ground, snarling as he towers over me, his claws digging into my throat. My airway closes off as his claws dig into my throat, crushing it with his weight and strength. My vision turns hazy, and my body aches all over.

Yet this time, I don't want Luke to save me.

I don't want him to have to fight his father. For another battle to the death to stain this soil.

As the darkness creeps in around the edges of my vision, a deep sadness washes over me. I've lost everything—my father,

my family, and now my future with Luke. The world around me starts to fade into a black haze, and my body goes limp.

Suddenly, Sean is yanked away as a furious cannonball of fur slams into him. I gasp for air, watching through hazy vision as they tumble over and over. They come to a stop and instantly leap apart, circling each other like Sean and my father did only moments ago.

They move slowly, sizing each other up as they begin an intricate dance of violence. I try to stand up, but my legs are wobbly and weak from lack of blood flow.

I crumple back onto the ground, horror gripping my heart. This fight I can't stop. My body is too broken, my mind still foggy from lack of oxygen.

I have no choice but to watch as my mate fights his father.

CHAPTER 19

LUKE



I face off against my father, fury rolling off of me in waves. He's wanted to kill Addy for as long as I can remember, and the fact that he went after her the moment he killed her father shouldn't have surprised me, but it did, and now I'm fucking furious.

I circle him slowly, coldness creeping into my veins. The moment I heard Addy let out a broken moan just moments ago while my father had her in his grasp is branded in my mind. Except this is even bigger than that. I'm fighting to protect Addy, the woman I love, but also for the Black Diamond Pack. If I win this, the Blood Borns will cease to exist. My father's monopoly on hate and greed will be over.

This battle has been long overdue, and now it's finally come to a head.

Adrenaline courses through my veins as I launch myself at him, roaring my rage. We collide, twisting and snapping, biting and slashing. The fight is brutal. As wolves, we are evenly matched, and our claws and teeth rip into each other's flesh.

Blood spatters the ground, and I can taste the metallic tang as it mixes with my own sweat. This isn't just a physical battle. It's also a battle of wills. My father's always tried to

break me, to mold me into his image. He's a master of psychological warfare and I've been his target for months.

Today, now, I'm showing him he no longer has the power to do either.

At the next clash, his claws slash my chest. My teeth graze his shoulder. We tussle and land so hard on the ground, we both push away, winded. We're back on our feet simultaneously, glaring at each other as if we never had the connection of father and son.

I tell him without words that I refuse to back down. That this is a fight I'm not willing to lose.

Eventually, we both shift back into human form, panting and covered in blood. We circle each other warily, eyes locked in a standoff. "You can't beat me, son," he growls. "I trained you, I taught you everything you know."

"You taught me a lot of things, but not everything," I reply. "I learned what leading a pack is about, and it's not fear and intimidation."

My father snarls, his eyes glowing with fury. "And what kind of leader are you, then? One who lets his pack members die without consequence? Have you forgotten your mother so soon? Your mate?"

My eyes narrow at his twisted version of the truth. He's trying to get under my skin. "The time for death is over," I say through gritted teeth. "That is the future of the Black Diamond pack."

He lunges at me, but I anticipated that already, and I'm faster than he is. I dodge his attack and tackle him to the ground. We roll over and over, grappling with each other. It's like a dance, an almost choreographed fight. But a deadly one.

Finally, I pin him to the ground, my knee on his chest. He's wheezing and gasping for air, but the fucker is still grinning.

My hands wrap around his throat, my eyes locked onto his. I've won. It's time to finish this.

"Well, son?" he mocks. "Too weak to finish me off?"

The smug look on his face only infuriates me more. He's still acting as if he's won, that he's broken me. Because by killing him, I'm proving I'm exactly like him.

But he's wrong. I will not be his puppet any longer.

An eye for an eye isn't what Black Diamond Pack is about. Killing my own father will go against everything I stand for.

"No," I say firmly. "I won't kill you. I won't stoop to your level."

"What? You weakling! You're a disgrace to this family!" my father bellows, thrashing beneath me.

"I won't kill for you anymore. I won't be a part of your twisted games," I say, voice steady as I push away and get to my feet.

My father's face twisted in rage. "You'll regret this moment," he snarls. "Mark my words, boy. And so will that little girlfriend of yours."

I shake my head, taking a few steps back. "I'm not afraid of you anymore," I say, increasing the volume of my voice. The others here need to hear this. "And Addy is stronger than you think. She's my mate, my equal. And together, we will forge a new way forward."

Before he can retort, I turn on my heel and walk away. I can feel the weight of his gaze heavy on my back, but I don't turn around. My gaze is on Addy, and I see her watching me

with a mixture of relief and awe, and I can tell that something has shifted between us. We've both seen a side of each other that we never knew existed. And we're both stronger for it.

Then, her expression changes to one of abject terror.

"Luke!" Addy's terrified voice pierces the air.

I turn around to see my father in his wolf form, mouth gaping open as he runs at me. I brace for the impact, knowing there's no time to shift.

I brace myself for the impact that never comes.

Jake rips my father away from me, slamming him into the ground. There's a blur of fur and teeth, and I can barely make out what's happening.

Then there's a snap. Then tearing of flesh.

Then nothing.

The silence that follows is deafening. I'm panting, my head spinning from the close call. Addy's sobbing as she runs towards me.

Jake stands before me, his own chest heaving. "I had to do it," Jake says softly. "For Fena."

My father's lifeless form lies on the ground, and I'm hit with a wave of emotions. Relief floods through me, but it's followed quickly by sorrow. The price of Sean's hatred is what ultimately killed him.

"Luke!" Addy cries, throwing herself into my arms. "He almost..."

"I'm okay," I reply, holding her close. "We're all okay."

But I know it's not that simple. My father's influence has been felt for too long. There will be consequences to face, both

for me and for the others he's hurt.

The battle has ended, and the tension in the air is palpable. I can feel the blood dripping down my face from the wound that my father has left me with, and I know I'm lucky to be alive.

I glance around the battleground, taking in the sight of our fallen pack members, both friends and foes alike. My heart aches with grief, and I know that it will take a long time to heal the wounds that this war has inflicted on us all.

I look at Jake, and I see his chest heaving with exertion, my father's blood on his hands. I nod my thanks, even as I wish it hadn't ended like this. With more vengeance. He lifts his chin, his gaze steady as he stares at me.

In some ways, he's right. Justice has been done.

Addy buries her face in my chest, her body shaking with sobs. Behind her is her father's lifeless form. It's a hard blow, and I can see that she's struggling to keep it together. I pull her in closer, my heart aching for her. For me. For all of us.

"I'm so sorry, Addy," I say, my voice barely above a whisper. "I'm here for you. Always."

She nods, wiping her tears away, and we stand there in silence for a few moments, grieving in our own ways.

As we stand there processing the aftermath of the battle, I begin to feel the tug of the mating bond in my heart, stronger and more urgent than ever before, cementing what we've always known.

Addy and I were meant to come together.

"It's time," Addy says, looking up at me, the same knowledge shining in her eyes. "We can show them there's a

different way. A new way.”

I nod, feeling a sudden sense of responsibility weigh heavily on my shoulders. It won't be easy to align two packs that were once enemies, but we're determined to make it work. Our love means we're both up for the challenge.

“Let's do it,” I say, taking her hand in mine. “Together.”

We turn to the others who have now gathered around us, shades of suspicion and uncertainty marring their faces.

“The Blood Borns are no more!” I say, my voice loud and sure. “The war with High Ridge is over.”

Addy lifts her chin. “As one of the remaining heirs of the Alpha, I pledge our pack's commitment to peace. There will be no more bloodshed.”

My chest swells with pride and love for this courageous shifter. “There will be a mating ceremony. Our packs will be allies from here on.”

There are murmurs and whispers among the wolves, but no one objects.

In fact, Jake raises his fist into the air, now the new Alpha. “High Ridge will be there, celebrating alongside you.”

My chest constricting at what's unfolding, I turn to the others. “As the Alpha of the Black Diamond pack, I invite you to join me in this new journey,” I say, my voice firm. “Those of you who choose to stay with me, will be welcomed with open arms. But I understand that this may not be the path for everyone. Those who choose to leave, do so with our blessings.”

There is a moment of silence, and I hold my breath, waiting for the inevitable response. But before anyone can

speaking, a voice rises up from the crowd.

“I will pledge my fealty to you, Alpha.” Jack appears, walking proudly as the crowd divides. He bows his head. “And I to you, Luna Addy.”

Ryan silently but undeniably moves to stand beside him.

Addy stiffens in surprise. For the first time, she’s being accepted.

Slowly, one by one, the wolves pledge their fealty to us. There are a few who choose to leave like Gavin, and while it pains me to see them go, I know it’s for the best. Joining forces after all the animosity that has sparked between both packs is a hard pill to swallow. This is just the beginning of a long journey.

When the last wolf has spoken, a cheer punches the air.

Addy turns to look up at me. “We did it,” she whispers, a smile playing at the corners of her mouth.

“We did,” I echo, a sense of disbelief and gratitude washing over me. I take in her beautiful face in the light of the setting sun. Despite the pain and loss that we’ve both suffered, hope and love and joy are the only emotions alive within me right now.

“We’ll do it together,” I say, my voice filled with conviction.

“Always,” Addy responds, her eyes shining with determination.

And with that, we turn toward our packs, our future, ready to face whatever challenges may come our way.

EPILOGUE

5 YEARS LATER

ADELINE

I have to keep myself from laughing as I chase after my toddler. My daughter, as always, is a bundle of energy and I know I shouldn't be encouraging this.

No matter how cute it is.

“Lucy, slow down!” I call out, but of course, she doesn't listen. She's a little ball of joy, with her curly brown hair bouncing and her tiny legs moving faster than I can keep up with.

I glance up ahead and see Luke standing there, a big grin on his face. He scoops up our daughter, who giggles and squirms in his arms as he laughs. He buries his face in the crook of her neck, growling and biting. Lucy bursts into squeals of laughter.

“I swear girl is going to make even a full-grown shifter exhausted chasing after her,” I say as I reach them, grinning broadly. “She runs so fast! Thank you for grabbing her.”

“No problem,” he chuckles, planting a kiss on my forehead. “We need to take turns chasing her around. It's like her energy is never-ending.”

We both watch as Lucy squirms in Luke's arms, trying to break free. She wants to keep running and playing, exploring this new place we've brought her to. And I can't blame her. The location my brother Jake chose for his mating ceremony is magnificent.

I look around and take it all in. The ceremony is being held in a big open field, with rows of chairs set up for the guests. The scent of wildflowers and fresh grass fills the air, and in the distance, I can see a beautiful waterfall cascading down into a pool of sparkling water.

Lucy points to the waterfall, her little voice ringing out. "Water, Mama!"

"Yes, sweetie, that's water," I say, admiring the beautiful sight alongside her. It's an amazing place, and I can see why my brother picked it for his ceremony.

The crowd of shifters are a colorful mix of fur and skin, some in their animal forms playing and lounging around. Some are chatting and laughing, while others are napping in the sun. The relaxed and carefree atmosphere is infectious, and I can't help but smile as I take it all in.

We walk back over to where Jack, Luke's second, is standing, chatting with some of our friends. They all smile when they see us, and I feel a sense of belonging wash over me. This is our pack, and they've been there for us over the past five glorious, tumultuous years. They were there when we mated, and they were there when we had our daughter.

"Looks like Luke caught the little speed demon," Ryan says, grinning.

"Yeah, but for how long?" Luke replies, winking at me.

We all laugh, and I feel so grateful for these moments. We're surrounded by love and family, and I am reminded that this is what life is all about. Luke and I, along with everyone else here today, have fought tooth and nail to secure this future for ourselves. Raising the Black Diamond pack from the ashes of the pack war was hard, rewarding work.

And every moment was worth it. Standing here, preparing for my brother's mating ceremony is proof of that.

I glance around, hoping to spot Jake but I see neither him, nor his future mate, Sophie. I asked Jack where his sister and my brother are, but he has no idea.

I leave Lucy with Luke, and go in search of Jake because I have a feeling that he's somewhere losing his mind right now. I follow his scent to his room in the quaint farmhouse where all the cooking and preparations have taken place. I take a deep breath before knocking on his door. I could hear his nervous pacing from down the hall. This is a big day for him, for both of us.

The day when he finally moves on from everything he lost to the Blood Borns.

I open the door to find Jake standing in the center of the room, looking a little lost. His face lights up when he sees me, the worry melting away.

"Addy! You're here." His voice is full of relief as he hugs me tightly. "What took you so long?"

I pat his back gently. "Sorry, I was just making sure that everything was taken care of. You know how it is."

Jake nods understandingly. "Yeah, I do. But everything is taken care of now, right?"

I smile at him. “Of course, everything is under control. You have nothing to worry about.”

Jake grins widely, his gaze drifting to somewhere outside the open window, then softening. When I look out, I see Sophie standing with some of her friends wearing the white slip that most she-wolves do for their mating ceremonies.

As if she can sense his gaze, she turns and their eyes connect. I practically feel the deep love that swells between them. It’s a beautiful sight, and it fills me with pride and happiness.

My brother has come a long way since the loss of Fena. And I’m glad he’s found love and happiness with someone patient and understanding like Sophie. Theirs will be the first mating between Black Diamond and High Ridge pack. They’re healing the fractures created in more ways than one.

“I can’t believe it, Addy,” Jake says, turning to face me. “It’s finally happening. I’m getting mated.”

“You deserve it,” I reply with a smile, watching the interaction between the duo. “It’s going to be amazing. Just breathe.”

As Jake takes a deep breath, Sophie comes into the room, Luke behind her. She smiles, so much love shining in her eyes it makes my breath catch. “It’s almost time.”

Jake nods wordlessly. Their hands reach out and their fingers intertwine and my heart swells with emotion. These two belong together. I can’t wait to be part of their mating ceremony.

I watch them leave, seeing their love and affection for each other in the way they move and speak, and memories of my own mating ceremony flood my mind. The way we felt, the

way we looked at each other, the love that came over us like a wave of happiness.

I turn to Luke, finding him gazing at me. There's so much tenderness in his green eyes that I know he's thinking the same.

We fought so hard for what we have.

And the prize was so much more than we anticipated.

The love. The hope. The family.

His gaze darkens. And the insatiable passion.

Luke takes my hand, leading me out and toward our room at the back of the farmhouse. "Lucy?" I ask, my voice already breathless.

"With Jack. They're racing to the food table and back, seeing who's faster."

I chuckle, already imagining Jack's dramatic tumble as he makes sure he loses.

Inside our room, Luke shuts the door, then locks it. We both know we don't have much time, that there's a mating ceremony to get to. But there's no resisting the pull that's always existed between us. In fact, we honor it. Glory in it.

The intensity of our connection explodes as we crash onto the bed, my dress pushed up to my waist and his rough hands exploring my body. We kiss hungrily. Ravenously. Passionately.

"Mine," Luke growls against my mouth.

"Always," I pant, my desire already at fever pitch.

Our bodies grind against each other in a way that makes me forget everything but Luke. In this moment, I'm not Addy

who's here to support her brother. I'm not the Alpha's mate, the pack Luna, or anything else. I'm just Addy, and Luke is just Luke.

My mate, the love of my life.

He roughly undoes his belt, then his trousers. He shoves my panties to the side, urgency twisting his features. It's the same urgency that has me gripping his shoulders and arching my back. I don't care that we're both dressed. That this is a stolen moment.

In fact, both of those are a turn on.

It's evidence that five years later, we're still insatiable for each other.

And we're here, now, because of our love. Reaping the fruit of our connection. Watching the Black Diamond pack flourish.

Luke rams his thick length in with a guttural growl and I have to clamp my mouth shut so I don't cry out. Every time this feels like coming home. Like forging fate. Like going higher.

The scent of our arousal fills the air as we move, our hips thrusting frantically, our mouth mating hungrily. We reach the peak fast, fueled by the sounds and scents, but also by the deep emotional bond that we share. I bite into Luke's shoulder as he buries his face in my neck, both straining and moaning as our love takes us to a place of pleasure. It's intense. Time-stopping and mind-blowing.

And so freaking beautiful.

We're both panting as the potent feelings fade. I pull back, looking into Luke's sparkling eyes.

“Wow,” I manage to say, struggling to catch my breath.

Luke grins at me, and his hand brushes my face. “I love you.”

I beam at him with joy. “I love you too.”

He strokes my cheek, gazing at me like he’d happily do this for hours.

“We’d better get back.” I clamp my inner muscles around his softening cock, making him hiss through his teeth. “We don’t want them to start without us.”

Luke leans down and kisses me deeply. “Thank you, Addy. Without you—”

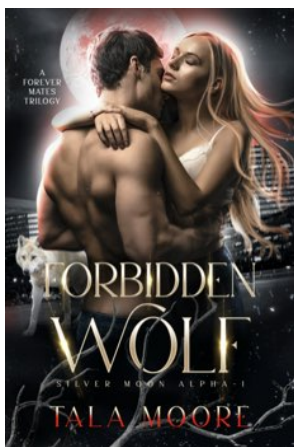
I kiss him to silence him. “Luke, our daughter will grow up with the knowledge that she’s loved and cherished, surrounded by a pack who protect and adore her.” I cup his face, love overflowing from my very soul. “And I’ll grow old, enveloped by the same. And it’s all possible because of you.”

His lips soften into a breathtaking smile. “Because of us,” he concedes.

Our lips brush, softly, tenderly, sealing the promise.

Because of us.

FORBIDDEN WOLF



As an Alpha, I have responsibilities. Ones I've never shied away from, because my choices mean safety for my pack. Their lives depend on it.

But then Carli appears in my house one sultry evening. She's beautiful, independent. Irresistible.

Off-limits.

She steals my breath. My heart. My good intentions. And now I have a choice to make, knowing our love could mean war. I should let her go. Yet, no matter how hard I try, I can't turn away.

The alternative is to follow my heart. Make her mine.

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ABOUT TALA MOORE

Tala Moore loves all things paranormal and romance. Give her possessive alpha males, sassy heroines, and a love that refuses to be denied, and she's set for as long as she can disappear from the world (which is never as long as she'd like!).

Driven to create the same swoon-worthy experience for others, she pens the Forever Mates story world. Dive in and discover her penchant for unforgettable characters, steamy romance, and a HEA that will stay with you long after the story is finished.

