

CARA WYLDE

WED TO THE

WOLFEMAN



WED TO THE WOLFMAN
ARRANGED MONSTER MATES



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Alia Terra

No one remembers the world before the Shift. It was thousands of years ago, all lost, all forgotten. Scientists and historians say that before, the world was better, brighter, and our planet belonged to us, humans. There were proud countries and bustling cities, and technology was at its highest.

We can hardly imagine all that. There is no proof, no written texts, no pictures of Alia Terra before the Shift. All we know is the face of Alia Terra now. The land haphazardly divided into territories, the walled cities, the poor living on the fringes, barely surviving.

The monsters.

The temples where young virgins can take a DNA test and be matched to one of them. An arranged marriage to a monster is often the only way a woman can save herself or give her family a chance to not starve.

This is Alia Terra. It belongs to the monsters, and we belong to them.

Chapter One

Kyden

I wasn't supposed to be here. Far away from my land, from my pack, in a village forgotten by the world and civilization – not that we'd had much of that in the past years. Alia Terra was a harsh world to live in. Always had been. But for the humans living in the poor districts, it was worse. Way worse than for those who lived in the cities, most surrounded by impenetrable walls.

I shouldn't have been here, but there was no turning back. My fated mate, my Luna, lived in this district, in this small, muddy village where everyone was miserable from dawn till dusk, where the humans and their children broke their backs working for the rich, making just enough to survive another day.

In my wolf form, I stalked through the woods, sniffed the air and made sure no one was around to see me. I didn't look like a normal wolf. Shapeshifters of my species were massive and strong, as big as horses. If a human saw me, they would have a heart attack. They were afraid of us. Of all of us. Shifters, aliens, bloodsuckers, horned beasts, and creatures from hell. They called us monsters. But without us, their world would've been destroyed. They showed gratitude in public and scorned us behind our backs. They knew Alia Terra wouldn't have survived the Shift if it hadn't been for us, so we had standing in their society, whether they liked it or not. And what that standing gave us was access to their females to take as brides, if we so wished.

I hadn't particularly wished for a human bride, just for a mate to call my own, regardless of her species. I'd searched for years, visited the neighboring packs, welcomed them into my home, courted the unmated wolf females, and all I was rewarded with was loneliness. Bitter, hollow loneliness. And also an enemy that I now had to deal with. Because when you welcome foreign Alphas with their sisters and daughters into your home, and they see you're living better than them, and

your land is wealthier, they might decide they want all that for themselves. It didn't matter. I had it under control. But to win, I needed her. My one true mate.

Months ago, while in the deepest pits of lonely, empty despair, I turned to the last resort that I had at my disposal. The Temple. Which wasn't just any kind of temple, and certainly had nothing to do with religion. The Marriage Temple. It was the only way that us, monsters and aliens, could take a human bride, the only system that worked in a world where humans didn't want us around, much less wanted to mate with us. We weren't like them. We didn't mate unless the match was perfect, and what the Temple promised was a perfect match based on a simple draw of blood – a DNA test.

The day before, I'd received word from the Temple that they had found her. Now I was here, wishing to see who she was, what she looked like, what she smelled like, before we met at the Temple for our arranged marriage. It was against all protocols. After a match was made, the mates would meet for the first time at the Temple, where the male would make the final payment, and a ceremony would seal the bond. But I couldn't wait. I had friends in high places, deep pockets, and a burning desire to see my Luna before she saw me, to see where she lived, what her family was like, and what life she'd had to endure before being delivered into my arms.

As I approached the edge of the forest, the trees became sparse. I had to duck, and hide, and camouflage myself when I heard voices coming from beyond the tree line. I saw two figures, one round and sturdy, and another tall, thin, and blonde. They argued for a moment, then the sturdy woman gave the young, beautiful woman a letter, and walked back into the house.

I knew who the blonde beauty was. My Luna, my mate. Her name was Blue. I wondered if it was because of her eyes. The Temple hadn't mentioned a last name, which was strange to me, but I didn't question it. If she truly was my mate, then she would soon have my name, and hers, whatever it was or wasn't, wouldn't mean anything anymore.

My ears perked when I saw her come toward me. I hid behind a bush and watched her as she entered the forest, light on her feet. She was wearing a long dress, so old that the color wasn't clear anymore, and so ratty that it had holes in it, and the patches she'd sewed barely held it together. Her hair was long and yellow, as bright as the sun, and her skin was pale, her cheeks flushed as she hurried to disappear between the trees.

I turned my head toward her and sniffed the air. I could distinguish a sweet, earthy scent, but I couldn't be sure. I needed to get closer, so I followed her, as silently as I could. I didn't want to give away my position, or that I was there at all.

I was stalking my future bride, and that was wrong. But I couldn't help myself. I'd longed for companionship for so many years, that now that it was within reach, I'd lost my patience.

She didn't go too far into the woods. She emerged in a clearing, and I stayed behind. I watched her sit on a log and look around her, and I guessed this must've been her favorite place. The sun filtered through the canopy, enveloping her in a warm glow. She sighed and pulled out the letter, opened it, and started reading.

I knew what the letter contained. I'd received a similar one the day before.

I watched her face as she read. I didn't breathe, didn't move... My whole body was tense, like a bow, and I was solely focused on reading her emotions. The letter told her that she had been matched to... someone. I knew it didn't specify my name, because the letter I'd gotten hadn't specified hers. And I knew it didn't mention my species, either.

The humans called us werewolves, and sometimes they called us wolfmen. I wondered what she was going to think of being mated to a man who could turn into a wolf at will. I would have to wait until the ceremony.

Blue folded the letter neatly and placed it back in the envelope. Then she held the envelope gently in her hands as she sighed deeply. With a trembling hand, she wiped her

cheek, and I realized she was shedding tears. My body tensed up even more, to the point where I was feeling physical pain. She didn't know who I was, yet she was crying knowing that she would have to tie her life to mine. Or maybe, that wasn't why she was crying? She was going to leave her family behind, after all, probably never see them again. Maybe that was why she was sad. I had to tell that to myself, otherwise I might've snapped and called it all off, because I couldn't stand the idea that I might've been the reason she was weeping.

After a few minutes, she slipped the letter into her dress pocket and stood up. I took a step back, and a twig snapped under my foot. I saw Blue perk up and look around her. Her cheeks were damp, and her eyes were bright. Her irises were blue, indeed. She was the most beautiful creature I'd ever seen, and all I wanted was to show myself to her, shift into my human form, and assure her that she was going to be safe with me. I couldn't do it, though. I'd broken plenty of protocols as it was.

As I held my breath, she shook her head slightly, sighed again, and started walking back home. I followed her once more. I should've gone on my way then. I'd seen all I'd wanted to see. I knew that she lived in a house that was so old and cheap that it was a miracle it was still standing, and the sturdy woman I'd seen her with was probably her mother. But I couldn't leave just yet. I felt it was my duty as her future husband and protector to make sure she got home safe, so I kept a fair distance and stepped as lightly as I could, as I secretly escorted her to the edge of the forest.

She was close now. A few steps, and she'd be out in the open. I heard male voices, and she heard them too, because she stopped in her tracks.

"Hey, Blue! There you are! We've been looking for you." A young male's voice. He laughed, and the other one he was with laughed, too.

"Yes, Blue! What are you doing all by yourself in the woods?"

There were two males, and I didn't like the way they talked to her. Not at all. I felt my lips pull away from my fangs in a snarl.

"Toby... Matt..." She said, reluctant. I could tell she was not pleased to see them. "I'm just going home."

"Wait a minute. We want to talk to you."

They stepped closer to her, and I stepped closer to all of them. No one saw me.

"What about?" She kept walking. But they closed in on her, and when she tried to go around them, one of them, either Toby or Matt, grabbed her by the arm. "Let me go. We can talk if you want, but don't touch me." I could hear the tremble in her voice.

"Come on now, Blue. We're friends, aren't we?"

"We're not friends," she said. She pulled her arm free and took a step back. I could see everything from where I was hiding. The two young men laughed. Blue crossed her arms over her chest. "What do you want to talk about?"

"Oh, we just wanted to tell you that we think you're pretty."

That was it. Not acceptable. No one got to say that to her. No one but me. I let out a growl. They didn't hear me. The two men were too focused on her, and Blue was looking for a way out. I could tell her mind was racing. She was afraid. She looked past their shoulders, and her house was in sight. I wondered if she was going to scream. But no, she didn't scream. Instead, when her aggressors were busy elbowing each other and laughing like idiots, she made a run for it. She ran so fast that she was out of the forest in seconds. Toby and Matt cursed and ran after her, but it was too little, too late. Before they reached the edge of the forest, I was on them.

As Blue rushed inside the house, I silenced the two human males with my claws and my fangs. They'd dared to be disrespectful toward my mate, my Luna, my future bride. They would never be disrespectful again toward anyone else's wife, daughter, or even mother. They would never be disrespectful again toward any living creature on Alia Terra.

When I was done with them, it was time to go home and prepare for the ceremony at the Temple. There was blood on my tongue and in my nostrils. I regretted nothing.

Chapter Two

Blue

I shut the door behind me, a little too loudly. That startled my parents.

“Blue! Are you okay? What happened?” Mother wiped her hands on her dirty apron and looked me up and down.

“N-nothing. I’m fine. Nothing happened.” I smoothed down my dress and slipped my shoes off. They were muddy from my stroll in the forest, and even more so from my mad dash across the yard. “Is dinner ready?”

“Yes, darling. I hope you don’t mind porridge and beans.”

I did my best not to cringe. It was what we had every evening. There had been evenings when we’d had to go even without that, so I was grateful. I had to remind myself every day how grateful I was for my family and everything they’d done for me.

Father was fixing a chair in a corner of the room, trying to keep his dirty tools away from where the food was getting made. He looked up at me, I gave him a smile, and he nodded, satisfied. As long as I was smiling, he knew I was fine.

“I’ll go check on Audra,” I said, slipping into the smaller of the two bedrooms, the one I shared with my sister and her newborn baby. Mother and Father had the other bedroom, which wasn’t significantly bigger than ours.

“Blue, wait,” Mother called. “Did you read the letter?”

I took a deep breath. “Yes.”

The corners of her lips turned into a frown. “It didn’t say much, did it?”

“No, not really. Just that I was matched to... I don’t know. One of them. No name, no nothing.”

“Darling, you don’t have to go if you don’t want to. We’ll be okay. All of us. Like we’ve always been. Your father agrees.”

Father grunted. He's stopped fiddling with the broken leg of the chair, so he could listen in on our conversation.

"I have to go," I said, my voice low, but determined. "For you, for Audra, but most importantly, for the baby."

Mother nodded, and Father nodded, too. They knew this was the only way. It was this, or my sister's baby, their real daughter's son, wasn't going to make it. The boy had been born so small and frail, just three weeks ago, and he was ill. The doctor in our village didn't know what to do, and there was no medicine. We had to go to one of the walled cities, but for that, we needed money. Audra hadn't even named her baby, for fear she would have to say goodbye soon. I wanted her to name him, and I wanted her to raise him. For that, I was willing to sacrifice myself and agree to an arranged marriage with a monster.

"Hey, how are you two doing?" I sat on the edge of Audra's bed. She had the baby to her breast, and she was rocking him gently.

"You know..." She looked up at me. My sister had dark hair and brown eyes, like Mother and Father. We weren't blood related, but it didn't matter. We were soul related. "I heard you got a letter."

"Yeah. I'm leaving tomorrow. I'm taking the train. There was a ticket included."

"I'm sorry you have to do this." A tear rolled down her cheek.

I reached out and wiped it away. "No. Don't say that. This is the least I can do for you. You took me in, all of you, and it's time for me to pay you back."

"Not like this. The cost is too high."

I ran a finger over the baby's forehead. "He needs a good doctor. And medicine. You will get the money tomorrow, and the day after tomorrow, Father can rent a carriage and take you to the nearest city. It's better than taking the train. Who knows what germs grow in those dirty compartments. Promise me you won't take the train."

“I promise.” She sighed deeply. “Blue, I don’t want you to go.”

“I know. But it will be okay. You’ll be safe, and healthy, and you’ll finally eat something other than beans and porridge for dinner. Mother and Father won’t have to work anymore. The credits you’ll get after I go through with the ceremony will last you for years, I’m sure. If you make a few good investments, maybe neither you, nor your baby will ever have to work.”

“That sounds...”

“Like a dream, right?” I laughed, and she laughed with me. “It’s okay, Audra. It’s my way of saying thank you. Thank you for adopting me, for bringing me into your home, sharing your food with me, and treating me like family.”

“You’re my sister, Blue.”

“I know.”

That night, we ate in silence, then went to bed, but I could tell that no one could sleep. I was wide awake, and Audra was wide awake. The baby was fussy. When I slipped out of the bed in the morning, Mother and Father were already in the kitchen, making tea.

I put on my nicest clothes, which weren’t nice at all, and my newest, cleanest shoes, which had belonged to Audra. I washed myself as best as I could with cold water from the basin Mother brought me, and brushed my long, blonde hair. My hair and my eyes gave it away. The fact that I was different, I didn’t belong here, and I wasn’t related by blood to the people I lived with. I’d been abandoned as a baby, and Mother and Father took me in and made me their own. I became Audra’s sister, and we grew up together, running around the house, playing in the yard, exploring the woods. Then we worked together in the fields, helping Mother and Father earn enough so we could eat two meals a day and buy second-hand clothes and shoes once in a while. The winters were the hardest because wood was expensive, and even though we lived near the forest, that didn’t mean we were allowed to use what it had to give for our own benefit. The forest belonged to the rich, like every piece of land we stepped

on. We didn't own anything. We paid rent on our home, as derelict as it was, and we had to buy everything we needed to survive. Father wasn't allowed to hunt. We worked for them, and in exchange, we were paid a measly amount of credits. It was how the world worked. It was how the entirety of Alia Terra worked, and it was all we knew.

I said my goodbyes and hugged my parents and my sister for minutes on end, not wanting to let go. But I had to let go, or I'd miss the train. Father took me to the train station, and there, we hugged one last time. I wasn't sure I was going to see them again, but my heart felt lighter knowing that starting today, they would have a better life. I got in and waved from the window, then settled in my seat and watched the landscape roll by.

It was late afternoon when I arrived at the Temple. Some temples were within the walled cities, others were outside of them. This one was outside, and I was a little disappointed. I'd never been in a walled city, and I was curious to know how people lived there. The walled cities were the wealthiest human dwellings. There were smaller cities that weren't protected by walls, and Father had taken me and Audra to one years ago, for the Christmas fair. The most he could afford to buy us was jam scones, and I could still remember the sticky, buttery taste.

I clung to these warm memories as I got off the train and was welcomed by a young man dressed in the long, red tunic of the Marriage Temple. He led me to a car, and we got in. I'd never traveled by car before, as cars were vehicles that only rich people could afford. I was speechless and also terrified by what was about to happen. The young man drove. He didn't even introduce himself, and I knew I'd probably never learn his name. I'd heard that the servants of the Temple, boys and girls, were supposed to be invisible. They were there to serve, and that was all. When we arrived, he held the car door for me, and then led me through the doors of the Temple.

The tall ceiling, the paintings, and the gold chandelier took my breath away. But I barely had a moment to take it all in, that two young women grabbed me by the arms and pulled me

into a room. Before they closed the door behind me, I spied someone from the corner of my eye. It was a man.

But he was like no man I'd ever seen before. Tall, strong, built like a boulder. He had long, brown hair that fell down his shoulders in waves, golden eyes, and his square jaw was obscured by a wild beard. He looked at me with intensity, and even though it was just a glance, I felt his eyes pierce me to my core.

"Who is that?" I asked the servant girls.

They didn't say anything. They shut the door and dragged me to the center of the room. There was a steaming bath waiting for me. The air smelled of rose oil. They quickly started pulling at my dress and shoes.

"What's happening? Please... just..." I covered my bare breasts with my hands and looked pleadingly at them. "Give me a minute."

They stopped. One of them, a beautiful brunette with green eyes, gave me a kind, patient look.

"We must hurry," she said. "Your train was late, and your future husband has been waiting for three hours. We cannot let him wait a minute longer."

"My future..." I mumbled. "Is that... Was that him?"

She blinked but didn't say anything. That blink was enough for me to know.

That was him.

Chapter Three

Kyden

I caught a glimpse of her as the temple servants pulled her into a room and quickly shut the door. And she caught a glimpse of me. Of course, she didn't know who I was. Our eyes met, and my nostrils flared. It took all I had to just stand where I was and not rush to her and bury my face into her neck and long, blond hair, smell her skin and whisper in her ear, "mine".

I waited impatiently, pacing before the altar. The human priest watched me from behind furrowed brows, but he didn't say anything. Blue and I were the only ones getting bonded today, or married, as the humans said. After what felt like forever, Blue finally emerged, and when I raised my gaze and looked at her, I felt almost blinded. It was as if the sun had stepped into the temple.

The servants had bathed her and rubbed her skin with scented oils. She smelled divine. Her hair was shinier than ever, and it cascaded down her back and shoulders, forming a halo around her entire being. She looked like a creature born from light. Her skin was luminescent, and she simply glowed. Her lips had been tinted with a light shade of red, but the servant girls hadn't put any other makeup on her perfect face, and I was grateful. I liked my Blue just the way she was.

As she stepped up to the altar, she gently bit the inside of her lip. I couldn't help but study her every move and gesture, trying to guess what she thought about me now that she knew who I was. She stopped before me, and I quite frankly didn't know what to do. It was almost ridiculous! I was Kyden of Clan Murdock, Alpha of the Duskblood Pack, and before this human woman, I felt like I was no one, like nothing I'd ever done in my life mattered, because this... this was the greatest achievement a male of any species could've hoped for – a mate like her.

"Hi," she whispered timidly.

My eyes widened slightly, and despite wanting to tell her at once how beautiful and perfect she was, my jaw locked, and my lips didn't move. I was stunned.

She looked from me to the priest, who was clearing his throat and getting ready for the ceremony, then back to me.

"I'm Blue," she said.

I still couldn't speak. I just stood there, dumbstruck, and I was starting to feel embarrassed. The expression on her face changed a bit, and not in a positive way. She'd walked to the altar open, curious, and maybe even a bit eager, and now, being met with my deep silence, she was starting to feel... inadequate. And it was all my fault. She probably thought I was completely uneducated. A barbarian. I had to do something and snap out of it. I was ruining our first official meeting. She might even refuse to have me as her husband.

"You have come to the Marriage Temple to seek connection, friendship, love," the priest began. "I say it in that order because an arranged marriage isn't simple. It will not be perfect from day one, and maybe not even from week one, or month one. Patience will be required, as well as kindness and understanding, and faith that you will grow to love each other in time. Connection comes first. After you leave here today, the first thing you'll have to do is approach each other with interest and curiosity. Get to know each other, and soon, you will find you are friends. From there, there's only one step to love."

I couldn't focus on the priest's words. To me, it sounded like he was making it all up on the spot. He could probably feel the awkwardness between me and Blue, – which was all my fault, – and thought this was a good speech to give to make sure that neither of us changed our mind. Of course, I would never change my mind. Not about her. But even as the priest went on and on, Blue looked even more reluctant. She looked like... she wasn't sure she could do this.

"Blue," the priest said, motioning toward her, and then to me, "This is Kyden of Clan Murdock. Kyden, this is..."

"Blue," I said.

She startled a bit at the sound of my voice. I realized she must've been weirded out by the fact that the first word she heard coming from me was her name.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I don't have a last name. My adoptive parents never gave me theirs, and actually... I'm not sure what their last name is. Where I come from, surnames don't matter that much. Names don't matter, in fact. We're just... umm... we're workers. In the fields." As she spoke, her voice became smaller and smaller, and a blush spread over her cheeks.

"You have a beautiful name," I said. "And never feel embarrassed about your past," I continued, trying to sound at least a little bit eloquent. I didn't feel like I was doing great. "The past made you, and you are perfect."

That only caused her to avert her gaze and blush even more.

The priest moved from one foot to the other, showing impatience. All he wanted was for me to take out the credits already, pay, so then he could declare us husband and wife, so we could be on our way. It was early evening, and he was probably thinking of dinner.

I turned to him. "I need to be in a room with her, alone," I said to him.

"I'm sorry, that's not how this works."

I knew he was going to refuse me.

"Wolves have a tradition that I cannot ignore," I said. "It will only take ten minutes."

He shook his head. "You can be alone with her after you pay and I declare you husband and wife."

"Only if I have a few minutes alone with her will I be able to determine if she truly is my one fated mate."

Blue's eyes moved between us, and I could sense that she was growing worried. She didn't know what was happening, and she felt like she had no control. I hated that this situation made her feel so uncomfortable.

“I assure you,” the priest said, “that the DNA test is infallible. We can guarantee this match. We’ve been doing this for decades, and we have never been wrong. The Marriage Temple has a long tradition, and no mistakes.”

“The wolves have a long tradition, too,” I insisted. This time, I took half a step toward him and let my lips pull away to reveal my fangs. I willed them to grow, and when the priest saw how sharp they were, he finally conceded.

“All right. I am certainly not one to argue with tradition.” He stepped aside and motioned toward a door. “Ten minutes.”

I held out my hand to Blue, and after a moment of hesitation, she took it. I pulled her toward the door, feeling her fingers tremble, feeling her skin go cold as she followed me. She was scared. She didn’t know what to expect. I opened the door, we slipped inside the empty room, and we were finally alone.

Blue looked around the room briefly, then her bright eyes settled on me.

“I’m a virgin,” she said. “I promise. If you doubt it, you can talk to the servant girls. They checked. It’s part of the... umm... process.”

“I know you are a virgin.” I gave her a smile that I hoped was reassuring.

She nodded. “Then, what is your tradition?”

“I am a shapeshifter. Like my ancestors, I can change into a wolf. Some call me a werewolf, others call me a wolfman.”

She nodded again, and I could feel that she was studying me even more closely now. I couldn’t tell how she felt upon hearing this information. In my human form, I looked exactly like a human male. With some small differences. My eyes were golden, which was a color that didn’t exist among humans. I was also bigger, wider, and stronger. And I was covered in a lot of hair – thick, coarse hair that no human male could ever hope to grow on his body.

“And what does that mean?” she asked. “In terms of... traditions...”

“We are beasts. And like beasts, we can recognize our mates by their scent and taste.”

“Oh?” She looked thoroughly confused.

I needed to be clearer.

“Lift up your dress. I need to smell you and taste you.”

Chapter Four

Blue

I couldn't believe what he was asking.

And he said it so normally, so casually, like it was the most natural thing in the world.

I was speechless.

We stared into each other's eyes for a long minute, and I half expected him to laugh and say it was a joke. He didn't. Of course he wouldn't. He didn't look like the type of man who made jokes. He wasn't just any man, I had to remind myself over and over. Half man, half beast. Though it was hard for me to imagine him as a wolf when he stood before me looking so human.

"I... I don't think I can do that," I finally managed to whisper.

I could feel my body throbbing with a mixture of feelings. Cold and hot chills chased each other up and down my spine, my hands were sweating, and my neck and face burned with embarrassment. I couldn't do it. I couldn't. No one had ever touched me like that. No one had ever kissed me, for that matter, or seen me naked. I was a virgin through and through. From an early age I knew I might have to do this – accept an arranged marriage to a monster to save my adoptive family. So, I made sure to keep myself pure.

And now... Now he was asking me too... He was my future husband. I believed the priest when he said the DNA test never failed. But still, how could I do this? It was too soon, too fast. I'd just met Kyden!

He took a step toward me, hands held up in the air, as if to show me he meant me no harm. I asked myself if I was scared of him and discovered that I wasn't. He was stern, and a man of few words, but he seemed to be gentle in a way that I hadn't seen in the young men in my village. His voice was warm and

soothing when he did speak, the low tone pulling me in and commanding my attention.

“It is the way of the wolves,” he said. “Our senses never lie. Let me smell you and taste you, just for a minute, Blue, and I will know the truth.”

“The priest said...”

“And I believe him. But I believe my instincts and my traditions more.”

I swallowed hard. I wasn't getting out of this, was I? If I wanted this marriage of convenience, then I needed to concede and let him do what he wanted. I belonged to him, anyway. Right? Or I was going to belong to him once he paid for the match and took me with him.

I needed him to pay. My family needed the credits. Audra had to take the baby to a doctor and get medicine for him. He needed to get healthy, so my sister would finally have the courage to give him a name without fearing that she might lose him. And she couldn't lose him. Not after she'd lost her husband, my brother-in-law, to the terrible fever that ravaged our village in winter.

Kyden needed to pay for me, but he wasn't going to unless he was convinced that I was the one. I didn't quite understand how this fated mate thing worked for non-humans. My people didn't believe in fated mates. We believed in decent partners, at most.

“Okay,” I said, and started to pull up the ample skirt of my dress. “But just for a minute.” I felt my whole body starting to shake. I steeled myself and tried to control my reaction.

“Just a little taste,” he said, and his voice dropped even lower. “I will stop if you want me to stop.”

I nodded. I pulled my dress up to my thigh, and he closed in on me. He grabbed me by the waist and lifted me onto the table. The room was sparse in furniture. There was a bathtub near the window, which told me it was just another room where future brides were assisted by servants in preparation for the ceremony. Kyden knelt before me and gently spread

my legs. I wasn't wearing anything underneath the dress, and now I wondered if the servant girls had known about the wolves' tradition. I couldn't focus on that, though. I couldn't focus on anything, because Kyden's head was between my legs, and I had to resist the urge to push them back together to cover and protect myself.

My blood boiled in my veins. I felt a trickle of sweat on my spine, and I shifted on top of the table uncomfortably. It was all so surreal. I heard him sniff me loudly, and I closed my eyes and held back a groan. I was glad I was clean and my skin was covered in rose oil. I had never been this clean in my life, and if the servant girls hadn't helped me wash and get dressed, I would've never been able to let Kyden... let Kyden do this.

"You smell incredible," he whispered.

And then I felt his tongue. Tentatively at first, then he used two fingers to part my folds, and his tongue pressed against me more firmly. I shuddered and let out a small moan when I felt hot juices rush out of me. My core throbbed with something I'd never felt before.

Need.

I needed him to do it again. Lick me again.

"And you taste..." His head emerged from under my skirt, and he looked up at me. I looked at him with hooded eyes. "You taste like my mate. Like my Luna."

"What is a Luna?" I asked in a daze. My head was swimming with hormones I'd had no idea my body could produce.

"A Luna is an Alpha's true mate. A Luna makes her Alpha stronger and more resilient. She is his power, his inner strength."

I didn't know what to say to that. I swallowed heavily, and as I looked at him, I realized I needed him back between my legs.

"Please," I found myself whispering. "I need... more."

He grinned, and I saw his fangs for the first time. They were long and sharp, but I didn't care one bit. He'd just said I was his Luna. He wasn't going to hurt me. He needed me just as much as I needed him to lick me again.

"Then I will give you more," he said. "I will give you everything you want, whenever you want it. All you have to do is ask." He kissed my inner thigh.

"I didn't know it would feel so... good."

"It feels good because we were meant for each other."

What a crazy idea. I was a human, and he was a monster. How were we made for each other? And still, somehow, it wasn't crazy at all. Because he was diving back under my skirt, and I found myself opening my legs for him and leaning back on the table to give him better access. In this moment, it all felt right. It felt like it had always been my destiny to meet Kyden of Clan Murdock and become his.

His tongue licked a trail from my entrance to my clit, and I gushed for him. The slippery tip circled my sensitive nub, and I let out a louder moan. My lips parted, and I breathed more and more intensely as he licked and teased, pressed and stroked. He sucked my clit into his mouth, and that pushed me so close to the edge that my hand flew to his head off its own accord. I couldn't control it even if I wanted to. I heard him let out a groan, and at first, I thought he was annoyed by my reckless gesture, but then he pressed his head harder between my legs, and his tongue dipped down, right inside me.

Nothing had ever been inside me before. Not even my own finger. That was how obsessed I'd been about my virginity. He pushed his tongue all the way in and rubbed my inner walls. My pussy throbbed harder, and I found I wanted more. Not more of his tongue, but more of... something bigger and more solid. This was just a tease. The tension built in my core, and when he traced his way back to my clit and once again wrapped his lips around it, I came with a surprised scream. It wasn't too loud, and I hoped no one had heard us from outside the door. My eyes were wide, staring at the ceiling, and my hand kept Kyden there, still. I rode my very first orgasm in a

sort of daze and awe, and when the waves of it abated, I collapsed on the table, spent.

Kyden stood up and leaned over me. He ran his fingers over my jaw, then gently rubbed my lips with his thumb. I looked up at him and was taken aback by what I saw in his eyes. Was that... adoration? It couldn't be. I had no idea what adoration looked like. I knew the word, and I knew what it meant, but I'd never seen anyone express it toward another being.

“Mine,” he whispered. “My Luna. Mine.”

His touch was possessive. I didn't mind it.

“Yours,” I said.

Chapter Five

Kyden

I took my bride's hand, and we emerged from the room together. The priest was patiently waiting by the altar. We'd been gone for a little over ten minutes, but he didn't say anything. Blue's cheeks were beautifully flushed. Now that she'd experienced lust and pleasure for the first time, it was as if she glowed even more. I'd only met her. This was our first day together, and she was getting more and more splendid by the minute. I couldn't wait to take her home with me and fall in love with her over and over again in the weeks, months, and years to follow.

"I trust you now know the DNA test never lies."

"She is my perfect match, indeed," I said as I pulled out a satchel that held the credits in coins. I passed it to the priest, and he started counting the coins, dropping them into a bowl, one by one. "The credits will go to her family."

"The Temple will withhold twenty-five percent, but yes, the rest will go to the bride's family."

"I have your word?"

I could feel Blue tensing next to me. I squeezed her hand gently.

"You do not need my word. This is how the system works. And we believe in the system, because thanks to it, we thrive. All of us. Humans and... non-humans."

I grinned. He'd just about said monsters. Or aliens. I knew that the system worked, but I'd wanted the priest to confirm it for Blue's sake, because I could feel her nervousness. And I'd seen her family and the house she grew up in. They needed the credits if they were ever going to have a better life. And I wanted Blue to know for certain that her family would be taken care of, so she could surrender to me completely and not worry about them and her past. I knew she loved them, but if I could help it, my Luna would never have to think about how

she used to dress in rags, work all day, and barely eat anything. She was so thin and fragile that all I wanted to do was to feed her the most delicious food. I was going to hunt for her myself.

Once the priest was done counting, he performed a quick ceremony that I couldn't pay attention to, then declared us husband and wife. Mates, as far as I was concerned. I felt Blue relax then, knowing that it was done.

"It's time to go home," I told her.

She nodded, smiling.

The priest took us to the portal. The Temple had its own portal, and I had one at home, carefully guarded, in a building that only my Beta and I had access to. Portals were rare, and only the wealthy could afford them. They were the fastest means of transportation.

When Blue saw the portal, she tensed up again.

"It's okay."

"I've never seen one before," she said. "Let alone..."

"I'll hold your hand."

"Don't let go," she whispered.

Her plea made me smile. This couldn't have been more perfect. The idea of an arranged marriage could be scary, even when we knew the DNA test always found the perfect match. But our arranged marriage was going great so far. She trusted me, and she wanted to rely on me, and that couldn't have made me happier.

We went through the portal together, and when we reached the other side, Blue leaned on me, her knees weak and shaking. I held her close until she felt stronger and could walk on her own.

"Is this your home?" she asked, looking around.

I laughed. "No, this is where we keep our portal. We have to make sure it's safe, and that no one uses it recklessly. It's just a barn."

“Oh. Silly me.”

I led her out, and the orange light of the early sunset hit us hard. It blinded her for a moment, and she shielded her eyes with her arm.

“This is beautiful.”

“It is. This is home.”

I took a deep breath, letting the smell of pine and wildflowers fill my lungs. Two of my men were posted at the door to the barn, and they nodded at me. They studied Blue with interest, but when she looked up at them and caught their gaze, they averted their eyes, trying to be respectful and not too prying. They knew I’d gone to bring my bride home. Now their Alpha had a mate. A Luna.

“I will show you around,” I said.

“Aren’t you going to introduce me?” she asked.

“I will introduce you to the entire pack when the time is right. You have to understand that you are special, now. Even if they don’t know you, they will regard you with love and respect. We can take our time introducing you to them. In fact, it’s better to take our time. It shows we’re in a position of power. That you are in a position of power next to me.”

She frowned. “I don’t know. I’ve never been in a position of power. I don’t think I can do it.” And after a moment’s hesitation, “What do I have to do? What does it mean to be the Alpha’s bride?”

I smiled. “You don’t have to do anything.” I lifted her hand to my lips and kissed her bony knuckles. I needed to get some rich, healthy food in her as soon as possible. “Just... exist.”

“But, I mean... I must have some responsibilities, right? I can clean. I can cook. I can do a lot of things. Work, if needed.”

I stopped and turned to her. I took her chin between my fingers and tilted her head. Her frame was small and frail compared to mine, and she was far from reaching my shoulder when it came to height.

“Listen to me, my Luna. You will never work again. I won’t allow it. You will not clean, and you will not cook. My pack is numerous, and every wolf has their duties.”

“Then, what am I supposed to do all day long?”

“Whatever you please.”

“I... I don’t know what that is. I never had time to ask myself.”

“You do now. You don’t have to worry about a thing. I will take care of you, and I’ll make sure you have everything you need.”

“Okay.”

But she didn’t sound convinced. She bit her lower lip gently, and I fought the urge to lean in and kiss her. This was not the time for that. My wolves had heard of my arrival, and they were starting to come out of their houses and the workshops to peek at us. At her. I took her hand again and led her further up the main road.

“As you can see, our town is surrounded by forest from all directions. That ensures protection, but also a great hunting ground. We don’t only hunt. We also grow our own food, we build everything we need, and we even raise chickens, cows, and goats. They are solely for eggs and milk, though. We do not consume them. They are our beloved pets.”

Blue listened as her wide eyes took in the houses with their yards, flowers, and fruit trees. Each family had dyed their house in the colors they loved, so the town was very bright and colorful, especially in this beautiful dusk light. We had horses that roamed free, and a few cows grazed happily here and there. Our animals loved the town and knew they were safe here, so we didn’t have to keep them in pens and enclosures.

“We have a few communal spaces, too, where we gather to eat or celebrate our traditions. We organize dances sometimes, bonfires, and we never forget to celebrate birthdays. It’s a lively community. You will fit right in.”

“And this is... your pack. Your people.”

“Yes,” I said, feeling my chest puff up slightly, despite myself. But I couldn’t help feeling proud. After my father passed, I took over as Alpha and grew the pack. We were more numerous and prosperous than ever. “This is the Duskblood Pack. Welcome home.”

She opened her mouth to say something, but she was in too much awe. It was all too new to her. She probably wanted to ask why it was called the Duskblood Pack but changed her mind. I would tell her the story at some point. But not now. It wasn’t a pleasant story, and it was old. So old, that it had nothing to do with me, and not even with my father, the former Alpha.

“We call our home the Den,” I finished.

She nodded. “The Den.”

I was about to show her the house where I lived, and where we were going to live together, when my Beta, Logan, rushed to us. He halted at the last minute when he saw Blue. He knew I was going to bring her today, but somehow, the shock was still there. He bowed slightly in her direction but didn’t say anything to her.

“Alpha, you must come with me.”

I furrowed my brows. “Why? What happened?”

He hesitated, which meant that he didn’t want to tell me with Blue there. Wise. If it was something that would’ve worried her, it was smart of Logan to stay silent in her presence.

“It’s urgent,” he said.

“I will come at once.”

I looked around and saw Mara watching us from her yard. I waved her over.

“Alpha,” she greeted me.

“Mara, this is my Luna, Blue. I must go with your brother, and I want you to finish showing her around.” Then I turned to Blue. “I won’t be long. Go with Mara. She is my Beta’s sister,

and she will take care of you and help you with anything you need.”

Blue’s eyes were filled with reluctance. “Do you have to go?”

“I do. But I will be back before nightfall.”

She nodded, and I leaned in and placed a kiss on her forehead. I could feel how tense she was. She was in a new, foreign place, and she was all alone. I hated that I had to go with Logan, but when my Beta said it was urgent, then it was urgent.

“I will be back, my Luna.”

When I let go of her hand, I felt how painful it was to be separated from her now that I’d found her.

Chapter Six

Blue

“Blue Moon.”

“What?” I looked at Mara with wide eyes. I didn’t understand what she was talking about.

“Your name. It’s like an omen, isn’t it? You’re rare. Don’t you know the saying? Once in a blue moon?”

“Umm... yes. I’m not rare, though.”

“You are. Unique, even. Alpha looked for years and couldn’t find his Luna. Even when he sent his blood to the Temple, he had to wait months to get a match. But it worked, and now you’re here.”

I didn’t know what to say to that. She was overly nice, seeing how I was a stranger. She was tall, too, and I had to crane my neck to look into her eyes. Like I had to do with Kyden. All werewolves were impossibly tall, strong and athletic. I felt out of place among them.

“Here, let me introduce you to Fyre and Luda.” She tipped her chin toward two women who were staring at us from the doorway of the house across the road. One of them was rocking a baby in her arms, and two toddlers were hiding behind her legs. “You’ll like them, and they’ll adore you.”

“Will they?” I followed Mara, since it wasn’t like I had a choice. “Why?”

“Because you’re the Alpha’s bride, and because you will bless the pack with even more babies one day. Soon, hopefully. We love having children running around here, but lately, not a lot were born. Luda has done a great job, and the other females of the pack can only hope to keep up with her. She has three pups, and a fourth on the way.”

That was when I noticed that Luda’s belly was round.

“In general, females are busy taking care of the young ones.”

“Are these the only... umm... pups in the pack?”

“No. These are just the youngest. The older pups are already training with the pack, and learning how to build things, fight, take care of the animals, and hunt. No more games for them.”

I nodded. It made sense, I guessed. I couldn't remember being a child and doing what children did. In my village, we worked from a very young age. Our parents took us to the fields when we could walk and were coordinated enough to help.

“It's hard to find mates these days. A lot of the pack wolves aren't mated,” Mara continued. “Logan, my brother, sent his blood to the Temple, and now we're waiting for the letter that will tell him he has a match. It's been a month, but we're not losing hope. It took longer for Kyden to find you. It might take even longer for Logan, and that's fine, as long as he gets a match.”

“I hope he does,” I said. “What about you?”

“It's harder for females. So, it's harder for me.”

We reached Luda's house, and the two females came to welcome us. They were all smiles and kind words, and we sat at a table in the yard, under a great apple tree, and Fyre brought bowls of fruits and pitchers of lemonade.

“Why?” I asked. I just realized something. The Marriage Temples were for male non-humans to find human wives. Not for female non-humans to find human husbands. How had I never questioned the reasoning behind it?

“Human females are welcome in a pack,” Fyre said. She had dark, short hair, and intense grey eyes. “Human males are not. They're not strong enough, so they're not worthy. A wolf male will never accept to live in the same community with a human male.”

“So, we cannot mate with humans,” Mara concluded.

“Wow. I didn't know that.”

Mara shrugged. “I have to find myself a wolf mate. One day, maybe...”

We all nodded, then Luda changed the subject, and the three of them started asking me questions about myself, my family, and my life before I sent a blood sample to the Temple. I didn't know what to tell them, so I was vague. Not because I didn't trust them, but because I was embarrassed. The way they lived here, in their little town surrounded by forest, was incredible. They had everything they needed, and they all worked for it and shared. They seemed to have a calm, peaceful life, and Luda especially seemed to be fulfilled with her role as a wife and mother.

I answered their questions as best as I could, without giving too much away. I didn't even tell them that my sister's baby was sick, because I didn't want them to pity me. They were polite and didn't straight up ask why I chose an arranged marriage. It was obvious human females made that decision when it was their last option. I didn't want them to know how poor I was, nor how much my family and I had starved last winter. It was clear from the way I looked, though, and I noticed that Mara, Fyre, and Luda tended to push the fruit bowls toward me and encourage me to eat another apple, another pear, more strawberries. The fruits were delicious, but I didn't want to seem rude, so I refused politely.

It was getting cold, and Mara noticed the goosebumps on my arms.

"Come on," Mara said, standing up. "I should take you home, so you have time to settle in before Alpha returns."

Right. The home that I was going to share with Kyden from now on. I was curious, to be fair. And a little scared.

We bid Fyre and Luda goodnight, then Mara took me back to where we'd started, then led me up the road, a few houses further.

"Here it is."

Kyden's house was obviously the largest. We entered through the little gate and walked the cobblestone alley up to the front porch. There were flowers everywhere, and the air smelled amazing. The yard was well kept, and behind the house stretched a garden like I'd never seen. The house had

one storey and an attic, and that made it unique, because all the other houses only had the ground floor.

“Come on. Go in.” Mara held the door open for me.

I left my shoes at the door and stepped into the living room. A fire was roaring in the fireplace, and there was a table that was absolutely laden with food waiting for me. It smelled amazing.

“Go ahead and wash up and eat,” Mara said. “Kyden might be a while, still. You have time to relax.”

“Thank you.” I didn’t know what else to say. “Is this all for me?”

“Yes. He had it arranged. That’s why I took you to Luda’s, so the kitchen girls would have time to set everything up.”

“Oh. Thank you so much.”

“You’re the Luna. Blue Moon. You deserve it.”

She left then, and I found myself alone in this huge house, with the fire crackling pleasantly, and a feast like I’d never seen in my life. I loved all of it. Except the fact that I was... alone.

Chapter Seven

Kyden

Despite my best efforts, I returned late, after midnight. I carefully opened and closed the front door, then tiptoed into the living room, thinking my Luna was surely asleep. Then I heard soft whimpers, and my heart started hammering in my chest. She was here, weeping, somewhere in the dark. I blinked and allowed my eyes to better adjust to the deep darkness in the room. The curtains were drawn, so the moonlight was blocked from entering, and the fire had long died.

I found Blue curled up in a corner, her back pressed to the side of the sofa. She had her knees hugged to her chest, and she was crying gently as she rocked back and forth. My first thought was that someone had upset her, and now they were going to pay.

“Blue?” I knelt before her. “Luna?” She looked up at me with her bright, sapphire eyes. “Who made you cry? Tell me their name.”

She smiled bitterly and wiped her tears as best as she could. She was a mess, but she looked even more beautiful. I couldn’t understand how she could be so perfect, and then even more perfect with each hour that passed.

“No one made me cry,” she whispered. “I made myself cry.”

That took me aback. My mate was sad, and I needed to know why. I needed to know everything.

“I was thinking about my family, and I just started crying all of a sudden. I miss them. I’ve never been away from them since they took me in, and this is... strange. And a bit hard.”

“What can I do to make it better?” I asked. I wanted to pull her into my arms and kiss all her tears away, but she was still curled up in a protective way, and I didn’t want to rush her. When she felt ready, I hoped she’d make the first step.

“I don’t think there’s anything you can do.”

I frowned. I didn't like to feel helpless. Not when she was in pain.

“Did you eat?”

“Oh, yes. More than I should have.” She studied my face, then added, “But I'll sit with you if you want to eat.”

I wasn't hungry. It was a good excuse to get her off the floor, though, so I nodded and helped her up. We walked to the table, and I pulled a chair for her. I sat down next to her and pulled a plate before me. I filled it with rare-cooked meat that was now cold and took a bite as I waited for her to unburden her soul.

“Do you think my family is okay?” she asked. “No, don't answer that. I know they're okay. They got the credits, and maybe they're having a feast right now, just like we're having. I mean, not right now. It's pretty late. They must be asleep.”

“Your family will be taken care of from now on, you have my word. I will send someone to check in on them tomorrow.”

“I don't know...” She bit her lower lip, like she always did when she was scared or uncertain. “I can't ask you to do that. I know there's work to be done around here, and... No, it's fine. I know they're okay.”

I covered her hand with mine. “I will send someone tomorrow. It's okay. I want to remove this burden from your shoulders, so you never have to worry about them. I will have someone check in on them often. As often as you want.”

She blushed cutely. “Thank you. I'm really grateful.”

“Tell me about them.” To give her space to open up, I piled more food onto my plate and ate. Now that I knew I could actually do something to make her feel better, my appetite was back.

“They adopted me when I was a baby. My real parents abandoned me. Or my real mother... Who knows? Maybe she did it because my dad bailed on her and didn't want to take responsibility. I would've perished if my adoptive parents hadn't found me and took me in. They had a daughter already.

Audra. We're close in age, though I can't know for sure, because I don't know when I was born."

It hurt to listen to her talk about the parents she never met, the love she never received from them, and the childhood she never had. And the fact that she didn't know when her birthday was...

"Then, when do you celebrate your birthday?"

"The day my adoptive parents found me. As far as I'm concerned, that's when I was born. They gave me the name Blue, but because they thought for a while that my real mother would show up and claimed me, they never gave me their last name. And then we just kind of forgot about it. It doesn't matter, anyway. Names don't matter when you live where I lived and you work for others. When your entire life is dedicated to others."

I wiped my hands on a napkin and turned fully to her. I cupped her face with my hands.

"Your name matters to me. You have my name now."

"Mara calls me Blue Moon."

I smiled. "Blue Moon. That's fitting. I like it. Do you?"

"I guess I like it."

"Blue Moon of Clan Murdock."

She blushed harder. "Yes, I like that."

I leaned in and pressed my lips to hers for the first time. I kissed her gently, tentatively, allowing her space to stop it if she wasn't ready. She didn't, though. She slipped toward me and leaned into my touch, and that was all I needed to move one hand down her side and encircle her waist. I deepened the kiss, and she moaned softly, parting her lips. I pushed my tongue inside her mouth, and she let me, eagerly opening up and welcoming my exploration.

The kiss lasted for a blissful minute before I could feel that she was getting out of breath. I pulled away and looked at her beautiful face.

“Kyden,” she whispered, “Why were you gone for so long? I waited, and waited... And then I started thinking about my family and felt sad.”

“I’m sorry I couldn’t have dinner with you. Your first dinner here, and I left you alone.”

“It’s okay. But... what kept you away so long?”

I settled back in my chair and let out a sigh.

“We’ve had trespassers at our borders. Lately, it’s been happening more and more. We have a conflict with a neighboring pack. We used to be friends, but now we’re enemies. But it’s nothing serious. They’re just trying to intimidate us, and it won’t work. The problem will be taken care of, sooner rather than later. Especially now that I have you, it’s as if they’ve lost already.”

“How so?”

“You are my Luna, and you make me stronger. Stronger than ever. The Alpha of the enemy pack hasn’t found his mate yet. That is why he will lose.”

She looked at me with big eyes, and I knew she was trying to understand, but it wasn’t quite clear to her how all that worked. I smiled. She looked so pretty when she had that look of curiosity mixed with confusion in her eyes.

“Come,” I said. “Let’s go to bed, Blue Moon. And I can tell you more.”

Chapter Eight

Blue

I followed him, but at the foot of the stairs, he stopped and took me in his arms. I let him carry me as I leaned my head against his arm. My hand was pressed to his chest, and I counted his heartbeats as he took me into our bedroom.

I'd seen the bedroom earlier. After Mara left, I had plenty of time to take a bath and slip back into the dress from the Temple. I had no personal belongings, except for a braided bracelet that I always wore around my left wrist. Audra had one, too. None of the clothes or shoes I owned had been worth taking with me, so when I left home, I left with nothing.

Now I was here, in my husband's home, with only the dress on my back. And as he set me back down on my feet, Kyden started to take even that off. I shivered. It wasn't warm enough in the room, but I didn't want to complain. I would've controlled my body if I could. The dress pooled around my bare feet, and now I stood naked before him. He ran his hands up and down my arms as he looked at my body, then he stepped around me and pulled the duvet off the bed.

“Get in. I'll make the fire, and then I'll join you.”

I was grateful, because my skin was covered in goosebumps, and my nipples had turned to hard, almost painful pebbles. I slipped into bed, and he covered me with the duvet, almost up to my nose. I smiled at him. He was so gentle and caring... I couldn't believe I was so lucky. The priest had said that arranged marriages could be hard, but I didn't see it. Kyden and I were doing great.

He made the fire and tended to it for a few minutes. The fireplace in the bedroom was smaller than the one downstairs. Once the fire started sizzling and crackling, Kyden went to turn off the light. The effect of the dancing flames was magical. The air smelled great, and the room was starting to feel warmer.

Kyden came to the side of the bed and began to remove his own clothes. He watched me as I watched him, and as embarrassed as I felt, I couldn't look away from his strong, ripped body. He took off his shirt first, and I admired the corded muscles in his neck and torso. He was covered in soft hair. It was dark brown, and so dense that it was almost like fur. Maybe it was fur. He was a wolfman, after all. His trousers were next, along with his boots. And now he was standing before me in all his naked glory, and I didn't know where to look first. Everything was perfect, and everything was overwhelming.

He was hard for me already. His cock jutted out proudly from between his thighs, and it was long and massive. The head was dripping with a translucent liquid, and to my own surprise, I licked my lips in anticipation. I felt my body come alive at the sight of him. Kyden was gorgeous.

He slipped into bed with me, and I knew he wasn't going to continue his story about how I made him stronger anytime soon. And I didn't mind it. I could wait.

"I will claim you tonight," he whispered in my ear.

I let myself fall deeper into the soft pillows. He was on top of me, and his breath felt hot on my skin. He started playing with my hair as his other hand traveled the line of my collarbone. I could feel his hard, throbbing cock pressed to my thigh.

"But I must warn you, Blue. The lust I feel for you makes it hard to control myself. I will try to be gentle, but I can't promise it won't hurt."

I let out a shaky breath. All his words achieved was to make me wetter and more eager. "This is my first time. And I know it will hurt."

"I might turn, too. I might shift. Not completely, but... The beast will want to come out and devour you. Metaphorically speaking, of course." He grinned.

My core throbbed. I had questions about... him shifting. But I swallowed hard and told myself it didn't matter, anyway.

This was happening. I was here, in his bed, with him on top of me, and there was no going back. His promise of being gentle would have to be enough. And if he shifted... I had to admit that I was curious about his wolf form.

“Blue,” he whispered as he started tracing kisses down my neck and chest. “My Blue Moon.”

My eyes rolled in my head when he wrapped his lips around one of my nipples. He teased the other with his fingers, and I realized that I was so sensitive, having never been touched like this, that I didn't know what to do with myself. I didn't know what to do with my hands. Was I supposed to touch him, too? I decided to just let go and try to get out of my own head. He was in charge, and my body responded instinctively to everything he did or said.

He teased me until I was a whimpering mess, and so wet that the sheets underneath me probably had a massive stain by now. My pussy throbbed for him, and he wasn't anywhere near it yet. When he was done torturing my nipples, he moved lower and licked a trail from my breastbone to my navel. I bucked my hips, and he held me down with both hands. I relaxed in his firm grip. I felt like he knew what he was doing, and I was safe with him.

“You smell so good,” he said before he dipped his head lower and licked my wet folds. He parted them with two fingers and stared right into my core.

I waited for him to lick me again and throw me over the edge like he'd done that morning, but nothing happened. I sat up slightly and looked down, and what I saw made my heart pick up the pace considerably.

His fingers had turned to claws, and his facial features had changed, too. He looked more like a wolf, and less like a man. His mouth was bigger, and it was filled with long, sharp fangs. When he raised his gaze to meet mine, his eyes glowed eerily in the dark. He puckered his lips and blew on my clit, and that was enough to send a delicious current of electricity through my body.

“Don’t be afraid, Blue,” he said in a low, growly voice. “I will take care of you.”

And then he moved back up my body and positioned himself between my legs. I spread them wide to accommodate him. Compared to my small frame, he was so big and wide. He held himself up on his knees and arms, careful not to put his weight on me.

I felt the tip of his cock at my entrance, and I gasped, then held my breath. I tensed up involuntarily, and he gently stroked my hair.

“Breathe,” he whispered. “Relax. Do you trust me?”

I nodded quickly.

“I need to hear you say it.”

“I trust you.”

I let out the breath I was holding with the words, and I willed my body to relax. It was natural for this to be scary, I reminded myself. It was my first time, and Kyden was... different.

He started pushing inside me, and I slowly closed my eyes to better focus on the sensations that assaulted me. He thrust a little deeper, and I could feel the burn. I parted my lips and let out a whimper. Vocalizing how I felt helped. He kissed my jaw and pushed in a little more, then a little more, until I felt like I was full, and I couldn’t take another inch.

“Halfway there,” he said.

I couldn’t believe it. I snapped my eyes open and stared into his eyes. I wanted to sit up and look at the place where our bodies met, but I didn’t have the strength. My limbs felt like jelly.

“You’re doing great, my Luna. I know it hurts. The pain will soon turn to pleasure, I promise.”

“I believe you.”

But when he thrust inside me again, sliding even deeper, tears gathered at the corners of my eyes. I was stretched to the

limit, and still, he had more to give me.

“Nearly there,” he whispered.

“I want this,” I said. I needed to reassure him. “It hurts, but I want this.”

“I know, my Luna. We were made for each other. Your body will learn to receive mine.”

I hoped my body learned fast.

I finally felt the head of his cock press against a point inside me that felt both painful and exhilarating. For the first time, he pulled out instead of pushing in, and when he thrust again into me, he did it in a sure, swift motion, and I gasped. He did it again, and I could feel the burning sensation starting to turn into something else. Before I knew it, each thrust brought more pleasure, until the pain faded away completely, and all I could register was how full I was, how his cock rubbed every delicious spot inside me. And I couldn't move, I could barely breathe... It was all too much, and not enough at the same time. I felt like I needed something more... I needed to get somewhere...

“You feel incredible,” he growled.

The hair on his body became denser, if that was possible. And darker. As he made love to me, faster and harder, I could feel his fur sliding across my skin, brushing away the thin sheen of sweat that covered me from head to toe. I loved it. I let my fingers glide through it, and I heard Kyden grunt deep in his chest. I saw his eyes darken.

“I like that,” he said. “Do it again. Touch me.”

I did, and it made him go so wild that he threw his head back and let out a long, guttural howl. I felt it reverberate through my entire body. The fur between his legs was now rubbing my clit as his cock ravaged my pussy, and I was getting closer and closer to release. I fought the urge to close my eyes as I neared what I knew was going to be a mind-blowing orgasm, because I wanted to watch him as he came, too. I wanted to see the look in his eyes when he filled me with his seed.

He howled again, and it was so intense that it sent me over the edge. It was fast and unexpected, and I found myself arching my back and digging my heels into the back of his thighs to keep him there, deep inside me, as I rode my orgasm. My pussy throbbed around him.

“Blue,” he whispered before he buried his head in the crook of my neck and his whole body shook with his own release.

That made me come again. Just the feel of his hot cum filling me up... It was overwhelming, and so delicious. I never wanted this moment to end.

We stayed like that for a while, then he gently rolled onto his back, pulling me with him. His cock was still inside me, and when I tried to roll off him, I found that I was stuck. That his cock was stuck... inside my pussy. My eyes grew wide, and I panicked a little.

“It’s okay,” he said, stroking my hair. “It’s just a knot. It will take a while, but for now, we have to make sure that my seed stays inside you.”

“Oh. I... I didn’t know.” And I hadn’t felt it, either! Or maybe I had, but I’d ignored it or didn’t know what it was. His cock alone made me feel so completely full, that I hadn’t realized a knot had formed and stretched me even more. “I kind of like it.” I smiled. “We’re stuck together now.”

“Forever. Well, not like this, but you know...”

“Metaphorically speaking.”

We laughed. I made myself comfortable on top of him and started playing with his beard. It was long, and soft, and I loved gliding my fingers through it.

“So, what does it mean that I make you stronger than ever?” I asked. “I’m sorry, but I don’t understand. You’re already so strong. I’ve never met anyone like you. And I’m... well, I’m me. I’m not strong. I have no powers, so what do I have to do with your strength?”

He placed one arm underneath his head and stared at the ceiling as he ran his other hand up and down my back. The fire

made long shadows dance on the walls. It was the perfect night, and I hoped all our nights would be like this.

“I will tell you about the legends of my clan, and I will tell you about my weakness.”

“You have a weakness?”

“I made a mistake. And now my enemies think I’m weak.”

“I don’t believe those two are the same thing.”

“Maybe they’re not, but perception is everything, is it not?”

“Okay, tell me.”

Chapter Nine

Kyden

It was hard for me to talk about the greatest mistake I'd made since I became Alpha of the Duskblood Pack.

Kindness.

My mistake and my weakness was kindness.

My wolves didn't talk about it. They knew it would upset me, so they pretended like the past never happened. I had to tell Blue myself, because no one was going to tell her, and then she would be left wondering what kind of man I really was. So, no matter how difficult it was for me to tell her the story, I had to. It was the right thing to do. She'd given herself to me on the first day of our arranged marriage, and she trusted me already. With her well-being, and maybe her life. I owed her the truth.

"I've been looking for a mate for years. Eight months ago, I thought I'd found her. The Alpha of another pack had a daughter, and he and my late father used to be friends. So, the Alpha promised me that when his daughter came of age, he would give her to me, so we could be mates. Nothing was set in stone. But there was a chance she could be my match, so we shook hands. Actually, my father did, before he passed away. When the time came, I couldn't go and bring her myself because we were dealing with the enemy we're still dealing with today. They were always at our borders, always hunting on our land, and it wasn't a good time for me to leave the pack. So, I sent my Beta."

"Logan?"

"No. Back then, my Beta was not Logan. Hallan was his name. I made Hallan my Beta when I became Alpha. I trusted him enough to task him with bringing to me the bride I'd been promised."

"What happened?"

“He went and did as he was told. But when he came back with her, they were mated. She had been meant for me, and Hallan had broken the rules. He’d taken her for himself. And then he had the gall to return and rub it in my face.”

“Wait. But if he took her for himself, doesn’t this mean they were... fated?”

“Yes.”

“So, was it really intentional? I mean... their betrayal?”

I sighed. “It wasn’t, I know that. And that is why I pardoned both of them. By all the rules of the wolves, I should’ve never forgiven such a betrayal. The Beta has to put his Alpha first, even when his own life or happiness is in danger. Hallan should’ve brought her to me, and then I would’ve seen that we weren’t a match, and then he would’ve been free to make his move. The fact that he returned mated to her was disrespectful. He’d claimed a female who had been intended for me, his Alpha.”

“I see. Okay, I think I’m starting to understand how pack dynamics work.”

I nodded and continued to draw circles with my fingers on her back.

“I forgave them both and exiled them. Hallan begged me to let him stay. The Duskblood Pack had been his home all his life. But I couldn’t let him stay with her here. None of my wolves would’ve respected me if I did. It was enough that they’d expected me to kill him and send her back to her father, and I didn’t do that. I chose mercy. And kindness. I exiled them, and they left.”

“So, what happened then? I think you did the right thing.”

“I didn’t. I did the wrong thing. And put the whole pack in danger. Because Hallan went and joined our enemy. And with him, the enemy pack grew stronger and more daring. Knowing that I’d pardoned Hallan when I should’ve killed him, they started attacking the borders more often and more boldly. They think I am weak. Kindness is weakness, especially when

betrayal and the breaking of rules are involved. So, that is what happened.”

“Still, what do I have to do with your... strength?”

I smiled. “Clan Murdock has a legend. Actually, we have many legends, but this one is about fated mates. It is said that when an Alpha finds his Luna, his one true love, he becomes stronger. Invincible. My enemy doesn’t have a mate. His Beta doesn’t have a mate, either. Hallan is only a subordinate. He only joined the pack because their land is right next to ours, and he hopes they will conquer us, so then he might move back here, where he was born and raised. But he is no one in their pack, and the Alpha is only using him. Yes, they have an advantage they didn’t have before, because Hallan knows the woods and the town. But now I have you. You are my Luna, and I believe in the legend of my clan that says you make me stronger. I will end this war once and for all. And then we will live in peace, and you will give me many pups.”

“I’m so sorry. It sounds like you were close to Hallan.”

“We grew up together. It is what it is. He made his choice.”

“Why do they want your land, though? If they have theirs...”

“The Den is well positioned. Our land is rich, and the fact that we’re surrounded by forest on all sides is a huge geographical advantage.”

“Well, I hope the legend is right, and that my presence truly makes you stronger.” She placed a sweet kiss on my chest. “It’s a beautiful legend. Does the other pack believe in it?”

“No, but I do. My pack does. And Hallan believes in it, too, and I’m sure he already knows I brought home a human mate. He will tell his Alpha, and with the news, he will most likely mention the legend, too. He will spread fear among the wolves without even realizing it, and that will be a good thing for me. For us.”

“It makes sense. I’m sorry it ended this way... your friendship with Hallan. Logan seems to be a good Beta, and I like his sister.”

“They are both loyal and trustworthy. I will have to join my wolves at the borders tomorrow, and I want you to stay with Mara and the other females. They will help you with everything you need. Mara said she would have clothes ready for you in the morning.”

“Oh, thank you. I was wondering about that.” She giggled, a little embarrassed. “I haven’t brought anything with me, and I feel so stupid. It’s just... my old clothes aren’t... umm... they aren’t that great.”

I could feel that she was ashamed of her past and what she’d had to wear. I kissed her forehead, then her nose and her lips.

“Don’t say another word, my Blue Moon. You will have everything you need and desire, and more. All you have to do is ask, and sometimes, not even that.”

“Thank you.” She wrapped her arms around my neck and sighed. “I don’t want you to go tomorrow. I want you to stay with me.”

“I have to go. But I won’t be long, I promise. I’ll end this ridiculous war once and for all, and then I’ll be all yours, and you’ll be all mine.”

“Okay. Just be careful.”

“I always am.”

I pulled the duvet over us both, and soon, she was asleep. She weighed nothing to me, and I loved how I could feel her steady breath on my chest, and how her heart beat right next to mine.

Chapter Ten

Blue

I must've been sleeping for an hour when I felt Kyden stir under me. I opened my eyes and felt foolish for having fallen asleep like that, on top of him. Then I felt something else. His cock slipped out of me, and I realized we weren't as one anymore. The knot was gone.

He rolled me onto my back, and I let him. I was so tired, but he seemed to have other things in mind.

"Did you sleep at all?" I asked.

"No. I watched you. I can't close my eyes and not look at you when you're so beautiful, Blue."

I smiled. The fire had died, but the room was still warm and cozy. His body gave off a delicious kind of heat that I was already addicted to. He moved on top of me, and I soon felt his cock push inside me. I was wide awake now. No matter how exhausted I was, I couldn't say no to him. I wanted it.

"Again?" I asked.

"Yes. Again and again, until your belly swells with a baby. When you'll give me pups, I'll be an even stronger Alpha."

The legends of his clan confused me, but they sounded good. And I had to confess I liked the fact that they seemed to put such a great importance on the Alpha's mate – in this case, me. Now I was starting to understand why all his wolves liked me instantly and accepted me even though I was an outsider and not at all like them. They needed a strong Alpha, and if I contributed to that, then they loved me.

"I will do my best," I said. "To be a good wife and mother."

"I know."

He thrust all the way inside me, and I was surprised that it didn't hurt this time. Not one bit. It wasn't only the fact that he'd stretched me before, but also that his knot had kept me

wide and open, and now it was as if his cock fit perfectly in my pussy.

I moaned and thrust my hips up to meet him. That earned me a grin from him.

“Tell me what you want, Luna,” he growled. I could see him start shifting. “Tell me what you need.”

“Don’t hold back this time,” I said. “I’m not that delicate, you know.”

“I could easily break you if I’m not careful.”

“You won’t break me. I’m unbreakable, Kyden. You just haven’t found out yet.”

His teeth elongated and became fangs. His face was covered in fur, and he opened his mouth and licked me from my jaw to my temple.

“Delicious.”

“I want to be on top,” I said, surprising even myself, let alone him. As the words rolled off my tongue, I realized that was truly what I wanted. “Let me ride you.”

“Your wish is my command, Luna. Especially when your wish is so juicy.”

He rolled us over, and I found myself straddling him, impaled on his cock. I placed my hands on his wide chest and pushed myself up. His hands went to my hips. I began to rock gently, and he helped me without taking control. I looked into his golden eyes, and he looked up at me with something that neared reverence. I blushed and felt my heart beat harder. I loved the way Kyden looked at me. I hoped it would never change.

I moved harder and faster, bouncing on top of him with all I had. His fingers turned into claws, and when he squeezed the sides of my hips, I felt them dig into my skin. And I loved it. I grinned and leaned over him, letting my nipples touch his face. He wrapped his lips around one and started sucking it hard, which only made my pussy throb and gush. I was so wet that I was dripping onto him. My juices were mixed with his cum.

This time, I felt it when his knot started to form. The base of his cock swelled until I could barely move. The thought that we were once again linked threw me over the edge. I came with a soft scream, and then I felt him release his seed inside me in hot strings of cum that filled me to the brim. I collapsed on top of him, and we both trembled and throbbed for a while longer. We were back in our initial position, and I felt even more exhausted than before.

But there was no pain in my body. There would be plenty tomorrow, I knew. I was used to physical effort, but not like this. It would be a sweet kind of pain, though, the type that held precious memories, so I was looking forward to it.

“Sleep now, my love,” he said.

“Love?” I murmured in his chest.

“Yes. Is it too early to call you that? Is it too early to say that I love you?”

I smiled. “Well, it’s only the second day. Had you said it on the first day, it would’ve been a red flag. But this is fine.”

“Then, I love you, Blue Moon.”

“I love you, too, Kyden Murdock.”

Chapter Eleven

Kyden

When dawn came, my Luna was fast asleep. I slid out of the bed carefully, not wanting to wake her just yet. Her first day here, mated to me, had been intense, and she needed her rest. I padded softly to the bathroom, where I took a quick shower. I then put some clean clothes on, gave my Luna one last, longing look, and headed outside. I was barely out the gate when Logan greeted me.

“Good morning, Alpha! I’m afraid I have to bring you bad news before breakfast.”

I groaned. “More attacks?”

“Worse than that.”

“Then the whole pack needs to know. Call a meeting.”

He nodded and went to do as I said. Sighing and rolling my shoulders, I made my way to where we held our pack meetings. It was a house in the center of the town. It was big enough to hold the entire pack, and it was dedicated to meetings and various gatherings and celebrations. When we all came together, we needed a lot of space, and this building was more of a warehouse than a house. It had the necessary amenities and a kitchen, but the ground floor was just a large room with tables and chairs that could be moved around as needed.

I took my time and enjoyed the crisp morning air on my skin and in my lungs. The walk invigorated me, and when I arrived, my pack was already there. I walked to Logan. Next to him was Mara, and figuring that her brother had already told her what was going on, I thought she could help me with something else.

I motioned at her to step closer, and she did. “Go check in on my bride. Make sure she has breakfast, and then bring her here.”

Mara nodded and was on her way. Then I greeted my wolves and invited Logan to speak. I wanted them to hear the news as I heard them for the first time, because the war at our borders concerned all of us. The Den was our home, the only home we knew. We couldn't lose it.

"We found sheep and cattle slain around the border," Logan said.

I felt my blood starting to boil in my veins. A murmur rose above the crowd.

"This is unacceptable," someone said.

And I agreed with them. The enemy had crossed a limit. No one touched our animals. We cared about them like we cared about our pups. They helped our community thrive, and they weren't food.

"This will not happen again," I said. "We've been too lenient, and I admit it was my fault. I hoped our enemy would see reason and give up this mad pursuit. This is our home, and we will defend it."

The murmur turned into cheers, and for the next few minutes, I relayed how we were going to end the war within only a few days. Now that I had Blue, I felt invincible. I could tell that my wolves could sense a change in me. It gave them strength, too.

Logan and I made a plan, and I gave the orders and told each wolf what their tasks and duties were. But before I let them go to their posts, where I was going to follow them, I saw Mara come in with Blue, and I silenced everyone with a raised hand. The crowd parted as the two females made their way to the center, where Logan and I stood. Mara took her place by her brother's side, and I took Blue's hand in mine.

It was time to introduce her to the Duskblood Pack.

"This is my Luna. You've already seen her, you already know that her name is Blue. I know word gets around. I waited until today because I wanted everyone to be present. She is my one true mate, and she will give birth to my heirs, bringing joy to the Den. Now that I found her, I am stronger, and we are all

stronger together. We will end our enemy, and all the neighboring packs will know to keep away from what isn't theirs."

Cheers all around. I wrapped an arm around Blue's waist and pulled her toward me. She smelled of the soap in my bathroom, the sheets on my bed, she smelled of my home and of me. I leaned in and kissed her lips gently, and grinned to myself when she quickly placed both hands on my chest and let herself fall toward me. Her weight was delicious in my arms. The kiss elicited more cheers from the crowd, but that only made Blue feel shy and embarrassed. She pulled away and looked up at me with bright eyes. Her cheeks were flushed. She wasn't used to getting so much attention.

I turned to my pack and exchanged glances with the wolves who'd gotten their tasks. I nodded, and they knew what that meant. They filed out of the room and went to get ready to go to the border. Logan and Mara went, too. This was a special situation, and the females who were unmated and had no pups would join the males in battle. Female werewolves could fight just as well as the males.

"My Luna," I said, "I have to go with them."

"I know. I wasn't sure I'd get to see you this morning before you left."

"My intention was to go directly to the border and see what's happened over night, but Logan brought distressing news that everyone needed to hear. But this time will be the last time. I will end this."

"Today?"

"I hope. If not, then tomorrow. But I will not allow it to go on any longer. The enemy has disrespected us enough."

"Okay. I understand."

"You are safe here. Go to Fyre and Luda if you need anything, and they will help you. The house is all yours. Explore the garden, sit in the sun, take a stroll and get familiar with the Den. You can do anything you like."

"I'll miss you. I hoped I'd do those things with you."

She was so sweet. I kissed her forehead and squeezed her to my chest. “I will be back soon, I promise.”

“I’ll think about you every second.”

I smiled. “I like that. Yes, think about me, but don’t worry about me.”

“I’ll try.”

I led her outside of the building. Fyre and Luda were waiting, having guessed that since Mara was going to be away, they were the ones who were supposed to keep an eye on Blue. Not that Blue needed anyone to mother her, but this was only her second day here, and no one could expect her to spend it on her own.

“Go with them,” I told Blue. “And I’ll see you later.”

“Okay.”

I pulled her in one more time and kissed her passionately. Fyre and Luda giggled and looked away. Luda’s pups must’ve been home, since meetings like these weren’t appropriate for the little ones. I tried not to think about my pack or the war for those few seconds when I had Blue in my arms. Her lips were warm and soft, and her body responded beautifully to my gentle caresses. When I pulled away, she clung to me. We exchanged one last look that said everything about how we felt for each other, then I took a step back, and another, turned away, and forced myself to walk straight ahead without hesitation or second thoughts.

Blue was going to be safe at the Den. And I was going to make sure no one would ever threaten our home again.

Chapter Twelve

Blue

Kyden didn't return that night. I didn't think anything of it, as he'd said it might take him a day or two to put an end to the war with the pack that wanted the Den. I made the fire in our bedroom and slept alone in our bed. I'd changed the sheets in the morning, with Mara's help. They were stained with blood, and Mara jumped up and down and kissed me on both cheeks, which made me feel so mortified that I wanted to disappear. The new, clean sheets smelled like him, though, and that soothed me. I woke up a few times during the night, my hand searching for him. He wasn't there, and I would turn on my other side and go to sleep again.

When I woke up in the morning, it was cold, and outside was raining. I made the fire, took a shower, and padded down to the living room, where breakfast was waiting for me. The female wolves who worked in the kitchen always made sure I had breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and they were so sneaky, that I had yet to meet them. They always made sure I had plenty of fruit, tea, and coffee. It was only my third day at the Den, married to a wolfman, and I was quite enjoying it.

I sat down to eat and thought about the family I'd left behind. I played with the bracelet around my wrist and thought of Audra and her baby. I was sure they were both fine, and I just wondered what name she'd given him. I wanted to believe that I would one day see them again. Maybe after the war was over and things went back to normal, – though I didn't know what normal was like at the Den, – then I could ask Kyden to take me to visit my parents. I wanted to see the life they had now. I wanted to see them happy, and healthy, and well fed, like I was.

I spent a few hours in the garden, then I had lunch all by myself. I was getting bored in the house, but I didn't want to bother Fyre and Luda. Even though Kyden told me to go to them for anything I needed, I didn't exactly need something, did I? And I was sure they had their own lives and things to

worry about. And Luda had her pups, who were such a handful that at least two people had to keep an eye on them at all times.

But after lunch, I felt so lonely that I couldn't take it anymore. So, I emerged from the house, stood on the porch for a minute, and when Luda saw me from her porch and waved at me, I gathered my courage and went to join her. She'd just given the pups a bath and was rewarding them with ice cream.

"Not that they deserve it," she said, watching them run back to their games. Next to her, the baby was sleeping in his stroller. "How are you, Blue? I know you must be worried about Kyden."

I shrugged. "He said it might take a while."

"He did. I'm sure everything is okay. My mate is at the border, too. They will both be back soon. All of them."

We had tea and talked for a while, then Fyre showed up. She was disheveled and in a rush.

"Hey! I just wanted to let you know that I'm leaving, and I'll be back later." She was talking to Luda. "Hey, Blue!"

"Hi. Umm... where are you going?"

"A group of us is going to the border with fresh food. Our men are fighting, and they don't have time to hunt. Also, the war scared all the game away."

I stood up so abruptly that my chair flew back a few inches. I grabbed it before it fell and made an infernal noise and woke up Luda's baby.

"Can I come?"

Fyre hesitated. She and Luda exchanged a glance. I suddenly felt like Fyre regretted telling me about her plan.

"I promise I won't be a bother," I insisted.

Luda stood up and gently touched my arm. "Alpha said you should stay here, Blue Moon. You can stay with me and the pups tonight. We can keep each other company, so we don't feel so lonely."

I bit the inside of my lip. “I want to help. And I realize that by going, I’m not actually helping. But I want to see him, you know? I want to make sure he is okay.”

“I understand, Luna, but...”

“Please.”

When I said please, something happened that I didn’t get at all. Both Fyre and Luda looked... guilty. Like, my practically begging them was not something that was supposed to happen. And it struck me that I was the Alpha’s mate, and that everyone regarded me as if I was above them somehow. So, I shouldn’t have been begging Luda and Fyre. I could just tell them that was what I wanted to do.

“I’m going. I want to see him, and no one can stop me.”

I started walking, and Luda didn’t stop me. Fyre nodded at me, and I knew I was getting what I wanted. Because they were supposed to take care of me while Kyden was gone, but they also weren’t allowed to disrespect me.

“We won’t come too close to the border,” Fyre said as she led me toward the group of females who were gathered around two carriages pulled by horses. “You might not even see Kyden if he’s in the middle of a battle.”

“I’ll take my chances. But honestly, I just don’t want to feel so helpless when everyone seems to be doing something. I can at least join you.”

“Makes sense.”

The other females greeted me with open arms, though there was some reluctance in their voices. They didn’t say anything, though, and we were on the road in no time. Fyre helped me up into a carriage, and I thought she would get in, too, but instead, she went to grab the horse by the reins. There were three more females, and they all walked beside the two carriages. I felt a bit stupid for having gotten in, but now I wasn’t sure what to do. It was true that they were stronger and more physically resilient than I was. Maybe it was a good idea to let the carriage take me there, and then, when we returned,

I'd walk with them and show them that I could keep up. There was no point in getting tired before I saw Kyden.

We arrived late in the evening. The forest was peaceful – not something that I'd expected. The ground was covered in mud thanks to the morning rain, and we found the wolves lying around, some in wolf form, others in human form. The ones in human form were completely naked, though some of them had put pants on. I turned my gaze from the ones who weren't covered as the carriage passed them, and upon seeing me, they immediately grabbed something to cover themselves with.

“The calm before the storm,” said Fyre. “They're preparing for another battle.”

Those who were in wolf form were licking bloody wounds. There was blood on the ground.

“Don't worry,” Fyre said, seeing the expression of dread on my face. “Werewolves heal fast.”

We stopped, and I remembered her saying we weren't going to go near the border, where danger lurked. I got off and looked around, hoping to see Kyden. I saw Mara, and she waved and came over. She was wearing a light tunic she'd just thrown over her sculpted body.

“Blue! You were supposed to be at the Den.”

“I couldn't stay behind.”

She laughed. “Of course not.”

“Kyden?”

“Alpha is not here. He's further along, at the border. He's trying to negotiate with Hallan, of all people.”

I remembered Hallan was his former Beta, the one who'd betrayed him and worsened the situation with the enemy pack.

“Logan is with him, so it's all good.” She looked inside the carriage as the females I'd come with were unloading the food. “What do we have here? I'm starving!”

They were all starving from the looks of it, because both wolves and men started approaching the carriages with interest. Fyre and the others passed portions of food around, and they all sat down to eat, right there, on the ground. The ones in wolf form ate like that, not bothering to shift. It was incredible to watch them. They were as big as the horses pulling the two carriages, and it was so strange to me that the horses weren't scared of them.

Mara told us about how the war was going while she ate. I sat next to her and listened. She seemed to be in high spirits, and everyone seemed to feel better after they'd eaten.

"What about Kyden?" I asked Fyre.

"Mara and the others will bring food to him and those who're closer to the border. We're not going. And you're not going, for sure."

I nodded. I was sad that I wasn't going to see Kyden, but I understood that this was serious and I had to listen to Fyre. I was glad I'd come, though. Even though I hadn't done anything to actually help, at least I was here with the pack, and not back home, hiding in my new-found comfort.

It was getting late, so Fyre said it was time to go. When she tried to help me back into one of the carriages, I refused.

"I'll walk with you," I said.

"It's a long way."

"I'll let you know when I get tired."

She knew when she could argue with me and when she couldn't. This was one of those times when she couldn't. Plus, it was no big deal.

We walked in silence for a while, and I could feel myself growing tired. Little by little, I fell behind. A few times, Fyre and the other females stopped and waited for me, but as we neared the other end of the forest, they started walking faster, eager to get home. I tried to keep up with them, but it was harder and harder. Now that we were far from the border, they talked louder and laughed, telling jokes and keeping each

other distracted from the long journey. I knew the way, so I wasn't too worried.

I stopped to rest for a moment. The moon was in its first quarter, and the sky was peppered with stars. In the distance, I could see the edge of the forest and the lights of the Den. I smiled thinking this was my home now. I stretched and shook my legs a bit to get the blood flowing. I was dressed well thanks to Mara, who'd brought me clothes the day before, when she took me to meet the pack.

I resumed walking, but I wasn't in any hurry. Fyre and her friends were talking up ahead, and as long as they were within earshot, I felt safe. Besides, we were far from the border, and this was our territory. No wild animals either, since they'd been scared away.

I heard a shuffle to my right, and I was about to amend that last thought when something, or more like someone, grabbed me from behind. I felt a rough, furry hand cover my mouth, and a strong arm encircle my waist. My attacker was tall and built like a boulder, and he easily lifted me in the air. I kicked my feet and tried to get free, but it was all futile. I tried to scream, and his hand only tightened against my lips, until I knew for sure it would leave a bruise.

He started walking backwards, and soon I couldn't hear Fyre's voice anymore. He carried me like this, like I weighed absolutely nothing, and like he didn't care at all that I was struggling. To him, I was just a puppet. Easy to handle, easy to control.

I was being kidnapped, and there was nothing I could do about it.

Chapter Thirteen

Kyden

We had them. One last strategic attack, and this war was over. Blood had been spilled on both sides, but my wolves were strong. I sent the ones who were too wounded to fight back home, because I knew that by morning, there would be no more challengers who wanted the Den for themselves. I lined the rest of my soldiers up along the border, all in our wolf forms, and prepared for one last battle cry.

The enemy lines were in front of us. I could feel tension on the wind. My golden eyes dilated, and I could see clearly that the enemy pack was shuffling and hesitating. I grinned, showing my fangs. They knew they were about to lose. The best thing for them would've been to surrender, but their Alpha kept pushing them, so they had no choice but to fall under my claws.

I saw a shape separating from the enemy pack, starting to walk toward me. I looked for a white flag, but I couldn't see one. What were they doing? What were their intentions, and what kind of strategy was this?

The shape grew, and I soon realized there were two people. One big and wide, built like a mountain, and one small and frail, almost insignificant. I tensed. Something wasn't right. The male was Hallan. I could see him clearly now, and it was easy to recognize him by his long, black hair and the deep, red scar on his ribs. I'd just given him that scar a few hours before. And the small shape... Blue.

No. It couldn't be her. How could it be her? She was at the Den, with Fyre and Luda.

I growled deep in my chest, and I knew my wolves heard me. It was a warning. No one was allowed to move until I gave the order.

"You think you're strong because you found your Luna?" Hallan yelled across the battlefield. "Well, I have your Luna,

Kyden. This ends now. Surrender and leave the Den. You lost.”

The look in her eyes... Fear, guilt, hope... Her beautiful, blue eyes. Hallan had his filthy hand over her mouth, and that did it for me. I knew I had to be rational. I knew I had to be careful, because she already was in so much danger. I’d just let my wolves know they needed to stay put, but I couldn’t stay put myself.

What happened next was out of my control. It had happened only once before in my life, when Hallan had showed up mated to the female who was supposed to be mine. Then, I was able to push the rage back down within me. But now, there was no hope of that happening.

I went feral.

I felt my body grow in size, my mouth widened even more, and my fangs grew as saliva dripped from them. I growled with the change, letting the anger take over.

Only Alphas could go feral, and sometimes Betas, if they were resilient enough. It was not a pretty sight, and when it happened, it was better for everyone to move out of the way. Extreme rage was needed to put someone in this state. And Hallan had managed to bring that out of me twice already.

My own wolves took a step back.

The enemy pack took a step back.

I could feel their apprehension permeate the air. My pack was wondering what was going to happen, and the other pack was wondering if they should’ve turned around and run.

Hallan took a step back. Taken by surprise, – though he really shouldn’t have been, seeing how he knew me and he’d seen me like this before, – his hand slipped from Blue’s mouth, and his grip on her loosened. I saw this because as I grew in size, my senses sharpened. That was enough for Blue to gather her courage and do something reckless. With a cry, she elbowed Hallan hard in the stomach, surprising him just enough to be able to wiggle out of his grip. She ran toward me, holding her arm. It was shattered. I saw the shock on Hallan’s

face. It wasn't the fact that Blue had hurt him. She'd hurt herself and didn't even bruise Hallan. It was the fact that she'd done it. That she'd had the gall to hit him and risk everything to escape.

Blue kept running toward me, and I knew she was safe now. Mara was going to take care of her. I ran toward her, but before we met in the middle of the battlefield, I leapt over her in a wide arch and landed right on top of Hallan, who quickly shifted into his wolf form. I went straight for the jugular.

I was done with him. With his betrayal and his disrespect. Within seconds, he was bleeding to death between my front paws, his eyes staring at me in a sort of awe.

I heard my wolves follow me, and we lunged at the enemy. They started dispersing. Most of them had started retreating and then running the other way when they saw me become feral. They looked to their own Alpha, hoping he would go feral too, and when that didn't happen, they knew they'd lost the war.

I went straight for the Alpha, and I saw Logan from the corner of my eye as he lunged at the Beta. It was a massacre, and it lasted less than anyone had expected.

Hallan had thought that by kidnapping my Luna, he would have the upper hand. He was wrong. My Luna was my inner strength, my very will to live and do right by my pack. All he'd managed was to fuel my fire. I'd forgiven him once, and that had been my mistake. From now on, no more mistakes. I had my Luna to protect and provide for.

The earth was soaked with blood. And it was all theirs.

Chapter Fourteen

Blue

One moment, I was watching Kyden leap over me as if in slow motion, the next, all hell broke loose, and I tripped and found myself face-first in the mud. My right arm hurt, and I was sure I'd broken it. No bones were sticking out, so at least that was good, but it felt wrong on the inside. I tried to push myself up to no avail. Wolves were running past me, snarling and growling, howling and crying out in pain or victory. I had no idea if we were winning or losing. I couldn't stand up, so I used my good hand and started crawling toward the tree line. I was covered in mud from head to toe, and something splashed on me from above. When I touched my hair, which was now wet, I realized it was blood.

I had to get out of the way. I had to get to safety.

I heard footsteps behind me, and my instinct was to move faster. But I was slipping on the mud, and there was no way I could run from whoever was coming for me.

“Blue!”

I felt a hand on my shoulder and heard Mara's voice. I let out a sigh of relief and let myself fall and roll onto my back. My wet, dirty hair stuck to my face.

“I'll get you out of here,” she said.

“I don't think I can walk.”

“I got you.”

She lifted me off the ground, bridal style, and all I could do was hold on to her. I was a little embarrassed, but Mara was just as tall and strong as the male wolves. She was naked, too, and I tried to not press myself against her body inappropriately. She didn't seem to mind.

“Thank you.”

“What happened? I thought you went back to the Den with Fyre and the others.”

“I was. I fell behind, but I was almost there. I could see the town. And then he grabbed me.”

“Hallan,” she growled.

“That was Hallan? Kyden’s former Beta?”

“Yes. The traitor.”

“I didn’t know.”

“He thought he could use you to make Kyden surrender. He didn’t expect your kidnapping to make him go feral.”

“Feral?”

“It’s something Alphas can do. When they’re provoked. Like, truly provoked, and rage takes over.”

I did notice something different about Kyden as he ran toward me and I ran toward him. But that was the first time I saw him in his wolf form, and I just assumed he was bigger than the other wolves, since he was the Alpha.

“Is that... bad?” I asked.

Mara grinned. “Bad for those who provoked him.”

We entered the forest, and she set me down against the trunk of a tree. I leaned back and cradled my broken arm with the good one. The pain was sharp, and I could barely focus on Mara. Or anything, for that matter. In the distance, wolves howled and snarled.

“I’m sorry,” I whispered.

“What for? You didn’t do anything.”

“I should’ve listened to Kyden. And to Fyre. And stayed at the Den.”

Mara looked around for something to cover herself with. There were torn clothes everywhere. She grabbed a few pieces, inspected them, and settled on an oversized T-shirt that she threw over her body. Then she started ripping another T-shirt into long strips.

“We should’ve seen Hallan sneak around us and caught him. I can’t believe he got so close to the Den.” She knelt beside

me. "Let me see your arm." I winced as she gently pressed her fingers into my flesh to assess the damage. "Right. It's broken in two places. I'm going to need something..." She looked around once more, then up at the tree under which we were sitting. She ripped two branches that looked straight enough. "This will help until we can get you back home."

"Ouch!"

"Sorry."

She started wrapping my arm with the strips of fabric. The two branches kept my arm immobilized. She then used another strip of fabric, wider and longer, that she placed around my neck, so I could keep my arm bent at ninety degrees, close to my body. She moved fast and was efficient, but the pain was so bad that I started crying without meaning to. I tried not to sob, but it was impossible.

"It's okay. I'm done."

"Thank you," I said through pathetic sobs. "I shouldn't have done that."

"What?"

"Tried to hit him."

"You did good. Are you kidding me? You did great. He was distracted, and you used it to your advantage."

"I don't think he even felt it, and here I am, with a broken arm."

She smiled. "It will heal. And Kyden will take care of Hallan, have no doubt. He will take care of all of them."

I sniffed and wiped my tears with my good hand. "I'll never hit a werewolf again, that's for sure. Not that I was planning to slap Kyden or anything."

Mara laughed. "No, don't do that. I know he can be difficult and piss you off sometimes, but don't slap him. You'll only break your hand."

I laughed, too. "It's good that I learned this lesson early, right? Now I know."

“Now you know.”

Mara waited with me. At some point, silence fell, and we knew that meant the war was over. Wolves started ambling into the woods, some pulling a broken leg after them. They plopped into the mud and started licking their wounds, or simply groaned in pain and placed their big heads on their paws and waited for their bodies to heal. Mara asked me if I was okay on my own because she wanted to go and help. I nodded, and she promised she wouldn't go too far.

But I was fine. The pain in my arm had subsided, and it was okay as long as I was careful and didn't move it at all. I watched the wolves, looking for Kyden. The ones who were not injured shifted and started looking for clothes. They paid me no mind. I didn't think they even saw me or recognized me, seeing how my blond hair was so dirty that it was black now.

And then I saw him. The most massive wolf in the pack. He had dark brown fur, long and caked with mud. His mouth was so big that he could've swollen someone like me whole if he wanted to. He had blood on his face and chest, but he seemed to be unharmed. He walked with purpose, exuding power. He was coming straight for me.

So, this was Kyden when he was feral. I didn't know how to feel about that. He came to me and didn't stop when he reached me. He positioned himself right above me, and I found myself shrinking against the tree trunk, looking up into his golden eyes. They were his eyes, but at the same time... there was something about them that made me wonder whether he recognized me or not. He didn't look at me like before, in his human form, with love and kindness. He looked at me like I was... just another enemy.

Maybe it was all in my head. I hoped it was all in my head. Because if Kyden was angry with me, with what I'd done...

He growled deep in his chest, and his nose came closer to my face. He sniffed me. A drop of blood landed on my cheek. I tried not to wince, but it was hard. His breath smelled coppery.

“Hey, it’s me,” I said in a small voice. I was ashamed of how afraid I was of him. He was my mate. I was safe with him, wasn’t I? Then why was my body reacting like this? “It’s me, Blue. Your Luna. Your Blue Moon.” He sniffed me again. “Kyden?”

I reached out and stroked the fur on his chest. I felt his heartbeat under my fingers, and I felt him shudder. Then the look in his eyes changed, and he started to... shrink. He literally started to shrink right before my eyes, and I didn’t know what was happening. He shrunk until he was as big as a horse, not an elephant, and then he took a step back. I thought he was going to shift into his human form, but instead, he lay on the ground and motioned with his head that he wanted me to get on his back.

“What? No, I can’t.” For one, I had a broken arm. And two, even though I’d ridden a horse a few times, that didn’t mean I could ride a wolfman.

He insisted with the same gesture and a growl, and I knew I had no choice. I had to do as he said. Carefully, I pushed myself to my feet, cringing at the pain that shot through my arm. That was when Mara appeared from out of nowhere, and I could thank the Heavens for her. She helped me onto Kyden’s back and showed me how to hold on to him with my good hand.

“He will go slow, don’t worry. He knows you’re hurt.”

“Is he taking me home?”

Mara smiled. “Where else, silly?”

I held on as best as I could, squeezing my thighs when Kyden rose to his feet and started walking. He walked slowly at first, and I gained some confidence and relaxed. When he felt that I was doing better, he picked up the pace, but he was still careful to not make sudden movements that would throw me off. My arm hurt so badly that I couldn’t stop the tears from falling. But I could do this. I could clench my teeth and hang on for a while longer. We were going home. The war was over. It struck me then that we had won.

Starting tomorrow, we were all going to live in peace and quiet, undisturbed and unthreatened. Just like Kyden had said. What happened tonight was going to serve as a lesson for anyone who might've craved what we had. The Den was ours and could not be taken from us.

Chapter Fifteen

Kyden

It was early morning, and I was pacing the living room. The sun had just come out. Upstairs, the healer was still with Blue. Luda had helped me clean her up, then the healer came and put her arm back in place and gave her medicine that was going to help her heal faster. They were talking now, and all I wanted was to go up there and be with her, but I felt like she needed space and air to breathe. She was rattled and scared, and our healer was an old, wise female who could help her now much better than I could.

Logan dropped by to let me know that we'd lost two wolves, and that the funeral was going to be later today. Even knowing that the enemy was destroyed, I didn't feel good about this. The war had been senseless. It shouldn't have happened at all, and no one should've suffered. I told Logan to take care of everything and sent him away.

I heard the healer pad softly down the stairs. She took her time, as she was old. Probably the oldest in the pack. She was training two young females to succeed her, but I hoped she had many years to live, still, because she was very good at what she did.

"Luna is doing well," she said. "A little shaken, but with what I gave her, her arm will heal nicely. And I gave her a little something for her nerves, too. Poor girl. She just got here, and so much has happened."

"Thank you. I'll go see her."

"Yes, do that. She's in a much better state than before. And I'll go tend to the other wounded."

"We lost two," I said.

She nodded. "It's a sad day today, even if we won. Go see your Luna, Alpha. She needs you."

I didn't need to be told twice. I rushed up the stairs and into the bedroom. Blue was sitting peacefully, propped against

pillows. She was smiling as she watched the flames dance in the fireplace. When she turned to me, I saw how happy and relaxed she was, and I laughed. The healer had given her something good. For her nerves.

I walked over to the bed and got in next to her, gently pulling her into my arms. She placed her head on my chest.

“Are you hurt?” she asked me.

“No. I was, but they were just scratches. They healed in minutes.”

Her sapphire eyes widened. “I wish I were as strong as you. And heal as fast as you. But mostly, strong, so when I hit a werewolf, I don’t break my arm.”

I laughed. “You were so beautiful and wild out there. Fearless.”

“I was crazy. What I did was crazy.”

“You made me stronger. Had it not been for you, I wouldn’t have gone feral.”

“About that... I don’t quite understand how it works.”

I sighed. It was hard to explain how I felt when that happened to me. “It’s like... my rage takes over and clouds my brain. It sharpens my senses, and all I see is the one who wronged me. I’m not rational in that state, and I can’t be forgiving, either. I might want to forgive, but I can’t. Unless I really try to control it. The first time it happened, it was when Hallan betrayed me. And I did manage to control it, because as you know, I pardoned Hallan and sent him away. But this time... It was too much. He had you. He’d dared to snatch you when I wasn’t looking, and there was no chance I was going to forgive him for that.”

“I’m sorry I caused... all that.”

“None of it was your fault.”

“I just wanted to help. Be useful, at least a little bit. Please don’t punish Fyre for letting me come with her.”

“I won’t punish anyone. Today is a day of mourning. We will bury the ones we lost. And tomorrow will be a day of celebration. Things happened the way they were supposed to. You had to be there to show me that I had to end the war swiftly. That I had to be merciless. I just hate it that you got hurt.”

“I’ll be fine.”

She snuggled against my chest, and I kissed the top of her head. She still smelled like mud and blood, but I loved it. She smelled like me, too. Like she belonged to me.

“No one will ever threaten you again, Blue Moon. I will protect you with my life. When I saw you with him, when I saw him holding you as you struggled... Something broke inside me. And I knew I would kill anyone who touched you or even looked at you the wrong way.”

“Did you? Kill him...”

“Yes. I ripped his throat out myself. And then I killed the Alpha. The pack pretty much scattered after that. It was quick.”

“It felt like forever.”

“I’m sorry you had to see so much blood and gore.”

“It’s okay. From now on, you’ll be here every night, right?” She looked up at me, and I saw so much hope and longing in her eyes, that all I could do was nod a promise. “You won’t leave me alone. If you do, I’ll have nightmares.”

I held her chin between my fingers and looked deep into her eyes. “I will never leave you alone again. Every night, I will be here, and I will hold you until morning. You will have no nightmares. Not on my watch.”

She smiled. “Thank you.”

I leaned in and kissed her softly. With a sigh, she relaxed against me and allowed me to hold her entire weight. I tried to be careful with her injured arm. I wanted her. I wanted to push her into the mattress, climb on top of her, and claim her, but

she was hurt, and I would've just hurt her more. Until she healed completely, I would keep my lust in check.

The kiss became more heated, and she parted her lips to let me explore her delicious mouth. Her good hand caressed my neck, then she started playing with the long hair on my nape. I had to pull away first, before she made it impossible for me to hold back.

“Kyden...”

“Not now, Blue Moon. Now, you have to rest.”

She nodded. “Will you stay with me?”

“Yes.”

We snuggled together, and soon, she was fast asleep. Later, we would have to get dressed and attend the funeral, but there was plenty of time for us to just enjoy this moment. She needed rest, and I needed to feel her close, to know that she was safe, that she was mine, and that she trusted me to protect her.

My Blue Moon was perfect, and after the way she'd handled herself the night before, she was worthy of her new position in the pack. A strong Alpha needed a strong Luna. Together, we would lead the Duskblood Pack into a golden age.

THE END

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Cara Wylde loves to write about strong, feisty women and their hot Alphas who will do anything to make them happy. Her books are filled with romance and just a dash of mystery, suspense, and that eerie atmosphere she fell in love with reading too many gothic novels. With a master's degree in Comparative Literature, she can't help but play with tropes and themes from various genres, trying to come up with fresh perspectives on the paranormal characters her readers love so much. Vampires, shapeshifters, demons, witches... Cara will always make sure they get their own twists.

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