



NYTE'S  
REJECTED LUNA  
WAVERLY SAGE

# **Nyte's Rejected Luna**

**A Werewolf Shifter Enemies to Lovers  
Romance.**



Waverly sage

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## CHAPTER ONE

Paige

“Run, run, run, Little Riding Hood. The big bad wolf is coming for you,” he said and laughed, his fast strides sounding behind me. He was toying with me.

My legs burned as I ran for my life, and so did my lungs and side. I don't remember the last time I ran like this. I feared for my life. I dreaded the thought of him getting his hands on me. I should have seen this coming. The cards had tried to tell me, but I had been so rushed this morning that I hadn't stopped to listen. Why didn't I?

“Don't be afraid! I won't hurt you,” he cackled. “Not in any way you won't come to enjoy, anyway.”

“Fuck off before I freeze your dick off!”

I turned just fast enough to throw a spell at him; his agile body dodged it, forcing a curse from my lips as I spun back to continue my run. It was the fifth spell he had dodged; a trail of ice was left behind like breadcrumbs in a forest.



“Was that meant to be my dick? A little off on the aim there, sweetheart.” The sound of his laughter sent a shiver down my spine. The sound held no joy. It was the laughter of a psycho—a beast toying with his prey.

Fuck that. I wasn't anyone's prey.

“Yeah, well, small targets are often hard to hit! Don't worry; I won't miss the next time!”

Home was just on the other side of the park. I had chosen to come this way to collect some herbs for Mom on my way home from work. I wanted to gather some since I noticed she was running low on black sage and remembered seeing some growing out on the cliffs. Now, I wished I hadn't: I wouldn't have caught his attention. I wouldn't be running for my life, listening to his taunts and teases.

“When I get you, I'm gonna huff and puff and blow your mind, Little Riding Hood. Just you wait.”

“Go to hell, you overgrown fur ball!” I yelled, tumbling over loose rocks and barely catching my balance. The last thing I needed was to be caught due to my clumsiness. That's how killers in movies caught girls. I wasn't the opening scene girl. I was the final girl. I wouldn't allow myself to become a werewolf's chew toy.

I threw another spell over my shoulder, cursing as it hit the path behind him, the crystal shimmer of ice catching the moonlight.

“Come on, Riding Hood. I promise you will like it. Who doesn’t like it when their mate makes them scream?”

“Well, I’m not your mate!” I growled over my shoulder, twisting and throwing another spell at him, my aim finally finding its mark. “So, take your popsicle dick to her.”

My spell wrapped his feet in ice, holding him still. He let out a feral growl as I kept running, working the magic spell to hide my scent as I ran while covering my tracks. I had to move fast. I couldn’t hold the ice spell for long. He would be free and searching for me; the last thing I wanted was to lead him home.

I could hear his howl echoing behind me, my scent blending with the ocean and the wet sand that fragranced the park. His howl turned to snarls, screaming in rage at the loss of my scent as I ducked and weaved along the rocky cliffs.

“I’ll find you!” he howled in rage somewhere behind me. “You can try and hide all you want! But I always get what I want. Don’t you forget that, Little Mate.”

Still, I didn’t stop running. Not until my feet hit the pavement, and I narrowly dodged a car before jumping onto the sidewalk and running up the path to my family home.

“Aye! Paige, what are you doing running in here like that?” Mom cried out, startled by my sudden crash through the front door.

I glanced out the door’s peephole, panting as I caught my breath. I made sure he hadn’t followed me. Only when I saw

the nearly empty street, with no one out of the ordinary walking around did I relax.

“Sorry, Mom,” I gasped, pressing my hand to my chest.

“What are you so worked up about?”

I shook my head, not wanting to worry her further, confident that I had eliminated the threat. He couldn’t find me without my scent, and I covered my tracks well. It was a big city; what were the chances of coming across him again?

“Nothing. I thought it was going to storm,” I lied, wincing at the very clear night sky.

Mom frowned and rolled her eyes at me. “Well, go get cleaned up. Did you eat dinner?”

“Yeah, I ate at work,” I answered, walking to the stairs to go to my room.

“Paige,” Mom called as my foot hit the first step.

“Yeah?”

“You’re tracking in sand. Take off your shoes and put your clothes in the laundry.” I heard her sigh, the rest of her words spoken under her breath. “Sometimes I wonder if fairies or spirits didn’t bring me a changeling. That girl cuts years off of my life, I swear.”

I smirked, taking my shoes off and carrying them up the stairs to clean them before getting ready for bed. My heart was still thumping in my chest from the chase through the woods; now that I had time to look down at myself, I could see just how

filthy I was. Sand and seaweed covered my jeans. Dry grass and weeds stuck out of my hair, and there were newly acquired holes in my shirt.

Walking into the bathroom, I sighed, looking over my appearance. My faded, purple-streaked hair was a mess, and one of the hoops in my nose turned upward at an odd angle. I flicked it back down with my finger, noticing that one of the stones on my ring was gone.

“For fuck’s sake,” I groaned.

It was the new tourmaline ring I had just bought a few days ago. I usually buy stones with the purpose of heightening my specialty, divination, but that one was meant for protection. However, it was a common rule with any crystal. They aren’t meant to last forever, and once they have done what you need from them, the universe takes them back.

*“I guess tonight took its entire ability.”*

I took a brisk shower, pulling grass and more weeds from my hair before going to my room and crawling into bed. The night had been filled with more excitement than I cared to ever experience again for a lifetime. I knew I’d be asleep as soon as my head hit the pillow. Reaching out to the lamp beside my bed, I switched it off.

Darkness filled my vision. Unnatural darkness. Void of all light. It wasn’t right. My window blinds had been opened. There should at least be moonlight coming in. My breath caught in my throat as fear crept inside my chest.

Light. I need light.

A bright light filled my entire vision as if answering my silent plea. Too bright, it only served to blind me just as much as the pitch-black darkness. I covered my eyes, trying to turn around and guard myself against the assault of the light, but something pulled me toward it.

A figure appeared at the center of the light. Broad shoulders were blocking out the brightness just enough to help my eye adjust to the sudden brightness around us. Something about him felt familiar; I just couldn't quite place it. It was like I had known him a lifetime and then some.

I stepped closer, squinted my gaze to try and see his face, but he was nothing but a silhouette in my view.

"Who are you?" I asked, my voice a whisper that echoed around us.

He held his hand out to me, my legs moving forward to take hold of it. Just as I touched him, his figure began to morph. His body contorted, his ears turning to points atop his head, his mouth extending into a snout, and his hands and feet turning into paws as he dropped to all fours. A howl burst from his lips. My heart leaped into my throat as I realized what was happening.

"No!" I screamed, throwing my hands out to cast a spell against him, but nothing happened. "What?"

I tried repeatedly, but nothing happened. Looking up at the werewolf, his eyes glowed as he pierced me with his gaze. A

whispered voice filled my head with a singular word, sending ice of fear through my veins.

*“Mate.”*

Knock. Knock. Knock.

I jumped up in bed, my heart beating a million miles an hour. Sunlight poured through the open blinds of my window, the sound of seagulls coming through the windowpane.

“Paige, are you still in bed?” Mom called from the other side of the door before letting herself in with a basket of clean laundry. “What are you doing? Get up! Get dressed! We have company.”

I stared at her in confusion, my mind still trying to process what had happened. The last thing I remembered was going to bed and turning off my light.

“What are you looking at me like that for?” Mom demanded, putting away the laundry she had brought in with her.

“What time is it?” I asked, shaking myself and looking away from Mom. I was beginning to piece everything together. A premonition had taken hold of me last night, brought on by the stalker in the park. The werewolf. My fucking mate.

“It’s half past noon,” Mom answered. “Get up. Your brother is here with his friend, Nyte.”

She smiled at me, excited for my brother’s long-time best friend and the soon-to-be Alpha of the Coronado Pack.

“Andale!” she demanded, swishing her hands at me in a shooing motion.

“Okay, okay!”

I pushed back the covers and rolled out of my bed, watching Mom close the door behind her. I could hear Anthony and Nyte downstairs calling out for something to eat. That was usually the first thing out of my brother’s mouth when he came home.

At the sound of Nyte’s voice, however, my back straightened. An idea began to form, something I’m sure no one has ever dared to think about—defying fate.

*Paige.*

I turned my head at the sound of the voice whispering to me, my eyes landing on my tarot deck beside my bed. They were hand-painted. My grandmother had created them before gifting me the deck when my specialty became apparent. They were my prized possession and the greatest tool of my craft.

*Let us help you.*

I smiled, hoping they would tell me my plan would be just crazy enough to work. Quickly, I shuffled the deck before drawing three cards and placing them on the bed before me. The four wands, the moon, and the hierophant stared back at me. My eyes narrowed at the moon, the sign of hidden enemies, no doubt pointing towards my supposed mate—the psychopath from the park. The four wands was a sign of good

results coming with the choice I had made, paired with the hierophant for alliance. I was convinced my plan would work.

Collecting my cards, I dressed quickly and rushed downstairs to the kitchen. Anthony stood by the stove eating an apple as he talked Mom's ear off about his latest adventures. However, everything faded as my eyes landed on Nyte. I could feel the same familiar butterflies in my stomach that I had always felt around him since Anthony first brought him home. His grey eyes met mine, and his lips with the perfect cupid's bow lifted in a smirk.

It took me a minute to collect and remind myself what I needed to do. Walking up to the table, I leaned forward and looked at Nyte, his eyebrow lifting in interest.

"Can I have a word with you, in private?" I asked, nodding toward the front porch.

"What do you need to talk to him about?" Anthony asked, suddenly losing interest in bragging to Mom.

"What part of a private word, don't you understand?" I asked back, resting my hands on my hips.

"Yeah," Nyte spoke up between us. "You can talk to me." He brushed his hands through his chestnut-colored hair, smirking as he caught me watching how his bicep popped out.

We went out to the porch, closing the door behind us so Mom and Anthony wouldn't hear our conversation. The last thing I needed was for one of them to jump in with their opinions.



“So,” Nyte asked, crossing his arms and leaning against the column. “What did you want to talk to me about?”

“I want you to pretend to be my fiancé,” I blurted out before I lost my confidence in this plan. “Only until I can find a way to sever the ties of the fated mate bond.”

Nyte’s eyebrows rose into his hairline, his eyes widening like saucers.

“You want to sever a mate bond?”

“Yes, mine. It’s a long story, but I had a premonition about my mate, I’m pretty sure that it’s this creep who was chasing me through the park last night, and I can’t do it. I know that people like to think that the mate bond is never wrong, but this time, it is.”

Nyte’s eyes darkened, his brows dropping back from his hairline and creasing.

“Someone was chasing you last night?” he growled, the sound sending shivers through my chest into my stomach.

“Yes,” I answered, watching his jaw tick with anger. “But I lost him. I covered my scent, but he will find me if he is truly my mate. That’s how it works, right? But he can’t have me if I’m already someone else’s mate.”

Nyte looked over my head; his gaze locked into the distance as he stood in front of me in thought. Just when I thought he was going to tell me “No,” doubting my plan, his eyes fell back to me.

“I’ll do it,” he said, “under one condition.”

“Yes! Anything! Whatever it is, I’ll do it.” I said without thinking.

“If we’re going to do this, we will do it right. Which means you are going to come live with me at the packhouse.”

It was my turn to lose my eyebrows in my hairline. I stepped back, grabbing the porch’s handrail as my thighs hit a baluster. I hadn’t expected that to be his condition. But to say I was entirely opposed to it would be a lie. It would be nice to get out from under my parent’s roof, even if it was only temporary; it would give me more time to sever the bond.

I looked back up at Nyte, my head bobbing in a quick nod. “Deal,” I said, holding my hand out to him.

## CHAPTER TWO

Nyte

“Deal,” I answered, accepting her hand and giving it a firm shake. I smiled at how her body tilted forward, then fell back at my acceptance of her deal. I was careful not to laugh as she tried to play off her momentary lapse in balance, clearing her throat and smiling up at me as if she had won the lottery.

I don't blame her for being surprised by how easily I had agreed to her proposal. Werewolves and witches didn't usually get along. One myth believes that all werewolves came from a curse. It is a curse that is still around even today, although its last known use was centuries ago. In fact, the last family known to suffer the curse had only broken it a couple of decades ago with the birth of a daughter between the descendants of the witch who cast the spell and the wolf it was placed on.

Some hated the witches believing they had punished some ancestor over a thousand years ago. Others hated them because they felt the rumor gave the witches too much power over

werewolves and the belief that we are better than witches who, aside from their magic, were just humans compared to us.

Not every werewolf is cursed. Some, like my current pack's alpha, are bitten, while others, like me, are born werewolves. It doesn't make a difference in the pack's hierarchy which way one becomes a werewolf. A human bitten can still come out as a powerful alpha and a born werewolf can be the weakest member of the pack.

The only thing that werewolves can't seem to get over is their mistrust of witches. It's practically ingrained in our DNA, making it all the more interesting that I became best friends with Anthony and was accepted by his entire family.

I had known Paige since she was sixteen when I came home with her brother from Pacific Academy at Fifteen. At the time, she was just my best friend's annoying little sister. However, two years later, I was hit with one hell of a surprise when I came for a visit on her eighteenth birthday.

She had grown so much in that short time. Her mom had been going off on her for getting her nose pierced again, making it three piercings, a ring in each nostril, and her septum. I could barely pay attention to their argument since my nose filled with the sweet aroma of her skin. My eyes locked on every flip and movement of her purple-streaked hair.

She was my mate.

It had taken everything in me not to pounce on her right then and there to claim what was mine. But she hadn't been ready. I would have only frightened her had I done so. It probably

would have confused her as well; and at the time, I had been just as confused. It wasn't typical for a werewolf and a witch to be mates—especially a future alpha and a promising witch from a powerful family. Logically, we both should belong to someone of our own kind.

Although I hadn't claimed her, I still made sure she was safe. I ran off any potential date. I guarded her throughout the day and night, except for last night.

I ground my teeth at the thought of her being chased through Sunset Cliffs National Park. I knew she sometimes took that route home, usually to collect native herbs and plants for her mother's spell work. Had I known she was going to take that route last night, I would have made sure to be there to guard her, but instead, I was at the packhouse accepting the official title of the next in line to be Alpha.

I had always known that I would take over. Last night was more for show and tradition than anything, but I would have skipped it in a heartbeat if I had known she needed me. I held back a growl of agitation at the thought of her running scared and being chased by some unknown werewolf bastard.

“So when should I move in then?” Paige asked, snapping me from the thoughts. “My promotion has me a little on edge, and the cards showed me that a hidden enemy is in my present time—so the sooner, the better to get all this going.”

“You'll move in tonight,” I informed her, walking back to the door to her house to let her mother and brother know.

“Whoa, wait! Hold on, I know I said the sooner, the better, but can I at least have time to tell Mom what’s going on and pack my stuff?”

“Don’t worry, darling,” I assured her, opening the door. “I’ll handle all that.”

“Handle all of what?” Anthony asked from the kitchen table, scowling at the both of us.

I smirked at my friend, throwing my arm over Paige’s shoulder and pulling her into my side before presenting her mom with the killer smile I knew melted her heart every time I showed it.

“Paige and I are mate bond snapped in place!” I announced proudly.

“Thank Venus! My prayers are answered!” Her mother cheered, throwing her hands in the air.

Paige stood dumbstruck, staring at her mother before turning to Anthony, who was still scowling between us, his eyes narrowing on Paige’s face.

“I’m going to have to move her to the packhouse tonight, Mrs. Ramirez. I’m sorry to take your daughter away on such short notice, but it’s pack law for mates to live together.”

“No, no!” Mrs. Ramirez exclaimed. “I understand. I’ll go and get her things packed. Important things first, then you can come back for the rest.” She moved toward the stairs, paused, and ran up to hug Paige and me. “Welcome officially to the family!”

Paige followed her mother up the stairs, calling her to slow down and not touch her things. I smiled after her, ignoring her scowling brother seated at the table.

“What the fuck was that?” he demanded.

“I told you,” I said, turning to him as Paige disappeared from view. “Our mate bond snapped into place.”

“That’s total bullshit, and we both know it.” He crossed his arms over his chest, leaning back into his chair. “You told me just yesterday that she wasn’t ready to accept it yet...that you were still waiting. What the hell changed?”

“Someone followed her through the park last night,” I admitted, his eyes darkening as I explained. “He led her to believe that he was her mate, and now she wants to find a way to dissolve a mateship.”

“What does that have to do with you announcing that she’s your mate? Did you tell her or something?”

I shook my head. “No, she thinks that this is an act. She asked me to pretend to help her avoid whoever followed her last night until she finds the spell to reject the bond.”

Anthony walked over to me, his dark brown eyes piercing into mine. “What are you going to do about the pack?”

I gave him a cocky grin, lazily shrugging my shoulder. “As far as I’m concerned, an alpha does what he wants. If they don’t like the mate that fate has gifted me, then they aren’t my problem.”

“Derrick isn’t going to like it,” Anthony mused. “Aren’t you the only one he’s even considered taking his place as Alpha?”

“Yeah, he’ll be fine. Even if the pack rejects my claim as Alpha, he won’t kick me from the pack. Not with everything else going on. He needs all the strength he can get on his side.”

“How the hell do you put on a shirt?” Anthony asked, confusing me by the change in topic.

“What? Same as you. What the hell kind of question is that?”

“Well, with that big ass head of yours, I wasn’t sure,” he said as I punched his arm, his laughter mixed with a groan. At the sound of his mother and sister bickering over what clothes were deemed necessary, Anthony straightened his back and looked at me.

He was still rubbing his arm, but his face was back to a serious expression. “You better take care of her, Nyte. I know she and I talk a lot of shit together, and I think she’s the most annoying little shit alive, but that’s my baby sister. And best friend or not, if you hurt her, I’ll kill you.”

I smiled, patting his shoulder reassuringly. “I won’t hurt her,” I promised. *Not in any way she wouldn’t like.* I added silently to myself.

When Paige returned from her room carrying a suitcase and a duffle bag, I took the bags from her and led the way out to my car. I packed everything inside, looking back at the porch to find Mrs. Ramirez coming out with a third bag, holding it out to a confused Paige.



“I’ve been saving this for you, Mija, for when you find your true love. As a girl, my mother gave me what she called a Hope Chest. It was filled with so many things she hoped for in my life. She gave it to me on my wedding day. This is my Hope Bag for you.”

“Mom,” Paige gasped, trying to return it to her. “Don’t give it to me; I’m not getting married yet.”

“Marriage is a human construct, Paige,” she said, pressing the bag into Paige’s hands. “A mate bond is deeper than marriage; it is timeless. It is the purest form of true love that you will ever know, rivaled only by your love for your future children. I am giving this to you now because there is no better time than when you seal a bond forged by fate.”

I smiled at her mother’s words, even though I knew they hurt Paige’s heart. She didn’t know how accurate her mother’s words were for her now. She thought she was lying to her family and it would break their hearts when they learned what she thought was the truth. There was also fear in her scent because she believed whoever chased her last night was her mate. She also feared that her mother’s words about the bond would bind her to him no matter how hard she fought against it.

Paige forced a sad smile, turning from her mom with the bag in hand toward my car. I took the Hope Bag from her, placing it in the back with the other two bags, but as she began to open the passenger side door, I stopped her, her eyes turning up to me in question.

“One more thing,” I said.

“What’s that?”

“This.” I pulled her head to the side, dropping my mouth down into the crook of her neck. My teeth sank into her skin, her voice gasping in surprise as the mark shot fire through each of our veins. She wouldn’t understand what I had done. She would think it was just to add to our show of pretending; I would allow her to believe that, for now.

I lifted my head from her neck, smiling at the mark I left behind and the shift of her scent. My scent began to mix with hers. Not as much as a fully sealed bond, but enough that any wolf who smelled her would know who she was and who she belonged to. My pack wouldn’t be happy about this. They may even demand that I be removed from the pack entirely, but I didn’t give a shit what they thought or did. Paige was mine, and I wasn’t going to let some obsessive stalker try and take her away.

Paige reached up to her neck, pulling back her hand as she expected to see blood. There wasn’t any. The mark was different from a typical bite. It wasn’t the same kind of bite that would turn her into a werewolf or leave a physical mark for just anyone to see. It was something that only other werewolves would notice: a scent marker between mates. And while it can be reversed if two people are only lovers and not truly fated mates, this mark would stay on her for the rest of her life. If she thought she would find some magical remedy to get rid of my mark, to get rid of me, she was going to be in for

a rude awakening. Once I take what I want, I never let it go, and that was precisely why I held back until she was ready.

I smiled as she glared up at me, her hand dropping to her side. I stepped out of her way, opening the door wider for her to slide into the seat before closing the door. Anthony's glaring gaze met me from over his mother's shoulder, Mrs. Ramirez smiling and waving goodbye to Paige through the window.

This wasn't exactly how I wanted to take Paige as my mate. It wasn't the right time or the right situation, nothing like what I had promised Anthony when I revealed to him that his sister and I were mates. But the fates have a funny way of pushing for what they want, and they knew just what strings to pull with Paige and her sight abilities. What better way to influence a seer's decisions than to give her a partial premonition that forced her right into her mate's arms for protection?

*Well played, you devious bitches. Well played.*

I slid into the driver's seat of my car, buckling my seatbelt and revving the engine before pulling away from the curve.

"Did you really have to bite me?" Paige demanded, scowling at me from across the middle console.

"Come on, Paige," I teased, looking back at her with a wide smile. "You know you liked the way it made you feel."

She turned away quickly to hide the blush peaking beneath her cheeks, but she didn't deny it. It was a fact that only served to widen my grin as I turned my head forward to keep an eye on traffic as it picked up around us.

“But yes,” I added. “I had to give you my mark before we get to the packhouse. It’s the best way to sell our mate bond to other wolves.”

Paige stiffened in her seat, realizing what it was I was telling her.

I smiled. *That’s right, little darling. No going back now.*

## CHAPTER THREE

Paige

“Is it permanent?” I asked, touching my neck where Nyte had marked me.

I kept thinking that it should be wet: I should find blood on my neck. His teeth had felt so deep in my skin, but each time I touched the spot, it was as dry as the rest of my body. Smooth even, the indentation of his teeth already faded from my skin.

“It’s as permanent as a tattoo or those piercings you are so fond of,” he replied, reaching over and flicking my septum ring with a chuckle.

I swatted his hand away, glaring back at him again. “So, it can be removed then. They have tattoo removals, and the piercing can heal if I remove the rings.”

Nyte growled as if annoyed by my insistence to know that I wouldn’t be walking around the rest of my life with a mate mark of a man who most likely would find his real mate, someone who deserved his mark sooner or later.

“Yeah, it can be removed so long as a pair aren’t fated mates.”

“Good,” I sighed in relief, watching the neighborhood change as we drove deeper into Point Loma toward the packhouse. “If it were something you couldn’t take back, I would have felt like a serious dick for whoever your future mate is. This should belong to her and not me, right?”

Nyte smirked, keeping his eyes on the road. “Yeah, that mark belongs to my mate.”

“Well then,” I looked away from him, a small piece of my heart tightening at the thought of someone else being so lucky as to call him theirs. “It’s a good thing you can reverse this then. And I promise you, Nyte, that it won’t be long. I have a friend at the Academy, so she can get me any books I might need for my research. I’ll be out of your hair in no time.”

“I don’t mind you being in my hair,” Nyte said, sending zaps of electricity through my belly.

I tightened my thighs, hating how much I loved how the words sounded coming from him. They were so innocent, yet they sounded so dirty and sinful on his lips. I had to look away again, focusing on anything but the warmth growing between my legs with every impure thought that crossed my mind.

I needed to get my mind out of the gutter and get real. I knew how messy relationships between werewolves and witches could be. It wasn’t easy even when the witch and werewolf were fated mates. My friend Grace proved that when she met her mate, Rome. An entire pack of werewolves came after her to prevent them from being together. They were true fated

mates, not just a young witch crushing on her brother's hot werewolf friend.

Granted, a psychotic vampire stirred that shit pot to boiling to keep them apart, but the facts remained. Matches between our kinds were rare, and when they did happen, it was never easy. Witches and werewolves didn't typically trust one another.

There has always been a power struggle between the two, but some bad vamps have recently exploited it to their advantage. Mom told me about an entire city where the werewolves and witches were close, but only in the last few decades. Before that, werewolves practically enslaved the witches, policed their magic, and took their children hostages to ensure their laws were followed. Mix that with the history of some witches cursing normal humans to turn into werewolves, and it was no wonder the two groups didn't get along.

"When we get to the packhouse, stay close to me at all times," Nyte commanded as if he knew what I had been thinking about.

"Do you think someone in your pack would hurt me?" I asked.

Nyte shook his head. "I wouldn't put it past some of my packmates. I may trust them with my life, but that doesn't mean I'd trust them with yours. Oh, and Paige," he said and paused, looking over at me. "No matter what you hear in the packhouse, I already agreed to help you. So, don't even think for a minute that I'll take back my word."

I smiled, fidgeting with the rings on my fingers. "Thank you, Nyte."

We reached the packhouse shortly after that. The building looked like any other home in the area. There was even a path from the porch down to the shores below. I plan to spend some time down there during my stay with Nyte. I hadn't exactly gotten to enjoy the scenery last night when I was running for my life. Having a direct path down to the beach from here would be nice.

Nyte pulled out my bags and suitcase from the back of his car, joining me on the sidewalk before gently pressing his hand to my back to guide me to the house. My heart pounded as eyes turned toward us, glaring as the scent of Nyte's mark reached them. A few turned to one another, whispering with appalled expressions before following us into the house.

"Nyte," a deep voice called the moment we entered. "What the hell is going on?"

We both looked up at the top of the staircase to see a large, heavily built man glaring at Nyte and me, his nostrils flaring as he breathed deeply.

"Why is there a witch in my packhouse with your scent on her?"

Nyte wrapped his arm around my shoulder just as he had before announced to Mom that we were mates, the exact words pouring from his lips now to the horror of his pack. "It's customary for mates to live together, and I just assumed you wouldn't want me moving from the packhouse at this time."

The man's face turned red as the hair pulled atop his head in a knot, his eyes narrowing at Nyte and me. "So, your mate is a



witch, then?”

“How can his mate be a witch? He’s meant to be our Alpha. We can’t have a witch as our Luna!” A man behind us called out.

“I can think of at least two witch Lunas in the world right now,” a girl just to my right piped up, her head tilting curiously at me.

“I refuse to follow a witch as our Luna! Nyte needs to choose. Pack or the witch!”

More voices added, drowning out the few who voiced more accepting opinions on my presence in the pack. I bit on my lip, mentally kicking myself in the ass for doing this to Nyte. I knew he was next in line to be alpha, but I didn’t think my plan all the way through. The pack’s response to me hadn’t been a surprise, but their quick demands to force Nyte to pick between me and his future in the pack had not completely occurred to me.

His words in the car echoed in my mind now. It had been a warning as well as a promise. He knew that this was going to happen, and he had already made up his mind on what he was choosing. I looked up at him; his lips tilted in a disobedient smile as he looked back at his alpha, still standing at the top of the stairs.

“I guess I have no choice then,” he called out for everyone to hear over their shouts. The pack grew quiet, a few smirking at me as though they believed he would choose them, only for

their jaws to drop when he proved them wrong. “I choose my mate.”

Shock rose from the pack, their voices overlapping in panic and outrage. Angry shouts pointed at me, the looks in their eyes spelling murder. Nyte pulled me closer to his side, his gaze never leaving the Alpha on the stairs, but his attention was just as trained on the pack surrounding us. Not a single movement went past him. Judging by the hairs raised along his neck, no one would go unpunished if they attempted to come any closer to me.

His warning in the car played back in my mind, along with his promise to help me. He knew his pack better than I had imagined. Everything he had expected to happen did happen. The possibility of one of the pack members attempting to harm seemed very real, though not a single one dared to make a move.

His pack ranked themselves by strength. The strongest was Alpha, and the second strongest tended to be Beta. It differed from many of the packs I had heard about who passed packs from parent to child. Alphas tend to be a hereditary group, but in the cases of bites, it was a fifty-fifty chance, which was why Nyte’s pack had forgone the tradition of passing packs onto their children. A bitten wolf could be alpha, but a bitten wolf’s children only had a fifty percent chance of being werewolves if the bitten wolf took a born wolf as a mate. Otherwise, they would all be just as human as the bitten wolf before the bite.

The only time a former human has ever been known to pass a werewolf gene onto their children was in the case of curses; and as with all spells, there were stipulations to that.

“You choose to turn away the position that you pledged to take on just last night in front of the entire pack?” The alpha asked Nyte, snapping me out of my head and silencing the angry pack around us.

Nyte shrugged. “I didn’t know I would have a witch mate today. Otherwise, I wouldn’t have pledged at all.”

The alpha closed his eyes, pressing his fingers to the bridge of his nose as if he could feel a headache forming. Looking back at the pack, he sighed. “Very well, since the pack refuses your mate as their future Luna, you are relieved of your responsibility to take over as pack alpha. Now get your ass up here; we have some business to discuss.”

“Alpha!” one of the men called out in shock, looking up the stairs. “You’re allowing him to remain in the packhouse after refusing to choose the pack?”

“Alberto, to be completely honest, I don’t give a flying fuck that he picked his mate over taking on my position. There are far more pressing matters to handle, and since Nyte is still the strongest wolf within Coronado, I would be an idiot to kick him out of the pack right now. If you don’t like it, there’s the fucking door.”

Alberto dropped his head, backing up a step in submission. I could almost hear the whine of his wolf as he retreated. Nyte

looked down at me and then behind me, beckoning the girl behind me to come forward.

“Madilyn, take care of my mate while I go with the Alpha. Don’t let anyone come within five feet of her,” he instructed. She bobbed her head in response, hooking our arms together.

“No one will lay a finger on her, Nyte. I promise you that.”

He turned back to me, brushing a purplish strand of hair out of my face. “Stay with Madilyn. Don’t let her small size fool you. She was primed to be my beta if I had become Alpha, so she’s the second strongest wolf in the pack; she can protect you just as easily as me.”

I looked over at the girl whose arm was linked to mine. Her blonde pixie cut accentuated the sharp angles of her face. She smiled at me brightly, a twinkle in her light blue eyes. She had been the one who tried to remind the pack of the two witches known to be Lunas in the world. One is my friend Grace.

As I looked back at Nyte, I nodded. “Okay, I’ll wait with her for you.” I wasn’t dumb. I wasn’t going to argue with him. I had no business listening to whatever his alpha had to discuss with him, and I wasn’t about to turn down a babysitter while sitting in a house filled with werewolves aching to kill me. Never once had I considered the possibility that asking Nyte to pretend to be my mate would be so dangerous. I thought it had been a foolproof plan to protect myself, but it looked like I was the fool.

Nyte turned away from me and made his way up the stairs, something inside me feeling vulnerable with the disappearance

of his strong arms around me. Madilyn led me to a room just under the stairs, a low growl vibrating in her chest whenever anyone attempted to approach us or came too close.

The room was bigger than I had expected. And very, very pink. I stared in shock and awe at the collection of stuffed animals piled on a plush chair in the corner, turning to look at Madilyn for an explanation of why this had been the room she chose to bring me to.

“Sorry for the mess,” she sighed, walking around me to pick up a few items of clothing I hadn’t noticed off the floor. I had been too shocked by the bright color of the room and the decorations to notice what she considered a mess. “I wasn’t expecting company in my room today.”

“Oh,” I gasped, looking around. “This is your room?”

Madilyn smirked, dropping down on the edge of her bed. “Yeah, I haven’t redecorated the room since I was ten. It’s a little jarring, I know.”

“No, no. It’s not that bad.”

Madilyn let out a chuckle as she shook her head. “Has anyone told you that you are a terrible liar?”

I felt my face drop, a heavy stone of fear dropping into my stomach. “What?”

“You don’t have to be polite. I know my room is bright and very girly. It doesn’t match the room of the second strongest wolf of the pack.”

I let out a sigh. I had been worried she saw through my and Nyte's lies. I knew that some wolves could smell lies and deception, and given that she was a powerful she-wolf, I was worried that she would be one of them.

"I mean, yeah," I admitted reluctantly. "It was a little hard on the eyes walking in. I almost pulled out my sunglasses to keep from going blind."

Madilyn laughed; the sound was pure and joyful. "Well, I'm glad it didn't blind you. Now, I smell some familiar magic from your bag. Would those be tarot cards?"

I smiled, the faint whisper of my cards promising a reading for the she-wolf. "They are. And they would like to read you, if you don't mind."

## CHAPTER FOUR

Nyte

I wasn't surprised by the pack's rejection of Paige as their Luna. I would have been prepared to step down had I been the Alpha when she was ready to accept me as her mate. If anything, this made things less messy on my end. I also wasn't surprised that Alpha Alexander didn't force me out of the packhouse. Instead, he brought me in for this meeting.

"Another pack has gone missing," he said when the door closed behind me.

My back stiffened at the news. "Which one?"

"The Ocean Beach pack."

"Shit," I scrubbed my hands over my face. "They were under our protection until they found a strong Alpha. How the hell did they go missing under our watch?"

Alexander shook his head. "They disappeared overnight; from the look of it, there was barely even a struggle. I don't know how or who is doing this, but we must get to the bottom of it.

The Ocean Beach Pack may not have had an Alpha, but they were nearly as big as us. And they are closer to our territory than the last pack taken had been.”

“Does the La Jolla Pack know anything?” I asked.

“No, they are just as concerned as we are. They’ve reported many of their smaller pack branches disappearing in the same way around their territory.”

Alexander stood behind his desk with a map of San Diego opened up in front of him. He pointed to each point on the map where a small pack had vanished.

“National City, Imperial Beach, Pacific Beach, Mission Beach, and now Ocean Beach. The packs in each area went without so much as a scent trail to follow. The only sign they ever existed are the few marks of claws that had been made during a struggle.” Alexander leveled me with his gaze. “You couldn’t have picked a worse time to choose a damn witch as your mate, Nyte. We must keep the pack together; you’re the only one strong enough to protect them. Whatever the hell this is, I don’t stand a chance against it without you.”

“Odd thing for an Alpha to admit,” I commented, letting my eyes drop to the map on his desk.

He pointed again at the map; his finger pointed to Imperial Beach. “Alpha Morales may have had a small pack, but he could kick my ass with both hands tied behind his back. He’s gone along with the rest of the missing packs. So, yeah, I will admit full-heartedly that I can’t take on whatever the hell is



coming our way. And now you won't be able to either...not unless you have the pack willing to follow you.”

He scrubbed his face with his hands, turning away from his desk with a frustrated groan. “Why now? Why did you have to bring her here now?”

I let out a sigh. I had told him back when he first told me he expected me to take over that I had found my mate and who she was. I wanted it to be clear that when the time came, I would choose her if the pack forced me to choose. He understood then, and he respected my choice in waiting to claim her until she was ready. He encouraged it even for the sake of my place as the future Alpha. And now I had gone and fucked it all up for him.

“Sometimes fate gets in the way of our plans.”

I didn't wait for him to dismiss me. I knew that our meeting was over. Without any clues as to who was taking the packs, there wasn't much else for us to discuss, and I wanted to get Paige to my room as quickly as possible.

Madilyn was a strong wolf, and I trusted her with my life. Had the pack accepted Paige as my Luna, it would have been part of Madilyn's duties as a Beta to guard my mate, but my wolf was on edge from being separated from Paige before we sealed the bond completely. Even with her only downstairs, it felt like I was miles away from her.

As I hit the bottom step of the stairs, I was stopped by one of the last people I wanted to see right now.

“This is a joke, right?” Katya demanded.

The she-wolf had been pursuing me for just over a year now. Ever since it had become clear to the rest of the pack that I was meant to be the next Alpha. Most of the men in the pack wanted her. They didn't care if she was their fated mate or not, often joking that they would reject their mates just for a night with her. I didn't see the appeal in that. There was no denying that she was beautiful, but she wasn't Paige. And any man who claimed they would choose her over their true mate clearly didn't understand the depth of the bond.

Katya tossed her long chestnut hair over her shoulder; the scent of sea salt and suntan lotion filled my nostrils. She was the classic California beauty. Beach waves in her hair, sun-kissed skin from spending hours on the beach. She was tall with a slim figure. I had been out in public several times with her and others in the pack. Humans would always do a double take when she walked by, questioning whether she was a celebrity they should know about.

“Is what a joke?” I asked, my tone bored.

“This whole fiasco with that witch. You can't be serious about taking her as your mate. No one in their right mind would turn down being Alpha for a witch!”

“Whoever said I was in my right mind never really met me,” I told her, pushing her out of my path. “No man who knows the pull of a mate bond is in their right mind, Katya. At least not until the bond is sealed. And even then, I wouldn't regret my decision.”

I had already reached Madilyn's door, pushing it open and closing it on Katya before she could reply. Looking around, I found my mate and Madilyn sitting on her bed, an array of cards strewn out before them.

"Looks like you do have a mate out there," Paige said, running her fingers over the hand-painted pictures. "But he isn't exactly close."

"When will I meet him?" Madilyn asked, anxiously looking down at the cards as if she could read them herself.

Paige looked up at her and smiled. "Soon. You will know him by the fire in his hair and the earthly depths of his eyes."

"Fire in his hair? What is he? A matchstick?" I chuckled, walking over and looking down at the cards. There were three cards laid out, their labels easily visible. The fool, the lover, and the knight of swords. I had never thought much about how Paige could tell the future from these cards. I often wondered why they hadn't told her I was her mate yet. But I could feel the confidence in her reading to Madilyn, and although I didn't understand them at all, I believed that whatever they told her would come true.

Paige smirked up at me. "The cards like to speak poetically, you smartass." She looked back at Madilyn. "He could have a mark from being burned somewhere along his hairline or simply have really red hair. You will know him when you see him, though; that much in the reading is clear."

Madilyn smiled. "Thank you, Paige. I believe you're right. I'm supposed to take a trip this spring. Maybe I'll find him then."

“Maybe so,” Paige agreed, collecting her cards and putting them back in the bag she kept with her. She turned her gaze up to me then, smiling. “I assume you came to get me.”

I felt myself swallowing nervously, my eyes locked on the perfect curve of her lips—images of everything I wanted to do to that mouth. “Yeah,” I forced out. “I figured you’d like to get unpacked in our room now.”

“Yeah.” She stood up, looking around my legs. “Where are my other bags?”

“Don’t worry,” I told her. “They’re already in our room. I slipped them in before going into Alexander’s office.”

“Oh good.” She looked back at Madilyn, the she-wolf smiling at her. “It was nice to meet you, Madi.”

“You too, Paige.” Madilyn waved as I led Paige from her room. I caught her flopping back and squealing into her pillow before I fully closed the door, smirking at how excited she was at the prospect of meeting her mate.

“So, my room is upstairs?” Paige asked, pointing to the staircase that Madilyn’s room sat under.

I nodded, pressing my hand to her back to lead her to our shared room. I smiled at the way she had phrased her question. *Her room.* As if I would allow her to be alone in a house full of werewolves willing to kill her just to have her out of the way of what they want.

Entering our room, I watched as she picked up her bags, setting each on the bed and pulling out stacks of clothes to put

away in the drawers. I did my best to hide my smile when I watched her pick up the pile of jean shorts first, walking over to my dresser to open the largest drawer at the bottom. She paused and stared at the filled drawer, her face going through an array of emotions. From confusion to embarrassment, her face twisted from a deep frown to a bright blush. She stood up quickly, looking back at me with widened eyes.

“I thought you were bringing me to my room.”

I nodded. “I did.” I walked over to her at the dresser, bending down and reorganizing the drawer to make room for her clothes. “Put those here. I’ll make room for your shirts next, and you will have your own underwear drawer all to yourself.”

She stood straighter, her eyes scanning the room, landing on the bed and searching again before returning to the bed. I remained kneeling by the dresser, watching her as she took in the entire room. A small part of me felt terrible for her as she realized the obvious.

There was only one bed.

“So...” she drew out the “O” of the word, still clutching the jean shorts in her arms. “This room is going to be for the both of us?”

I reached up, took the shorts from her arms, and placed them in the drawer where I had made room for them. “That’s right. I told you at your house. We would do this the right way. That includes sharing my room at the packhouse.”

“You didn’t say we’d have to share a room,” she argued. “You only said I would have to come live with you here.”

“And you said you would agree to anything for this arrangement,” I reminded her. “Did you really think there would just be open rooms for you to settle into while pretending to be my mate?”

“Don’t you have guest rooms for visiting Alphas?”

I let out a dark chuckle, returning my stormy grey eyes to her. I could hear the breath catch in her lungs. Her heartbeat picked up in tempo, but thankfully not from fear. I didn’t want my mate to fear me. Respect me, sure, but fear? Fear was meant for enemies, not mates. No, another emotion was causing her heart to race, driven by the look in my eyes. I could smell the excitement wafting in the air.

“How would I explain to the pack why my mate, whom I gave up my station for, wasn’t sleeping in my room?” I asked her, standing to my full height and looking down into her dark chocolate gaze. She swallowed hard, reflexively taking a step back.

“I don’t know.” Her voice was little more than a whisper as she fought to breathe.

I had always known she had a slight crush on me, but she had never seemed to be as affected by our bond as I was. Now, with my mark coursing through her veins, she was beginning to feel precisely the kind of torture I had endured since the day the bond had sparked inside me.

“They would be suspicious, Paige,” I answered for her. “And packs talk to each other.”

“Shit,” she whispered, understanding what I was hinting at.

It wasn't that I was worried that the wolf who chased her last night would find out. I knew he wasn't her mate and would never be able to track her as a mate can, but she didn't know that.

“Yeah,” I said, smirking. “Shit. Now go get your next stack of clothes while I make more room in the dresser for you.”

She frowned but did as I said, returning to the bed and retrieving the stacks of shirts she had unpacked. I placed them in the drawer with my shirts and began to clear out one of the smaller drawers for her to put her socks and underwear in.

“When we finish the drawers, you can take any of your bathroom supplies through those doors to the en suite,” I told her, pointing to the double doors that led to my private bathroom. “Oh, and Paige,” she paused to look at me, her arms reaching inside her suitcase for the remaining clothes.

“Yeah?”

I let myself give into an amused grin, the expression deepening her frown as she looked back at me. “I sleep on the right side of the bed. So, you can take the left side and put whatever you need near you at night on that nightstand.”

Her eyes widened again at the reminder of the single bed in the room, looking back at it and then at me again. I didn't say much else to her, tapping the drawer I had cleaned out as I

walked over to my chair next to the bookshelf and sat down to pretend to read while she finished unpacking.

I watched her move around the room, smelling her nervousness and excitement, battling for control. When she disappeared into the bathroom, I finally let my act fall at the sound of the shower turning on. I walked over to the hope bag her mom had given her, opening and looking at what her mother had hoped for her daughter, a smile spreading across my face at what I found.



## CHAPTER FIVE

Paige

We spent the entire day in his room. Even at dinner time, food had been delivered to his door by Madilyn. I realized she was the only wolf besides his Alpha, who he seemed to trust completely. Maybe it was because she hadn't balked at the idea of me as his Luna, even though I wasn't really his mate. This left me wondering why he would give up his future like he did for me.

I looked away from the TV on the wall across from his bed and the tray of food still on the mattress in front of me as he laughed at the underlining joke of the sitcom we were watching. My eyes trailed along his profile, the subtle curve of his nose. His strong chin and jawline. I couldn't imagine the kind of woman the fates would deem acceptable to be his mate; a part of me was jealous at the thought that it wouldn't be me. Not for real, at least.

"Would you like to take a picture?" Nyte asked, jolting me from my thoughts.

“What?”

He turned his head to look at me, smirking as he did. “You were staring pretty hard at me. I figured if you took a picture, it just might last a little longer.”

I scoffed, rolling my eyes to hide my embarrassment at being caught. “I was just wondering why you would give up your future to help me. I know I came to you and practically begged for your help, but that didn’t mean you had to blow up your entire life over it. I would have come up with another plan had you said no.”

Nyte shrugged, seeming completely unbothered. “My life is no different than it was yesterday afternoon. I didn’t ask to be the next in line. I never really wanted the position of alpha. So, as far as I’m concerned, nothing about my life is destroyed or ruined by helping you.” He smiled; the look he gave was genuine, sweet even. “I would have helped you regardless, however. You are more important to me than you realize.”

“Why? Because my brother is your best friend?” I chuckled, trying to hide how much I loved hearing him tell me I was important.

Nyte didn’t answer; he only shrugged and returned to watching his show and eating the rest of his dinner. When bedtime rolled around, he collected our trays and set them outside the door to be collected while I went to the bathroom to get ready for bed.

I found my toothbrush in the toiletry bag Mom sent with me, as well as my face wash and creams. I was already in my

pajamas. After I realized Nyte planned to keep me in the room all day, I didn't see a need to stay in my day clothes. I much rather be comfortable. In the other room, I could hear him opening and closing his drawers, getting himself ready for bed while I finished up in the bathroom.

When I came out, he walked past me in nothing but his boxer briefs, my traitorous eyes zeroing in on the front. My face heated with a blush as I all but ran back to the bed and dove beneath the covers, pulling the sheet over my head.

I heard him as he returned from the bathroom. I felt the mattress dip and the soft touch of air against my skin as he crawled into the bed behind me. My heart was racing, making the blush in my cheeks grow deeper from knowing he could hear it.

*Damn him and his werewolf senses!*

I focused on calming my heart, trying to figure out just why I was acting so crazy right now. It wasn't just my heart running wild right now. I could feel other parts of my body reacting to his being so near while picturing every line and dip of muscle along his naked chest. The deep V leading into his boxer briefs where a perfect bulge had been cradled, leaving nothing to the imagination.

The skin on my neck where Nyte had bitten me tingled as the thought of what he was hiding beneath his boxers crossed my mind. I touched the spot gingerly, thinking about what the mark meant. It was something that every wolf pairing had, even if they weren't fated mates. It was akin to a marriage, I

suppose. And married people were able to do things. Certain things that I very much wanted to do with Nyte. I had wanted to do them for a long time, but of course, I had never acted on them. But now the impulsive thoughts were coming in stronger. It was hard to ignore them with him so close and my body reacting so strongly.

Would it really be so bad to take advantage of this arrangement? The worst he could do was tell me no. I was a big girl. I could handle being told no. I only had to try.

Rolling over, I pulled the sheet from over my head, finding Nyte facing me, his eyes opening as he sensed my movement.

“I’m not getting out of my own bed, Paige,” he said.

“That’s okay,” I breathed, scooting closer to him, paying attention to his body language as I did. There was no sign of him pulling away from me, his brows drawing together curiously. “I wasn’t going to ask you to.”

I leaned forward and pressed my lips to his, my hand resting on his bare chest. I barely had time to enjoy the feel of his skin or the press of our lips before he took control. A gasp opened my mouth to him, his tongue stroking against mine. My back pressed down on the mattress, his body positioned over me and his hands cupping my face.

“You shouldn’t have done that, Little Darling,” he growled against my mouth, his hand moving to my throat and giving just enough pressure for me to feel him hold my life in his hands.

I lifted my chin, allowing him more of my neck to grab onto, a small pleading whimper passing my lips.

“Haven’t you learned by now that I do what I want? Not what I should?”

I felt him smile at my response, his teeth pulling at my bottom lip. “Do you know what you’ve gotten yourself into?”

I wrapped my arms around his neck, arching my back into him. “I’m fully aware.”

His hands lifted my shirt, fingers tracing the curve of my waist before reaching my breast and cupping it. I moaned between our lips as he pinched my hardened nipples, a mixture of pain and pleasure sending sparks of electricity to my core.

“You have no idea how long I’ve wanted to do this,” he whispered, his hand moving to give my other breast the same treatment as the first.

My stomach fluttered at the thought that he had been feeling the same desires. I wanted to know just how long he had wanted me. Was it as long as I had been wanting him? He pulled my shirt over my head, tossing it somewhere in the darkness. His lips and tongue left a trail of liquid fire as he kissed, bit, and licked his way down my neck. My back arched deeper against him, moan after moan urging him on.

“More,” I groaned, my nipple rolling between his teeth while his hand massaged the other. “I feel like I’m on fire, Nyte.”

He rose from me, his hands gripping the waistband of my pajama shorts and lifting my legs in the air as he pulled them

off. My thighs instinctively closed at the feel of cold air against my sex. I was feeling utterly exposed in a way I had never been before. His hands pulled them apart with a deep growl, his eyes glowing as the wolf inside him pushed to the surface.

I should have been terrified at that moment, seeing the predator staring back at me like I was his next meal. Instead, I felt even more excited. I allowed my legs to part for him, his shoulders pushing them farther apart as he nestled his head between my thighs.

A yelp burst from my lips as his tongue ran along my opening, circling the tip around my clit to send increased waves of pleasure straight to my core. My hips bucked against him, my body craving something I have never had before. It was something I couldn't put words to, but from the way Nyte held me in place, his fingers joining his tongue in wringing out pleasure from every nerve in my body, I knew that he knew exactly what I needed.

“Nyte,” I cried, his middle finger sliding inside me.

“Shhh,” he hushed me, the digit moving in circles against my inner wall. “Just relax. I got you.”

I bit my lip on a whimper, my hands covering my face as I withered beneath his touch. I could feel something building inside me with every lap and flick of his tongue, as another finger joined the first inside me. He began to pump the two digits in and out of me. The motion rocked my entire body, my hands flinging out to my sides to grip the bed sheet.

I could feel the snap of something inside me, my body tightening around Nyte. Even my thighs tightened around his head, holding him in place as waves of the most intense pleasure I had ever felt washed over me.

I wasn't a moron. I knew what an orgasm was. It wasn't my first one, but it was the best. I laid back against the pillows on the bed, panting as I thought over all the times in the past I had touched myself. Every orgasm I brought on alone in my room. None of those moments had come close to what Nyte had made me feel, and something told me that that was nothing compared to what was to come.

"Come here." The sound of his command nearly sent me right back into the whirlwind, my body barely able to move as I struggled to sit up. He had removed his boxer briefs already and was now sitting at full mast as he leaned against the footboard of his bed. "Put a knee at each side of my hips."

I did as he instructed, gasping at the feel of his head of his shaft pressing against me.

"Hold onto the board behind me," he said, resting his hands on my hips as he looked up at me. Again, I followed his directions, my fingers curling around the wooden footboard. "Don't clench."

Slowly, he pressed down on my hips, forcing me to sit on his cock as the head began pushing inside me. I bit my lip, my fingers digging into the wood as I gripped it harder. I could feel my body pressing against him, not used to anything so significant entering me.

“Don’t clench, little darling,” Nyte reminded me, lifting his hips while he inched me lower onto him.

I took a deep breath, nodding to him as I fought for my body to relax. He watched me breathe in and out, each exhale pressing himself deeper inside me. On the fourth breath, he jerked me down and covered my mouth with his, swallowing the cry as it ripped up my throat.

“Shhh,” he muttered. He moved his mouth, kissing my cheeks while he held me in place, my body filling so full of him inside me. “It’s okay, just relax.” He continued to soothe me, kissing my cheek and jaw. I felt a wetness on my cheek, his hand reaching up and swiping away the tear I hadn’t realized was there.

Slowly, he began to rock his hips beneath me, his hand cupping my breast and rolling my nipple between his thumb and finger. “That’s a good girl, Paige. You look so beautiful.”

I moaned at the feel of his hands on me, my heart fluttering at the words. The combination of the two helped with the shift from pain to pleasure, my body becoming used to the feeling of him inside me. My hips began to join his pace, as his hands guided me up and down along him. My head fell back with a moan, my hands still gripping the footboard.

I was grinding against his hips; a pressure formed inside me again. I felt something inside me shift. My soul lifting out of my body and looking down at the two of us on the bed. I watched myself rock my hips back and forth, his hands lifting



and pulling me up and down. My head fell back with another moan, my back arching to take him deeper inside.

“Nyte,” I moaned, his fingers digging into my flesh as he picked up speed.

“Fuck, Paige, you feel so good.” He held me in place, pressing my chest against his as he drove deeper and harder into me.

“Oh, God, fuck!” I cried out, my voice muffled by the crook of his neck. I couldn’t form a coherent thought; my mind was swimming with pleasure exploding throughout my body. I could feel my body tightening around him. My back fighting against the hold of his arms, aching to pull away from the intense euphoria. Lights flashed before my eyes, and with one final hard thrust, I felt Nyte pulse, his cock throbbing as he came inside me full force.

My body collapsed, my face buried in his neck and my arms draped over the footboard, no longer gripping the wood.

“You okay, Paige?” Nyte asked, his hands rubbing circles tenderly along my back.

I smiled at his skin, nuzzling my face closer and taking a deep breath.

“I’ve never been better.” I whimpered as he shifted his hips, pulling out of me; my body somehow felt incomplete without him now.

I could feel myself being shifted in his arm; I felt us moving back to the head of the bed with my back against the mattress and the blankets covering our bodies as I held him tight. I

couldn't find it in me to regret what had just happened. Once upon a time, I had hoped to save myself for my future husband—my possible fated mate. But given who I now believe my mate to be, I was so happy with my decision to give that piece of me to someone I cared about. Someone who seemed to really care about me as well.

With that thought, and the exhaustion settling over my body, I drifted into a dreamless sleep, completely content while wrapped in Nyte's arms. It was as if this was where I had always been meant to be, and I wanted it to last forever.

## CHAPTER SIX

Nyte

I shouldn't have done that. I knew better, but the self-control I had been clinging to evaporated the moment her lips touched mine. The bond took control in that moment, driving me to fulfill its purpose.

"Nyte," Alexander called out, drawing me out of my mind and into the meeting. "Did you hear what we said?"

The three alphas and their betas all turned to me, waiting for my reply.

"Two packs in one night," I repeated back, letting them know that I had been listening, even if my mind was elsewhere.

"Yes," Alpha Markus of the Ocean Side pack continued. "And I have heard from the packs in L.A. and San Francisco. They've been experiencing the same phenomenon. Smaller, lesser packs, completely vanishing overnight."

"Yes, but the two packs taken last night weren't as small as those taken before," Alexander added, concern etched into his

brows.

“There is little pattern to the packs being taken, aside from them being smaller than us. We still have no scent to go off. No tracks to follow. Nothing.” I added, leaning back in my chair.

“A witch has to be involved,” Markus snarled, his eyes narrowing at me. “I heard you took a witch as your mate. Maybe we should be questioning her about these occurrences.”

“Would you be so boldly questioning Alpha Orion’s Luna? Or perhaps Alpha Rome’s Luna? They are both witches themselves. Or maybe you want to try your luck with the Voland Witches in Montana. After all, their high witch’s son-in-law is a werewolf from a curse their ancestor put on his family.” I sneered back at him. “My mate isn’t aware of the werewolf disappearances or our business. Come near her, and I promise you it will be the last thing you do.”

“You’re threatening an Alpha?” Markus’s beta growled, baring his teeth as his canines began to elongate.

“Thompson,” Markus barked, “stand down.”

Even as he glared at me, he knew his Beta stood little chance against me. There was a reason Alexander chose me as the next Alpha. I wasn’t just more powerful than him. I was the most powerful werewolf in the state of California. I was a rare phenomenon all of my own. If this were in the medieval area, I would have been classified as a King Alpha and given an entire country filled with packs to follow me. But these were

modern days, and I had little interest in laying claim to the title of the past.

“We need to come up with some kind of plan to catch whoever is doing this,” Alexander said, redirecting the meeting to the point at hand.

I looked over at the third Alpha, who had remained silent this entire time, frowning at the drink in his hand.

“What is on your mind, Uncle Blake?”

My uncle looked up from his glass, turning his deep grey eyes to me. He was my mother’s brother and the Alpha from the Escondido Pack, the biggest pack within San Diego. He swirled his drink before tossing the contents in his mouth, emptying the glass in a single gulp.

“A witch very well may be involved, but witches couldn’t have cleared out this many packs without leaving a trace. There was barely even a magic touch in the air at each location. Taking out even the weakest of packs would have taken far more magic whether we all want to admit it or not.” He turned his gaze to Markus. “Witches could have wiped us off the face of the planet eons ago, but they are inherently peaceful. The few who use their magic for the wrong reasons are far fewer. That’s why it’s so rare to come across a cursed bloodline today.

“I know there is a trend amongst humans to call the mistakes of their ancestors’ generational curses, but they aren’t the same as true curses found in a witch’s magic. If you think witches are our enemy here and now, you are blinded by ignorance.”

Markus huffed, though he remained respectful to my uncle. “Well, what do you suppose we do about protecting our packs then?”

“Be vigilant. One of the few signs left behind as I’ve noticed is that they were taken at night from their beds or during dinner. And they are increasing the closer we come to the full moon. Whoever is taking our fellow werewolves wants to collect us before we reach our monthly peak in power. That’s all I can think to add to this meeting.” Alpha Blake stood, tipping his head to me. “I’ll be sure to tell your mother the news about your mate, Nyte. She will be happy to hear you have found the happiness she has always dreamt for you.”

I only nodded in return, my eyes on my Alpha as my uncle and his Beta left the room. My mother would be ecstatic to hear about my mate. She would want to meet her as soon as possible. My mother had a forbidden romance herself, although hers had been with a wolf from another pack. She wouldn’t care that my mate was a witch. All she would care about was that she was who the fates had chosen to bring me love and happiness. That was all my mother ever wanted for me...and all she ever wanted for herself as well. It was too lousy fate decided to take her mate from her soon after finding him.

*He was my greatest love, and although our time was short, our love is infinite.*

That was her favorite line to tell me growing up; it took me discovering my bond to understand what she meant entirely.

Fated mates were once in a lifetime, and the bond is always there, even in death.

“How does being more vigilant help us?” Markus growled after the sound of my uncle leaving the packhouse could be heard. “How much more vigilant do we need to be?”

“It sounds like we need to warn every pack to increase their watches during the most vulnerable times of the evening,” I said, looking back at Alexander. “Double the watches. Have everyone schedule their meals so not everyone is eating dinner at the same time.”

Alexander nodded. “That’s a good idea.” He looked at Markus. “Scheduled meals and double patrols for the packs. It’s our best shot at being ready. At a minimum, with double the patrols, a warning to the others could get out.”

“Fine,” Markus growled, standing up and stomping to the door. His Beta cast me another glare as he passed, following Markus close.

I paid them both even less attention than I had my uncle, watching Alexander and his Beta look over the map once again. My mind returned to Paige and what we had done last night. The way her lips had parted at the sound of my name—the feel of her body molding around mine. It had only been one time, but I was already addicted. Despite having done something that I had every plan to hold back on until she was truly ready to know the truth, although now, there was no way for her to dissolve our bond.

I fought back the smirk teasing my lips. It was hard not to be pleased with the result. Even my inner wolf held a smile in the back of my mind. The bond was sealed. It was done, but she still had no idea that it had happened; she had made it happen and initiated the act all on her own.

“Nyte,” Alexander called to me, again breaking my thoughts away from my mate. “Will you be willing to help with patrols in the evenings?”

I frowned. “I will be willing to take early evenings. So long as Madilyn is available to guard Paige.”

“We can’t be giving your witch special treatment,” Beta Jose said with a low growl. He had been one of the ones opposed to me taking Paige as my mate.

I narrowed my eyes back at him, sitting forward in my seat. “Until I can trust that no one in this pack will harm my mate, I will put her protection above everyone else. If you want my help, then those are my terms.”

Jose growled at me, his wolf pushing to the surface, stirring my own.

“That’s enough,” Alexander interrupted. “We can make those arrangements. Having you and Madilyn on opposite shifts works in our favor, anyway.”

I smirked at the fuming Beta. “Do you need me for anything else?” I asked, wanting to get back to Paige.

I had left her with Madilyn in my room. The two of them settled on my bed with a bowl of popcorn and a reality show



on TV. I hated leaving her again for yet another meeting, but I was glad to know she was forming a friendship with Madilyn.

“That’s all,” Alexander sighed, allowing me to leave.

I left without another word, all but running back to my bedroom to relieve Madilyn of her guard duty. I narrowly avoided wolf after wolf, catching Katya in the corner of my eye, attempting to reach me just as I reached my bedroom door. Madilyn and Paige looked up at me as I closed the door behind me. The same reality show was still playing, although it seemed to be an entirely different season than when I had left them.

“Anything I need to know?” Madilyn asked.

“Yeah, we’ll be taking extra patrol shifts and eating meals on a block schedule from now on,” I answered, my eyes locked on Paige as she looked between us curiously.

“Anything else?”

“You and I will be on opposite shifts.” I looked at Paige. “When I’m gone, you will be with Madilyn. Either in this room or in hers. You don’t go anywhere in this house without one of us at your side, clear?”

Paige let out a scoff and then nodded. “You do realize that I have magic, right? If anyone wants to fuck with me, I’ll just freeze their dick off.”

Madilyn let out a snorted laugh, covering her mouth with her hand. I frowned at my mate, shaking my head.

“I’d rather you not increase the pack’s distrust in you by freezing anyone’s dick off.”

Madilyn let out another snort. “He’s right, Paige; as much as I would really love to see that. The pack needs to see you as helpful more than fearful. Maybe you can freeze some ice cubes for their scotch and brandy. That’ll at least get old Malachi on your side.”

I chuckled at that image of the older man who once was Alpha before Alexander accepting my mate for something so simple. He certainly did like his brandy on the rocks. She’d get even more points if she could snap her fingers and give him a bottomless bottle.

Paige wrinkled her nose. “Okay, well, my point is that I can take care of myself, Nyte. You don’t have to keep making Madi babysit me.”

“I don’t see it as babysitting you,” Madilyn argued before I could. “I love hanging out with you! Do you know how hard it is to make friends with other girls in this pack? They all see me as some weird creature just because of my strength.”

Paige smiled at Madilyn, seeming to melt at the she-wolf’s struggle.

“That’s that, then,” I informed her. “You and Madilyn will hang out every night while I take my patrol. Madilyn will take her shift when I return.” Paige opened her mouth to argue, but I raised my hand to stop her. “No more arguments. It’s final—approved by the Alpha, making it pack law now.”

“Why should I care about pack law?” Paige asked, crossing her arms. “I’m not part of the pack. I’m a witch, remember.”

I walked over to her, lifting her chin to meet my gaze. “Whether they want to admit it or not, you are a pack member so long as you have my mark. That means you follow the pack’s laws and enjoy the pack’s benefits. It’s a give and take, Paige. Just accept it all now. There is no use in fighting it.”

A small whimper crept out of her lips, her eyes heating with desire from my mere touch. I couldn’t fault her for that. I felt the same way: it was the fully formed bond driving us. It wouldn’t slow down until she was pregnant, the thought of her swollen belly with my child sending sparks of pleasure through me.

I looked down at Madilyn, her eyes rolling as she collected the bowl of popcorn before making her way to the door.

“I’ll be back later, Paige. Don’t watch anymore of the show without me,” she called out, my mate turning and waving to her friend before the door closed.

When she looked back at me, I took advantage of the movement and grabbed her chin before pulling her bottom lip into my mouth. She melted into me, a moan replacing the whimper that had begun the heat in my veins.

“Why don’t we get you into something a little more comfortable,” I said.

She looked down at herself. “Nyte, I’m in a tank top and sweatpants. What could be more comfortable than this?”

I grinned, “How about nothing but the sheets on this bed?” I bent down and grabbed her around her thighs, lifting her into the air and dropping her on the mattress.

She squealed and laughed, wiggling herself free of the sweatpants as I assisted her in pulling them down her legs. I leaned over her, pulling her tank top over her head. “We have till dinner time,” I whispered into her ear. “And then again after my patrol. You’ll always know just how comfortable this bed really can be.”

“It sounds like Mom overpacked my suitcase with clothes,” she laughed.

I nibbled on her earlobe, her legs wrapping around my waist. “Maybe just a little.”

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Paige

“I’m just going to my parents’ house. No one from the pack will follow me there or try to hurt me with a house full of witches. They’d be crazy to try.” I looked over at Nyte as I slipped my feet into a pair of sandal wedges that made my legs look five inches longer.

“And what about that werewolf who stalked you last week? Do you think he will stay away? You’re family lives close enough to the cliffs; if he is close by, he’ll catch your scent.” There was a deep growl in his voice at the mention of my potential mate—the stalker from Sunset Park. When I looked again at Nyte, there was a wild and dangerous look in his eyes.

“Okay,” I said, giving in. “I guess you can come with me. Mom would find it weird if you weren’t with me for our family dinner night anyway.”

We walked out of the room, his hand on my lower back as we descended the stairs. Some pack members glared at me; others

watched us curiously. I felt every one of their eyes on me, a crawling sensation beneath prickling my skin. Nyte's fingers twitched each time one of the males looked my way with more interest than was needed. I wondered if it was because they could sense our lack of a true bond. Were they able to smell the weak bond held only by Nyte's mark?

I knew they could smell him on me, but was it different than how fated mates smelled? I should have thought about that before. Maybe it wasn't such a good idea to do this after all.

"Nyte." A tall male approached, his arms open wide to hug Nyte.

Nyte pulled me tighter to his side, pushing me back behind him. The movement placed him between me and the new werewolf; the man was looking between us curiously with a grin. A growl rumbled in Nyte's chest, finally stopping the man in his tracks as he looked between us.

"Hey, don't worry, man, I'm already attempting to win my own mate's heart. I'm off the market; just take a whiff." He raised his arm with a grin.

"Chase, what do you want?" Nyte growled, still gripping me possessively.

"Alpha Alexander asked me to come here. He's worried that my branch of the pack is vulnerable." He rolled his eyes as he said the words, turning a grin at me. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Paige. I've heard a lot about you. Sorry, I wasn't here to help with the vote. I'm the Alpha of the lesser branch of the Coronado Pack here in Point Loma. My packhouse is just

down the road if you ever need a safe place to hang out. I know this side of the pack is a little...”

He paused, looking over my shoulder at the members of the pack still watching me. “Traditional. My side of the pack is more liberal with our beliefs. You would be safe amongst us.”

“Thank you,” I said, smiling at Chase, the second wolf who has been kind to me. “I really appreciate it.”

Nyte narrowed his eyes. “Was that why you came up to me? To offer my mate your little sanctuary?”

Chase chuckled, shaking his head. “No, I came to say hello and saw an opportunity for my mate to have someone she can relate to. That’s all.”

My eyes widened in surprise, opening my mouth to ask who exactly his mate was, but Nyte pressed against my back and pushed us forward.

“Fine, then if you’re done, we’re running late for a family gathering.”

Chase stepped out of our way and pushed his hands into his pockets with a chuckle. I looked over my shoulder at him and waved. “It was nice to meet you, Chase.”

“Likewise, Paige.” A mysterious smile spread across his lips before turning and walking further into the packhouse toward the stairs.

I frowned, looking up at Nyte as we reached his car. “Does everyone in the pack know my name already?”

“No,” he growled, opening my door. “No one in the packhouse besides Madilyn has bothered to learn your name. And before you ask, no, she didn’t tell him. I don’t know how he knows your name.”

My nerve endings started to fire up again, my heart skipping a beat. How did he know who I was?

We were quiet on the way to my parents’ house. My mind was racing with questions about Chase and how he could have known who I was. I tried to remember what the wolf from Sunset Park sounded like...what he had looked like. It had been dark that night, and I was running for dear life. I barely caught the color of his hair as his face had been shadowed, with the moonlight at his back.

I could have sworn my stalker had pitch-black hair. Chase had dark brown hair, almost black. Could it have been him? Was all his talk about working on winning his mate a hint at trying to get to me? He offered Nyte to sniff him, but it could have been another way to let his guard down.

I was wringing my hands in my lap as I thought about it all, unaware of how far or how long we had been driving in silence...not until we were suddenly parked in front of my family’s home. My grandparents’ car was parked in front; my brother and Dad were sitting on the porch waiting for Nyte and me to exit the car. I hadn’t seen Dad since the day before I left with Nyte. He had already gone to work when I woke up that morning and had been in bed when I had rushed through the



door after work. He looked angry now, and the little girl in me shivered at the thought.

“Come on,” Nyte encouraged. “Looks like your dad and Anthony want to have a chat with me.”

Nodding, I got out of the car, Nyte at my side faster than I could blink. We walked up the path to the house, my body tensing as I readied myself for whatever my father had to say, only for him to be cut off before even opening his mouth by my mother and grandmother rushing out the door to greet us.

“Paige! I heard the good news!” Grandma cried out, pulling me tightly and kissing my cheeks. “Oh, and this must be the lucky man to find a mate in my granddaughter!” I watched helplessly as my grandmother turned to Nyte, pinching his cheeks and kissing them just as she had done to me.

“Ama!” Mom cried out to her mother. “Stop hogging him. He’s my son-in-law.”

“Julisa, I am the elder of this family,” Grandma replied smugly. “I will hug him all I want.”

“Ama, Julisa. Take Paige inside. Anthony, Nyte, and I have some business to discuss before dinner.”

We all turned to Dad, his eyes on Nyte as my grandmother let go of his cheeks. I looked back at him, frowning as he nodded and nudged my back toward the house with Grandma and Mom. I reluctantly followed them inside, watching over my shoulder as Dad and my brother walked down the steps of the porch; the three men began to walk away from the house.

“Where are they going?” I asked Mom.

“Your guess is as good as mine, Paige.”

“They seem to be heading to Sunset Park,” Grandma answered, putting on her glasses and looking at her phone.

“How do you know that, Ama?” Mom asked.

“What kind of mother would I be if I didn’t track my daughter’s husband? I put a tracking spell on him the day you two announced your engagement. A girl at my store helped me modernize the spell when I got my new smartphone. Look, it’s like the GPS.”

“Ama!”

I took my grandma’s phone and frowned at the dot moving in real time over the map. Sure enough, they were headed right for the park.

“Why would they be going there?” I wondered aloud.

“Who cares? I need help setting the table. They will be back sooner than we will expect, even if your grandmother is tracking your father. He is never late for a meal.”

Grandma chuckled, leaning in and whispering as she took back her phone. “That would be because of another spell I put on him on their wedding day. But don’t let her know that.”

I laughed. “Did you put a spell on Nyte too?”

Her smile widened, but she never answered, walking to the kitchen to help Mom with the final preparations for supper. I gawked momentarily before jolting at the sound of Mother

telling me to hurry up and help set the table. By the time dinner was ready, Nyte, Anthony, and Dad walked through the door. They cleaned their hands at Mom's insistence before sitting at the table just as she set the last serving plate in the center.

Throughout the entire dinner, Nyte sat close to me, his hand occasionally grabbing my leg and squeezing it as if to make sure I hadn't moved. I tried to ignore him, watching how Dad and Anthony eyed us from over the table. A few times, I would make a face at Anthony when I caught his gaze on me. I wasn't a fan of the overprotective macho attitude he was giving off with Dad.

Their attitude was only met with Nyte all but pissing on me to mark his territory. He seemed to have forgotten that this is only temporary. I didn't belong to him. Not in the way we were pretending that I did. When we left my family's home, I was utterly annoyed with the men in my life. As soon as Nyte got into the driver's seat and pulled away from the curb, I let my annoyance become known.

"You need to take a fucking chill pill with your possessive act."

"Excuse me?" Nyte asked, whipping his head around in surprise.

"You heard what I said. We agreed this was temporary, but you're acting like I'm your real mate. I can feel the energy coming off you every time you touch my back...even in front

of Dad and my brother. You all seemed to have been having some kind of pissing match at dinner. It was embarrassing.”

“You think I was in a competition with your dad and brother?”

“It was some kind of macho man bullshit. I don’t know exactly what they were on, but you were making some kind of declaration that isn’t even true. And honestly, if this is how you act with me, I hate to see how you act with your real fated mate. Poor girl will probably be locked in a tower like a fairy tale princess.”

Nyte chuckled to himself, shaking his head.

“My point is…” I continued, seeing that he wasn’t going to add to the conversation. “I may be enjoying our arrangement, but that doesn’t make me your property. I am my own person, Nyte. That means if I want to walk around the packhouse with Madi, then I’m going to do it. You. Don’t. Own. Me.” I punctuated each word, my finger poking at his arm as he drove.

A slight growl rumbled in his chest, sending tendrils of excitement through my body.

“How about we finish this conversation when I’m not driving,” he said, his voice low and his fists tightening on the steering wheel.

I shrugged, turning and facing forward in my seat. “I think I got my point across already. Just stop acting like you own me, and we will be just fine.”

The car ride remained quiet the rest of the way to the packhouse. I rested my elbow on the armrest, my eyes locked on the ocean as its view passed between buildings and trees. Nyte eventually put on music, drowning out the silence between us.

A part of me wasn't completely settled by how I handled things with Nyte. I didn't like being treated like property: I never have. But somehow, the thought of being his didn't sound all that terrible, and knowing that I wasn't really his mate made it worse. I shook my head, feeling the cold glass of the window on my forehead as I rested my head against the smooth pane.

When we arrived at the packhouse, I could spot a bonfire on the beach behind the house—the sounds of people laughing and music playing. The house itself was pitch black. Not a single person appeared to be inside. I longed to go down to the beach and join whatever celebration the pack had going on, but I knew better. I wouldn't be welcomed, and Nyte wouldn't allow me near anyone who could hurt me.

With a sigh, I followed Nyte into the dark packhouse, the two of us making our way up to our room. My assumption that the house was empty proved right in the silence of the halls. Not even the softest voices coming through any of the many rooms I knew housed different pack members, just as Nyte's room housed the two of us. We were completely alone.

Entering his room, I barely stepped away from the door before Nyte grabbed me by my waist, my wrists pressed against the

closed door. He held them there with one hand, the other wrapped around my waist, pulling me to him. The position left my back arched; my hips now pressed into his. I gasped in surprise as he nipped at my lips when I tried to struggle away, my heart beating a mile a minute and my thighs pressing together tightly.

I could feel the energy zapping around us. My body reacted to the slight pain from the position he held me in. I looked into his deep grey eyes, finding a fire burning bright in their depths. My throat bobbed as I swallowed air nervously, watching his lips parted before speaking.

“I said that we would finish that discussion when we got here,” he whispered, and his lips brushed against the shell of my ear.

I couldn't help the moan that slipped out of my mouth. I couldn't even begin to explain how his holding me like this was such a turn-on for me—especially given how adamant I had been in the car that he stop treating me like a possession. Yet here we were with him manhandling me like he owned me, and I was melting in his arms over it.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Nyte

A dark chuckle vibrated in my chest as I looked down into Paige's honey-pot eyes. It hadn't been more than an hour since she insisted that I not treat her as my possession. I nearly broke down right then and there to tell her she did belong to me. She had belonged to me the moment the fates showed me who she was—the day I realized she was mine just as I was hers. We belonged to one another, but she wasn't quite ready to hear that. Not at that time, anyway.

Some might think she should be. After all, we've been sleeping together every night since the first night I brought her here. The bond pushed us to do what lovers do. She didn't know that, however. She felt in control as if it had all been her choice to reap the benefits of our arrangement. It felt wrong to burst her bubble like that...to take away the sense of control she was feeling. I knew that eventually, I would have to tell her, but when that day came, I hope she would be ready to

accept it. Or better yet, realize it on her own without any interventions.

“Nyte,” she moaned my name, the sound like honey dripping from her lips.

“I’m going to show you just how possessive I really can get, Paige,” I told her, pushing her legs apart while still holding her against the door. “No matter what you say or think, you belong to me.” I kissed her neck, her breath catching in her throat with another moan. *And I belong to you.* I kept the thought to myself, smiling as her body shook with desire at my touch.

“How are you going to show me?” Paige asked, her voice breathless.

I ran my hand along her hip, dipping down her thigh and listening as she held her breath again.

“Feel that? The way your body shakes beneath my touch. You think just any man could do this to you?”

“Oh, gods,” she gasped.

“No, no, little darling.” I ran my tongue lightly along her jaw, moving my fingers closer to the apex of her legs. “Nyte. I guarantee no gods are doing this to you. This is just you and me here.”

My fingers pressed against her shorts, the friction of the denim against her sensitive sex threatening to send her over the edge. I tightened my hold on her wrists to keep her up, with my knee pressing between her legs to help support her weight. My



fingers worked to open her shorts, pulling the zipper down before slipping inside to feel the skin beneath the material.

“Nyte,” she moaned, her hands fisting above her head where I held them.

“Tell me who owns you, baby girl.” I ran my finger along the wet slit of her pussy, flicking the tip over her clit.

“Fuck!” she cried out, her hips bucking against me.

“Say it.”

She bit her lip, her eyes hooded as she looked back at me, refusing to admit that her body was mine and I held this power over her. Even as her body jolted at my touch, begging me for more, she refused to say what we both knew.

I pressed my middle finger at her opening, moaning at how wet she already was. “It’s nothing to be ashamed of,” I coaxed. “Just admit that you like me owning you.”

“I’m not an animal. You can’t own me.”

I chuckled at the flash in her eyes, gone instantly as I pushed my finger deeper inside her. “No, you aren’t an animal,” I agreed. “But you are mine. Just admit that.”

“Nyte, I need more.” She rocked her hips against my finger, still refusing to tell me what I wanted to hear. I slowed the movement of my finger inside her, pushing my thumb against her clit to force out another sharp gasp.

“If you want more, you know what you need to do.” I leaned into her, sucking on her neck. I felt her crumble against me,

moaning out pleas and sighs.

Leaning back, I watched the thoughts running through her eyes, lust mixing into her gaze as I circled my finger inside her. “Say it.”

“Yes,” she moaned, her head falling back against the door. “I’m yours.”

“Good girl.” I smiled, pulling her shorts the rest of the way down and releasing her wrists before turning her over. I pressed her hands to the door again, caging her in with my arms as her bare ass pressed against me. “Spread your legs,” I insisted.

She did as I commanded, adjusting her stance with her legs spread apart. Her back arched in this position, her hips rocking back and forth as I ran my hands from her arms down to her hips.

“Don’t move your hands,” I warned, smacking her ass to punctuate the order. She whined but did as I said, keeping her hands exactly where I had placed them on the door.

I undid my jeans, kicking them off next to her shorts and positioning myself behind her. I ran my fingers back over her wet cunt, lubing my cock to be ready for her. She moaned at the feel of my touch, looking back over her shoulder as best she could from this position, her eyes burning with the same heat that filled mine.

“Fuck me,” she moaned, her head lulling back and eyes closing.

“I’m about to, little darling.” I thrust forward, her lips parting on a cry as I sat fully inside her, holding her in place. My fingers dug into her hips, pulling half out before thrusting back inside her.

She pushed herself back, her hands pressing against the door as she met me thrust for thrust. Her head coming close to hitting the hardwood of the door. I reached out and gripped her hair, holding her head back and making her back arch more; I continued to thrust faster.

“Yes, don’t stop,” she panted, her nails clawing at the door as I maneuver in and out of her.

“Who do you belong to?” I growled, feeling the way her body tightened around me. “Who’s pussy is this?”

“You,” she panted. “Yours. It’s all yours, Nyte.”

“That’s right,” I groaned, leaning over her bent back and nibbling her ear as I rocked my hips against her ass. “Every sassy inch of you belongs to me. Don’t you ever forget that, little darling.”

She let out a whimper; her lips parted on her gasps, and her eyes were hooded. I could feel her shaking, every inch of her body burning with need. I rolled my hips against her, reaching my hand around to tease her clit as I slowed my thrusts, enjoying the feeling of her wrapped around me.

Her body bucked at my touch, my hand tightening around her hair to keep her in place.

“Nyte,” she pleaded.

“What do you need, tell me,” I demanded.

She closed her eyes, a blush forming over her cheeks from a mixture of the heat and an uncharacteristic bashfulness.

“More. I need more, Nyte,” she answered, her voice cracking.

I dug my fingers into her thighs, thrusting forward hard. I let out a low growl at the sound of her moan, her back arching against the mattress as her body rocked with the thrusts. My body moved faster, hers matching my speed. She rubbed her fingers over her breasts, her other hand dipping between her legs toward her clit. I watched. My body tightened as I continued to thrust into her.

Every sound she made and every movement of her body all added to the increasing pressure inside my body. I could feel it building inside hers as well. Her pussy tightened around me, pulling me deeper inside her as she moaned and cried out my name, begging me for what was to come. With a deeper growl, I pulled myself out again, watching her body sag as she whined in protest.

“Not yet,” I soothed her, rubbing my hand over my cock while looking down at her. “Move to the center of the bed.”

Clumsily she obeyed, scooting herself to the center of the bed as I crawled after her. She looked up at me expectantly, biting her lip as she waited for what I would do next.

“Roll onto your belly.” I watched her roll, looking over her shoulder as she positioned herself. I wrapped my hands around

her hips, pulling them into the air as her upper body remained flush with the mattress.

I ran my hand over her cunt again, spreading the slick wetness before pushing two fingers inside, teasing her with small strokes. She moaned into the mattress, her hands gripping the covers, pulling them from the corners of the bed.

“More,” she begged, the sound muffled by the loosened blankets and sheets.

I smiled as I removed my fingers, replacing them with my cock, and thrust into her. I moved slowly at first, enjoying the feel of her body, so ready to burst, intensified by the denial of her orgasm. My speed gradually picked up, her teeth biting into a pillow she grabbed, muffling her screams as my thrusts grew harder. Her body gripped me tight, making me moan with a mixture of pain and ecstasy. I could feel myself losing control, causing my hips to move faster.

She cried into the pillow, her hands fighting for something to ground her as her orgasm possessed her. I reached around her hips, finding the swollen bundle of nerves with my fingers, prolonging her climax as I continued to thrust fast and deeper. She bucked back against me, trying to pull away from the intensity of her climax, her body instinctively looking for a way to regain some sanity.

I held her in place, my own sanity falling apart. A deep growl rumbled through my chest, my teeth shifting as the wolf inside tried to push to the surface. With a shuddering wave, I came, my cock throbbing inside her as I fell to the mattress, pulling

her with me. I held her close, both of us panting, sweat droplets littering our skin. I nuzzled into her hair from behind while my thumb were tracing circles over her belly.

“If you have any doubt in your mind as to who you belong to,” I whispered against her violet streaks. “Just tell me now. I’ll be happy to repeat this lesson.”

I could feel her breath catch, a pause of silence raising my brow.

“No,” she finally answered, resting her hand over mine. “I have no doubts.”

She turned her head slightly, giving me access to her parted lips. My lips covered hers, my tongue sweeping inside her mouth. I could taste sex on her breath just as I could smell it in the air.

She rolled around, pressing her chest to mine and lifting her leg over my hips. “But I wouldn’t mind another demonstration of how you own me.”

I smiled deviously back at her, grabbing her thigh and rolling onto my back so that she straddled my hips. My cock jerked again to attention, her sharp breath telling me that she felt it. My hands held her hips, rocking her along my hard cock as she moaned.

“How about you show me how you own me this time?” I suggested, running my hands up to her breasts, cupping their weight before pinching the hardened nipples.

Her hips continued the motion I had set, slipping along my cock as she grew wet again. I groaned at the feeling, fighting back my urge to thrust against her.

“Go ahead, Paige,” I encouraged. “Own me like I own you. Let me feel you claim me.”

I knew she wouldn't know how deeply I meant my words or their true meaning. A selfish part of me enjoyed the idea of her claiming me without realizing it was forever. We were already fully mated, but it didn't feel complete without her taking from me everything I received from her.

She raised her body from mine, reaching down to grab my cock. I groaned as she positioned my head at her opening, slowly settling back down, taking me all the way to the base. Her head fell back, a moan echoing through the room. I rested my head on my hands, allowing her complete control this time, only my hips lifting and falling at her pace.

“Nyte,” she moaned, her hands pressing to my chest as she rocked back and forth.

“That's it. Ride me like that. Show me who I belong to.”

Her thighs tightened around me, her fingers digging into my chest. I thrust my hips harder, watching her lips part with a moan on them, her nails scratching down my chest.

“Fuck,” I groaned. “Just like that. Good girl.”

She lifted her body, her hand reaching behind her on my legs, arching with our matching trusts. I could feel her coming again; I watched as her face morphed with pleasure. I couldn't

hold myself back anymore, sitting up and wrapping my arms around her.

“You’re so fucking beautiful.” I cupped her cheek and kissed her, swallowing her moans as we came in tandem.



## CHAPTER NINE

Nyte

My skin felt on fire, crawling along my muscles and bones. Looking at Madilyn as she shared a pizza with Paige, I could tell she was feeling the same way. It was always like this leading up to a full moon and feeling our animalistic side taking control, urging us to do as animals do. Run. Hunt. Fuck.

My gaze moved from the she-wolf to Paige, desire stroking the fires building in my body. I was nervous about what would happen. It was the first full moon since bringing her here, and there was still so much animosity around her from the pack. I was worried about what the moon frenzy would do to them and what they would try to do to her.

“You, okay?” Paige asked, looking at Madilyn as she shifted from one spot to another at the end of the bed, picking at the cheese on her slice of pizza.

“Huh?” she asked, looking up at Paige with confusion.

“She’s okay,” I answered for her, reaching over and pulling Paige to me, smiling at the little yip she made from the surprise.

“I’m not sure if you have much room to talk.” Paige looked up at me, pressing her hand to my forehead with a frown. “You look about as far away as she does, and your skin feels like an oven!”

“I’m fine,” I promised. I leaned down and smelled her, the blood instantly rushing to my cock. Without thinking, I nipped playfully at her ear before she shoved her hand to my chest and glared at me.

“Cool the fuck off,” she growled. “Madi is right there. Are you out of your mind?”

I looked over at Madilyn, her eyes locked on the window, her mind somewhere far from this room. She had no idea what was going on around her. Something out there held her attention. I followed her gaze, finding a bobcat perched outside in a tree. My eyes narrowed at the creature, barely able to hold back a growl as my instincts to protect my territory took hold.

“What are you both staring at?” Paige demanded, shaking me from the trance of the animal in me.

I smiled down at her, licking my lips as my eyes danced over every curve of her body. She looked amazing. More than she usually had. Every sense of my being homing in on her and her alone. I leaned into her, pressing my nose to the crook of her neck where I had marked her, taking a deep breath at the

scent of our bond. She pushed back at me again, cursing me under her breath as she struggled to shove me back. As I groaned at the effort it took to obey her demand to let her be, a sharp knock at the door diverted my attention.

The moon was increasing the strength of the bond pull. I could smell every pheromone on her body calling to me. As much as I knew I could never hurt her, I became increasingly nervous around her. She wouldn't understand what was happening to me. Not fully.

"Who is it?" I growled through the door, refusing to open it and risk someone ballsy enough to try and attack Paige in our room. With how the moon was affecting me, I wouldn't put it past some freshly turned wolf to try and remove the obstacle they saw in Paige.

"It's Chase."

I let out a warning growl through the door. "What the hell do you want?"

"Calm down, Nyte. I'm not coming after your mate. I volunteered as a messenger. Alpha Alexander needs Madilyn to come to see him."

Madilyn got up from the bed, suddenly aware of the sound of the order.

"I'll see you later, Paige," she said, waving as she approached the bedroom door.

"Step back," I growled to Chase, my teeth grinding at the sound of his chuckle as he moved away from the door.

When I was sure he was far enough from my door, I opened it just enough for Madilyn to leave, slamming it closed behind her.

“Seriously, what is wrong with you today?” Paige demanded behind me.

I looked over my shoulder, a groan leaving my lips at the mere sight of her. She stood beside the bed, her hands on her hips and a single brow raised. The rings in her nose caught the light of the lamps, giving her an ethereal look, like a statue of a goddess come to life.

Taking a deep breath, I looked away, gathering myself before I pounced on her and scared her to death. “It’s the full moon,” I grunted.

“What?” I could hear her walking around the bed, picking up her phone from the bedside table. “The full moon isn’t for another two days though.”

I shook my head, pressing my forehead to the bedroom door. “The moon’s effects start taking hold days before and lasting several days after.” I swallowed a hard lump that had been stuck in my throat, trying to keep my mind clear as I explained this to her. “It’s more important than ever for you to stay away from the pack. The moon weakens our impulse control. We become more animal than human. The pack is more dangerous to you, especially if they are new to the effects.”

“What about you?” she asked, startling me.

“What about me?”

“Am I safe from you in this state?”

I turned away from the door, slowly walking to the side of the bed she occupied. I cupped her cheek when I reached her, stroking my thumb over her high cheekbone.

“I would never hurt you, Paige. I would sooner throw myself off the lighthouse than hurt you in any way.”

She leaned into my touch, closing her eyes. “I believe that, but I had to hear you say it. You’ve been acting so weird with me today.”

I tilted her head up to look into my eyes. “That’s because, on top of my impulse control weakening, my libido is growing. Every time I look at you, all I can think of is bending you over this bed and sinking into you. It gets harder and harder to resist.”

“Would you hurt me if you gave in?” she asked curiously, lifting her hand to my chest.

I smirked, knowing full well I wouldn’t. Not in any way she wouldn’t normally enjoy. What worried me wasn’t hurting her. It was pushing her too far before she was ready. For werewolves, mating under the full moon had more consequences than she would be prepared for. I had to resist as much as possible.

“No, I wouldn’t hurt you any more than I already have.”

“Then why are you resisting?”

Another knock interrupted us, our eyes moving to the door.

“Who the hell is it now?” I demanded with a growl.

“Alpha needs to see you now,” Beta Jose called from the other side.

The hairs on my neck stood on end, my arms instinctively wrapping around Paige at the sound of the Beta’s voice. He wasn’t a fan of most witches.

“Why?” I growled, suspicion filling my voice.

“You know why,” he growled back. “I’ll step back from your door. Your mate is safe; you have my word as pack Beta. We need you immediately.”

Reluctantly, I stepped away from Paige, forcing my instincts back as I understood why Beta Jose had been sent to fetch me. There could be only one thing the pack beta would come to me for.

I paused at the door just before turning the knob, looking back at Paige. “Do not leave this room for any reason. I’ll be back as soon as possible.”

I left before she had time to answer. She would listen; she respected me too much not to. She would do as I demanded for her own protection.

“I’ll have a guard outside the room for your mate,” Beta Jose assured me, turning back to the Alpha’s office. “I’ve chosen one of those who wouldn’t mind a witch as their Luna. We don’t need you to be distracted during this meeting.”

There was truth in his words. As much as I wouldn’t trust him around Paige, especially around the full moon, I trusted his

word when it came to the business of the pack. He was loyal to his Alpha, which led him to be respected by me in the same way that Alpha Alexander had my respect.

“Which pack was it this time?” I asked.

“I’ll let Alpha Alexander and the others tell you. It’s not my place to disclose pack business outside my Alpha’s office.”

I nodded, respecting his honesty. When we entered the office, I again found Alpha Markus and his Beta with the others, although my uncle was nowhere in sight.

“It’s about damn time,” Markus growled, raising my hackles. He usually kept his composure with me, recognizing my strength over his, but the full moon has a way of showing a werewolf’s true feelings. I turned away from the alpha, giving Alpha Alexander my attention over him.

“We received word from the Las Angelas pack and the Academy pack’s Alphas. The academy has had several werewolf students go missing. And the L.A. packs are reporting similar numbers of missing packs across the cities. We are also checking with Portland packs now, but all the Pacific coast packs are likely being affected,” Alpha Alexander explained.

A voice over the conference phone on the desk spoke, adding to the information I was just given. “On top of the werewolf students going missing, I’ve had some strange occurrences with the vampire students at the school.” I recognized the voice of the new Headmaster, Professor Rome, the Alpha of the newly formed Academy pack. “They have been

reprimanded, and a few even expelled for claiming superiority over the other students, primarily the werewolves. They have even disregarded my authority as headmaster before their expulsion, stating that I was a worthless mutt who needed to learn my place.” A deep growl came over the phone.

“Do you believe there is a connection there?” Alexander asked, looking down at the phone.

“I do my best not to let my past affect my judgment. The first few students, I disregarded the possible connections. However, every missing werewolf student can be connected to one or all of these vampire students, fighting just before going missing in the middle of the night. Grace and I have discussed it, and we can’t shake the feeling it’s them.” He paused, the sound of muffled conversation in the background reaching my ear. I could hear Paige’s name mentioned, my brow creasing with suspicion.

I was aware that she knew Professor Rome and his mate. She had been at school when they met. She was even his mate’s roommate, becoming close friends during their time at the school. However, hearing her name mentioned during this meeting left me unnerved. I wanted Paige as far from pack politics as possible for her safety.

“You have Paige Ramirez in your pack now, do you not?” Rome asked, aiming his question at Alexander.

My alpha looked at me; his brow raised as he answered. “That is the name of the mate former Alpha elect Nyte has taken, yes.”



“You should use her to get the answers on the missing wolves,” Rome continued. “Her powers of premonition are unmatched. She very well could be the answer to all our problems.”

The room fell silent, his eyes filled with a mixture of emotions turning to me: Disgust. Curiosity. Temptation.

“The pack hasn’t accepted her,” I stated, narrowing my eyes at Alpha Alexander. “So why should I ask her to help those who don’t want anything to do with her?”

Rome joined the silence of the others. Madilyn tilted her head at me from behind Beta Jose; her eyebrow raised with a look that said she disagreed.

“We don’t need a witch to help us with pack business,” Markus said, breaking the silence. “If vampires are targeting us, we know how to fight them. It’s only a matter of time before the bloodsuckers slip up in their plans.”

I wanted to remind him of the possibility of them working with a witch, and one powerful enough to hide the scent trail of an entire pack and those who took them. However, I didn’t want them to try and bring up the idea of using Paige again. I wouldn’t put that kind of pressure on her. As great of a seer as she was, she didn’t control the visions she saw. There was no guarantee she could even help; if she failed, it would only drive the pack to hate her more. All for something she had no absolute control over.

“If that’s how you all feel,” Rome said, hanging up and ending the call.

“How he managed to build his own pack, I’ll never understand,” Markus growled, sitting back in his chair. “I heard his witch mate was also a late bloomer with her magic. Not exactly the most impressive couple if you ask me.”

“It’s a good thing no one is, then,” I replied, turning to the office door.

“Don’t turn your back on my Alpha.” The sound of a snarl raised my brow.

I turned around just in time to see Markus snap at his beta; his eyes narrowed at me. He was barely holding on to himself, a flicker of bloodlust in his gaze giving away his true feelings.

“Excuse my beta,” he sighed. “It’s just the full moon; I think we can all understand the effect it has on all of us.”

I turned to the door; my teeth pulled back with a snarl of my own. “Be sure to have him count himself lucky. The moon is pulling me in a different direction this month. Otherwise, I’d think he was challenging me.” I left the room, making my way to check on Paige.

I stopped at my door, pushing down a growl as I realized who had been guarding my mate while I was gone. I had been so distracted during the meeting with the moon frenzy, fighting my senses to stay focused on the task of the meeting, that I hadn’t realized he was there.

Chase looked at me, his back leaning against the wall beside the door frame. “Meeting over already?” He turned to the door, knocking and calling out to Paige. “I guess I’ll be going

then. It was nice talking to you. Even if it was only through the door.”

He walked past me, a faint scent of salt water and sand mixing with his natural scent. “Tell me, Chase,” I said, not bothering to look at him as I spoke, “Have you been to Sunset Cliffs recently?”

He let out a chuckle, sniffing his clothes before answering. “I have. I’ve been looking for a romantic spot for me and my mate. I didn’t realize you could smell that exact beach on me. That’s impressive, Nyte.”

His footsteps faded, my hands tightening to fists before entering my room to check on Paige.

## CHAPTER TEN

Paige

Nyte had been agitated ever since Chase left. I could tell he didn't trust him either, even if it felt wrong not to trust the guy. He was nice! The whole time Nyte was away at his meeting, he just asked me questions about being a witch and what I could do. He even had me draw him a couple of cards... although, the reading did little to earn my trust in him.

I saw the seven of swords, the chariot, and the lovers. The story the cards told me was one of trickery and deceit. He was determined to get what he wanted, and through all odds against him, he would. Again, I wondered if he could have been the stalker who chased me through the beach. Maybe this nice guy's act was just that—an act. The cards weren't specific. They had been far too vague with their answers as of late. Even now, as I tried to give myself a reading to know for sure if Chase was the wolf in sheep's clothing I believed him to be, they merely circled the question.

“What are you hiding from me?” I asked out loud, forgetting for a moment that I wasn’t alone.

“What’s wrong?” he asked. He was changing into a swimsuit, preparing for the pack run tonight under the full moon. I couldn’t help but follow the lines of his muscles, descending into his shorts like a direct path to the land of milk and honey. “If you don’t stop looking at me like that, I won’t be able to stop myself from what I want to do to you.”

My eyes jolted back to his, a little heat tinting my cheeks as my heart picked up with excitement at the thought.

“What are the cards not telling you?” he asked again, nodding to the hand-painted deck.

I shook my head. “It’s silly, really. I can’t shake this uneasy feeling that the psycho from that night is close by. However, whenever I ask the cards for clarity on who he might be, they give me vague answers.” I picked up a card and frowned. “Like this.” The high priestess looked back at us, wisdom and power emanating from her gaze. “It keeps telling me that I know more than I realize and need to look inside myself to know the answer. I can’t clear my mind enough to make out the face from my vision. No matter how hard I try.”

I shuffled the cards, drawing another and sighing. “This isn’t exactly what I want to hear either.” I laid the fool card down on the bed, rubbing the heels of my palms into my eyes.

“Did your cards just call you an idiot?” Nyte chuckled, looking at the card.

“No, it’s telling me that no matter how psycho that guy is, he is my mate, and I should just give in to him.”

Nyte frowned, “The cards called your mate a psycho?” There was a bit of hurt in his voice. The sound confused me.

“Well, no,” I admitted, wanting to make him feel better. “It just says that despite the dangers surrounding this event, I need to have faith and embrace the experiences.”

“I see.” He ran his fingers through my hair absentmindedly while I stared at the cards. “Draw another one.”

“Okay,” I sighed, shrugging as I drew yet another card. The tower stared back at me, the blood draining from my face.

“What? What does that card mean now?”

I shook my head, biting my lip, taking all the cards, and placing them in the bedside table drawer.

“Paige, are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’ll be fine,” I lied, trying to hide how my body shook.

“No, you’re not. What did that last card tell you?” he demanded, lifting my chin to face him.

I swallowed hard, meeting his eyes as tears flooded my vision.

“Danger. Unavoidable and life-altering changes.”

His eyes danced between me and the drawer with my cards in it, his hand tightening on my chin as he held me still.

“You should come down to the beach,” he finally said, staring into my eyes, his grip on my chin loosening as his thumb stroked my cheek.

“Won’t everyone be out there changing?” I asked, hoping he wouldn’t change his mind. I hadn’t been down to the beach once since he brought me here. I wanted to lay across the sand, still warm from the sun, and watch the moonlight shimmer across the waves as they caressed the land, strengthened by the lunar cycle.

“I don’t have to run with the pack; I don’t even have to shift. There is a cave close by. It’s dry during the full moon. You’ll be safe there.”

I smiled, jumping to my feet to get ready to go, pulling a bikini from the drawer along with a pair of washed-out shorts. I didn’t bother going to the bathroom to change my clothes. It wasn’t like Nyte hadn’t seen every inch of my body already.

When I was ready, the sun was already setting, and the house was quiet like the other day. Nyte stood by the door, his hand stretching out to me as I approached. I gladly took it, following him out into the hall and down the stairs. A few others were leaving at the same time as us. They gave me a confused look before quickly averting their gaze. We walked silently with them down the old wooden stairs toward the beach.

I couldn’t be bothered by the awkward silence from the other wolves. I was far too excited to feel the sand between my toes for the first time since coming to the packhouse. The breeze carried with it the scent of the beach. The sounds of waves crashing against rocks filled my ears like music all of its own. We parted from the others when we reached the bottom of the

stairs. I felt their stares on my back as we walked into the darkness. The sounds of the pack fading the further up the beach we went. Soon, all I heard was that beautiful tune of the sea. A few seagulls calling out from their nests in the rocky cliffs around the beach. Not another soul was around.

The caves were often a popular tourist destination. Humans worldwide have marked it as a must-see location while visiting the area. However, they rarely came to see it at night. The night was the best time to be at any beach, in my opinion. The cooler air contrasted with the sand, still warmed from the sun. The way the moonlight shimmered and danced along the ocean into the dark horizon. It was my happy place, and I felt the joy at being on the beach shift my mood completely.

Releasing Nyte's hand, I danced ahead of him, twirling and laughing at the bright full moon. Wolves howled in the distance from the direction we came; humans often disregarded the sound as coyotes or dogs, convinced there were no wolves in Southern California. I'm sure there were a few who, deep down, knew the difference between the sounds of dogs and coyotes as compared to wolves, but their logic wouldn't allow them to believe it.

"The cave is right over here," Nyte told me, pointing to a dark shadow along the rocks. He jogged ahead, turning and offering his hand to help me into the cavern.

The scent of the sea was richer here. The sound of water dripping from the ceiling telling me that the tide would fill the cave at high tide.



“Watch your step,” Nyte warned, holding my hand tight to support me as I stepped down onto the rocky path.

Darkness gave way to light, the ceiling of the cave opening to a full view of the moon. I gasped at the beauty of it, turning in a full circle as I smiled toward the sky.

“This is beautiful!” I cried out.

“Yeah, I agree.”

I looked over at Nyte, his gaze on me, no sign of turning his gaze to the sky above us. I blushed at the attention, walking up to him as he watched me with hungry eyes. He had been distant with me since yesterday, and careful with every touch we made. I knew why. He had told me it was hard to hold back his animal instincts around the full moon. The wolf took control then. No matter if you were cursed, born, or bitten, the moon dictated your actions.

It was the same for witches, although not as intense as werewolves. The moon cycle dictated our spells and rituals. Tonight, my coven would be meeting at Ama’s home, ready to end the cycle as the moon began to fade to black, taking whatever bad habit they wished to break free of with it. I would be there now if I wasn’t with Nyte.

I cupped his cheek, staring up into his darkened grey eyes. “Why are you still holding back?” I asked. “Don’t tell me you brought me here just so I could look pretty in this view?”

It was like a damn broke free, his arms wrapping around me in a tight embrace as his mouth devoured mine with a feral kiss. I

moaned against his lips, arching into his arms as my hands glided up his chest. The sand pressed against my skin, my eyes fluttering open with surprise. I hadn't realized that he had moved us to the ground; I was busy gasping at the feel of his teeth sinking into my bottom lip.

He was rougher than usual—more animal than man. A part of my brain chastised me for thinking I could handle him in this state. I wasn't a werewolf and not built for these strong shifts under the full moon's light. But a stronger side of me loved it—yearned for it. And that side of myself had walked up to him and started this all.

His hands ripped my shorts down my legs, throwing them off onto the rocks surrounding us. The strings of my bikini bottoms loosened, the knot coming easily undone. I wrapped my legs around his waist, shivering at the cool breeze touching my damp center before pressing myself against his heat.

“Nyte,” I moaned as he pulled my breasts free of the bikini top, his lips moving to taste the hardened buds.

My hands raked up his back, my hips thrusting against his, searching for the sweet friction I craved. His hands roughly grabbed my hips, shoving them back into the sand and pinning me in place. With another smooth motion, he grabbed my hands in one hand, flipping my entire body to my belly and spreading my legs apart with his knee. He lifted my hips from the ground, my wrists pinned in his hand to hold me still. I squirmed against him, biting my lip at his growl. I was playing

a dangerous game, tempting a werewolf on a full moon. Even without his physical changes, he was far more beast than man.

I could hear him shoving his shorts down and feel him positioning himself behind me. My thighs tightened together in anticipation. My body screaming for what he was about to do to me. Slowly, he pressed the head of his cock into me, my neck arching back with a deep moan vibrating up my throat. I had expected him to take me hard and fast, just as he had often done. Instead, he moved slowly, pressing inside me inch by inch, pausing after each push inside. I tried to push back against him, craving him deep inside me, but his hand kept me pinned, immobilized against his delicious torture.

“More, fuck, Nyte. I need more.”

My voice cracked over the words, desire stealing the moisture in my throat.

“Shhh,” he coaxed me, pressing another inch inside before pausing. “I don’t want to hurt you.” His voice was little more than a growl, the beast fighting Nyte for control.

“Fuck that,” I gasped, rolling my hips as best I could while tightening my core muscles around him. “I want the pain.”

He let out a dark growl. My body suddenly pressed deeper into the sand, and he pushed his entire weight into his thrust. He released my hands, my fingers searching for anything to hold onto but only pulling back more sand. I moaned into the sand, not caring that the gritty morsels got into my mouth. My body rocked back against his, matching him thrust for thrust, barely keeping pace as he moved faster and faster.

“Yes! Don’t stop!” I screamed, my voice scratching against my dry throat.

That familiar pressure was building, my eyes squeezing shut as I felt my body come undone. I dug my hands deeper into the sand, still searching for anything that could ground me as the euphoric wave took control of my body. I felt Nyte’s body tightening, his breathing growing louder as his thrusts grew harder. We both called out at once, the throb of his cock filling me just as my body clamped down around him.

His body fell on top of mine, rolling us both to our sides as he kissed along my neck, his tongue tracing where he had marked me. I tilted my head on instinct, begging him to bite into me. I wasn’t even certain where that desire had come from. It had never occurred when we fooled around before, but I wanted it more than anything now.

I gasped as he did just that, his teeth sinking into my flesh as they had outside my family’s home. Marking me all over again for all to know who I belong to.

“Did I hurt you?” Nyte asked, licking the mark and sending another spark of lust straight between my thighs.

“No,” I answered with a moan. “That felt amazing.”

He chuckled into my ear, flicking his tongue over the piercings along my ear. “Good enough to do again?”

My thighs squeezed tight as my breath hitched. “Yes.”

I moaned as his hand slid between my legs, tracing my clit and sending shock waves through every limb of my body. My hips

rocked with the motion, his cock growing hard against my back.

“How many times do you think you can handle?” he asked against my ear.

I moaned, his finger slipping inside me, twirling around my still pulsing cunt. “As many as it takes,” I answered.

“For what?”

“To get you out of my system.” The words slipped from my lips before I knew what I was saying, my body freezing against his as his fingers stopped stirring in my body.

He chuckled once more against my ear. “What if that never happens?”

I bit my lip again, looking at him from over my shoulder. “Then I guess we will never be done here.”

He pressed his lips to mine, adding another finger inside me as he returned to thrusting them in and out. “We’re gonna be here forever then because I’ll never get you out of my system. You run too deep.”

I kissed him with a moan, rolling around in his arms to wrap myself around him. I couldn’t help but believe him, even as the voice in my head reminded me that I wasn’t his forever. He wasn’t mine forever, even if it felt like I was. Even if he believed it now, our time would end, but he would always be a part of me.

We rolled in the sand, covered from head to toe, not caring where the gritty earth deposited on our bodies. I soon sat on

top of him, my legs straddling his hips.

“I love you,” I heard myself say, wondering where the words had come from or why they felt so right.

He didn't say the words back, only deepening the kiss and pulling me so we were chest to chest. It was still early in the night; and with his head pressing against my thighs, I knew it would be a long night of rolling in the sand and maybe taking a skinny dip in the ocean before covering ourselves with sand again.

“I want this to last forever,” I whispered, my head falling back as he thrust into me, taking us back to the brink of pleasure and pain.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

Nyte

I volunteered to patrol the beach of Sunset Cliffs for nearly every shift. When I was here with Anthony and his father, I had picked up a faint scent that seemed familiar, but I couldn't place it. It was a male werewolf. The familiarity of the scent left me uneasy, in any case. The only scents I would be familiar with would be other neighboring pack Alphas or a member of my own pack. The Coronado pack was large, with several lesser packs branched off. If the werewolf who had stalked Paige had been familiar enough with Sunset Cliffs to chase her as far as he had, there was a good chance that the wolf was a familiar pack member.

I growled at the thought of one of my own trying to claim my mate, leading her to believe that he was her fate and pushing her to come to me for help out of fear. I squatted down to try and find the scent trace again, anxiously trying to figure out who he could be. The sounds of footsteps in the sand barely

pushed through my concentration, whipping my head around to find Anthony walking up to me.

“Hey,” he greeted, waving his hand in the air. “Find anything?”

I shook my head, standing up to my full height and meeting him halfway. “No, it’s been driving me nuts since family night. It’s so familiar but far too faint for me to place the scent. Now, it’s even more faint. Too many foreign scents have muddied it further. Have you figured anything out yet?”

“Nah, we even tried the variation of the tracking spell Ama put on Dad that she thinks he isn’t aware of. Whatever clues that were here aren’t enough to piece together who it was, or even where they went afterward.”

I scrubbed a hand down my face. “So, we are exactly where we started then.”

“Not entirely; you did confirm that it was a local werewolf. Not some rogue from out of town causing problems.”

We began to walk along the beach, heading to the path along the cliffs that Paige always took, hoping for some clue to appear magically.

“I just wish I knew more than that. Like, why the fuck he would try to claim my mate as his.” I let out another low growl.

“Maybe it was the wrong choice to hide it from her all this time.” Anthony sighed, scratching at his head.



“No, it was the right thing. If she was meant to know, the cards would have told her a long time ago. If we think that we have any control over what the fates decide, we’re severely kidding ourselves. Just look at where we are now.”

Anthony chuckled. “Fake mated to your real mate. It’s like something out of a sitcom, don’t you think?” He looked over at me; his hands shoved into the pockets of his shorts. “So, besides looking for the psycho, what’s up with all the increased patrols? The coven has noticed the activity with the packs. They’re getting nervous about what you all are up to.”

“What do they think we’re going to do? Round them all up and make them work for us?”

“Wouldn’t be the first time a pack did that.” I looked at Anthony, hating that he was right.

“I can’t tell you much; it’s pack business. What I can tell you is that the increased patrols is for our protection. Nothing more.”

Anthony looked at me, the questions I couldn’t answer bouncing around in his mind. I could see it in his eyes. Thankfully, he didn’t ask. He recognized that there are some things that I can’t tell him when it comes to the pack’s business. Not that I didn’t want to, but because it was against pack law. The pack wouldn’t like a witch knowing that we were disappearing...pack by pack, stolen into the night, not a trace left. Not even a scent and no explanation as to why. Nothing to tell us who is doing it, much like the situation with Paige’s stalker.

Markus had brought up the possibility of witches being involved, using their spells to cover the scent, much like Paige had done to escape her stalker.

I paused my step, looking at Anthony again. “Wait, there is one thing I can do.”

“What is it?”

“Could the spell to cover scents hide multiple people? To the point that it would seem they had never been somewhere?”

Anthony thought about it for a moment before nodding. “Yeah, if the witch was powerful enough to pull it off. Just look at Paige for an example. She covered her scent for a few miles; less powerful witches couldn’t cover it even that far. Add in a potion, and she could have covered her scent from the entire city. She would have been a ghost to all of the wolf kind.”

“What about others, though, not just you but several others at once?”

“A combination of magic and potions creates a number of abilities. So yeah, it would be possible, but it would have to be a very powerful witch. The only ones in the city that comes close to that level of power would be Ama and Paige. However, Ama doesn’t tap into her powers as much now that she’s older. Mostly she gives pendulum readings at her store and sells some watered-down love potions to humans. And Paige isn’t that confident in her powers yet. I’m not even sure she realizes how powerful she is.”

We continued on my patrol in silence. I wasn't sure what he was thinking about, but my mind was focused on the information he had just given me. Their coven was the largest in the city, their bloodline dating back to before California was part of the US. They were called curanderas, or healers for their people. Now, they are simply referred to as witches, an umbrella term now that covers a multitude of branches of healers and seers.

If Anthony says the only ones known to their coven to be that powerful were his grandmother and Paige, then it was likely a rogue witch new to the area. But what would a witch want with werewolves? They didn't have much use for us outside of romantic flings or the rare mateship. Even cursed werewolves turned on the witch who cursed them, no matter how hard the witch had tried to write in their obedience for her. The werewolves were too strong-minded to control.

That left only one other option: the witch had to be helping some other being. But who? Other packs trying to steal territory? It could be vampires; although a war between the wolves and bloodsuckers hasn't occurred in centuries, there was always that one vampire who yearned for chaos and bloodshed between the two night-creatures. There was really no telling which could be the more likely option.

"Do you have any time to spare during your patrol?" Anthony asked, breaking the silence.

"For what?" I asked.

“Dad wants to ask you about this mateship between you and Paige. He’s a little pissed that we’ve kept it a secret for the last few years. He says he knows you had to have known of it when she turned eighteen. He just about ripped my head off when I told him that I knew.”

“What the hell does he care? Did he want me to take his daughter away as soon as she had turned eighteen? Would that have made him happier?”

Anthony shook his head. “He just wants to hear from your mouth that you had no intention of rejecting her. He knows how a lot of the wolves in your pack feel about witches. He doesn’t want Paige to be in a loveless relationship for the rest of her life.”

I sighed, nodding in understanding. His father wanted to know why I didn’t claim his daughter immediately if I actually wanted her as my mate. He needed to hear from me that I cared about her and she was going to be happy with me.

The house was dark, the only light coming from the room their father used as a home office. Quietly, Anthony and I entered, careful not to alert his mother to our presence in the house. As much as I loved the woman, she would get in the way of her husband asking me the hard questions he needed to ask.

“Dad,” Anthony greeted, closing the door behind us before sitting on the plush loveseat against the window.

Mr. Ramirez looked up from his book, his gaze landing on me without glancing at his son. “You came, good. That is the first test passed. Have a seat, Nyte.”

I sat across from his desk, keeping his gaze as Anthony cleared his throat.

“I’m told you have questions about my intentions with your daughter.”

Mr. Ramirez finally glanced at his son, nodding. “That’s one way of putting it, yes.”

“Ask me anything. I promise you; I have nothing to hide, and you have nothing to fear from my answers.”

“How long have you known my daughter is your mate?”

“Since her eighteenth birthday.”

“Why didn’t you claim her then? Why wait until now? Is it only because another werewolf threatens what’s yours?”

“Partially, yes,” I answered honestly. “She came to me and asked me to pretend to be her mate. I had been waiting for her to come to me when she was ready to claim me herself. However, that wasn’t the case.”

“She doesn’t know that you are her mate? How is that even possible? She’s a seer, for God’s sake!”

“She had a vision that night she was followed through the park. The vision showed her mate as a werewolf, but it didn’t show the face. She assumed since her stalker that night had claimed to be her mate, that the vision confirmed his threats. She thinks she can break the bonds of fate.”

Mr. Ramirez stood from his desk, slamming his hands down on the surface. “Why wouldn’t you tell her the truth?”

“You were told about the stalker. How is it that you didn’t know what he had claimed in his chase?” I asked, not moving from my seat as I stared back at my mate’s father.

“I didn’t know that she was unaware of the truth in your mateship. I thought she knew the truth and went to her mate for help. I had no idea she was unaware of your true relationship. I have no doubt that you’ve sealed the bond with more than a mate bite. She still doesn’t know that she is bonded to you for the rest of her life?”

The older man sank into his chair, his eyes hardening as he looked at me, although his lips were twisted in apparent distress.

“You know that no matter what, she and I were going to be together. Despite the fairy tales of rejection and second-chance mates, once the fates show a bond, it is inevitable. I tried to give her the time to realize who I was for her. Years I waited, watching her from a safe distance, keeping her at arm’s length until I knew she was ready for our shared journey through life. The fates decided that I had waited long enough. They lead her straight to me as her protector, even if they did not elaborate on the kind of protection I had offered her.”

“Do you love her?” Mr. Ramirez asked. I could feel Anthony perking at the question, wondering the same thing.

I smiled, softening my eyes as I thought about Paige: the way her nose wrinkled in her sleep, the spark in her gaze whenever she felt challenged by me...the soft pout of her lips just before I kissed her.

“I have loved her since the day I saw her for who she is. Not the girl I first met, but the strong woman she grew to be.”

“You mean when the fates revealed the bond to you.”

“No.” I shook my head. “I still hadn’t seen her. It was after she came back from the Academy’s summer program. Something about her had changed. She seemed more confident in her gifts and more mature in using them. That was when I fell in love with her. Bond or no bond.”

Mr. Ramirez’s face softened, opening a drawer to his right to reveal a small velvet box. “My father-in-law gave this to me. He insisted that I would have a daughter; it would be needed when she met her true love. I’m still unsure what it is needed for, but I swore to hand it over to the man whose heart belonged to my daughter.”

He handed over the box, watching as I flipped the lid open to reveal its contents. A small, pointed stone sat on a coiled chain. It reeked of ancient magic. A power that the world hadn’t seen in centuries.

“A pendulum?” Anthony asked, now leaning over my shoulder to look. “And Obsidian pendulum? For what?”

“As I said, I never was told what it would be for, only that it would be the tool needed to aid your sister’s mate. Given the increased patrols we have noticed from the packs across the city, I’m sure that Nyte knows what the pendulum can uncover for him.”

I gritted my teeth as I nodded. The fates clearly had plans for my mate that I disapproved of. First, Rome asked why we didn't use her to find answers. Now, some long-deceased family member left a tool with the same unspoken words. I closed the box and put it deep in my pocket, standing up from my seat and nodding toward the door.

“I need to get back to my patrol.”

Mr. Ramirez nodded. “Of course, thank you for coming and putting my mind at ease. I hope that whatever my father-in-law foresaw can be remedied quickly.”

With a shrug, I went to the door. “We'll see.”

I returned to the cliffs alone, the box in my pocket feeling like it burned at my skin. I knew enough about witches and their tools to understand what it was used for. It was another divination tool, one that could help clear up so many of Paige's questions and help the pack. The only question was: was she ready for all that? How much longer did I have to decide before fate again intervened to force my hand?

I ran my hands through my hair, reaching the meet point for shift trade-off. “Why is something always getting in the way of my plans?”



## CHAPTER TWELVE

Paige

“Where the hell did they go?” I growled under my breath, pulling the drawer off its track and dumping everything on the bed. I never left this room with them. I always put them right back here, yet my cards were nowhere to be found.

I could hear the shower running in the bathroom. Nyte was utterly undisturbed by my missing cards. I had asked him before he went in if anyone had been in the room, but he had assured me that it wasn't possible. Not since we rarely left the room empty...and no one would ever dare to steal from either of us. Even if they didn't like me, the thieves in the pack were severely punished.

“They have to be somewhere in this apartment,” I thought, looking around the destroyed room. I had ripped apart every drawer and pulled the cushions off the chairs. The bed and pillows were now bundled on the floor at my feet, but my cards were nowhere to be found.

I looked again at the bathroom door, inhaling a breath before rushing to the bedroom door. I hadn't left this room with my cards since coming here. I was always with Nyte or Madi, so leaving the room alone left me slightly vulnerable.

A few she-wolves stood at the end of the hall, tilting their heads curiously as they noticed me. I lifted my chin and smiled, doing my best to fake the confidence I didn't feel. Turning away from the two women, I made my way to the stairs, doing my best to find the packhouse's common areas to look around.

Sometimes my cards do disappear. Usually, I can hear them calling out to me, near whoever needs their message. I didn't hear them this time, but it was always worth looking around. If I didn't look, I wouldn't know.

"Hello," a small boy greeted me, smiling brightly as I entered the common room. "You're a pretty witch! Does that mean you're a good witch?"

I chuckled at his question. "Yes, how did you know?"

"Because of this book!" he held up an old novel, smiling wider. "The good witch said that only bad witches are ugly."

I bent at my waist, smiling at the boy and his book. "You are very smart! Bad witches aren't ugly in the way we think, however. Their face can be beautiful, but their veins are black as ink." I showed him my arms, pointing out the blue veins of my arm. "See, mine are blue, like yours. More proof that I'm a good witch."

“Wow!” He gasped, leaning in to look at my veins.

“What’s your name?” I asked.

“Diego. And I know you, your name is Paige! You are Nyte’s mate.”

I smiled at the boy, ruffling his hair playfully. “It’s nice to meet you, Deigo. Can I ask you a question?” He bobbed his head in a nod. “Have you seen a deck of cards? They are old and handmade.”

“Like poker cards? My uncle Jose has poker cards in his room.”

I smiled. “No, not exactly like poker cards. These have wands and caldrons on them. They’re called tarot cards, and I lost mine somehow.”

“I don’t think I’ve seen anything like that,” he thought, pulling a paper from a bag at his feet. “Can you draw a picture? Then if I find them, I’ll bring them to you. I could bring them to Nyte’s room; I know where that is.”

I smiled, taking the paper and a pen to draw a few pictures of the cards as a reference. “Here,” I said, handing the paper back to him.

“Yeah, I’ve never seen these, but if I do, I’ll bring them to you!”

“Thank you, Deigo.” I stood back up, giving the room another look. “I guess I better get back to my room before Nyte notices I’m gone. I’ll see you later, kiddo.”

“Bye! Next time I see you, will you show me some magic?”

I chuckled, “Sure. Maybe I’ll find my cards before then and give you a reading.”

I turned to leave the room, finding the two she-wolves from upstairs standing in my way.

“Oh, sorry, excuse me.” I tried to step around them, only to have the taller of the two women move back into my path.

“You have some nerve,” she growled, her curious gaze now cold. She tossed her hair behind her shoulder like some movie mean girl, narrowing her light blue eyes at me.

“I’m sorry; what exactly is happening? Can you please explain what exactly I have done to get on your nerves?” I asked, looking back and forth between the two she-wolves as they glared at me.

“You stole her fiancé!” The other girl accused, pointing a partially shifted finger at me. “She was meant to be the pack’s Luna when Nyte became alpha before you came along and stole him! You ruined both of their futures, you witch!”

She spat the word witch at me like a curse, my lips twitching with amusement. Why did people think calling me a witch is an insult? I’m damn proud of who I am.

“Listen, I don’t know who you are. I’ve never heard Nyte mention a fiancée before. So, this is all news to me. However, he had a chance to turn me away. He didn’t. So, I’m inclined to believe you’re full of shit and that he didn’t want you as his Luna.”

“You bitch!” the friend growled, raising her arm as if she were about to strike me. I pulled magic to my fingertips, prepared to defend myself from her attack.

A hand shot up from behind them, startling both of the she-wolves. They whipped around, moving out of the way for me to see just who had come to my rescue.

“The two of you really don’t have any brain cells to rub together, do you?” Chase stepped in front of me, separating us and shoving the arm of the one who aimed to strike me back with a snarl. “What do you think in your little pea brain would have happened if Nyte found out you harmed his mate?”

“Maybe he would come to his senses and take back Katya!”

Chase’s gaze swung to the taller woman. “Katya should know better than to come between a man and his fated mate. It’s not like it’s the first time she’s witnessed the power of the mateship.” He pushed past the two women, grabbing me around the shoulders and leading me out of the living room.

I glanced over my shoulder, seeing Diego curled in the chair, glaring at the two women. The taller woman, who looked like she had stepped straight off the runway, peeled her lips back in a silent snarl.

“Don’t mind, Dasha and Katya. They’re power-hungry bitches. Your showing up disrupted their delusions of power plays. But by themselves, they are at the bottom layer of the tier.”

“Katya, that’s the tall one, right?”

“Yeah, Dasha is her sister. Their mom mated with one of the pack members and moved the three of them to the US from the Ukraine. She had been married to their father; and as you know, it can’t be denied, even if children are involved.”

I felt my heart twist at his words, dread gripping my heart. What would happen when Nyte found his real fated mate? I know I told him this was temporary, but after everything we’d been through, I wasn’t sure I wanted it to be temporary.

“Their mom divorced their dad because of the mate bond? How did they even find one another if they were in Europe?”

“He won some radio contest. Fully paid vacation right to their hometown.” He chuckled and added, “That’s the fates for you. They always get their way.” He looked down at me, another rock of fear weighing down my stomach. “There is no hiding or running from what the fates decide.”

Reaching Nyte’s bedroom, I quickly pulled away from Chase. “Thanks for your help.”

“Of course, not that it was necessary; I know you pack a punch with those spells of yours.” He turned away, pushing his hands in his pocket as he went. “You better hurry inside; I hear Nyte steaming from here.” He chuckled with that, descending the stairs just before the bedroom door tore open.

Nyte stared at me, his face morphing from anger and fear to relief and agitation. “Why did you leave the room, Paige? You know it’s not safe. The pack still blames you for me stepping down as Alpha Elect.”

“I’m fine,” I said, pushing past him into the room. “I couldn’t find my cards. I thought maybe they would turn up somewhere else in the house.”

“I told you no one would steal them,” he growled, following behind me.

“I didn’t say they were stolen. Sometimes they just appear in places that I’m needed.” I looked back at him, barely noticing the towel hanging haphazardly from his waist. “Were you really about to storm through the house like that?”

He smirked back at me, striding the short distance between us. “And if I were?”

The thought of Katya and Dasha seeing this much of him sent a flicker of rage through my body. I didn’t like the idea of them seeing so much of him. I was not too fond of anyone having ever seen these parts of him—the curves of his muscles...and that perfect V shape ridge descending into the towel.

I never thought of myself as the jealous type. I always believed that jealous people were overcompensating for their own indiscretions. But Nyte could turn my brown eyes green with a single glance in another woman’s direction even before we entered into this arrangement.

“Well?” Nyte asked again, wrapping his arms around my waist.

“I’d be embarrassed for you.” I lied, swallowing the jealousy with a gulp of air.

“Is that so? What exactly would I have to be embarrassed about?” He flicked the tip of his tongue over my lips, my legs shaking at the simple touch.

“Don’t people have nightmares about being caught in front of their peers with nothing on?”

Nyte smiled, pressing me against his hard chest. “I have no peers, Paige. Those nightmares don’t exist for me. I would run down the middle of downtown buck naked to find you without a single thought or care about what others would think or see.”

He pressed his lips to mine, his tongue sweeping across my mouth until I parted my lips for him. His hand cupped my cheek, angling me towards him for a deep kiss. I nearly fell over when he pulled away, smiling at me with humor in his eyes.

“If you don’t want me to run naked through the streets to find you, then listen when I tell you not to leave this room without me. Because I promise you, I would burn everything in my path with a smile on my face if it brought you back to me.” He kissed my forehead, then turned me by my shoulders, pointing to the bathroom door. “Now, go clean up for bed while I clean this room. The way you left this place had me thinking there was a struggle, and someone had taken you away without your consent.”

I looked back at the room before looking back at Nyte sheepishly. “I guess it wasn’t a good look coming out of the bathroom, huh.”



“I thought some idiot got the balls to try and kidnap you right from under my nose. There was about to be blood spilt. Now go shower. I’ll have everything cleaned before you know it. And if I find the cards, I’ll let you know.”

I smiled, looking at him before I entered the bathroom. “Thank you, Nyte.”

“Of course, just don’t make it a habit.”

I showered quickly, combing through my hair before exiting the bathroom to a freshly cleaned room. Nyte was positioned on the bed, the sheet and pillows back in place and the comforter pulled back on my side. I smiled as he looked at me, lifting the remote with a brow raised.

“I didn’t find your cards, but I found this remote under your side of the bed. I believe you and Madilyn were the last ones to use it, two days ago.”

I giggled as I crawled up into the bed. “Oops, well, I guess you can watch your show recordings now.”

He clicked the button on the remote, the mounted TV screen coming to life. “You mean, WE get to watch the show. Don’t act like you don’t want to see who comes out as the best chef.”

I laughed, settling into the bed and curling up next to Nyte. “Okay, you’re right. Put it on.”

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

## Nyte

I watched her sleep, her head nestled into the crook of my arm, a peaceful smile gracing her lips. Gone was the stress of her missing cards...at least for now, in her sleep. My gaze slowly moved from her content expression, rising to the hidden compartment below the mounted TV. She didn't know it was there. If she did, it would have been one of the first places she looked before venturing out into the packhouse.

I cursed myself for not considering her wandering off to find them. They were a part of her just as much as my wolf was a part of me. It was a lapse in my judgment, but I couldn't take it back now. Not yet. I couldn't risk the cards revealing what I already knew.

She's pregnant.

I knew it the moment it happened in the cave. It had been a high probability that it would happen with the full moon. Even if she weren't a wolf herself, the effects of the moon still affected me. It had been why I held back and fought against her scent's call, but nothing stopped me once she beckoned me to give in to our desires. Even if she had no idea about the consequences, she was welcoming.

That night, I decided that if she got pregnant, I would need to hide the cards. I waited a week and a half for her scent to change before doing so. As soon as I smelled the change in her body, I took the cards and put them in the hidden

compartment, knowing she couldn't find them right away. The last thing I needed was for her to read in the cards about her condition and panic. She still wasn't ready to know the truth about us, and a baby would only complicate her feelings even more.

I reached over her, gently stroking her flat belly with a smile. As complicated as the little pup was, I was happy to be a father. The secret made it hard because I wanted to share the bliss of our first child...to see the joy in her eyes as she saw the two pink lines of a test. However, in the state we were currently in, the pregnancy wouldn't bring her the same happiness it had brought me. She wouldn't know she was exactly where she was meant to be and where she belonged for the rest of her life.

She would see this baby as a complication between us. She wouldn't believe me if I told her the truth about our bond. Even if she did, she would be pissed and try to reject me. No. I had to plan this out perfectly. It wouldn't be long until she recognized the change in her body. Even human women notice the subtle changes in their behaviors and monthly cycles. As a seer, she would have a heightened intuition. That could be why she had already begun to search for her cards. She felt something off and knew they would give her the answers as to what was different.

I turned my body to her, pulling her closer to my chest and breathing in her ocean breeze scent, closing my eyes to dream of telling her the truth about everything and celebrating our future with her.

“Wake up,” Paige poked at my nose, a groan escaping my lips as the sunlight filtered through the window.

I usually kept the blackout curtains closed, allowing my bedroom to resemble a dark cave, easily hiding that I was on the second floor of the packhouse. However, Paige seemed to have gotten up and opened them, her finger prodding again at my nose as I squeezed my eyes tighter.

“Nyte, wake up. I want to see the rest of the packhouse. Either you give me a tour, or I’ll ask Madi to.”

It had my eyes popping open, a low growl rumbling in my chest at the thought of my pregnant mate walking around the packhouse without me. I still didn’t know exactly what had happened yesterday. There were only trace scents of a few pack members and Chase’s voice just before I opened the door to search for her. Aside from that, she hadn’t said much about what had or hadn’t happened while she had left the safety of our room.

“Why do you want to see the packhouse?” I asked, narrowing my eyes at her suspiciously.

“Because you can’t keep me locked up in this room forever. And I still don’t know where my cards are. If I can move around the house, maybe I can hear them call out to me.”

I purposely averted my eyes from the hidden cubby in the wall, rolling out of the bed with another groan of protest. “Call out to you?” I asked, hiding my expression behind a yawn and stretch.

“Yeah, they’re connected to me. They call out when they have a message for someone or when they need to tell me something. Maybe if I can see more of the house, I will find them and whoever they are trying to lead me to.”

I looked back at her skeptically, trying to figure out how to tell her they wouldn’t be found outside of this room without revealing that I knew where they were. The fact they hadn’t revealed themselves, as she claimed they could do, was a relief. Maybe the cards agreed that she wasn’t quite ready to know everything.

“If you don’t want to do it, I have Madi’s number right here on my phone. I can call her right now. Just say the word.” She held up her cell phone, showing the contact card for Madilyn pulled up on the screen.

“Alright, alright,” I sighed, walking over to my dresser while stretching loudly. “Let me get dressed, but I doubt you’ll find anyone here needing or willing to have a reading from you.”

“That’s for the cards to decide.” I looked back at her, buttoning my jeans before pulling out a black tank top.

When I finished getting dressed, I reluctantly took her out into the hall, placing my hand on her lower back protectively. I sensed the attention of everyone in the hall turning to us: curious tilts of heads from a few who probably wondered where we would be going. After all, I only ever brought her out of our room when we were leaving the packhouse. They wouldn’t expect to watch her move about the packhouse as though she lived here permanently.

A couple of the elder she-wolves sniffed the air as we passed by, their eyes widening with hidden smiles at the familiar scent. They would be the only ones aside from myself to notice it. It was part of their job to help bring new life to the pack, and though Paige wasn't a werewolf, they would still treat her as if she were while she birthed my child. Not because they would finally accept her but because the pup was pack no matter what.

I slowly raised my finger to my lips as Paige looked away, the elders nodding their understanding to keep quiet about the news. It was our news to share, and I wouldn't share it with anyone until Paige knew herself. Only then would I tell Alpha Alexander, and only after she could share the news with her friends and family. I couldn't control the elder she-wolves whose noses were trained to notice the scent of an expecting mother, but I could at least control their silence from the rest of the pack.

I lead Paige towards the common room, several children now occupying the space with bowls of cereal and morning cartoons playing on the TV. One little boy, in particular, turned to us, smiling and waving at Paige. I frowned when she waved back to the boy. He was Beta Jose's nephew, Diego. He was often found in this room, his mother and father working outside the pack, and his uncle kept busy with the pack's business.

"You came down here during your solo exploration yesterday; I take it?" I asked, drawing her honey-brown eyes back to me.

“Yeah.” She nodded. “This was the farthest of the house I got to, actually. I wanted to explore more but was interrupted by a couple of pests.”

The hairs on the back of my neck stood on end at the way she spat the word pest. A wave of annoyance washed over me, stealing the smile that Diego had given her.

“What happened?” I clutched my fist tight, trying to contain my anger at the thought of someone approaching her without me present.

“Probably nothing, just a couple of girls and some things they said.” She frowned, turning away from the child-filled room to explore the first floor deeper.

I caught her elbow, swung her around, and pressed her back to the wall. My eyes pierced into hers, looking for the answers to yesterday’s events.

“What happened.”

“Were you engaged to be married before I asked you to help me?” she asked. The question startling me at the pure absurdity of it.

“What? No! Why would I have agreed to help you like this if I was engaged to someone else?” I asked.

“You didn’t promise anyone the title of Luna when you became Alpha? Didn’t lead any of the pack’s she-wolves into thinking they had a future with you?”

A scoff left my lips, realizing just what had happened yesterday. “Katya,” I growled.



“The fact you know who I’m talking about doesn’t exactly help your case,” she growled back, narrowing her eyes.

She tried to slip from under my arms, but I swept her back against the wall, keeping her caged between my arms.

“Katya and I have never been a thing. She’s been spreading rumors that we were destined to be ever since she learned I was the Alpha Elect. But aside from her lies, nothing has ever happened between us. I hardly ever spoke to her outside of small talk at pack events.”

I watched as Paige visibly relaxed, her stiffened shoulders dropping back down as she released a deep breath. “So, Chase was right then,” she sighed.

“Chase?” I growled. “What does he have to do with anything?”

“He stepped in when Katya and Dasha were ganging up on me. He told me that Katya was a power-hungry bitch and to ignore anything she or her sister had to say. They’re lucky he stepped in when he did, or they would have been ice pops.”

I frowned, feeling unease from her threat and the idea of Chase being the one who had come to help her, even if his words had been in my defense. “What exactly did he step in on?”

Paige shrugged, looking away from me. “It was nothing. Just mean girl bullshit. Nothing new under the sun.”

I pinched her chin between my finger and thumb, returning her head to look me in the eyes.

“Paige, what exactly happened? Why did he have to step in?”

I needed to know exactly what happened.

Paige rolled her eyes and sighed deeply before looking at me. “Dasha was going to hit me with a partially shifted claw. Chase grabbed her wrist out of nowhere, telling her that she must have had a death wish and some stuff about what you would do if you had found out she hurt me. But he really didn’t need to stop her. I was ready for it. She never would have touched me with her clawed hand; I was prepared.”

“She was going to cut you?” A deep growl rumbled in my chest at the mere thought of someone harming Paige. An unwelcome helplessness was crushing my stomach at knowing I had still been in the bathroom at the time.

“She was going to try,” Paige scoffed. “But I’m telling you, she wasn’t going to so much as touch a hair on my head. I’m not some helpless human. I can hold my own in a fight.”

“That’s not the point,” I growled. I moved to push myself off the wall, my instincts telling me to hunt the two bitches down here and now and eliminate the threat they posed to my mate and unborn child. The law against harming a pack member would still apply even if they hadn’t known she was expecting.

Paige grabbed my arm, pulling me back to her, her hands suddenly cupping my face as she forced my eyes back to hers. “Calm down,” she growled at me, her voice nearly as feral as a true she-wolf.

“I am calm,” I replied, ignoring how the world came through in a hazy red tone.

“Then why are your claws and fangs out?” Paige countered, tightening her hold on my face when I tried to pull away. “If I need your help, I will ask for it just like I asked for your help with the stalker. I do not need your help with this. Mean girls, be they werewolves, humans, witches, or vampires, are my battle to fight. Not yours. And that is all Katya and her sister are. A couple of mean girls. I got this.”

Gradually, the red in my vision faded. The claws which had been forming returned to human hands. I could feel the sharp tips of my canines receding. Paige slowly smiled at my regained control, her thumb tracing circles on my cheeks.

“There you are,” she sighed, leaning up and kissing my lips innocently. “Can we get back to you showing me around the house now? Maybe show me to the kitchen next. Seeing the kids eating all that cereal has me craving some peanut butter puffs.”

I chuckled at the shift in her mood, nodding as I took her hands in mine. “Kitchen it is. But first.” I leaned in, pressing a harder kiss to her lips; her back was pressed once more to the wall. As I pulled back, I saw the tail end of Katya’s ponytail disappear around the corner she had come from. I looked at Paige, breathless and unaware of the spy. “Next time someone tries to bother you like that, whether you can handle them or not. Tell me immediately what happened.”

She let out a breathy laugh as she nodded. “Fine, I promise to tell you immediately if I have to lay down some witchy ass kicking. Now, about that cereal.”

“This way,” I laughed, pressing my hand to her lower back as I guided us toward the packhouse kitchen. “And you are in luck. As it turns out, Peanut Butter Puffs are a house favorite. So, you can have two bowls if you want. There is always plenty to go around.”

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

## Paige

“I have to go to another meeting,” Nyte growled as he checked a new message on his phone.

“Again?” I groaned, reluctantly sitting up so he could roll out from under me and out of the bed.

I had been using him as a pillow, groaning at my aching stomach and contradictory cravings. For the past few days, I had been miserable, sick in bed day and night with barely any strength to continue searching for my missing tarot cards. On top of all that, Nyte had been called to the Alpha’s office these past few days more often than in the previous weeks. I had tried asking him a few times what was happening, but he always told me it was nothing to worry about. Just pack business.

“Can’t you just sit this one out? Please?” I whined, rolling on my side as another wave of nausea swept over me.

Nyte bent down, kissing my forehead and rubbing circles over my upset stomach. “If I could, I would. No questions asked. But this isn’t something I can just sit out of. Trust me; I don’t want to leave you alone any more than I have to.”

“What kind of pack business is this?” I asked, even as I knew what he would say.

“It’s nothing for you to worry about. Just relax. Take a nap if you can. I won’t be too long.”

He pressed another kiss to my forehead before leaving. My heavy eyes watching as the door closed behind him. Usually, Madi would have come to keep me company; but lately, even she was attending the meetings, making me even more curious about what they were about.

I rolled over onto my stomach, trying to find the perfect position to lie in to ease my rolling stomach. Part of me just wished I would throw up, hoping that if I did, the nausea would subside, and I could get over whatever sickness I had caught. The buzzing sound of my phone brought my face out of my pillow, stretching my arm out to grab the device from the bedside table.

*Grace: Hey, Paige. Long time no talk. You busy?*

I smiled, happy to see a message from my friend. Ever since she and Rome took over the Academy, I had rarely heard from her. Despite the light of the screen doing little to ease my nausea, I sent a hasty reply.

*Me: Hey, stranger! No, I'm not busy unless you count dying of food poisoning as being busy.*

I waited a few minutes for her reply, lolling my head back into the pillow as I waited, only lifting my head again when I heard the alert chime again.

*Grace: Is it true you are living in the Coronado Packhouse?*

I frowned.

*Me: Yeah. How do you know?*

*Grace: Word travels fast within the werewolf network. What has Nyte told you about what is going on?*

I forgot my nausea momentarily; my interest perked as I wondered if Grace knew what all these pack meetings were about. Was it more than pack business after all? She and Rome weren't part of the pack here. Rome had formed his own pack with the werewolf students who chose to stay at the school. So, if they knew something, then it had to be bigger than pack business.

*Me: What do you mean?*

*Grace: The meetings he has been attending at the packhouse. What has he told you about them?*

I swallowed hard, forcing myself to sit up in bed despite my protesting stomach. She did know something. There was something to know, and the fact she chose now to text me as my curiosity was rising. It had been one of the driving forces pushing me to find my cards: wanting the answer to what Nyte was hiding from me as if I were some delicate flower who needed protection from the ugly truths of our world.

*Me: Nyte hasn't told me a thing. He just says it's pack business and not to worry about it. Do you know what is happening then?*

*Grace: Yes. Rome and I are in the meeting now over the phone. I asked them what you knew, but no one would be straight with me. I've been telling them to bring you in for a few weeks now.*



How serious was it that Rome and Grace had to be on a conference call in the meetings? Just what was going on? This certainly wasn't just pack business. The more I looked over Grace's message, the way she urged the werewolves to ask for my help, it was far more serious than Nyte was leading me to believe.

*Me: What exactly is going on, Grace?*

*Grace: Werewolves are going missing all across the Pacific coast. We've had students disappear in the middle of the night with no trace of them left behind, not even their scent. The same has been happening with entire packs up and down the coast.*

The air rushed from my lungs, shock widening my eyes as I read her message, viciously typing my reply.

*Me: How could entire packs go missing?*

It didn't make sense. Werewolf packs were close-knit. They worked together to defend each other like the wolves in the wilderness. One alone could be taken, but an entire pack? It didn't make sense.

*Grace: At first, it was small packs. Packs who generally kept to themselves. No one noticed at first, and when they did, they believed that maybe they had moved to a new territory. But then, more social packs began to disappear. They were gone overnight without a trace.*

*Grace: That is when the larger pack Alphas began to meet. It was to see if the missing packs had moved into the territories*

*of the other Alphas. But as they met, they realized that everyone was affected. That these packs were gone. Nothing but their personal effects were left behind.*

*Me: How long exactly has this been going on?*

*Grace: Months. Longer than you've been in that packhouse. The packs going missing have only gotten larger. And with no scent trails to follow, it's impossible to know where they've gone. I've even tried some tracking spells...but nothing. Have you, by chance, seen anything in your cards or a vision?*

I groaned at the reminder of my missing cards, sending another wave of nausea up my throat.

*Me: My cards have disappeared. They've been gone for about a week now. But even before then, I hadn't seen anything that told me about this. Everything you've said is completely new to me.*

*Grace: Well, when you find your cards, pay close attention and watch out for yourself. The Coronado Pack is big, but the latest pack to go missing was nearly as big. Whoever or whatever is doing this is growing stronger. I know that the pack may not accept you, but whoever is doing this won't see past you being there. Stay safe.*

*Me: Thank you for the heads up.*

*Grace: Anytime. Stay safe and stay in touch. I hate that I heard about your mate from Rome and not you.*

Guilt filled my heart, wanting to tell her the truth: that he wasn't my mate, not by fate at least. But I couldn't. I couldn't

reveal the truth about Nyte and me even to my friend because to say it out loud to anyone other than him made it true. I wasn't sure I actually wanted my time with him to end anymore. I wasn't sure I wanted his mark removed anymore. Even as I knew how selfish it would be of me to keep what belonged to another, I just wasn't sure I could go on to live a happy life after giving him up.

It started as only a crush on him. Seeing him come and go with my brother all these years always left butterflies in my stomach anytime our eyes met. Now, that crush has grown into a wild garden that not even the most skilled gardener could manage. I was madly and deeply in love with him, so much so that I could feel it consuming me.

I went to place my phone back on the table, deciding to take the nap Nyte had suggested, but another message came through from Grace, grabbing my attention.

*Grace: One more thing, we suspect a vampire and a witch are behind this. But we have no proof. So, keep that in mind when you get the cards back. You might be able to confirm our suspicions.*

My eyes narrowed at the message. It wouldn't be the first time a vampire messed with werewolves. But what would a witch gain from working with a vamp against werewolves? Our history with werewolves was complicated enough, and many high witches worked tirelessly to mend the ties between our kinds. I've never even heard a witch speak out entirely against

mixing the relationship, especially since more than a few witches were sitting in the seat of Luna for powerful packs.

I didn't reply to Grace, setting my phone back down as a new wave of nausea hit me. I buried my head into the pillow and groaned to myself.

What did I eat? I couldn't think of anything out of the usual things that I had eaten, and Nyte had been sharing his food with me. He wasn't sick. In fact, he seemed completely thrilled lately, as if he were walking on a sea of clouds anytime he looked at me. He also had no problem jumping up to get anything I asked for while I lay bedridden and miserable. Even volunteering to rub my tummy, which somehow helped ease my nausea.

The first time he did it, I thought it was strange. I had swatted his hand away and asked him if he had lost his mind. But he persisted, and I found myself relaxing at his touch by the third or fourth time. It was intimate but not sexual. We had begun doing a lot more intimate things that didn't involve stripping down to our birthday suits and playing a round of naked wrestling. Like watching his favorite cooking show. Making bets on who would be cut off the show in each episode and ranting to one another when they sent home someone we didn't think deserved to go.

He even began watching some of my favorite reality shows with me. We were fully engaged as we gasped at the drama between the housemates on the show. It made me feel like we were a real couple. Like my parents when they would watch

Mom's favorite novellas on TV. Or when Mom would sit and cheer for Dad's favorite soccer team. It wasn't just physical. We had reached a higher level than I ever thought possible when I came and asked Nyte for his help.

I just wish he would trust me with the trouble he was facing.

A frown creased my brow as I thought about the messages from Grace and how Nyte had been keeping it all from me. I had been living in a bubble all this time when I could have helped them as soon as I arrived. I could have helped any time before I lost my cards. All he had to do was ask.

It didn't matter to me that the pack didn't accept me as his mate. Technically, I wasn't. They didn't have to accept me. But even if I was, I still wouldn't care if they didn't accept me. I would still help because it was the right thing to do. And if a witch was involved, my duty as Ama's granddaughter was to help. It was the duty of any future high witch to right the wrongs of her fellow witches, no matter who the wronged party was.

Rolling over off of my stomach, I stared at the door, wondering when he would be back. Grace had said the last pack to disappear was almost as big as Nyte's pack. It could easily be a longer meeting with so much stress and panic at the prospect of now being next.

The Coronado pack was one of the biggest in the entire state, with the second being the Ocean Side pack that was up north along the coastline. If the pack taken last was really as large as

this pack, then they would be fearful for their safety. And the safety of their children.

The thought came with images of Diego and the other children living in the packhouse. If entire packs were going missing, that meant their children were as well. The idea of anyone harming innocent babies sent a fire in my veins that I didn't even know I could feel. A sense of protectiveness grinding my teeth.

I turned my gaze from the bedroom door, rolling over until my body slid off the other side of the bed to face the bathroom door. Cards weren't the only way to see things. I rarely scried with water. Admittedly, I wasn't very good at using water in my divination yet. I was barely learning to use a pendulum well. But water was the next best thing without my cards and no pendulum available to me to try.

“Don't get too reliant on the cards. They are a tool, just like anything else. The true power of premonition comes from within us.” Ama's words spilled from my lips as I remembered the day she had gifted me the cards.

Maybe I had become too reliant on them lately. Perhaps that's why they were lost to me at this time. The fates wanted to test my power by removing the tool I often used the most. I stepped into the bathroom, shedding my clothes before stepping into the large walk-in shower. I turned the water on to the hottest setting, sitting on the bench as the steam began to fill the bathroom, the moist condensation dripping down the glass door of the shower.

I reached into myself, searching for the power of my specialty. The gift that all my power came from. I put the question out to the universe, asking if there was anything I needed to know. Any important details that could help those I cared about. Blurred images began to shine behind my closed lids, my inner eye trying to focus on the images. Slowly, I opened my eyes, looking directly into the swirling water around the drain. The images began to take form, the blur sharpening to reveal what I needed to see. Nyte's face came first, his brilliant smile as he looked down at the smaller shape—a woman's body.

The door to the bathroom opened, the sudden cool air of the other room stealing the steam and breaking the fragile spell of premonition from me.

“Paige?” Nyte called out, his tone gentle but a hitch of concern cracking his voice. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” I replied, turning the hot water down and adding some cooler water to the shower. “Just wanted to relax. The steam was helping with my nausea.”

The door to the shower opened, and my eyes widening as Nyte stepped inside, already undressed, a mischievous grin on his lips.

“Well, if you are feeling better.”

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN



## Paige

Nyte stepped closer, bringing me to my feet, his arms wrapping around my waist to press my flushed body to his. I could feel every hard ripple of muscle. A whimper slipping out at the feel of him, already hard and ready. My hands slid up his chest, looking up into his grey eyes, my lips parting on a silent moan as he shifted so that he rubbed up against my clit. He rocked his hips, running his hard length against me, my body reacting with every stroke.

“Nyte,” I moaned, holding onto his slick neck as best I could, the water from the shower now cascading down his back.

He moved us, my back pressing against the stone wall of the shower, the thrusts of his hips growing faster with me now held in place between him and the wall.

“Did you know,” he whispered to me, his voice dark and husky as his lips grazed over mine. “That you look especially beautiful today?”

I wanted to scoff and roll my eyes...to argue with him that he must be insane. There was no way I looked anywhere close to beautiful today. I had been sick all day today and yesterday. This was the first time I had decided to shower in days, and I hadn't done anything with my hair either. I have done nothing but sit on the bench and try to scry with the water as it swirled down the drain. Even when I entered the bathroom, I avoided

looking at myself in the mirror, knowing I would look half dead with how I felt.

However, I couldn't do it. His eyes looked at me with so much sincerity that I couldn't help but suddenly feel like I was the most beautiful woman in the world. He gently brushed a stray hair from my cheek, pressing his lips to mine again as his body pressed harder into mine. Then in a flash, his gentle touch hardened. He took hold of my wrists, lifting them above my head and pinning them in place.

Warmth rushed to my core, excited by the sudden roughness he now treated me with. It was a rush, the whiplash of gentle to forceful. A moan parted my lips as his lips moved along my jawline. His hand held my hips in place as he continued to move his hips sinfully against my sex. I tried to push against him, smiling at the growl and small nips to my neck that my attempt earned me. My thighs clenched together, aching for more friction than he gave me.

I whined shamelessly to him, the sound holding no words but evident in my eyes.

More.

I needed more than he was giving me. I needed to feel him inside me, the hint of pressure teasing my nerves as his lips moved down my neck, teeth grazing along my collarbone. My wrists struggled against his hand just to hear him growl. I was trying to goad him, recognizing after all this time that when I struggled, I would get what I wanted far quicker than simply allowing him his complete control. My smile was cut short, a

cry ripping from my lungs as his teeth pulled at my tender nipple. The sensation somehow heightened now compared to when he usually did it.

I gasped as he released me, his tongue tasting the hardened bud, mixing the pain with pleasure, weakening me at the knees.

“Please,” I gasped, feeling breathless already, my body shaking with the building need he fostered.

“Please, what, little darling?” His hand on my hips slides across my skin, slipping between my thighs. He ran his fingers across my slickened opening, a smile playing upon his lips with a moan of his own. “Is this what you want?”

I bit my lip, arching my back against the wall. “Yes, more.”

His fingers teased at my clit, twisting the bundle of nerves to draw out another cry from my lips.

“Tell me exactly what you want,” he ordered, moving his fingers to my sex, dipping a single fingertip inside me.

My mind races with everything I wanted from him at once, overwhelmed by such a simple command. But it wasn't simple. Not really. Not to me. There were a multitude of things I wanted him to do for me at this moment. I wanted him to lift me in his arms before slamming into me with my back pressed to the wall, while at the same time, I wanted him to turn me around and press the front of my body into the wall as he took me from behind. I wanted his mouth on me as well as his

hands. There was just so many options that I couldn't choose a single one.

“Come on, Paige,” he coaxed, pressing his lips to my neck. “Tell me what you want me to do to you. Tell me your darkest desires.”

I moaned as he sucked on the tender skin where my neck met my shoulder, rocking my hips against his teasing hand. I wasn't sure how to respond to him now. I didn't know if I had any dark desires. Nothing that he hadn't already done to me, that is. I tried to focus my mind on one choice. I was searching through all the scenarios in my mind for the darkest choice. Then I realized what it was I really wanted. My eyes moved to his as he pulled back from my neck, looking at me expectantly.

“I want you to completely own my body,” I revealed.

I didn't want the control. Not at this moment. Not with him.

If anyone had told me three months ago that I would willingly allow a man to control me, even the one man I had been pining over for years, I would have thought them crazy. I was always in control. My specialty helped me with that. You would think knowing futures and having premonitions that save people would have left me the understanding that we can't change certain things. However, it showed me the opposite. I could see all the paths to the future. Every decision leading me to that place taught me that I could control the outcome by controlling which path was taken.

That controlling part of myself was precisely how I ended up here. Although I hadn't seen the path leading me to break the

bond with my stalker mate, I knew there had to be a path. That was how I ended up here with Nyte now. But I didn't want that control with him. I wanted him to have it.

"Your wish is my command," he growled out, grabbing my thigh and lifting my leg off the tiled floor of the shower.

My ankle soon sat on his shoulder, the head of his cock pressing against my opening. Just as he thrust into me, his hand covered my mouth, muffling the sound of my cry. I looked back at him, confused. He had never silenced me before. He had always tried his hardest to get me to make as much noise as possible.

"The visiting packs are still here," he growled, pulling his hips back before slamming back into me, his hand still muffling the sound of my moan as my body began to match his rhythm. "I don't want them to hear you. These sounds belong to me."

My heart hitched at the pure jealousy in his tone. With his next thrust, I bit back the cry, bending my toes to grip the slick, wet tile beneath our feet. As he noticed my body slipping, he released my wrists, allowing me to wrap my arms around his neck to hold onto him as he thrust harder and harder, his hand still covering my mouth. I could feel my body tightening, that same familiar pressure building like a dam against a flood. My nails dug into the skin at the back of his neck, my stretching muscles in my legs adding more to the building pressure.

His body was tensing with mine, edging toward oblivion at the same rate. I bit at his palm to stifle my cries, my head spinning as the light flashed before my eyes. At the same moment,

Nyte's body stilled, his head falling into the crook of my neck and biting down on my flesh. I could feel him throbbing inside me, filling me.

A distant thought in my mind warned me that I should be more careful letting him finish inside me. How complicated would things be if I ended up pregnant?

Nyte slowly removed his hand from my mouth, pressing a soft and gentle kiss to my lips and cheek. He gently sat my foot back to the ground, wrapping his arms around my waist as my legs shook beneath me.

"Are you okay?" he asked softly.

I chuckled at his concern, holding tight to his neck. "Yeah," I assured him. "I just can't feel my legs."

A cheeky smile lit up his eyes before sweeping his arms beneath my knees and lifting me. "Allow me to help you then."

I laughed as he carried me out of the shower, my hands grabbing for two towels as we passed the rack before leaving the bathroom bridal style. He lay me out across the bed, accepting the towel I offered as I began to dry my hair and body on the bed. I watched him walk around the bed, grabbing the remote and turning the TV on as he wrapped his towel around his waist. He dropped into the bed beside me, pulling me to him and nuzzling his nose against my hair.

"Is there anything you want to watch?"

"Not on TV," I answered, running my hand up his bare chest.

Fire blazed behind his darkening grey eyes, the same mischievous smile as before returning to his lips.

“Oh? What do you want to watch then?”

I smiled back at him, dipping my head to his chest and running my tongue along his abs. My smile grew at the sound of his breath catching in his lungs, the towel around his waist beginning to raise.

“I want to watch you get owned by me now.” My hand slipped within the towel, rubbing his growing shaft in the palm of my hand.

His head fell back on a moan that made me lick my lips, excited by the power I held over him.

“Don’t worry about being too loud,” I continued, slipping between his legs as I removed his towel. “I don’t mind if the entire city hears how good I make you feel.”

I ran my tongue up the seam along the underside of his cock, smiling as it jerked in my hand.

“Paige,” Nyte gasped, his head falling back into the pillow.

“Yes, darling?” I smiled, watching him attempt to smirk at the way I used his endearment with him.

Before he could answer, however, my lips wrapped around the head of his cock, my tongue tasting the precum accumulating at the tip. As I took more of him in my mouth, I moaned, vibrating around him, my eyes watching as his eyes rolled to the back of his head. Yes, I wanted him to have control when it

came to me, but that didn't mean I didn't want some control over him, either.

"Fuck, Paige," he moaned.

I took him deeper, pulling back as I sucked before bobbing my head down and moaning around his stiff shaft. My tongue ran along the salty taste of his skin, warmth touching the back of my throat as more beads of precum mixed with my saliva. His hands found their way into my hair, pulling at my roots as he fought for control. I felt his hips buck up, his cock hitting the back of my throat. It took everything in me not to gag on him while carefully swallowing around him and breathing through my nose.

"That's it," he cooed, holding my hair up and rocking his hips at the same pace as my mouth. "Just like that. Fuck, you look so beautiful."

I hummed a response, looking up at him through teary eyes. I could feel him swelling inside my mouth, my jaw beginning to ache at the hinges.

"I'm almost there," he moaned, his hips picking up more speed. He held my head still by my hair, thrusting into my mouth as I kept my jaw wide and my lips sealed around him.

I lifted my hand to his balls, massaging them as they moved inside his body, his moaning growing deeper and becoming a growl. With a final thrust up, he called out my name. The sound vibrating nearly every surface of the room. It was almost a full fledge howl, and I had no doubt the sound could be heard in every hall of the house. His cock throbbed inside



my mouth, hot liquid flowing down my throat as I swallowed each gulp. He released his grip on my hair, yanking me by the shoulder until I lay beneath him on the bed, his lips covering mine in a ravishing kiss.

“You are amazing,” he growled against my mouth, running his tongue along my lips. “Completely. Totally. Undoubtedly. Amazing.” He punctuated each word with a kiss along my jaw, moving down to my neck to nip at my collarbone. “I’m utterly addicted to you, Paige. More so than the addiction of running beneath the moonlight. You consume me.”

His words sent a wave of butterflies to my core, joy lighting up my eyes with a smile that stretched parts of my face I didn’t know could move.

“I feel the same way, Nyte,” I confessed, cupping his face. “I never knew a person could consume so much of me, but every part of my body burns for you. Every thought in my mind revolves around you. I love you...more than I have ever loved another in my entire life. And that scares the shit out of me.” I kissed his lips, smiling at him as I leaned against the pillow. “But it also excites me.”

He brushed the hair from my eyes, a smile lightening the grey to an almost blue color. My eyes fluttered closed as he leaned down, kissing my forehead.

“I love you too, Little Darling. More than you have yet to realize.”

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

## Paige

I walked down the stairs to the common room with Madi. Nyte had loosened a bit on my confinement; so long as I had Madi with me if he couldn't join me. Although I still felt like I was being babysat, it was nice to move around the house freely, especially since the pack had added more patrols throughout the day and night. We would spend time with little Diego while Nyte was on his shift. The little boy wanted a reading with some poker cards, and while they weren't exactly the same as using my cards, it was possible to give someone a reading of sorts. I would just lack the Major Arcana cards.

“How accurate is a reading without the Major Arcana?” Madi asked as we stepped off the stairs and turned toward the common room filled with children and the sound of the TV playing.

“Accurate. Just not as detailed as it could be. Mostly I can do yes or no questions in this way. Red for no, black for yes. I could possibly pull off a romance reading too, but I'm sure a ten-year-old boy isn't interested in that kind of reading.”

We laughed together, walking into the room to find Diego sitting at the game table at the back. The other children were lounging across the chairs and couches, a few laying on pillows on the floor, their eyes glued to the new movie they had all waited impatiently to watch all week.

A cartoon wolf released a howl, followed by another with the joke of being unable to control themselves. I laughed as each child began to howl with the cartoon, their giggles over their shared joke more addictive than the howls of the cartoon characters. We sat at the table with Deigo, his eyes sparkling up at me as he held out the playing cards he had borrowed from his uncle.

“Here, Paige! Can you tell me my future?” He wasted no time asking, pushing the cards to me excitedly.

“You’ll have to ask a question,” I explained, shuffling the cards as I looked at him. “What do you want to know?”

“Will I be as strong as Nyte someday? I wanna be an Alpha!”

Madi giggled behind her hand, watching the two of us as I cut the deck and pulled a card. “Ace of Spades. You will be a strong leader when you are older.”

His face lit up. “Will my mate be as pretty as you?”

I couldn’t help but smile, reshuffling the cards and drawing the queen of clubs. “Yes, you will have a strong and beautiful mate when you grow up.”

“Will his mate interrupt the plans of the pack like you?” A snarky voice asked from behind me.

I first looked up at Madi, the hairs on the back of her neck standing on end as her lips peeled back in a snarl. I knew who it was—I recognized the delusional voice.

“Diego, go watch the movie,” I said, giving him back the playing cards and shooing him off with the other children. He

looked between me and Katya, worry glistening in his little eyes. “It’s okay. Go to your friends.”

I waited until he reluctantly joined the pack of children, squeezing onto the couch with his cousin, who eyed us suspiciously.

“You have got to stop with your false beliefs. Not only has Nyte told me that he never intended to take you as a mate, but Madi and Chase have backed his claim,” I said, now on my feet and facing the she-wolf.

Her lips peeled back, stepping closer toward me with a growl. “It’s not false beliefs! I was meant to be his Luna. Nyte was to be my mate. And then you came along!”

“And who exactly told you that you were meant to be the Luna?” I challenged, stepping closer to her.

I could see Madi move to my side from the corner of my eye. Her body was tightly wound, her eyes shifting between Katya and her sister.

“I was promised the position,” she growled. “It’s my destiny to be Luna!”

“Then take it up with the fates,” Madi growled at my side. “Because they chose Paige to be Nyte’s mate, not you.”

A rock dropped into the pit of my stomach. Madi had no idea how wrong she was. Fate didn’t choose me for Nyte. I was running from the one they had chosen for me while trying to figure out how to break the ties woven by fate. What if Katya was right? What if she and Nyte were truly fated mates? What

if he, like me, was looking for a way to break the bond between them?

If that was the case, I could understand her anger, but if Nyte wanted her as his mate, he wouldn't have agreed to help me.

"If Nyte had ever wanted you, he would have made certain to have you," I finally said, turning away from the angry she-wolf, no longer feeling the desire to continue this fight. "Nyte isn't the kind of man not to take what he wants."

"She's right," I heard Madi chuckle from behind me. "Nyte always gets his way. And he never wanted his way with you. Just get over yourself, Katya. You aren't ever going to be the Luna of this pack."

Madi came to my side, leaving the commons with a farewell wave to Diego and the other children. They had paused their movie, looking between us and the other two women with curious eyes. I could hear the two sisters talking in their native language, with Katya snapping back at whatever her sister had asked. I didn't look back, however. I was done. I wasn't going to sit around and argue like some teenage girl over a boy. I didn't even do that as a teenager, so why would I stoop to that level now as an adult?

"You, okay?" Madi asked.

I smiled back at her, nodding my head. "Yeah, I think I just need a nap. How much longer do you think Nyte will be on patrol?"

“Probably about another hour or so. Do you want me to hang out with you till he gets back?”

I shook my head. “No, that’s fine. You should probably rest up before your turn to go out. I’ll just lock the door and rest. I don’t know why I’m always so tired here lately.”

Madi chuckled. “Katya could have something to do with it. Just being in the same room with her exhausts me on a normal day.”

I smirked, slowly taking the stairs, a chill running down my spine. I looked over the railing, feeling eyes on me, and found Chase watching me with a smile. His gaze moved from Kataya to me, raising his brow before I turned away.

“But seriously,” Madi said after the next step, pulling my gaze away from Chase. “Don’t let her get to you. You were absolutely right about Nyte. If he had wanted anything to do with her, he would have. I doubt even the fates themselves have much sway over him. I can see it in his eyes. Fate or not, you are his chosen mate.”

I smiled back at her, her words soothing my true anxiety about not being chosen for him. As much as he loved me, and I loved him, the thought of his true mate coming forward worried me.

She wouldn’t know my fear about that. She would only think that I was worried about Katya and her claim that I ruined her life. She wouldn’t know that I was more worried that if Katya wasn’t his true mate, there would be another to come, and that woman could be the one to steal him away. But the thought of

Nyte defying fate was, well, realistic. I chuckled to myself, reaching the top of the staircase.

“What’s so funny?” Madi asked, smiling as we approached Nyte and my room.

“Just picturing Nyte fighting the old ladies from the Disney movie.” Madi snorted a laugh, no doubt now picturing the same thing.

“That is a great way of picturing him defying the fates. It’s a good thing that he loves you. He doesn’t have to fight the inevitable then.”

My smile fell, my hand pausing on the doorknob. “What?”

“It’s fun to say, and I have no doubt he would absolutely try if he had to. But you can’t fight the fates. You should know that better than anyone as a seer. Once the fates weave their threads, only their golden sheers can cut the bonds.” She giggled, turning to leave me in my room. “That sounded way too poetic to be coming from me.”

Grimacing, I entered the bedroom, doing my best not to throw up as a wave of nausea hit me. This time, I knew why I felt so sick. Only the fates could sever a bond. There was no way to escape what they decided for you. So all of this, all these feelings that have grown with Nyte, didn’t matter because the fates had chosen a psychopath who chased me through the cliffs and beach with a clear motive in mind.

My mateship didn’t hold the love that my relationship with Nyte had forged. It was an obsession. He wanted to possess



me more than love me. I could sense it in his voice as he teased me with a display of a big bad wolf chasing little red riding hood through the woods. I had been trying for weeks to find anything to help me break a mate bond to escape him. And maybe, just maybe, offer Nyte the same choice to be with me no matter what the costs. But there was no way around it. The golden sheers which unbound one's fate were as tangible as the fates themselves. My fate, and Nyte's, were sealed.

A sob bubbled from my lips; my back pressed against the door as I sank to the floor. I never cried. I hated crying. Crying didn't fix anything. It seemed like I was doing more of it lately and even crying when Nyte brought me an extra box of cereal yesterday morning.

"Why am I so emotional?" I sobbed, burying my face in my hands.

*We know why.*

I jerked my head up at the sound of the ethereal voice, recognizing it immediately.

"Where are you?" I called out, wiping my face and pushing myself back to my feet to look around.

*Over here.*

*Let us help you.*

*We're right here.*

The voices were coming from the walls, my hand running along the surface, following their sound as they called to me. My fingers traced over a small indent, just below the mounted

TV. From a glance, you couldn't tell anything was there. The compartment is perfectly flush with the rest of the wall. I traced along the edge, finding each corner and the hinged end within the wall itself.

"How do I open this?" I asked myself, trying to find a hidden nob of some kind.

*Push.*

The voices whispered. I followed their direction, pushing directly against the hidden door. A soft click told me it had worked, releasing the door for it to pop open. My cards sat in a small plastic bag, a colorful array of cards from the TV surrounding them. I let out a squeal of joy, grabbing the cards and ripping them from the plastic bag before pressing them to my chest.

"How did you get in there?" I gasped, turning to the bed and sitting on the edge as I looked over each card, ensuring they were all there. "Why didn't I hear you call out before."

*Read us.*

*Let us tell you everything. It's time for you to know.*

I felt my face pinch into a frown. "Time for me to know what?"

*Everything.*

I began to shuffle the cards, curious as to what everything meant. What secrets could my cards have been keeping from me? Was it about the missing wolf packs? About my future mate and perhaps a way to escape my fate? I cut the cards into

to deck before reshuffling them once more. The hierophant came up first. It made sense, the cards guiding me to a truth I have yet to know. I tilted my head at the card, shuffling again before drawing a second.

The two of cups stared back at me, my brow creasing more. A deep love and strong connection. The kind that was meant to be between mates, but I only felt this way with Nyte. My eyes widened, quickly drawing my third card. The Empress faced up, her swollen belly grabbing my attention over all the other details of the cards. My mind raced as I looked at the beautiful hand-painted picture, my hand touching my belly. My emotions began to make sense. My nausea and increased appetite had confused me for the last two weeks, ever since I had lost my cards.

“No...” I gasped, drawing the fourth card to confirm my new suspicion, though praying I would be proven wrong.

The high priestess smiled back at me, tears flooding my eyes as she revealed the truth. Images of Nyte caressing my belly, the gentle smile on his lips as he did so. He knew. He had known everything. I stared down at the cards—a mixture of emotions overpowering me. I had been wrong. My cards had told me before that Nyte was the answer to my desires...that he would help me. I had been foolish before, not understanding what they had met.

While I believed they were leading me to a path that would protect me from my mate, they really led me directly into his arms. Tears flooded my eyes. And he knew the truth: he let me

beg for his help. He allowed me to tell him my plans to dissolve the mate bond, and he never once said that he was my mate. That I had nothing to fear of the stalker who claimed his title.

My vision began to tunnel, the room around me replaced with a vision of me. Round bellied and smiling at myself in the mirror as my mother cooed over me. I was in my bedroom at home—with no sign of Nyte. The vision faded, the room returning through my tear-filled eyes. And the sound of the door opening alerted me that I was no longer alone.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

## Nyte

I passed Katya and Dasha on my way to the stairs. The two sisters had earned quite the gathering around them as they yelled back and forth, including the Alpha Markus.

“What’s going on?” I asked Chase, who leaned against the wall, watching with minimal interest.

“Your mate and Madilyn had a standoff with the sisters today. From what I gathered, Paige had made a good point against Katya’s claims of you two being meant to be and she disrupted your plans as if you’re announcing her as your fate-chosen mate wasn’t point enough. Now Dasha is questioning her, and poor Katya doesn’t like being questioned when she has no answer.”

I let out a low growl, turning away from the crowd and rushing up the stairs to check on my mate. I had relented on keeping her cooped up in the room under the condition that she be with me or Madilyn. That was due to my impression that the pack would see Madilyn as my ears and eyes, just as she would have been if we had become the Alpha and Beta. Apparently, Katya didn’t see it that way.

The door was locked when I reached my room, relief in knowing that Paige had locked the door after Madilyn left her in the room. I quickly pulled out my keys, unlocked the door, and walked inside to greet my mate. My steps froze in place as I saw her. Tears streamed down her cheeks; cards spread out in

front of her. It didn't take a seer to know what the cards had told her. As she stared back at me, the look in her eyes told me everything.

"You knew," she accused, sweeping a hand over the cards to collect them back into a deck. "Don't try to deny it or act dumb. You knew."

I didn't have it in me to deny it. I had been keeping enough from her as it was. And if she found her cards, it meant that fate had decided for me, just as they had when she came to me to mark her.

"You weren't ready to know the truth," I said, pulling the sweaty shirt over my head and tossing it to the laundry basket.

"I wasn't ready. Really? That's what you're going with here? Who the hell are you to decide what I can and cannot handle?" She stormed up to me, bumping her chest against mine. "And when exactly were you planning to tell me that I'm pregnant? When was I suddenly gaining weight for no apparent reason?"

"I honestly figured you would want to find that out for yourself. You're still early. I assumed you would notice other changes to your body before I ever had to tell you anything."

"Oh, you mean like a missed period? I have PCOS. I don't always get a period. I can go without one for months at a time. So, would you have told me if I had gone over a month without noticing anything? Or would you just assume I was hiding it from you like you've been hiding it from me?"

I was taken aback by her accusation. I had no idea about her condition. I hadn't smelled anything on her before.

"I wouldn't have let you go too long without seeing a midwife," I argued back, certain that I wouldn't have allowed that. I would have wanted her to get prenatal care sooner rather than later.

"Oh, so I'm supposed to believe you now, even though you have kept this a secret from me for this long." She held up her cards, her eyes narrowing at me in a challenge. "And how exactly did my cards end up in that cubby behind the wall? You told me you didn't know where they were."

She pulled out a card, looking at it before scowling at me. "See this?" She showed the card with *The Magician* written across the top. A man holding up a wand glared back at me. "This says that you plotted behind my back to get whatever outcome you wanted. This tells me that you took my cards, hid them, and then lied to my face."

More tears filled her eyes, her lip quivering in anger as she glared back at me. "You took a piece of me. All so you could keep me from knowing about our bond. Why? Were you hoping I actually found a way to break it? What else have you lied to me about, Nyte? Do you even love me? Have you ever wanted me as your mate?"

I grabbed her shoulders, pulling her against my chest, my hands pressing her head into my shoulder as she wept. "I never lied about how I felt, Paige. You have to believe me."



She shoved me back, eyes narrowed. “I can’t. I can’t believe anything from you because you haven’t been honest with me from the very beginning! You could have told me that day on my front porch that it was you in my vision and the psycho on the beach was just that, a psycho. I had nothing to fear when it came to whom the fates chose for me. Instead, you pretended to be my fake mate while you actually were!”

She ran her hand over her neck where my mark had been made. “You marked me, telling me that it could be undone. But it can’t when the mark is between true fate-chosen bonds. You didn’t even give me the chance to accept you.”

“How was I supposed to give you that opportunity? You mentioned finding some spell or potion to break your bond!”

“From him!” she screamed at me. “Not you! I wanted to break my ties with the man I thought was my mate. I came to you because I trusted you.” She took a step back, shaking her head. “How can I trust you now?”

A sharp knock came at the door just as I approached her, Jose’s voice thundering through the wood. “Alpha’s office! Now!”

I growled at the command. The timing couldn’t have been worse; I knew that Beta Jose coming directly to me meant trouble. The trouble that I couldn’t turn away from, even to console my shattered mate.

“I’ll be right there,” I called back, pulling a clean shirt from my drawer and looking at Paige, her eyes piercing mine with daggers. “I’ll be back. Wait here.”

She scoffed, turning away and walking into the bathroom, the door slamming behind her. I sighed, leaving the room and walking toward Alpha Alexander's office. As soon as I entered the room, I noted two new Alphas in attendance.

"Nyte, may I introduce Alpha Orion and his daughter, Liberty," Alexander nodded at the two Alphas.

I took in the older Alpha, recognizing his name before his face. It was hard not to know the wolf's name with witches fully integrated into his pack, thanks to his mateship with their city's High Witch. I just never expected to meet him or his daughter, for that matter. The young hybrid was barely eighteen years old; it was said that she would be taking over the pack from her father soon.

She smiled back at me, standing as she extended her hand in greeting. "I would like to say it's a pleasure to meet you, Nyte. However, under these circumstances, I think it might be slightly inappropriate."

I shook her hand, noting the combination of her features. Her dark hair matched that of her father's, but the sparkling green of her eyes held magic and no doubt came from her mother. "I assume your pack has been experiencing the same phenomenon as we have if you have come all this way."

"Not exactly," Orion said, gesturing for his daughter to return to her seat. "Our city is easily locked down. However, there have been attempts. Thankfully, those attempts have been thwarted with witches at every corner of the city."

Alpha Markus scoffed, earning a glare from the older and more powerful Alpha and his daughter.

“Do you know who is behind it then?” I asked, eager to end this nightmare once and for all, hoping to save the missing werewolves.

“Yes and no,” Liberty replied. “We have caught a few vampires. However, there are spells upon spells placed on them. Each time we attempted to question them, they’d bite off their tongue or burst into flame before our eyes. I can barely find a trace of the power used. It’s dark though. Very dark.”

Orion looked at me, tapping his chin with his finger as his eyes gazed behind me and then at my face. “I understand that you have a witch-mate,” he stated. “And I hear she has a powerful tracker bloodline and premonitions.”

My back stiffened, recognizing the same request that Rome had tried over the phone. Why couldn’t these men, whose mates were also witches, not understand that she owed the pack nothing? They didn’t trust her, so why should she help us?

“Why should that matter?” I asked.

Orion chuckled. “You can’t protect her from what she is. What she is, is the best chance you may have to stop this. It is witches who protect my pack from this outside force. A witch may need to save you and your missing packs.”

Orion nodded to Liberty, the two standing again. The young hybrid smiled at me before her gaze turned to Madilyn. “I will see you in a few weeks then, Madilyn. We are looking forward to your visit.” I watched my would-be Beta smile, nodding to the alphas.

“Thank you, I look forward to it as well. It will be interesting seeing how your pack works,” Madilyn replied, bowing her head respectfully.

Liberty turned back to me, a soft smile touching her lips. She stepped closer, lowering her voice low enough that even the sharp senses of the wolves in the room couldn’t catch every word. “I have the power of premonition as well. You have to trust your mate; if you don’t, then you both will lose the fates’ favor.”

With that, they departed, leaving the rest of us to contemplate the new information they left with us.

“Bah,” Markus scoffed loudly. “They are just trying to spread that witch wolf integration bullshit they feed their pack. Just because they haven’t lost any wolves yet it doesn’t mean they won’t. Witches are only out for themselves. As soon as it gets too much, they will leave that city, and Orion and his half-breed daughter will come to us for help.”

“Watch your tongue,” I growled, narrowing my eyes at the visiting alpha.

Markus grimaced at me, his Beta growling low. “That’s right,” he chuckled darkly. “Your little witch bitch is probably already planning her exit. No doubt she caught wind of the danger the

packs are under, and she's ready to hightail it out of here. Mark my words, you will be mate-less before your pack is taken out."

I jumped to my feet, his Beta jumping in front of him, our noses pressed together as we growled. "You don't know shit about witches," I snarled, shoving his beta to the side to look my actual opponent in his eyes. "You're ignorant words show that. Covens are as sacred to witches as packs are to werewolves. They're family."

"So, you think your little witch feels that your pack is her coven?" He let out a booming laugh. "I've seen how this pack treats her. There is no way in hell she has loyalty to any of you."

I felt my claws extending, the desire to punish Markus for his disrespect of my mate and her kind. I was just about to make my move when Alexander's voice boomed out around the room.

"Nyte! Madilyn! Stand down!"

I jerked my head around, finding that Madilyn had taken the Beta I had shoved away to the ground, holding him in place with a chokehold. The lesser Beta had begun to turn blue as she held him, gasping for air when she released him at our Alpha's command.

With a crack of her neck and knuckles, she stepped away from her fallen opponent, obeying Alpha Alexander and placing herself between me and the other Beta as he slowly rose back to his feet.

“Nyte, I understand the desire to protect your mate, but I’ve told you before that we can’t afford this internal bickering. Not when any of our packs could be the next.” Alexander scrubbed his hand down his face, Beta Jose growling low at us. “We can now confirm that a vampire and a witch are doing this. And the fact that they attempted to take Orion’s pack means they have the confidence to go for larger packs. Orion’s pack is twice our size, and since they couldn’t take that pack, they will be coming for any of us now. We pose less resistance than a pack protected by an entire coven of witches.”

“Maybe we should enlist witches then,” Madilyn spoke up.

“Over my dead body,” Jose growled.

“It just might be,” Madilyn countered with a huff. “You are so blinded by a history that has long been in the past. Witches are not our enemy. Not all of them, anyway, and certainly not Paige or her family. They have done nothing to our kind except accept Nyte into their home and family. They were praising the couple even! Yet we stand divided. You even voted to remove Nyte as the future Alpha over his connection to a witch, despite him being one of the most powerful werewolves within the last century.”

She looked around the room, scoffing before turning away and heading to the door. “People love to say that love is blind, but I’m finding that hate is the blind emotion. Love sees too much beauty in those different to us to be truly blind.”

She left the room, her words ringing in the silence of the office. Not even Markus spoke up; his brows furrowed in deep

thought. I looked back at Alexander and Jose; they exchanged glances equally thoughtful in their silence. I said nothing, turning and following Madilyn out of the office. As I approached my room, I stilled; the door was left ajar, and a lack of scent sent alarm bells through my head.

*Shit.*

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN



## Paige

I only carried one bag with me, a couple of shirts and shorts stuffed inside with my tarot cards, walking along the winding road towards home. It had been more complicated than I expected to sneak out of the packhouse. Even with Nyte and Madilyn in the meeting, I had caught more than a few curious stares as I made my way to the door as naturally as possible.

The real test of my stealth was to sneak around Katya and Chase, the two speaking just off to the side of the house. Part of me wanted to find out what they were talking about. I still didn't trust Chase entirely, and seeing as he didn't seem to respect Katya, I couldn't help but wonder what they could be talking about outside the house, alone. However, I was too furious with Nyte to really care at that moment. I just wanted to get home to my mom and tell her everything that has happened, all the way back to the beginning.

I wanted her to comfort me and promise that everything would be okay. That this moment wouldn't be the foundation of my and Nyte's future. Because Heaven help me, I still wanted to be with him. I still loved him with everything I had, and I would forgive him when the anger passed. Maybe I'd even be able to trust him again. But for now, I needed some space away from him. I watched lizards scurry across the road, and seagulls fly overhead, squawking to one another in their search for food along the beach. It was going to be a long walk back

to my part of the peninsula, but I didn't mind. I always walked home from my job, and although this was a far longer walk, I could manage it just fine.

"Wouldn't have to be walking at all if I had found Nyte's car keys," I groaned, kicking a rock along the path.

Luckily, my chucks were available, making the walk much more manageable than if I had to wear my flip-flops, which would have most likely broken before I reached the cemetery. I turned my head at the sound of an approaching car, frowning as the unfamiliar vehicle began to slow to a stop beside me.

"What in the hell are you doing out here?" Katya asked, lifting the sunglasses from her face as she looked at me with a disgusted smirk.

I rolled my eyes, returning to walk as she inched her car alongside me. "None of your business, Katya. Just go on about whatever you're doing, and I'll do the same."

"You really don't get how a pack works," Katya snarked. "Just because we fight doesn't mean we won't help each other out. And you were right; I don't have a future as Nyte's Luna. He isn't even going to be Alpha now, so none of that stuff matters. But as his mate, you are technically pack, so I can't exactly leave you on the side of the road now that I've seen you out here."

I looked at her; my eyebrow raised suspiciously. "You were literally ready to rip me apart earlier today."

“Yeah? I’m ready to rip my sister apart every morning, but she’s still my sister.” She pulled the car up ahead of me, turning to block my path along the road before getting out of the car. “Listen, I’m already in hot water for picking fights with you in front of the kids. If anyone finds out that I left you to walk to wherever the hell it is you think you are going, then I run the risk of exile. So, how about you help a girl out and get in the car? I’ll take you wherever you need to go.” She held up three fingers, smiling. “Scout’s honor.”

I groaned, dismissing my best judgment as I looked along the road, seeing just how far I had to go. I barely could see the cemetery entrance from here, and my family’s home was all the way up by the Sunset Cliffs.

“Fine,” I submitted.

Katya smiled, her eyes glistening like the ocean as they caught the sunlight. “Good! I knew you couldn’t be all that bad.”

I snorted, walking around her car and sliding into the passenger seat. I dropped my bag at my feet, fastening my seat belt as she checked her lipstick in the review mirror before pulling back onto the road.

“I’m just going to my parent’s house,” I told her. “You can drop me off at the Sunset Cliffs. I can walk from there.”

“Oh, how fun!” she cheered. “I was meeting up with a friend there! He loves the sights in the peninsula area and told me I had to come to see them for myself.”

I frowned, looking her up and down. She wasn't exactly dressed for the cliffs, but I didn't say anything. Maybe this friend of hers was a rebound date to get her mind off Nyte and her delusions of grandeur at his side. I'm sure she just wanted to look her best for this date, even if the location and her outfit weren't exactly matching up.

"Yeah," I continued the conversation, not wanting to ride in a quiet car with her. "The cliffs are beautiful. Tourists love them, so it gets crowded, especially at sunset. But come nightfall, that's the best time to be there."

"You go there often?" she asked innocently, her eyes on the road.

"Yeah. I grew up in the area. Grandma held our coven meetings there when I was a kid. Human cops intervened, however. They told us we needed to have a permit if we had more than a certain number of people gathering there after dark. So, Ama opened her own shop with a big warehouse on the back, and that's where they meet now."

"Humans are ridiculous with their permits to gather places," Katya chuckled. "It's like they see a group of people and just assume they must be up to no good. They never stop to think that someone alone with no ties to anyone or anything is the real danger."

I looked over at Katya, enjoying this new side of her that I was seeing. She looked brighter now. And though I could tell she was gorgeous before, downright celebrity material, with the

ease of our conversation and getting along, she somehow looked even more beautiful.

“So, this friend,” I prodded, watching her shoulder stiffen a bit at the mention of him. “Is he a friend, friend? Or is he a potential more than friend, friend?”

She giggled, sparing me a glance as she wiggled her eyebrows. “That is for me to know and you to find out.”

I joined her in a laugh, shaking my head. “Well, You certainly are dressed like a girl trying to impress, so if you’re aim is more than friends, then you’re a sure thing.”

Her cheeks blushed, turning her eyes back to the road as we entered the cemetery. “Thank you.”

“You’re very welcome, Katya. And thank you for picking me up. You aren’t as bad as I had thought you were.”

She smiled and shrugged. “Yeah, well, I’m a complicated girl. What can I say?”

The rest of the drive was quiet. Katya turned on the radio; the two of us occasionally sang along with a song as it came on. I mostly stared out the window, watching the landscape and buildings change in a blur. The last time I had been up this way was with Nyte to attend my family’s dinner, it had been the first night out around my family since he had marked me.

I had felt so guilty then, believing I was deceiving them with my mateship to Nyte. Every time Ama had praised our pairing, a piece of me had died a little. I couldn’t enjoy my family’s joy for me because I believed it was all fake. I sighed under

my breath, the music on the radio drowning out the sound as Katya sang along at the top of her lungs.

Why couldn't Nyte have just been honest with me?

I know the cards had been vague when they pointed me in his direction, but that came with the territory of premonitions and fortune-telling. The powers often enjoyed sending you on a quest without all the facts. But Nyte was different. He should have trusted me with the truth. You weren't ready to know. That was what he had told me. Who the hell was he to decide what I was prepared for? I wasn't a child. I've helped to save people with my visions. I wasn't fragile to crazy news. Not with the things I've witnessed just by closing my eyes. So, what made him believe I wasn't ready to know the truth about him being my mate?

I sat a little straighter in my seat, my eyes widening as another thought rose. How long exactly has he known? I have been so angry up till now that I assumed he had known since I approached him with the idea of faking it. But he had to of known before then. Werewolves could smell the bond the moment it fell into place, and Nyte had practically lived at my home until then.

When exactly did he know that I was his mate?

The car began to slow and turn, the change of speed and movement pulling me out of my thoughts. I looked around then, immediately recognizing the parking lot to the cliffs and beach.

I smiled at Katya, gathering my bag and reaching for the door handle. “Thank you for the ride,” I said.

“Wait!” She gasped, grabbing my arm to keep me from leaving the car.

I looked back at her, confused, raising my brows. “What?”

“I have no idea where he wanted to meet. You said you come here a lot. Just help me find the meeting spot, and then you can go. I helped you. Now you help me.”

I sighed, rolling my eyes as I nodded. “Alright, alright. I’ll help you. Where did he say to meet him at?”

Katya’s face brightened with an Academy Award-winning smile, clapping her hands together excitedly. “Yay! Thank you!” She grabbed her phone, pulling up the message, and read it aloud. “Meet me at the sea caves. I’ll be just inside.”

“Of course,” I sighed, opening the car door and getting out. “I know where to go. It’s as big an attraction as the cliffs themselves. Come on; I’ll show you.”

“You are such a lifesaver! I’m so glad I didn’t leave you on the side of the road.” Katya laughed, meeting me on the passenger side of the car and linking her arm with mine. “It’s too bad we got off to such a rough start. I can see us being great friends.”

I laughed, leading the way to the path towards the sea caves. The area was surprisingly bare of people. Only a few tourists passed us, making their way up the path. I could hear a few grumblings about the sea caves being closed, frowning as I looked back at them. The sea caves only closed at high tide,

and the tide wasn't high at this time. So why would they think they were closed? I looked back at Katya, watching her smile, looking around at the scenery in awe, completely ignoring the humans as they passed us.

“Hey,” I said, her gaze moving back to mine. “Are you sure he said the sea caves?”

“Yeah?” she pulled up her phone, showing me the message from her friend. “See. Why do you ask?”

I shook my head and shrugged. “Those humans back there seemed pissed, talking about the caves being closed off.”

“Oh, yeah,” she giggled, covering her mouth. “I think he set up some fake police tape so we could have the place to ourselves. How sweet is that?”

“Kind of sounds illegal,” I grumbled, feeling bad for the tourists who most likely would never get another chance to revisit this spot.

“All the best gestures are,” Katya said in a sing-song voice. “Trust me, it's romantic.”

I chuckled nervously, looking around at the empty path. “I'll take your word for it, Katya.”

My stomach began to roll the closer to the cave we got. A voice in my head screaming for me to run while waving a bright red flag. Something didn't quite feel right.

“How do you know this guy?” I asked Katya, eyeing the opening to the cave warily.



“Hmm?” she hummed, looking at me. “Oh, he has been coming around the packhouse a lot lately. We just got to talking and bonding over some issues we shared, and before you know it, we had hit it off.”

An image of Katya and Chase outside of the packhouse appeared in my mind. My heart spiked, and my breathing quickening before I could control my emotions.

Katya looked at me, the smile dissolving into the same hateful glare she had given me since we first met. “Oh, for fuck’s sake, I give up.”

She grabbed me by my arm, pulling it behind my back forcefully, forcing a cry to ring from my lips. Her other hand clamped down over my mouth, hissing curses under her breath.

“Shut the hell up, or I’ll roll you the rest of the way down the path. And don’t even think about using your magic on me.” She held out her hand, showing off a dark metal ring on her thumb, clear quartz and runes decorating the band. “This little baby will just suck your magic right up. So, it’s not even worth your effort to try.”

I cursed into her hand, biting at her palm as she shoved me forward. As much as I wanted to struggle harder, the threat of her rolling me down the path kept me obedient. The last thing I wanted was to risk my unborn child’s life, and a roll along this rock path would undoubtedly end my pregnancy just as I learned of its existence.

“Get in there,” Katya growled as we reached the end of the path, shoving me at the opening of the rocks.

I stumbled over my feet, her hands releasing me as I fell to my knees, my eyes looking down at a pair of black dress shoes, so out of place of the landscape they stood on.

“Hello there, Little Riding Hood.” My eyes widened at the voice, instantly recognizing the dark laugh of my stalker all those nights ago at this very beach. “I told you I’d find you.”

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

## Paige

“The Oceanside Pack owes you, Ms. Future Luna of the Coronado Pack,” my stalker said, smiling at Katya.

“Anything to ensure a long-lasting peace between our packs,” she responded, tossing her hair behind her shoulder with a flourish. “It’s just lucky I noticed her sneaking off.”

The two smiled down at me, my heart racing so fast that the sound of my blood racing began to muffle out their voices. It was him. I knew his voice like it had only been yesterday. The cruel tone of his laugh as he knelt beside me. He smelt like seaweed. A salty scent that I might usually enjoy, but from him, it curdled my stomach. It took all I had not to throw up then and there.

“Last I saw of you, Little Riding Hood, you left me with my feet frozen to some rocks. I must admit, I almost lost you.” He brushed the hair from my face, my body jerking back on instinct. “How fortunate it was that you were hiding in the Coronado Packhouse. I have to admit, I was surprised. Furious, in fact. To think you were pretending to be another man’s mate.” He clicked his tongue with a shake of his head. “I told you; you belong with me.”

“You fucking wish,” I growled, spitting at his face.

I fell forward again, a stinging pain at the back of my head. Looking back, I found Katya glaring at me.

“You should show some respect to Alpha Markus; after all, he is your mate. You don’t have a choice, remember. Fate decides.”

“Fate decided that Nyte was my mate, not him,” I argued back, glaring between them. “He’s just delusional. Like you. Maybe you two should pair off instead.”

“Now, what good is a power-hungry she-wolf to me?” Alpha Markus chuckled. “I have so many to choose from back in my pack. What I need is a powerful witch. And that’s what I get with you.”

“If you don’t need me for anything else, Alpha, I have some shopping to do.” Katya bent down and grabbed my bag, smiling as she put it over her shoulder.

“That’s mine!” I called out, throwing a sheet of ice at her feet with little effect on her.

Katya looked back at me and smirked. “Don’t worry, I’ll be sure your clothes go to a good cause. But this bag is just too cute. Totally vintage. I just love some good flower child vibes.”

I watched her walk out of the cave, leaving me and my stalker behind. Alpha Markus bent down again, grabbing me by my wrists and yanking me to my feet. I struggled against him, holding my breath against his foul scent.

“Let’s get you home, Little Riding Hood. I have a whole pack to introduce you to. They might not be happy about a witch

Luna, but they'll learn to love you just like you'll learn to love me.”

“Doubtful,” I growled out before shrieking as he threw me over his shoulder.

He chuckled, smacking me on my rump as I hung over his back. I growled at his touch, but I didn't dare struggle anymore. There was no escape for me right now. If I tried, I only risked hurting the baby, and who knows if the baby hadn't already been hurt with what has happened so far. I couldn't be sure, but I wouldn't risk any more harm to the growing child within me.

I closed my eyes, praying silently to the gods to protect my child and guide me out of this mess I was in.

Back at the top of the stairs, the parking lot now sat empty. Not a human soul around. I desperately scanned the area, hoping to see some familiar face. My family's coven often came to the cliff. They were drawn to them just as I was, but as I looked, I found no one. It was like the entire area had been blocked off from the public, giving my captors the perfect opportunity to take me and disappear without any witnesses.

“Alpha,” a voice greeted, his tone less than approving at the sight of me.

Great, another werewolf who doesn't like witches. I thought. A gasp escaped my lips as Markus dropped me to my feet just before shoving me into the back seat of a black town car with overly tinted windows.

“Alpha, are you sure about this?” The new werewolf asked, my gaze finding his eyes now.

He didn’t look utterly disgusted by me. It was there, but clearly not the prime thought in his head as he questioned his alpha. “If he finds out...”

“He won’t. We’ve already made sure of that. The girl isn’t going to tell anyone. Besides, it’s not like we took her from the packhouse. So, the pack won’t turn on us. They don’t even accept her.” Markus laughed darkly. “Now, let’s go before these witches out here get curious about what’s happening at the cliffs.”

“Yes, sir.”

Markus slid into the back seat with me, my body recoiling as far from him as possible. I pawed at the door handle, desperate to escape the car, but it remained locked.

“Now, now, Little Riding Hood,” Markus purred at me, grabbing me by my leg and dragging me towards him. “The child’s lock is there to protect you. Can’t have you jumping out of a moving car on the interstate, now can we.”

“Sounds a whole lot better than going anywhere with you,” I spat out, pulling against his hold.

The car began to pull out of the parking lot, my head whipping around to see a sign that hadn’t been there when Katya and I had pulled up. A warning sign to the tourists and locals about loose rocks on the cliffs, the potential of falling, and a rope blocking the parking lot, preventing anyone from entering.

How the hell had they been able to plan so flawlessly? I had only just decided to go home to my parents, yet they were so prepared to take me. How?

As we passed the entrance to my neighborhood, I felt a cry bubble up my throat. Familiar faces stood among a crowd, walking toward the cliffs to investigate the closure. I tried banging my hands on the windows, screaming out to my father and mother as they walked by, all to the great amusement of my captor.

“They can’t hear you. They can’t see you. They can’t help you, Little Riding Hood.” Markus said with a laugh. “So just sit back and relax. We have about an hour’s drive to my packhouse. Thompson, how about some music to calm your new Luna.”

“Yes, sir,” the response was made through ground teeth, the music filling the car.

“There,” Markus sighed. “Just enjoy the ride. We will be home in no time, Little Riding Hood. Then we can take care of that false mark you bear before giving you mine.”

I cringed at his words, my hand reflexively going up to my shoulder where Nyte had marked me as if I could protect my connection to him that way. My body curled into a ball in the seat, pressed to the door as I gazed out the window, watching the passing scenery go by. He wouldn’t be able to remove my mark. I knew that for sure now. The mark of a fated mate was permanent. There was no amount of magic in this world that could sever the bond, but someone could certainly try. No



matter how painful it might be to the couple, they could still try to tear them apart.

My other hand touched my belly, worry crinkling my brow as I thought about the pain I would be forced under in Markus's delusions of making me his mate. The amount of torture I would endure could quickly end my pregnancy, a pregnancy that I had no guarantee of experiencing again, given my health condition. I had to do something to protect my baby while I could.

I glanced over at Markus, watching him hum and tap his fingers to the beat of the song. He was completely distracted from me, giving me the perfect moment to act. I slipped my hand under my shirt, pressing my bare palm to my skin. Closing my eyes, I focused my power on the hand, picturing in my mind a perfect sphere of magic surrounding my child like a second womb. My child would feel none of the stress or pain I would endure inside the sphere. It would be as if I were walking along the beach, swaying the baby with my movement.

As I opened my eyes, we were on the freeway, the world speeding by in a blur as we left the peninsula behind, and all I could do was watch. My heart screamed out with each mile we sped. The tether between Nyte and I stretched thin but never broke. He knew I was gone by now. He was screaming through the bond and following my every move. He would feel where I was going. The direction and the speed, but would he know the end location before I arrive? Would he know what happened or think I was running away?

Closing my eyes, I reached out to the bond, tapping it to let him know I was there and hadn't run from him. Not this far, at least. I had never intended to be away from him for long. I only wanted my family to help ground me and control my anger. I would have been back to him by tomorrow at the latest.

Another strum rattled the tether between us—a response to the tap I had sent him. I could feel his emotions. His fear. Anger. Confusion. I gathered my own, trickling them back to him. I started with my anger and hurt. I had been so mad at him when I left. All the secrets he had kept from me, the decisions he had made for me of what I could and couldn't handle controlling me. I wasn't a toy to be bent and twisted at his will.

Then I sent him my fear. Not for me, but for our child. The danger I was in should Markus discover I was pregnant. The risk my child would be in. I sent him the anger I felt toward Katya, the betrayal of her deceit. She had tricked me. Even with as much as she didn't like me, I never would have thought she would lead me to the person I had been hiding from. She purposely made me trust her, putting on a show of accepting my place with Nyte only to take me to the man who would see me destroyed instead of with my rightful mate.

*Nyte. I can't get out of this without you.*

The thoughts trickled down the bond. A prayer to the gods that he would hear my words. That he would understand. For good measure, I sent down images of Markus and the wolf driving. His Beta, I assumed. I sent images of what Katya had done.

Her car. Her fake smile as it fell from her lips as I stopped making things easy for her. And my bag. She had taken my bag with my cards inside. If I had any prayer of a chance, Nyte would need to be able to find my bag and prove her involvement. That was if he could even convince his pack I was worth saving. A Luna they didn't want.

“What are you thinking about over there?” Markus asked as if we were a real couple driving through the city.

I turned and glared at him, keeping as much space as possible between us in the small back seat.

“I'm thinking about how great it's gonna be to see Nyte kick your ass when he comes and gets me.”

Markus let out a deep laugh, his head falling back on the headrest of his seat. “Even if he wanted to come for you, he won't.” He turned to look at me with a cruel smile on his lips. “We are at war with something much bigger than all of us. The war is making us all join together as one. Can't be one if he comes charging into my territory for a little witch.”

He reached out for me, my body jerking back. I curled my lip in a snarl, glaring at him. “You mean like how you kidnapped this little witch from his territory?”

“His territory? Oh no, he has no territory. He gave up his future as the Alpha when he claimed you as his mate. No, he's just a rankles wolf in the pack now. And the Alpha of the Coronado Pack isn't going to care that I took you. He is too busy worrying about his pack to care about a little witch from the San Diego Coven.”

He laughed again as my back pressed as much against the door as I could without merging with the leather. He was right. Nyte gave up any power he had in the pack for me. He brought me in because I asked him for help hiding from Markus. Now, all of that had backfired. Nyte had no power to help me now, and by hiding in the packhouse, I all but lit up flares for Markus to find me. Had I not asked Nyte to help me and just stayed hiding at home, would I have ever fallen into his hands? And if I had, would Nyte have had the power he needed to come for me then? He would have probably been Alpha by then. The pack wouldn't have been able to reject him had he waited to claim me till after he took over. They would have had no choice but to accept me as their Luna. Now, all Nyte had on his side was Madi and Chase.

A soft scoff left my lips at the thought of Chase. I had thought he was my stalker. I was so suspicious of him. Right up until the end, watching him chat with Katya before I left, I had been wary of his intentions. Now, I doubt he was ever a real danger to me at all—just a guy who was looking out for his friend's mate.

“Thompson, call the pack. Tell them there will be a meeting as soon as I arrive. I want everyone to be ready to greet their Luna. And I want no objections to who she is. I'm not like Nyte. I won't allow my pack to drive me out, and I won't allow them to reject my chosen mate.”

“Yes, sir,” Thompson answered, pushing a button on the screen of the dashboard and calling on a number.

Markus turned to me as Thompson talked over the speakers, smiling. “See, life as my Luna is already going to be far better than what Nyte offered you as a rejected alpha. I offer you power.”

## CHAPTER TWENTY

## Nyte

Flashes of faces come through the bond, my fists colliding with the wall as Chase rushes to me.

“We lost her scent about a mile outside the cemetery.”

“I know where she is,” I growled, his eyes turning to the hole my fist created.

“Well, that’s good?” he said, frowning. “Where is she?”

“Markus.”

It was all I could say, turning at the sound of the front door opening and bringing the scent of the one who handed my mate over to the Oceanside Alpha. Her face had played a massive part in the messages sent to me from Paige. Her face turned from a bright smile to pure evil before shoving my mate into a cave where her stalker waited. Katya twirled her hair with her fingers, and Paige’s bag draped over her arm as if it belonged to her. She smiled when her sister spotted her, the smile slipping as the other girl turned a panicked gaze up to me.

The entire packhouse knew I was searching for my mate. They all knew I was on a rampage, and her sister could smell Paige on the bag. It was all she needed to confirm that her sister was involved and, thereby, in danger of my wrath.

“Katya!” I roared, jumping over the upper floor railing and the flight of stairs. My feet landed with a loud thump, my body

rising to my full height as I glared down at her, her body instinctively cowering away.

She attempted to hide Paige's bag behind her, forcing a nervous smile on her lips. "Nyte, what can I help you with?"

"You fucking took her!" I roared, grabbing her by the hair and pulling her closer, taking a deep breath of Paige's scent still on her. "You handed her over to another Alpha. You touched what doesn't belong to you!"

"I don't know what you're talking about! You're sounding crazy, Nyte!" She cried out, struggling against me.

I ripped Paige's bag from her arm, shoving her into Chase as he stepped down the stairs. Inside the bag were Paige's clothes and toiletries. Katya hadn't even bothered emptying the contents. I dug inside, pulling out her cards and holding them in front of the she-wolf's face with a growl.

"You even stole her cards."

Her eyes widened as she realized her mistake in taking the bag and all its contents, struggling against Chase's grip as his hands tightened.

"I told you not to do something stupid," he growled at her. "I told you just a few hours ago to accept your fate."

"Fuck you, Chase! I'll never accept him!" She growled back, struggling harder.

"Nyte!" I looked away from the she-wolf, finding Alexander at the top of the stairs, glaring down at the scene we had created in his packhouse. "Chase, let her go."



“She kidnapped my mate!” I roared, defending Chase, not wanting to back down on this. Not when my mate needed me, and I needed someone to punish.

“I didn’t kidnap her! She was already leaving! I just gave her a ride!”

“Right into Markus’s hands?” I accused, fighting my body from shifting and ripping her apart.

“That’s enough, Nyte! We don’t have time for this crap. I need both you and Chase upstairs; now.” Alexander growled, the hair on the back of my neck rising.

Reluctantly, Chase released Katya, the she-wolf rushing to her family’s side with tears in her eyes. I glared at her before turning to the stairs, following Chase towards Alpha’s office.

“Alexander, Markus has my mate. Katya handed her over, and he is taking her to Oceanside now,” I growled, slamming the door behind me as I stormed into his office. “I want retribution and my mate back safely to me.”

“And you must wait and handle that all on your own time, Nyte. Now is not the time to go chasing another Alpha into his territory.”

“You really are willing to allow him to take from our pack? To come into our territory and take one of our members?”

“No,” Alexander growled at me, the others staring wide-eyed between us. “But she isn’t one of ours. She is yours—your witch mate who has been rejected by this pack. I will not lead

us into a war over her. Not when two more packs in the last hour have turned up missing.”

My eyes widened at the news, but a growl rumbled in my chest at everything else he had to say. She was my problem. That’s what he was telling me. The pack wouldn’t accept her, so they wouldn’t fight for her. Especially not with everything happening right now. Markus was taking advantage of it. He knew the divide my mateship had caused in our pack. He knew that I gave up my power within the pack to claim her. So, he knew that no one would stand by me to go after him.

No matter how powerful a wolf is, alone, he is weakened. There was a reason rogues didn’t last long alone and why they often pulled together into rogue packs, never as strong as they could be with a true Alpha leading them. Without the pack behind me now, I was little more than a rogue against Markus and his entire pack.

“Two more packs? What packs?” Chase asked, his gaze never leaving me as I fought to control my emotions.

“Small packs again,” Alexander answered, turning his attention to the map on his desk. “Mission Bay and Imperial Beach.”

“Those are close to us,” Madilyn gasped, sitting straighter in her seat.

“Close to us, but far from one another. They are splitting up, and they are circling our pack. Both Point Loma and Coronado sit at the center of the two newly taken packs. I have increased the watch over San Diego Bay Refuge. A few naturalist packs

are living in the area. They haven't yet experienced any loss, but they have noticed disturbances in their territory."

"Vampires, right?" Chase asked. "We've confirmed that vampires are involved, didn't we?"

"Yes, we just don't know about the involved witches." Alexander looked up at me. "You questioned the San Diego coven, correct?"

"You mean my mate's family?" I snapped. "Yeah, I talked to them. They have no idea what is even happening. Although if they find out we are letting their daughter be held captive, they could begin to cause us problems."

"We will help her when we figure out how to help ourselves. Chase, has your pack noticed anything on their watches?"

"Nothing out of the normal, no. We have newborns now, so the she-wolves are getting more anxious."

"Anxious she-wolves with pups are never good," Alexander contemplated. "It may be best to take them somewhere only they know exists. The midwives have some hidden caves that not even I know the locations of. It would give the pups and their mothers a new sense of security."

"I'll have my pack meet with the midwives to begin moving them," Chase nodded.

Alexander turned to me, his eyes narrowing. "Will you be useful? Or will you be a hindrance to this pack? We don't have time for internal conflict. This situation is becoming far too dire for our kind. We still haven't found a body belonging to

the missing wolves. I need all hands on deck, but not if your hands have nothing to offer.”

I growled back at my alpha, standing to my full height. “I’ll help the pack. But don’t expect me to be happy about it when my mate is in the hands of my enemy.”

“I didn’t realize you considered Markus your enemy,” Jose sneered. “I thought he was little more than an annoyance to you.”

“When he has been stalking my mate for this long, he is my enemy. And he will be nothing when I get my hands on him.”

I watched the beta bristle at my threat as Alexander nodded. “Use that anger to help this pack right now. I doubt Markus will harm your mate. It seems he may have different plans in mind for her.”

I growled at the thought of Markus touching her in any way, turning and leaving the office.

“Alpha didn’t dismiss you, Nyte,” Jose growled behind me.

“It’s fine. Nyte, go with Chase to speak with the midwives and help move the she-wolves and children to a safer location only they know about.”

Chase joined me at the door, the two of us silently leaving the room. I heard soft, padded feet following quickly behind us, the scent telling me that Madilyn had left the meeting and joined us.

“When do we go for her?” Madilyn asked, poking her head between Chase and me.

“What?” I asked, glaring at the blonde as she stared back at me.

“Come on, I know you aren’t going to just sit by while Markus has Paige. When are we going to go get her back?”

“It would be suicide to go without the full pack,” Chase answered her for me, shaking his head. “Markus’s pack is as large as the Coronado pack. Without the full pack’s support, we wouldn’t stand a chance. Even with Nyte.”

“So, we aren’t going after her?” Madilyn gasped, looking up at me with widened eyes. “What kind of man doesn’t defy orders to save his mate?”

“The kind who wants his mate to come out of this alive,” I growled, my fists tightening. “If I go in underprepared, he could kill her then and there to spite me.”

“What’s stopping him from killing her with the pack with you?” Madilyn scoffed. “Sounds like the same threat to her life to me.”

“If the entire pack is with him, then Markus would have to accept that she is a member of our pack, not his. It would show the pack has accepted her and that she is not only a member but also our Luna to be, just as Nyte is the Alpha to be. If he killed her, it would be the end of him and his entire bloodline. After kidnapping her, the council would destroy his pack for killing another Alpha’s Luna.”

Madilyn’s eyes widened at the thought. “But the pack won’t accept her. Even after dealing with the vampires, they won’t

accept a witch as their Luna. At least, not the majority. And if a witch is helping the vampires, they definitely won't want her as their Luna."

"That's why we need to figure out a way to force the pack to accept her now," Chase sighed. "For now, let's get these she-wolves taken care of. Several new mothers are nipping and snarling at anyone who comes near them while all this is happening, and on top of that, there are a few expectant mothers as well."

At the thought of expectant mothers, my mind drifted back to Paige. Would she have been safe had I told her immediately that she was pregnant? Would she have left in anger if I hadn't kept so many secrets from her?

Fear crackled along my skin at the thought of what Markus might do should he realize Paige was pregnant with my child. He was under some kind of delusion that she was his mate. He had been since the moment he had chased her along the beach. It was a mystery to me still why he would believe her to be his. Since our bond had been established for a few years now, what was it in his mind that led him to think she was his?

"Hello, Alpha Chase, Alpha to be Nyte," The old she-wolf greeted as we approached the midwife's lair at the bottom of the stairs.

"I'm no longer Alpha to be," I snapped at the older woman without thinking.

"My apologies. However, I had always accepted you as my leader, no matter who the fates have chosen as your mate."

The she-wolf smiled back at me. “What may I do for you both?”

“Alpha Alexander mentioned you have secret caves nearby. We ask that you take the women and children there to protect them from the current threat the packs are facing,” Chase explained quickly.

The older woman smiled and nodded. “Of course, I will gladly bring all of the pack’s children into the safety of our caves.” Her eyes looked up at me. “I understand that the Oceanside Pack Alpha has taken your mate. Should I keep room for her? Should you retrieve her before this is all over?”

“Unfortunately,” Chase quickly explained. “We won’t be able to retrieve her until after the vampires have been dealt with and the danger to our packs has been eliminated.”

The midwife frowned, looking from me to Chase, her eyes barely stopping on Madilyn. “I’m surprised that Alpha Alexander isn’t more enraged by the kidnapping of a pack member.”

“He doesn’t see Paige as a pack member,” I growled again at the thought, trying my best to calm my nerves and breathing as my claws cut into my palm.

“I understand how he might feel about the witch,” the midwife said with a shake. “But I was referring to your baby. After all, the child is a pack member by blood. How is Alpha Alexander excusing the kidnapping of one of our pups?”

Madilyn gasped; she and Chase turning to look at me with widened eyes.

“Nyte! Is Paige pregnant?” Madilyn asked, her hands gripping my arm.

“Is it still not common knowledge that she is?” the midwife asked, confused. “Her scent surely has grown since I first caught it in the hallway.” She looked up at me.

“My mate only found out herself just before Markus kidnapped her. No one else in the pack has learned of her pregnancy yet.”

“Oh, my goddess,” Madilyn gasped again, covering her mouth with her hands. “That explains why she had been so tired and sick! How did I not realize this!”

“Nyte, do you really not get what this means?” Chase asked, watching me more closely. He was frowning at my lack of reaction, his head tilted to the side.

“What? Markus not only has my mate, but he also holds my first child’s life in his hands?” I growled, irritated by the reminder that my mate and child are in danger and I have no way of helping them.

“No, it means that whether the pack accepts Paige or not, they must accept your pup. The child is born into the pack no matter who their mother is.”

My eyes widened, a smile breaking my grimace. “So, Alexander would have no choice but to get her back. No matter what.”



## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

## Paige

We arrived at the Oceanside Packhouse, a severe-looking woman standing outside with her hands on her hips, glaring at the car. Her dark black hair was pulled to the top of her head in a high knot, and baby hairs curled around her forehead perfectly. She looked like a force to be reckoned with. As Markus stepped out, he smirked at the woman before reaching into the car to drag me out to him.

“Morghan, I didn’t expect you to be the first in line to greet your new Luna.” His hand dug into my arm, a hiss of pain slipping through my teeth.

The woman’s eyes snapped to mine before looking at Markus. “You know damn well that’s not what I’m standing out here for, Markus. You’ve lost your damned mind if you think we will keep standing aside while you doom the pack the way you have been.”

“Alpha Markus,” Markus growled to her. “You will address me properly, Morghan.”

“I will address you as my Alpha when you start acting like him again,” Morghan growled, her teeth peeled back in disgust. “If it wasn’t for your scent, I would swear you aren’t the same man at all.”

“Morghan, that’s enough,” Thompson stepped between Markus and the she-wolf, turning anxious eyes to me. “Greet

the new Luna and tell the others to prepare a feast for tonight; we celebrate in her honor.”

Morghan glared at Thompson, turning to the door and storming inside.

“All hail, his majesty!” she yelled out behind her. “And his stolen bride!”

Markus growled, pulling me to follow him into the packhouse. Pack members were already stepping into the hall and watching us with curiosity. A few whispered, quickly disappearing with anxious glances in my direction, Nyte’s name fluttering in the air within their whispers. From the looks in their eyes and the fearful whispers, I could tell they knew who I was. They knew the truth, so why was their Alpha so adamant that I was his to claim?

“I present to you your new Luna!” Markus announced as he entered the packhouse, smiling at those still present. “I expect the feast to be ready as soon as possible. We shall celebrate our new Luna and the protection she will provide us from here on!” He looked at me. “You should set the perimeter around the compound, like they do in the Rigel Pack.”

“I don’t know what you think I’m capable of, but the Rigel Pack’s witches are an entire coven. I’m only one witch.”

Markus frowned. “You are Luna, and it’s your job to protect this pack. Now protect it!”

Something in his eyes looked detached, a tick in his cheek showing the growing rage under his furry. I felt his hand

twitch around my arm, tightening as his fingers dug into my skin. “Okay, okay. I will protect the packhouse. I can do that.” I lied.

My powers were focused on protecting my baby, but he didn’t need to know that. I didn’t have enough energy to protect the entire Packhouse, but he wouldn’t know the difference. Besides, something told me the only thing he needed protection from right now was Nyte, and I wasn’t about to prevent my true mate from getting to me.

“Good girl,” Markus purred, pushing a strand of my hair behind my ear. It took all I had not to flinch away, swallowing the disgust as it rose in my throat. “Take her upstairs to the Luna rooms.”

Markus shoved me into Thompson’s arms, the Beta nodding at the order and turning me toward a large staircase like the Coronado Packhouse back in Point Loma. Ascending the stairs, I looked down at the pack, their gazes following me as I reached the top. Their stares broke from me as Markus walked to them, an uneasiness settling in their postures as they looked at their Alpha.

“What happened to him?” I asked Thompson as we approached another set of stairs leading to a third floor.

“That’s not your concern,” he growled at me.

“He’s claiming me as his Luna, so I think I should know what I’m getting dragged into,” I insisted.

“We both know you aren’t his mate,” Thompson growled at me, pushing open the door at the top of the stairs and shoving me into the room. “Just play along until Nyte gets here for you. I’m unsure when that will be, but I doubt he will stay away for long. Until then, mind your own business.”

The door slammed shut behind me, followed by a slight click, telling me the door had been locked. To keep me in or to keep Markus out, that was the question. It was more than clear that he was the only one who thought I was his mate. The rest of the pack knew better.

What the hell is wrong with him?

I looked around the room, taking in the clear remodel that had recently been done. It was an attic room, the ceilings arched with the roof above. A beautiful vanity sat next to the large circular window overlooking the beach through tinted glass. Between the vanity and me stood an antique iron bed, a quilted comforter folded down in a welcoming gesture.

Exhaustion settled over me at the sight of the bed, my feet moving before I even gave them the order. I fell onto the soft mattress with a sigh, my eyes drifting closed, but just as a void of darkness greeted me, a flash of light chased away the dark around me, fading into a vision of a forest. The forest shifted before my eyes, creeks and rivers moving by in a blur before settling over rocks and caves. Inside the caves, the sounds of children crying echoed off the walls. I moved closer to the caves, looking inside the darkness.

My heart stuttered at the sounds coming up through the darkness of women consoling their weeping children and men screaming in agony after the sound of leather cracking. I ventured deeper into the cave, my hands tracing the side of the cave to keep my balance as I moved deeper into the cool, dark earth.

“Shift!” A snarled voice yelled, another crack of a whip piercing through the cave. A light began to shine at the curve of the tunnel, my pace slowing as I approached.

I pressed my body to the side of the cave, looking around the corner; a gasp barely held back as I saw the rows of cages strewn within the cavern. Women and children huddled together in large pens, separated by bars of silver. I watched as many of the women pressed their bodies against the bars, reaching over to the crying children on the other side, their flesh sizzling beneath the pure metal.

A domed cage loomed in the center of the cavern, men in both human and wolf forms chained to the ground within. Standing over them, holding silver-tipped whips, vampires paced back and forth. They yelled at the men to shift repeatedly, the werewolves panting in exhaustion from the energy of changing back and forth between the two forms. I covered my mouth at the sight of their blood pooling beneath them, their skin blistering under the silver cuffs and collars.

Another sound stole my attention from the horrors of the cavern, and my feet began moving of their own accord. The sound was far more familiar, a sizzle telling me that magic was

being used nearby. The pull led me deeper into the cave system, passing more caverns with cages and the sounds of whips and cries. The tunnel opened wider, lights of flickering lanterns hanging from the walls and ceilings, the sound of a woman's chants surrounding me with the taste of magic. I stepped out of the tunnel, the light of the moon filling the space from a large crater in the earth. I looked around the room, like a hidden oasis within the forest, with trees stretching their boughs over the opening above a waterfall filling a pool at the center of the room.

The water pulled me to its edge, but my feet didn't move this time. I stayed put, my eyes moving past the pool of sparkling water to the other side.

"How many packs do we have so far?" a raspy voice asked just as he came into the moon's light.

I nearly stumbled back, hit with the power rolling off of him; the blood-red eyes were somehow seeing right through me, yet seeing me all at once. Even in this vision, I could feel the power he held, the energy that only an Ancient being who has witnessed the dawn of time could hold.

Ancients were rare. Most are believed to have died centuries ago, bored by the long life of a vampire. Yet, here, one stood, somewhere deep in the forests nearby, holding the missing werewolves enslaved. As awful as it was, it also made sense. It was the way of life in the beginning. The belief is that witches created both werewolves and vampires with spells and curses. Werewolves quickly were seen as of a lesser race than the

vampires, the bloodsucking creatures taking it upon themselves to tame the werewolves as humans did to dogs. It hadn't been until the first werewolf king came to be that the slave trade of werewolves had ended. Vampires couldn't hold their own against a werewolf king.

A werewolf king like Nyte.

What were the odds that an Ancient was behind all this and that Nyte was here now with the power and strength of a werewolf king? The only creature capable of standing up against the ancient vampire lord.

"We are up to thirty," a softer voice answered, her long black hair curling down her back.

She was the source of the magic I was feeling. Dark veins spidering along her paled skin, matching the dark aura that surrounded her. The waves of magic rolling around her revealed her magic use, her lips moving in a soft chant as her eyes closed, looking up into the night sky above.

"Soon, my magic will be strong enough that even the werewolf king will not be able to sense us. Then you can strike, My Lord." There was a softer tone in her voice as she addressed him, her body leaning towards the vampire lord as though drawn to him.

The water of the pool began to sparkle with her spell, my feet moving me forward before I realized what I was doing. I watched as the dark witch also moved to the pool, a soft smile on her blackened lips. Her eyes remained focused on the water, dark lashes blocking them from my sight.



At the pool's edge, I looked down, watching the ripples move from the waterfall, cool splashes of water bouncing off the surface to my bare feet. An image began to take place, showing a vision of more wolves being ripped from their homes, swirls of magic covering their tracks as faceless vampires overpowered them. They had been enhanced with magic, even the strongest werewolves not standing a chance against the horde of vampires invading their pack home.

The image shifted again, the witch letting out a small gasp as she watched. An image of Nyte appeared before us, and his lips peeled back in a snarl to reveal partially shifted teeth. He was fighting The Ancient and overpowering him with the packs at his back, holding back the hordes of vampires attempting to help their lord. The ripples moved again, showing me and the witch, our magic flashing between us in a fight.

When the water rippled again, it showed another version of the fight. Nyte alone, the vampires and witches stopping him before he ever reached The Ancient. I watched his life end in a matter of moments, only for the image to shift back to the first, watching him kill the vampire lord, and the packs call out in praise to him as their Alpha and me as their Luna. as we raised our hands in victory, I saw the flash of a pendulum dangling from our joined hands. The scrying tool was somehow familiar to me, though I couldn't recall where I knew it from.

I understood then precisely what had to be done. The paths laid out to me and the dark witch by the fates themselves. Ever a balance, she would know just as much as I did what had to

be done. I also knew how it was that I would find this cave and the forest where it hid, although I wasn't sure the dark witch would understand that part of the message.

I looked away from the visions in the pool, recognizing what must be done. As I did, my eyes met the witch's pools of black, staring right back at me with a smile that would haunt me for the rest of my days. My eyes widened as they looked back into hers. She shouldn't be able to see me. This was a vision.

I wasn't really here; I was safe in the Oceanside Packhouse. And yet a chill ran down my spine as she stared back at me, her smile holding no joy, only pain and cruelty.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

## Nyte

I turned on my heel, running back to Alexander's office.

"Bring the midwife," I called over my shoulder to Chase and Madilyn.

I didn't look to see if they followed my command. I knew they would. They wanted to get Paige back from Markus almost as much as I did. They were among the few in the pack that would follow her as the Coronado Pack Luna. We burst into Alexander's office, Beta Jose quickly jumping in front of his Alpha with a growl.

"What's the meaning of this?" he asked. Alexander raising a brow from behind his beta.

"Stand down, Beta Jose," he said, pulling back his beta by the shoulder. "They have a midwife with them. That means this is news involving the children." He looked back at us expectantly, nodding for us to continue. "Is there a problem with the preparations?"

"We are missing a pup," I answered, smirking as he perked up with interest.

"What? Which child is missing? Do we have any idea who was the last person who saw the child?" He looked to the midwife with panic at the thought of losing one of the young.

"The child in question is still in its mother's womb," the midwife explained, Alexander's brows drawing tighter.

“However, I understand that the mother has been kidnapped by the Oceanside Alpha. Why have we not gone after her yet?”

I smirked at the midwife, loving how she played with Alexander, feigning ignorance of the Alpha’s decision not to go after my witch mate.

“What?” Alexander asked, his gaze snapping at me. “What is she saying?”

“Paige is pregnant with my child,” I answered, smiling at Alpha Alexander, showing my victory. “That means Markus didn’t just kidnap my witch mate. He kidnapped my pup, and Katya helped him.”

Alexander let out a disgusted growl, claws digging into his desk as he leaned over. “Why didn’t you mention this before?”

“I was protecting her,” I answered honestly. “I didn’t think anyone would care that my half-witch child was in her womb, and the thought of Markus learning she was pregnant and attempting to end the pregnancy felt like a real threat.”

“This changes things,” Alexander growled, looking at an equally angry Beta Jose. “We can’t condone our children being taken. No matter what the circumstances.”

“I agree, Alpha,” Jose nodded. “Our children are our most important resource.”

“Go and round up the pack,” Alexander ordered Jose. “Tell them they will answer to Nyte by retrieving his pregnant mate from the Oceanside Pack. All mothers and their children must

go with the midwives into their caves. The packhouse will not be safe while we are gone.”

Beta Jose nodded, turning and leaving the office to carry out the orders. Alexander narrowed his gaze at me.

“You get your mate back, Nyte. Now, you better hope we don’t lose too many wolves in this fight. We need our full numbers to go up against the Vampires and whatever witches are helping them.”

“The only wolf we will be missing is the one holding my mate from me,” I told him, turning and leaving the office with Chase and Madilyn behind me. “No one touches Markus but me,” I told them, their responding growls confirming my order.

“I’ll try to contain myself,” Madilyn growled. I smiled at her, heading to the front door with the newly growing pack of wolves ready to retrieve my mate. Their eyes were bleeding with blood lust as their instincts to protect the young overtook their disdain for the witch mother.

“Nyte,” Dasha called out, stepping from the crowd and immediately baring her neck to me. “I’m sorry for what my sister has done. Please allow my mother and me to earn our place by helping retrieve your mate and child.”

I rolled my eyes. “I won’t turn away from any help, and I don’t fault you for the crimes of your relatives. We all make our own choices, Dasha. I just hope that yours are better from this point forward.”

I spotted Katya being cuffed and handed over to the midwives for guarding while the rest of the pack left to right her crime; her eyes were flooding with tears. Her gaze met mine momentarily, a flash of pleading crossing her face before I turned away, the little hope she seemed to hold vanishing.

She would be banished and made a rogue for what she did. Whether she knew that Paige was pregnant or not, the crime against a child of the pack could never go unpunished. It was among the laws we had put into place to protect our children. Laws that no one was above, not even Alphas.

Chase and Madilyn joined me in my car, the others piling into SUVs together; many pack members were already parked in vehicles with engines running along the side of the road of the packhouse. They were waiting for me to lead the charge.

“Hold tight and buckle up,” I warned Chase and Madilyn. “And call any witch or wolf we know in law enforcement. I don’t want to deal with any cop who chooses to chase us over us speeding.”

I took off, my tires squealing behind me, emitting a plume of smoke and the smell of burning rubber. The others took off behind me, a convoy of vehicles speeding through the small Point Loma Neighborhood, turning north to reach the interstate and leave the peninsula behind.

Chase called every wolf and witch we knew who worked in human law enforcement, getting a trooper to escort us through the interstate toward Oceanside. It didn’t take much time to

reach the pack's territory, and we quickly rolled up to the packhouse.

I stepped out first, frowning as members of Markus's pack stared at us; no one was making a move to stop us as we approached.

"You're here for the witch, right?" a woman asked, spitting at her feet. "She's inside. Third floor in Alpha's private rooms."

"You don't have any objections to our pack entering the territory?" I asked, suspicious of their lack of action.

"The fact you have come means the witch is important to your pack. We have no intention of fighting you for one we don't accept. The Alpha has been making questionable decisions for years now, but with this choice, we cannot stand at his side. We will not stand in your way."

I looked away from the she-wolf, finding the rest of their pack backing away from the door, parting like the Red Sea to allow me to pass. Only one wolf stood at the end of the path, still blocking the front door.

Beta Thompson.

I growled, walking toward him, my eyes taking in his stance while watching how his eyes shifted nervously. A battle raged inside him. The struggle of a beta forces them to choose between his duty to his Alpha and his commitment to the pack.

Given the bond with Paige, he was just as torn between following his orders and engendering disapproval at what his Alpha was doing. In the visions Paige had sent, I saw that he



was reluctant to take her, but he did as he was ordered, like the good Beta he was.

“Will you stand between me and my mate?” I asked him as I reached the first step of the packhouse, narrowing my gaze at him.

“Don’t be stupid, Thompson,” the she-wolf from behind me urged him. “The pack can’t stand against him with his entire pack on his side. Step aside. The pack needs you more than Markus.”

“Sophia,” he growled, looking past me to her. “He’s our alpha.”

“He hasn’t been our alpha for some time now, Thompson. Nothing he has done in the past year has been for our benefit, especially not taking that witch from Nyte. He doomed us when he kidnapped her. I could smell just how doomed the moment he brought her into the packhouse. Step aside and let him pass.”

Thompson looked back to me, a low growl rumbling in his chest before stepping aside, leaving my path clear to enter the house. I entered the packhouse, finding it empty, proving that the entire pack was outside. A soft sound could be heard down the hall, past the staircase leading me to the room I had been told Paige was being kept in.

I quickly looked at the path before following the sound deeper into the packhouse; a soft light was flickering in a room resembling the common room back at my packhouse.

“So,” Markus sighed, swirling a glass of whiskey on the rocks in his hand. “I guess the pack has changed their mind about the witch. And my pack has turned their backs on me for good.” He let out a low chuckle. “Cowards.”

“What exactly were you expecting in all this, Markus?” I asked, stepping into the room and circling the older alpha. He didn’t bother standing up, sipping his drink as if we were two friends meeting to share after-work cocktails.”

“I expected loyalty.”

“Loyalty has its limits, and it isn’t blind.” I stepped closer, his gaze leaving his drink and smirking at me.

“Shouldn’t it be? After all, I give my life to protecting their lives. Shouldn’t they be willing to do anything I say?”

“You’ve lost your mind, Markus. No Alpha wants blind loyalty: it leads to imbalance. An Alpha is meant to keep balance within his pack.”

Markus let out a laugh. “Balance. What balance do you give your pack with all that unrivaled strength? You could destroy us all if you really wanted to put your mind to it. Where is the balance there?”

I smiled. “She’s upstairs in your room, waiting for me to take her home.”

Markus’s eyes changed. His expression darkened as his canines began to elongate with a growl. “You can’t have her. She’s mine!”

My own change began, my claws growing out as I adjusted my stance; the older man jumped to his feet, looking more wolf than man as he let out a deep howl.

“You have no claim on her,” I snarled, diving for the shifting wolf’s throat.

He avoided me, turning his fully shifted snout around at me, snapping sharpened teeth at my neck in the same attempt to end this in one bite. We swung our claws at one another, taking hit after hit, his claws digging into my side just as mine dug into his. I let out a feral howl, snapping my jaws at his arms. My teeth successfully sank into his right arm, his howl of pain echoing through the empty house as I pulled. I was entirely shifted now, using the full strength of my wolf to rip at his arm, relishing the loud snap of cartilage, tendons, and bones ripping apart.

His claws tore at my back, his teeth snapping unsuccessfully at my neck and side, struggling to free his arm. I pulled harder at the limb, finally releasing it, watching the useless arm fall to his side, far too torn to repair itself. I then turned to his other arm, dragging his body to the ground as I attacked his good arm, working to leave it as crippled as the other.

Markus’s howls turned from aggressive to panicked, the sound certain to be driving his beta mad outside as he fought back his urge to come to his Alpha’s aid. I decided to end this quickly, not wanting any of his pack to give in to their instincts to come to the call of their Alpha. It was far too convenient not to have to shed their blood. I had promised Alexander that Markus was

the only wolf who would be gone after this, and I aimed to keep that promise.

My jaws closed around Markus's neck, ending his howls, the sound replaced by a choking sound, his lungs filling with his blood. I gave a quick shake, breaking his neck and ending his suffering. I couldn't begin to understand how he had come to this point in his life. His claim of Paige belonging to him. His belief that his pack should follow him blindly, even as he steals another man's mate. None of it made any sense, and now, none of it mattered.

Thompson appeared in the doorway as I shifted back to my human form. Madilyn and Chase appeared behind him as he stood frozen in the doorway. I looked at the pain crossing the Beta's eyes as he looked down at his fallen alpha, tears shimmering in his brown eyes.

"He wasn't always like this," Thompson swore, wiping his eyes. "Something happened about a year ago...a shift in his personality as if something inside him had just changed. He spoke nonsense. He claimed his mate was a witch, and he could feel her near. He began to leave the house every night to search all over the city for her. But he always came back empty-handed."

I frowned at his words. "Until he found my mate."

Thompson nodded. "He said that he knew it had to be her. No other witch in the city was as powerful, and he insisted his mate had to be powerful." Thompson looked back at me, swallowing hard. "Your mate is upstairs. The old attic was

converted years ago to become Alpha and Luna's room. Markus put her there."

I nodded, pushing past him and leaving the Beta to collect his Alpha's remains. No matter how lost Markus had been at his end, his pack would still lay him to rest as the Alpha he was to them. I had no intention of stopping them from doing so. Madilyn and Chase followed me back down the hallway and upstairs, taking the steps two at a time. At the top of the second flight of stairs stood a single door, light trickling through the bottom of the door from a fireplace on the other side.

Slowly, I pressed the door open, looking around the room until my eyes fell on the bed. Paige was lying on it. She looked like she was sleeping like Sleeping Beauty, waiting for her prince's true love kiss to break the spell of the evil fairy queen. I approached her carefully, bending next to her, my hand brushing the hair from her forehead. She didn't stir, my heart skipping a beat before her heartbeat reached my ear. Steady, strong. Her breathing even.

"She's sleeping," I sighed. "Paige?" I tried to shake her, frowning when she still didn't wake.

"Kiss her," Madilyn said. "Like they do in the movies."

I frowned at my would-be beta before looking back at my mate. Gently, I bent my head down to kiss her like a fairy tale character, but her eyes flew open just before my lips touched hers; her eyes widened as she took me in.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

## Paige

The dark witch's eyes met mine. Black veins running through the whites of her orbs gave an illusion of pitch-black eyes. I gasped, stepping back into the void. She turned around, her eyes almost seeming to follow me, her steps coming closer to me. An arm was stretching out with clawed fingers reaching toward me. My eyes flew open, and the wooden ceiling of the room I had been locked in blocked me from my view; my eyes widening as the shape took form, the vision faded away, and my eyes focused on the reality around me.

“Nyte,” I gasped, blinking as I stared into the grey eyes I knew so well. “Is that really you?”

His lips practically brushed mine, turning up into a smile, his hands pushing my hair from my face. “Yes, Little Darling, it's me.”

I let my eyes drift closed at the feel of his touch, my energy releasing the spell I had placed on our baby to protect it. If Nyte were here, then we were safe, and my energy was needed elsewhere now. My eyes flew open at that thought, looking back at Nyte. “Nyte! I know everything. I know what's happening with all of the werewolves.”

His eyes widened, a gasp drawing my gaze over his shoulder. Madi and Chase stood just behind him; their eyes widened at my announcement.

“You told her about the missing packs?” Madi asked. “I thought you didn’t want her knowing any of it. You said she didn’t need to worry about those who didn’t accept her.”

“He didn’t tell me,” I assured her, narrowing my eyes at my mate. “He kept a lot of things from me. However, the fates ensured I knew what I needed to know.”

“You had a vision?” Nyte asked, leaning back to get a better look at me.

I nodded, pulling myself up in the bed, letting out a hiss at the stinging pain in my head left behind from being knocked out by Markus. I pressed my fingers to my temple. Nyte’s body stiffened as he watched me, a low growl rumbling in his chest.

“I’m okay,” I assured him with a smile. “I’m safe now and with you.”

“What did you see in your vision?” Madi asked, leaping to Nyte’s side, not even flinching when he snarled at her sudden appearance. “Do you know for sure who is taking the packs?”

“I know that you were already suspecting vampires,” I said, watching Madi nod as Nyte frowned, wondering how I could know that. “Your suspicions are correct. The vampires have been recruited by an ancient.”

“An ancient what?” Madi frowned, her pixie blond head bouncing as she looked between me and the others.

“She means an ancient vampire. The witches call them Ancients. They are vampires who have been around since the dawn of time.” Nyte explained, his voice darkening with



understanding of what this means. “It also means this isn’t going to be as simple as going up against a coven of vampires.”

I nodded. “He is one of the oldest, from what I could tell. He wants to return to the old order of things. The days before the first Werewolf King. The packs have been collected and tethered to the vampire lord as slaves.”

“Slaves?” Madi gasped. “They’re making them slaves?”

“How can even a powerful vampire manage all this?” Chase asked from behind Nyte, pacing along the edge of the shadows. “Even vampires emit scents of rot and death.”

“He has a witch,” I answered, images of the black-veined woman from my vision crossing my mind. “A powerful witch with a lot of dark magic.” I shivered at the memory as if she could see me in the vision, her claw-like hand reaching through the void and space in my vision to take me. “A very, very powerful witch.”

“So, what the hell are we supposed to do then?” Chase asked, looking to Nyte for the answer.

“You all have to convince the pack to follow Nyte,” I answered, nodding to my mate as his eyes whipped back to mine.

“They already rejected me. I won’t turn my back on you for them.”

“They have to accept you as Alpha, and they need to trust me as the Luna. It’s the only way that we can face them,” I

insisted, grabbing Nyte's hand and bringing it to my lips.  
"They need us both."

Nyte pulled his hand from mine, grabbing my chin to force me to look up at him. "Why do they need to trust you? What are you saying?"

"I'm saying that you don't stand a chance against the witch. No one without my power can. I'm the only one who can end her suffering."

"Suffering?" Chase and Madi both asked at once.

I nodded. "A witch with that much dark magic is lost. She will never be accepted back into her coven. It's painful having that much dark energy run through your veins. She will die slowly, becoming little more than a husk around power. Those old stories of hags eating children in the black forest? They aren't completely made up. Those are witches rejected by their covens, filled with dark magic. She may live a long life, but it will be nothing but pain. Only I can cleanse her and send her to the other side peacefully."

"She chose her path then," Nyte said, his eyes hardened as he looked at me.

I shook my head. "It's not that simple, Nyte. That kind of energy doesn't come from nothing. She had been heartbroken, rejected for who she is, so she chose revenge."

"Let her suffer her revenge then! I can't risk your life! Our baby's life!"

“You don’t have a choice, Nyte! If I don’t stand against her, she will kill you! I saw it all. Every path, every choice. This is the only way.”

“Why?” Madi asked, looking between Nyte and me. “Why is it the only way?”

I looked at my friend, my eyes dropping. “Only a werewolf king can face an Ancient and stand a chance, and she knows that. That’s why your pack has been circled but otherwise untouched. They didn’t want to risk drawing too much of Nyte’s attention yet. The witch will be waiting for him, though. She will target Nyte to protect the vampire.”

Madi’s eyes widened, understanding what I was telling her now. “And if she takes out Nyte, that removes anyone who could fight against this ancient vampire guy.”

I nodded. “We will need the entire pack and all the other packs still left to go up against them. They have an army of vampires.”

“They won’t follow a witch,” Chase said and sighed, shaking his head. “Even though we’re here and the pack followed, it was for the baby, not for you. They still won’t accept you as their Luna.”

“They have to, or none of this will work if they don’t trust Nyte and me to lead them. All the packs have to be united under Nyte. Otherwise, it will all be chaos, each looking to find who they should follow.”

“You’re certain of this?” a voice behind Chase asked; all but Nyte were jerking their heads in that direction.

Alpha Alexander stepped into the light; his eyes locked on me as his Beta stepped up behind him. My mouth hung open, uncertain whether I should answer him or not. He had never spoken to me. I had only seen him once when I arrived at the packhouse with Nyte when he forced a vote and had Nyte choose between me and the pack.

“Are you sure? There is no mistake in what you saw in your vision?” he asked again, walking past Chase and coming closer to Nyte and me.

Nyte didn’t turn towards his alpha, although he watched from the corner of his eye. The hairs along his arms were standing on end while his body coiled with energy ready to explode. I pressed my hand to his, looking back at the Coronado Alpha.

“Yes, I understand my vision completely. The fates gave me all the information needed to win this, but we need the packs. They must accept Nyte and me, even if it’s only for the night.”

“A pack can’t simply give themselves over to an Alpha for one night. If they all agree to follow him, he will be taking on the mantle of a Wolf King. There would be no turning back for either of you,” Alexander stated, looking back at beta Jose. “If you are certain that this is what the fates have chosen for us, I will help to turn the vote. The Oceanside Pack has no current Alpha now; the Coronado pack and all the under packs were expected to follow Nyte before he claimed you as his mate.” He turned to Nyte to say, “Your uncle will have no issue

following you either. He has lived most of your life waiting for the day he will bow to you. Ever since it was revealed that you were a Werewolf King.”

I narrowed my eyes now, my grip on Nyte’s hand tightening to help control myself. “Are you telling me you could have turned the vote all along? That Nyte never had to choose between me and his pack?”

Alpha Alexander shrugged. “I could have, yes. However, I prefer allowing my pack to have some democracy. Call it the old patriot in me. Nevertheless, the safety of our kind supersedes allowing them their choices. Nyte can start by taking the Alpha position of the Oceanside Pack. Then we will turn over the others; we only need to find where the vampires are keeping the stolen packs.”

I looked at Nyte, watching the war in his eyes. He had always acted like he didn’t want to lead, as if he could care less if he was Alpha or not, but I could see the excitement of leading in his eyes. He wanted this more than he allowed himself to know. It was in his soul. A king needed a throne, and he was about to have his, although a side of him seemed to be holding back.

“I can help with that as well,” I told Alexander, keeping my gaze locked with Nyte’s. “Finding the packs, I mean. The witch has been hiding their scents, covering every trace of their coming and going, but I can find them. In my vision, I made a connection. I only need a pendulum and a map to show you their exact location.”

Nyte's head tilted, his brows creasing. "A pendulum?"

I nodded. "Yeah, you know. A crystal hanging from a chain. My family has a few I can use; we just need to go by there."

"No," Nyte shook his head. "I know what it is. I have one back at the packhouse. Your father gave it to me. He said that your grandfather gave it to him to give to your mate...we would need it, but he never told your father what we would need it for."

I let out a laugh, covering my mouth. Of course, the fates had this planned for years since before either Nyte or I was born, it would seem. My grandfather had been a powerful seer like me. It was rumored that he even knew about the mateship between Orion and Diana and he was a friend of the Crete witches before their fall all those years ago.

"You lead us to them, and I will make certain that you have the packs you need to go up against the vampires," Alexander stated. "Now, Nyte needs to go and claim this pack as his, then we will bring them along to Point Loma. Meet me in my office; we will begin transferring the pack over as soon as you have the location of the missing packs."

Alexander turned and left the room, and then Beta Jose, giving us all one last look before following the man he had dedicated his life to following—the man who would be handing over it all to Nyte and me in a matter of hours.

I looked at Nyte, bringing his hand back to my lips again. "I'm at your side," I promised him, scooting to the edge of the bed.

“We can do this together, or I can step aside to allow you to do this on your own; but no matter what, I’m with you.”

His hand tightened around mine, pulling me to stand with him. “They will have to accept you no matter what. You and I will claim the pack as ours together.”

Madi and Chase followed us down the stairs, Madi taking her place as our Beta within the pack. I could see on their faces they didn’t like being claimed by a witch Luna, but I no longer cared how they felt about me. That wasn’t what was important anymore. They had to accept us; their lives depended on it. The future of all werewolves depended on it.

There was a reason why Alpha Orion’s pack was untouched by the vampires. Their connection to powerful witches protected them. Their kinship with the coven within their city saved them from the touch of the dark magic of the witch working with the Ancient vampire. I was exactly what they needed.

“The fates always have a plan,” I said to myself. Madi smiled over at me as the Oceanside Pack approached, baring their necks to Nyte and me and pledging to follow us as their leaders.

“The Fates are tricky beasts, aren’t they,” Madi sighed. “I hate to see what they have in store for me.”

I smiled back at her, giving her a wink. “Hair of fire and eyes of the earth. That’s what they have in store for you.”

I turned back as Markus’s beta approached, his head bowed. He dropped to his knee, baring his neck to us. “I pledge myself

to Alpha Nyte and his Luna, Paige. I promise to serve and protect you both, as the pack's future depends upon you." He looked up at us, trails of tears evident on his face as he mourned his fallen Alpha.

A whisper echoed in my mind, telling me that there was something he needed to hear – a message that belonged to him through me. I stepped forward, Nyte growling at my movement but not moving to stop me. Thompson looked up at me, uncertain, daring not to move in any way. I bent toward him, tipping his chin with my finger and searching his eyes.

"You are a loyal man," I said. "Even though you knew that something was wrong with Markus, you still followed him as only a Beta would. I respect that, and for that, I will offer you answers. You only have to survive this coming battle, and then I can tell you why Markus changed."

I turned from him before he could ask me anything further; the next wolf stepped forward to pledge themselves to us. Nyte looked at me with the same question in his eyes as Thompson, but I couldn't answer either of them yet. I only knew that there would be answers to come...so long as everyone involved survived.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

## Nyte

My new pack didn't put up much of a fight in accepting me as their Alpha and Paige as their Luna. Even the woman waiting outside the packhouse when we arrived bore her neck to us without a fuss. Not a single wolf chose to leave the pack to be rogue.

"What are your first orders?" the she-wolf asked, stepping forward with Beta Thompson.

"What is your name?" I asked, frowning at the air of authority she seemed to carry within the pack.

"I am Morghan, Alpha. I was the older sister of Alpha Markus and often performed the duties of Luna within the pack. I offer my services to you and Luna Paige now."

I looked to Paige then to see how she would react to the woman. Her reaction would tell me of the treatment she had received and how I would proceed.

"That was why you didn't seem scared of Markus," Paige mused, tilting her head.

Morghan gave a nod, looking at Paige. "Yes, Luna. Although my brother was unwell, I never feared for my safety around him...only for the safety of the pack. I am sorry for his treatment of you and the welcome you were given when you arrived. It was a very trying time for us all."

Paige smirked at me. “It was still a warmer welcoming than I got from the Coronado Pack.”

That was the answer to her treatment, the she-wolf now gaining my respect through my mate. “We are to go to the Coronado Packhouse. Anyone able to fight should remain in the house. Anyone unable to fight, mothers and their children, and the elders will join the midwives in their caverns to hide until the threat is handled.”

Morghan’s interest seemed to peak, her eyes widening. “Alpha Nyte, are you saying you know where the kidnappers are? Where the missing packs are?”

I shook my head, watching her deflate. “No, but my mate can find them.”

The nearest wolves all stared at Paige, eyes widened in amazement.

“The witch Luna can find them?”

“How is that possible?”

“Can we trust, really trust her?”

The voices and whispers all rose, news passing from wolf to wolf until the entire pack heard that Paige could find the missing packs. Paige stepped forward, raising her hand and calling out for the pack to listen. “Yes, I can find the missing wolves and those who have taken them. The fates gave me a vision. I know for certain the missing packs are being kept alive. I know who has them and for what purpose, and I know how to find them. However, even if I lead all of us to them

right now, we will fail if you don't trust Nyte and me. An Ancient Vampire Lord is keeping them prisoner, and a dark witch is at his side. We must gather all the remaining packs and join forces against them. Can you trust us to lead you? Can you trust me to guide your friends and family to the missing packs? Will you stand with us, as your Alpha and Luna, at the sides of the other packs?"

Morghan looked over her shoulder as nervous eyes turned to her for guidance. Clearly, they still respected her and now looked to her to speak for the pack.

"We have sworn to you as our Alpha and Luna," Morghan stated, lifting her chin proudly as she spoke. "We will follow you both. There is no hesitation from our pack. Whatever you need, you can find it with us."

Paige smiled at the she-wolf, the stern look on the older woman's face softening.

"Then it's time for us to return to Point Loma."

Madilyn and Chase joined another car on the way back to the packhouse, leaving Paige and me alone in my car. It was such a relief to have her back; my body relaxed in places I hadn't realized had stiffened since she was gone. It had only been for a few hours, but my body felt like she had been separated from me for days.

I rested my hand over hers on the middle console, a soft sigh leaving her lips as she relaxed at my touch.

“I’m sorry,” I said, watching her turn away from the window in the corner of my eye.

“What?”

“I said that I’m sorry,” I answered, keeping my eye on the road now, embarrassed at apologizing to her.

“I heard that, but what are you sorry for?” She watched me expectantly.

I knew what she wanted. I also knew that I owed her an apology for everything. I thought about it while she was gone. I felt inner rage for having kept so much from her, realizing that had I only trusted her with the truth, she might not have been taken from me.

Trust. That was what Liberty had told me I needed to do. Trust my mate.

I turned to look at Paige, my hand tightening around hers. “I’m sorry for all the secrets. I’m sorry for not telling you that I was your mate. Not just your fake mate, but your fate-chosen mate. I’m sorry for not telling you about the baby the moment I knew. I’m sorry for hiding your cards to keep all my secrets. Above all, I’m sorry for not trusting that you could handle the truth...and for believing you needed protection from yourself.”

Tears sparkled in Paige’s eyes as she looked back at me, her hand tightening with mine. “I accept your apology. I’m sorry as well. I shouldn’t have left the packhouse. It was stupid and immature of me.”

“You were going home. You wanted family support.” I stated, turning my eyes back to the road. “I don’t blame you for that. And I don’t blame you for trusting Katya. Accepted or not, she was a pack member, and you should have been able to trust her. I know I left little for you to trust in my pack when you first came to the packhouse, but deep down, I never had thought they’d actually harm you.” I brought her hand to my lips, pressing them there. “Katya will be punished.”

“Nyte,” she questioned. “Why did the pack come with you if they haven’t accepted you as Alpha?”

I smiled, pressing another kiss to her hand. “Because they may not have accepted you as a pack member just yet, but they never turn away a pup. They would die for our child even if they have no wolf and all magic. They would still be born a member of the pack.”

It was a relief to know this and to tell her with confidence that no matter what, our child would be accepted and cared for by the pack. I could see in her the relief at hearing that. When we finally arrived back at the packhouse, with the caravan of all the packs filling the neighborhood, I parked in the driveway of the packhouse just behind Alpha Alexander.

“Are you ready?” Alexander asked, nodding to Paige.

“I just need the pendulum and a map.” She confidently walked up to him, the pack gathering in the driveway. I could hear a few whispers, my newly acquired pack growling at some derogatory comments to Paige. She glanced back at everyone. “No fighting. We don’t have time for any of that.”

Alexander stared at her in surprise and respect, nodding his agreement. “Everyone remain prepared. The women with young children should be taken to the midwives while we prepare.” He looked back at Paige after addressing the packs. “I have several city and state maps in my office. Meet me there with the pendulum.”

Paige nodded and looked back at me. “Where did you put it? Is it in that cubby that my cards were hidden in?”

“Yes,” I told her, taking the lead into the packhouse. “It’s in a velvet box. I’m surprised you hadn’t found it when you found the cards.”

She chuckled behind me. “Magical tools sometimes go undetected when they are not needed. They have minds of their own.”

We rushed up the stairs and into our room, reaching the hidden compartment beneath the TV. Paige watched as I opened the small door. Her eyes widened when she saw the black velvet box in the middle of the wires, exactly where she must have seen her cards sitting. Careful not to unplug any wires inside, I pulled out the box and turned to her, offering it like a human might with an engagement ring. She slowly reached for the box, opened it, and looked inside, gasping at the pendulum within.

“It’s the same one,” she whispered.

“What does that mean?” I frowned, watching her carefully lift the pendulum from its box.

“I saw this exact pendulum in my vision. Every detail is the same. I hadn’t ever seen it before, but something about it is familiar. I now understand why.” She lifted the pendulum so its stone dangled in front of her face, allowing her to admire the stone before her.

“What do you feel?” I asked.

“I feel him,” she answered without hesitation, my brow creasing at her words.

“Who?”

“My grandfather. I never actually met him since he passed before I had been born. But I feel him in this stone. His magic. It’s strange. Our signatures are so similar, yet so different. He put so much of himself into this stone.”

“Your dad said that he gave it to him on his wedding day. It would have been a few years before you were born then.”

Paige nodded, letting the stone return to the box and looking at me. “He was a seer like me. I knew that growing up. He could see things, but it would come out in riddles if he tried to explain them to Ama. That’s what she told me when I learned my specialty. It’s why she gave me the cards. They help unjumble messages and make it easier to share what I see.” She looked back down at the stone again. “No one knew that about his gift. They all just thought he enjoyed speaking in riddles to them.”

I smiled at her, a glow coming off her as she looked at the pendulum. As much as I wanted to sit there and let her bask in



this new connection to a family member she hadn't been able to meet, I knew we didn't have the time.

"Come on." I took her elbow, guiding her to the door. "Everyone is waiting for us."

She nodded, snapping the box closed and rushing from our room at my side. I led the way to the alpha office, our footsteps echoing in the nearly empty house. Everyone else had remained outside. Those unable to fight joined the midwives on the beach as everyone else waited for orders. I could hear a distant phone call from Thompson, ordered by Alexander to call the remaining packs to join us here, my uncle included.

Inside the alpha's office, Madilyn, Chase, and Jose already sat on the seats inside as Alexander paced behind his desk. His maps were strewn across the desk; his head snapped around to face Paige and me as we opened the office door.

"Do you have it?" he asked Paige, a flicker of hope shining in his eyes.

"Yes," she answered, holding the box with the pendulum inside. She walked around his desk and looked down at the maps, reaching for the state map first. "We'll have to start wide; I saw trees and a cave in my vision. I doubt that they were in the city."

"That sounds reasonable," Alexander commented, stepping out of her way.

I watched as my mate pulled out the pendulum, dangling the black stone over the map. The stone began to spin; her hand was still as she moved her arm over the map, watching as the pointed stone spun faster and slower as she moved it over different areas of the map.

“Closer,” she whispered, moving the stone further inland from the city limits.

I leaned over, watching the area where the pendulum began to spin the fastest.

“Shit,” I whispered, Alexander, leaning over the map and looking for himself.

“You’re sure?” He asked.

“Yes. I can narrow it down when we get there, but this is the general location. They’re somewhere in the state park.”

Alexander nodded, then looked up at me. “A deal is a deal,” he said, looking at Beta Jose. “Gather everyone for the passing of power.”

“Alpha,” Jose gasped.

“Tell them that their new Luna has found the missing packs. She and their new Alpha are going to be leading us into battle. We should get the power transferred quickly before we have to leave.” He looked back at me again. “It’s a long drive to Cuyamaca Rancho. We don’t have much daylight to spare.”

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Paige

We arrived in the state park parking lot, all the San Diego packs pulling in behind us. The lot quickly filled with vans and trucks loaded with werewolves. I stepped out of Nyte's car, holding the pendulum in my hand as Alpha Alexander approached with a map. It was lucky that the park ranger was a shifter. Otherwise, we may have faced issues with the number of people we were bringing into the area now.

Alexander laid the map out over the hood of the car for me, the pendulum feeling hot in my hand as I dangled it over the map. It began to buzz with magic, spinning and swaying as I held it over each path on the map. I felt its heat in my hand as its speed increased the closer I got to where we needed to go.

The area was marked on the map as pure wildlife, with no marked paths to follow. There were even some warnings about stepping off the marked trails with a statement that any rescue would be at the cost of the wandering hikers. The vampires chose their hiding place well. Only the most adventurous

humans would have wandered near their hiding place, and those unfortunate souls would have never been seen again—just another lost hiker in the wilderness of California.

“We need to head west,” I told Nyte and the others, pulling out a marker to circle where we were heading. “This path will get us the closest, but we will have to move off the path from here.”

Nyte leaned over to watch where I marked, nodding to Madi to join us. “Madi, spread the word to the other Betas. We are going down this path first and breaking to surround this area. Everyone needs to be on high alert. The sun is setting soon, which means the vampires will be more active with the setting sun.”

“Got it,” Madi said before running off to Thompson and Jose, who stood with another Beta who had joined his pack.

“How should we proceed, Alpha Nyte?”

I looked up at the other Alpha who joined us, Nyte’s uncle. He smiled at me briefly, his face in a permanent serious expression. Nyte glanced at him before pointing to a spot just north of the area.

“There is a cave system where the vampires are keeping the missing wolves,” Nyte explained. “I want you to move over the entrance as best as possible. If you need to shift, do it. We need to ambush the vampires as they run out of the caves. I want no one to escape. We can’t have this incident repeated.”

“Understood,” Alpha Blake nodded, turning to pass on the plan to his Beta.

Alexander looked at Nyte next, waiting for the order of the Coronado pack. Nyte responded immediately. “Alexander, you will lead the others to surround the outside of the cave when we find it. As my uncle’s pack ambushes from above, you will corral the vampires and prevent them from escaping.”

“Where will you be?” Alexander asked, looking between Nyte and myself.

“The Ancient and his witch are at the deepest point of the cave system. There is no ceiling there; they could escape that way. We are going to pinpoint that area and lead the Oceanside pack to ambush the caves from that area.” I explained. “The pack will push the vampires out of the cave and free the stolen packs while Nyte and I fight the witch and Ancient one.”

Alexander looked between us before nodding in understanding. “Where do you propose we split then?”

Nyte answered him this time. “We will first locate the cave. Once we have found it, we will split up to our places outside the cave.”

“We will have a limited time, so make sure every pack knows their place,” I added. “There is a spell over the area of the cave. When I break through it and reveal the cave to everyone, the witch will notice.” I glanced over at Nyte’s uncle as he reappeared, nodding in understanding.

“How long do you suppose we will have to get organized?” he asked.

“A matter of minutes,” I replied. “She is a strong witch. The ripple of her magic breaking could even alert the vampires without her notifying them.”

“How are you so certain you will break through?” Alexander asked.

I smiled at the Alpha. “Because I’ve seen myself do it. The fates showed me what to do. So long as you all do what I’ve said, we are all going to walk away from this stronger than ever.”

The Alphas all nodded, turning and waving for their Betas to join us at the base of the path we were to start on. I held the pendulum in my hand, letting it guide me along the path to know precisely when to split and head into the unmarked forest. The sun was slipping below the horizon, darkness falling quickly beneath the canopies of the trees overhead. We didn’t have much time to search, but my instincts told me that we would make it. We had to.

“Are you sure you’re okay?” Nyte asked, placing his hand on the base of my spine. His eyes were filled with worry, glancing at my flat belly as if he could see the little one growing inside me.

“I’m fine, Nyte. Trust me, I wouldn’t be here if I didn’t think that the baby and I could handle this.” I assured him with a smile. “The baby is safe. Witch children aren’t affected by

magic in the womb; and if I feel the need, I can always put an extra barrier to protect our child.”

“How do witches fight if magic doesn’t affect them?” Nyte asked with a frown.

“When a witch gets their magic, the protection is gone. They have to rely on their own magic to protect them. But before that, they have protections.” With my eyes closed, I placed my hand over my stomach, feeling the soft, distant hum of the natural magic that protected our child from using my magic and magic used against me.

It wouldn’t have been the same against the werewolf magic had Markus attempted to remove Nyte’s mark. That had been why I put the extra barrier around my womb. However, no matter how much this dark witch threw curses and magic at me, my baby would be unaffected. Only if she managed to kill me would my child be harmed. But that wouldn’t happen. I was going to walk away from this with Nyte at my side. I saw it, and with the packs behind us, it would come to fruition.

The pendulum began to pulse in my hand at a bend in the path, pulling in the direction it wanted me to go.

“This way,” I told Nyte, allowing him to stay a step ahead of me. His instinct was to protect me in my condition even though I could handle myself. After Markus took me, I was more than willing to let Nyte follow his instincts. Not only that, but the pack needed a clear leader; although the Luna stands at the Alpha’s side, he leads the pack. I had to respect

that tradition. The pack needed it for us to come out on the other side in one piece.

I could hear the wolves sniffing the air as we left the path, memorizing our way so we could get out of the forest quickly when we accomplished what we had set out to do here. A few, I'm sure, were hoping to catch the scent of a wolf or vampire they could follow, but I knew they wouldn't. The witch's spell was still in place. While my pendulum could find them through it, any scents would be hidden from the wolves.

My pendulum spun in my hand before pointing in a new direction, rounding a rocky bend in the forest. I could feel the magic buzzing in the air around us. The taste of darkness souring the familiar feeling of spellwork in the air, sending a shiver down my spine.

"We're getting closer," I whispered softly to Nyte. "I can feel her magic everywhere."

Nyte looked at me with concern, his eyes drifting to the pendulum as it pulled in my hands, urging us forward. He kept the lead, looking back at the pendulum to ensure he was going the right way. The further we went, the thicker the air felt, although only I seemed to notice. The magic was heavy. Dark and ominous, I could almost see it trickling through the forest, running through the very veins of the woods. I quickly realized what she had done when I spotted the first of the mushrooms in an unnatural line.

"Wait," I said, grabbing Nyte's arm. He raised his hand to halt the packs following us, looking down as I pointed to the



mushrooms. “She made a fairy circle. That’s how she is keeping such a large area hidden. She’s using the mushrooms.”

“What does that mean?” Madi asked from behind me, stepping closer to look at the mushrooms. “What would have happened if we hadn’t stopped?”

“Everyone would have forgotten why they were here. It’s ancient magic. The kind that witches used to use when humans believed in the fairy folks to keep them away from important monuments and ritual grounds.” I stepped around Nyte, kneeling by the mushrooms. “Mushrooms have a different form of roots than other plants. They are connected to each other for miles. They communicate with each other through the mycelium.” I explained, digging my finger into the ground to trace out a sigil I had learned as a young child.

Nyte and Madi stood close behind me, watching and listening as I worked and explained how the magic works.

“Fairy circles aren’t usually made as big as this, but they can be and are just as effective. Because mushrooms can communicate with one another, they move the spell, making them a perfect continuous conduit for magic.” I finished the sigil, feeling the sputter in the magic before reaching out and plucking the mushroom. “Just like with a string of lights, the magic will end when you safely remove one from the circle.”

“Oh, my gods,” Madi gasped, sniffing the air with widened eyes. “I can smell them!”

She wasn’t the only one. An uproar was stirring behind us, the Alphas all doing their best to calm their packs. Nyte stood tall

beside me, letting out a sharp barking sound that could only have come from his wolf. The sound held an Alpha command that I couldn't understand, but every wolf in the forest did; they all reacted, baring their necks with a few dropping down to their knees as they tilted their heads.

“You have all been given your orders,” he reminded them. “I understand that many of you have family within the stolen packs. Be they your mother, father, sister, or brother, if you want to see them through this, you better stick with the orders you have been given.”

Silence fell over the packs. “Escondido Pack, find a way above the cave entrance. With the scent of the wolves and vampires uncovered, you should be able to move downwind and position yourselves. Coronado Pack, you surround the entrance and stay hidden in the trees. You aren't to let any vampires past you should they evade the ambush of Escondido Pack. As for Oceanside Pack, you come with us.”

Nyte held his hand out to me, pulling me onto his back before taking off at a fast sprint. He was fast. Far faster than I had ever realized a wolf could be. Looking over my shoulder, I watched Madi follow us; Thompson, and the other Oceanside wolves barely kept up with Nyte as he sprinted through the forest. Chase remained with Alexander. As a branch pack of the Coronado Pack, he had to lead his wolves to surround the outside of the cave as ordered. Only Madi remained with us. Nyte's Beta became an Oceanside wolf the moment he took over as Alpha.

Trees rushed by in a blur. The feel of magic is still thick in the air. I pointed with my finger in the direction I felt it coming from. “Nyte! That way!”

He followed my direction, turning so fast that his hands grabbed a tree, deep claw marks left in the bark as we swung in the new direction. The ground began to rise at an angle, the trees at the top of the hill coming into view, their canopies familiar to me. Nyte skidded to a halt just before the forest floor opened up, the sound of running water heard before the sight of the small river and the roar of the waterfall into the cave.

Nyte let me slide down his back, his eyes surveying the opening, searching for the ancient vampire he would have to face. A frenzy of vampires swarmed below, panicking as they ran about. They knew we were here. No doubt the witch felt the break in her magic. She would know it was me. She had been in the vision with me. She saw almost everything that I had seen, and it was likely she would have seen things I hadn't.

“What's your orders, Alpha?” Madi asked from his right side, her back straight as she awaited his orders.

“No vampire leaves here alive,” he ordered. “We can't afford any of them spreading word of what they accomplished here. We don't need an ambitious vampire attempting it somewhere else.”

Madi nodded, turning to Thompson before the two spread the order to the pack. Nyte took my hand then, drawing my eyes

away from the two Beta wolves to look up at him.

“Don’t you dare die tonight,” he growled at me.

“I won’t if you won’t,” I replied, reaching up to cup his cheek. I lifted myself up on the tips of my toes, pressing my lips to his and opening my mouth as he deepened the kiss. I could taste the anguish he felt - the dread that this could be our last kiss. I couldn’t let him think that. “I’ve seen our victory, Nyte. We are going to go home together. You just have to trust me.”

Something flashed in his eyes before he nodded, cupping my cheek as I held his. “I trust you, Paige.”

He kissed me once more before turning away and jumping down into the cave, the pack quickly following him. Only Madi and Thompson remained at my side, bound by their Beta duties to guard their Luna with their lives.

I looked between the two of them. “Which one of you is gonna help me down in there? I have a witch to cleanse.”

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Nyte

Trust her. The words kept coming back around to me. I have to trust her. I should have trusted her from the beginning, yet that fear of never seeing her again - never holding her - clenched my heart like a vice. It had taken all my strength to dive into the cave and lead my pack into the fray of battle as my mate sought out her own fight - one I had to trust she would come out of unscathed.

I don't spare a glance back at her, my pack colliding with the vampires as they shift in midair. I have to trust that she can take care of herself. I have to trust in her strength. She swore to me that she could handle this. So, instead of looking back for her, I look for the vampire who caused all this. I land in my fully shifted form, my thick coat shining in the risen moonlight. A vampire attempts to dive at me, his fangs bared in an attempt to attack me, but I swat him away like a fly. My claws tear into him, his body falling motionless at my feet. My opponent wouldn't fall so easily.

I help my pack as I search for the ancient vampire lord, knocking the lesser vampires from their backs as I pass. Appreciative yelps greeted me as they were freed, running off to help another packmate now that they were freed. A flash of purple-streaked hair catches my attention momentarily, my head following the color just in time to see Paige on Madi's back and Thompson running beside them. The Betas would stay close to her, the knowledge that she had two protecting her giving me solace before continuing in my search for the leader of the vampire horde.

"You undoubtedly are a werewolf king," a deep voice chuckled at my left, my head whipping around to search for the source. Only wisps of smoke remained, the deep laughing echoing around me, but the scent of death was heavy in the air.

"Your size and power are impressive, I must admit; however, you aren't the most impressive werewolf king I have faced in my time."

I growled low as I turned my head, still missing the voice's owner at the last second.

"My witch was so concerned about you. She wouldn't dare target any of the major pack branches outright. She always uses her little pendulum to decide which packs to take. Now that I see you, I'm wondering what it was that concerned her so much about you." His voice came from all around, his scent circling me and the battle surrounding us fading away as a dark aura settled around me.

I shifted back to human form, turning in a circle to find the demon. “If you’re so unimpressed, then why don’t you stop hiding from me?” I called out with a sneer.

“Where is the fun in that?” he whispered back, his voice directly in my ear. I turned my head just in time to see him fade from sight, still laughing, although his voice echoed around me again.

“I’ve found many who hide their cowardice behind the guise of playing a game,” I chuckled. “Never thought an Ancient would be amongst those fools.”

“Trying to bait me?” the disembodied voice asked with amusement. “I’m far too old to fall for that. I’ve killed many werewolf kings in my time that I think I’ve earned the fun of playing with my food.”

I gritted my teeth as his voice bounced around me, his aura blocking my view of the pack and Paige. I couldn’t even hear them behind his miasma. I didn’t know how their battles were going. For all I knew, the witch who worked with this ancient being was wiping them all out as I was distracted by her partner.

*No!* I scolded myself. *I have to trust her.*

I shook my head, focusing on the vampire lord. “If you are so powerful, then why are you only now trying to bring back the werewolf slaves? From what I’ve heard, the werewolf kings of the past nearly wiped all you ancients off the face of the planet and ended this bullshit. Yet here you are, centuries later, trying to revitalize the practice.” I let out a deep laugh of my own,

mocking his amusement. “Seems to me that you only had a chance at this because of the witch helping you. Maybe it’s her I should be focusing on. Take out the real power.”

“She is simply a weapon. A tool. A means to an end. If she were to be taken from me, well, there are more witches where she comes from. Like your Luna.”

I held back my snarl, refusing to allow him to bait me. He already had the upper hand in creating his battlefield with his aura. I didn’t need him to manipulate my emotions.

“I think you’ll find that my mate isn’t interested in helping you revive the past,” I said, catching his scent behind me, but I didn’t turn. I remained still, waiting to see if he would make a move. The moment he did, I would turn it against him instead.

“I can just do to her what I did to my current witch,” he whispered behind me. “It’s amazing what a few sweet nothings whispered into a woman’s ear can earn you.”

A growl slipped past my lips that I couldn’t hold back. “It takes a lot more than that to win over Paige.”

“I’m sure that’s what Silva’s mate thought, too.”

I felt the air swift between us, moving quickly to dodge his clawed hand. Liquid dripped from his nails, the scent of wolfsbane nearly making me gag. His scent of death had covered the poison’s scent up until now. I could only smell it because his hand had been less than a foot from my face. I shifted back to my wolf form with a snarl, jumping back farther, finally getting a full view of the vampire lord. I had



heard the rumors of the Ancient Vampires and their beauty. The kind of beauty that drew in victims like moths to a flame, but I hadn't believed it. Not until now.

He was pale, although not as pale as I would have expected him to be. Behind the years of no sunlight, you could still make out some color to him - a soft brown that spoke of his region of origin. His bone structure was sharp and strong, his hair tumbling in curls around his face. Even I had to admit the man was handsome. If what he had said were true and he wooed the witch to turn to the dark arts to help him, I could see why she would.

"You certainly are quick," he laughed. "I will give you that. Possibly the fastest werewolf king I've come across to date, but you will fall just the same."

I growled, bending my legs to prepare to dodge him again. He only laughed more, running his hands through his hair as his head turned skyward in his laughter.

"I love the way you creatures react. So animalistic. When I was younger, I had a pup with the same lively attitude. Always so defiant." He looked back at me, a gleam in his yellow eyes. "She was an excellent guard dog after she had been broken and trained. Maybe I won't kill you."

I couldn't hold myself back anymore; my paws were digging into the ground as I rushed at him. Pain ricocheted through my body, his claws digging into my side. I felt the warm wetness soak into my coat. He was faster than me. A hacking sound

came from my mouth, blood spurting to the ground as I fell to my belly.

The vampire laughed from behind me again, but I didn't turn to look at him. My body screamed at the pain, my mind fighting with me to look at the wound. I didn't need to look, though. I knew he had cut me deep, the kind of wound that didn't heal fast. It was far deeper than any other werewolf could cut into me.

"What?" he cackled. "Was that all you had? Some werewolf king you are! The last one I killed was still standing after that. He even managed to claw my gut pretty good."

I felt the strength in my body slipping from me. The pain was throbbing through my entire body now. How could anyone be able to move from this wound? The vampire had to be lying.

"Nyte!" the scream echoed in my head. Paige's terrified voice sobered me immediately. "Don't give up! You can do this!"

I lifted my head, turning to try and find her, but only seeing the dark aura surrounding us in our private battlefield. It took me a minute to realize that she was yelling at my mind. The mate bond was stronger now that we were within range of one another.

"You have everything you need to beat him," she assured me. "Trust me."

There it was again. The reminder of Liberty's warning to me. Trust in my mate. I had to trust that she could handle her fight, but I also had to trust that she knew the outcome of this battle.

She had sworn to me that we would both walk away from it... that this wouldn't be our end.

Howls rang out beyond the aura—the first sound of my pack since the miasma had blocked them out. I looked over my shoulder to see the surprised look on the vampire's face. He dropped that look when he noticed me looking, plastering his amused grin back in place once more.

“They can't get in. They can't help you,” he said.

I pushed myself back to my feet, growling at the pain on my side. I forced myself to shift again, the action helping to quicken the healing of the wound, although the process was far more painful than it would have been without the damage.

Standing at my full height, I looked back at the vampire, smirking at him. “I don't need their help to kill you. I have everything I need to do it right here.” I shifted my fingers into claws, gesturing for the vampire to come and get it. I would fight him in this position and trust my mate's vision of us walking out of here together. Unlike me, she had never lied to me. So, if she said I could do this, then I could fucking do it.

I charged at the ancient vampire as he ran at me, a glint of fear as he looked at my form. I realized he wanted to fight the wolf—the wolf or the man. He would have fought me in either form; however, I wasn't either now. I was both—a single being fighting as one. The revelation shot through me with a newfound confidence in myself, jumping over the vampire's head and landing behind him. My clawed hands sliced down

his back, peeling away skin and clothes in a single blow. Blood poured down his back, pooling at his feet.

A vicious scream erupted from the vampire's lips, spinning with his claws to swipe at me, but I was faster than him in this form. I dodge him easily, his movement in slow motion before my eyes. He couldn't hide the pure fear in his expression now. I understood the true strength of the werewolf king now. The bigger size and faster movements in wolf form was only something in the werewolf pack. It was how the others could recognize the strength and authority I held, but my true strength came from the combined power of both my forms.

Unlike other werewolves, I was faster in my partial shift. I was stronger, too. If this vampire's claim of killing werewolf kings in the past was valid, it was due to the lack of knowledge to be passed down from king to king. The truth behind the true strength of the werewolf king. To embrace the human and the beast as one. Judging by the panicked look on the ancient one's face, he also knew the truth.

I twisted my body away from another of his blows, a laugh ripping from my lips as his eyes watched in horror at my speed as I moved past him in a blur to his eyes. My claws dug into his side, ripping useless organs from his body and tossing them away. Although he didn't need the organs left behind from his time as a human, the loss of blood and pain would still affect him just the same.

I spun my heels, clawing into his other side as he reacted to the chunk of flesh stolen from his body. I had found my tempo

in this fight now. I was tearing the vampire limb from limb before he could even react. A crazed laugh bubbled from within me as he fell to his knees, clutching his wounds. I stopped moving, standing before him and looking down at the bloodied mess around him. He snarled at me, his yellowed eyes devoid of the human they had held only a moment ago.

“It’s over now,” I told him.

“You really think that killing me will put an end to this?” He spat blood at my feet, giving me a cruel smile as he looked back up at me. “You think I’m the only Ancient out there looking to return to the old ways? We are just waking up, boy. You can’t fight us all.”

I smirked back at him, squatting down to eye level. “You think I’m the only one willing to fight? I may be the only werewolf king known right now, but this is a new world your kind is awakening to.” I held my arms wide as if to gesture to the wonder of our world. “Witches and werewolves are coming together. Do you think you were so smart to find yourself a single witch? We have covens on our side. Entire cities of witches are willing to fight with us. So, this isn’t the end?” I laughed. “Bring it on.”

I slashed my arm back, my claws severing the vampire lord’s head from his body. His haze faded away, revealing the battlefield to me once again. Lesser vampires turned to the drop of the aura, their eyes bulging when they saw me stepping forward, their lord already nothing but dust in the wind.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Paige

Madi carried me down into the battle, my hands gripping her fur as she rushed between clashing vampires and werewolves. Thompson followed close beside us, blocking any vampire who attempted to rush at us. I didn't pay them much attention, counting on my Betas to watch out for me as I followed the pull of the dark magic.

"Take me to the waterfall!" I yelled out to Madi, pointing to the running water at the center of the cave.

She didn't hesitate to follow my directions, turning her body and kicking up loose rocks as her paws pounded into the ground. Only when a vampire rammed into her other side did she falter, my body flying through the air off of hers. Thompson caught me in midair, landing hard on his side with me safely against him. I pushed off of the large brown wolf, pointing to Madi as several vampires surrounded her.

“Help her!” I commanded, putting all the authority I could muster into my voice. “I’ve got this! You watch her back.”

He let out a growl of protest, the sound falling on deaf ears as Madi let out a painful howl, a vampire biting into her neck.

“Go!” I yelled, zapping him with magic to punctuate my command.

The large Beta yipped at the shock, standing to run to Madi’s aid, leaving me at the water’s edge.

“You certainly have a way with animals,” a soft voice laughed behind me.

I spun at the sound, my eyes widening as I recognized the witch from my vision. Her skin is papery thin, the black veins evident, the look of sludge moving through her body from the effects of her dark magic use.

“You aren’t as pretty as you looked in the vision,” she said with a frown. “Maybe it’s all those piercings. I don’t think your astral body had any of those. Didn’t your mother ever tell you that so many holes diminish the value of a fine piece of art?”

I scoffed. “Are you really lecturing me on the defilement of my body? With those veins?”

The dark witch looked down at her arm, laughing as she looked back at me. “All the better to smite you with.”

A tendril of dark magic slashed out at me like a whip, wrapping around my arm. She yanked me forward, pulling me into the spring that separated us, the water deeper than I had

realized. I slipped beneath the surface, the dark tendrils of magic wrapping themselves around me and holding me under.

I fought against them, drawing on my magic to help ease my screaming lungs. A bubble of air formed around my mouth and nose, manipulating the oxygen in the water so I could breathe as she attempted to drown me in the pool. At the relief of my lungs filling with air, I could focus my magic on her, pushing the inky black magic from my limbs and breaking through the surface.

“Oh my! What strong magic you have,” the witch cackled at me.

“All the better to fight you with,” I countered, sending ice at her feet to hold her in place.

She let out a screech of anger, pointing her magic at her feet to free herself from the ice. It didn't take her much to do so, but it gave me plenty of time to get out of the water and gain back my footing as I readied myself for her next attack. I gathered my magic in my hands, facing the witch just in time to see her smile drop as she looked behind me. A gasp drew my attention just enough to glance back, finding Thompson in human form staring wide-eyed at the witch on the other side of the cave spring.

“Silva?” he asked, shaking his head as he stood frozen in place.

“Hello, Thompson,” she responded. “Fancy meeting you here.”



Her blackened eyes almost softened when she looked at the Beta, tilting her head to the side as stray curls of hair slipped over her shoulder.

“What happened to you?” Thompson asked, stepping closer to the water’s edge. I watched his reaction to her, turning my head back and forth between the dark witch and the Oceanside Beta.

“How do you know her?” I asked, keeping my hand raised and power sparking in my palm.

Thompson shook his head. “She grew up near our pack. She and Markus were best friends. Inseparable up until he took over as Alpha. After that, he was always so busy. He just didn’t have time for her.”

The witch cackled, holding her sides as the black magic wisped around her feet. “That’s what you think, Thompson. That’s what I made sure you thought.” Her eyes turned to mine, a curious look in her gaze as she looked me up and down. “How is it you managed to get the Oceanside Pack here? Markus would never have agreed to follow the werewolf king. He’s too proud.”

Thompson’s head drooped, stepping back. “Markus is dead, Silva,” he answered for me. “He stole Alpha Nyte’s mate to claim her as his own, and he paid the price with his life.”

Silva’s eyes narrowed at me, disgust twisting her lips. “He tried to replace me with her?”

Both Thompson and I shared a shocked look, turning back to the dark witch as she sneered back at me. “What?” Thompson asked. “What do you mean replace you?”

Silva cackled again. “Did I really cast that good of a spell on you, Thompson? I was Markus’ fated mate. Your pack was not happy with that, but that’s okay. Thanks to my new mate, I found the strength to reject the bond before he could mark me.” She smiled behind me, my gaze following hers to see the vortex of a dark aura.

I could feel Nyte inside it, his irritation and fears slipping through our bond. As I turned back to the witch, I found her eyes piercing into mine once more.

“There is no denying the fates,” I said. “Even if you rejected him, the link would still be there. I looked into this when I thought that Markus was my mate. There is no way to escape the plans laid out by the fates.”

Silva smiled with amusement. “That’s why I cast the spell over the pack and Markus. Making them forget that I was ever his mate so he couldn’t try and come after me.” She chuckled. “I guess I didn’t do so well on him. It would seem he was looking for a witch mate all along. I wonder what it was about you that reminded him of me. We don’t look alike. Hmm.” She tapped her finger to her lips, walking closer to the water on her side of the spring.

“No,” Thompson gasped, shaking his head. “You can’t be serious, Silva! I know you! You wouldn’t have done what you claim you’ve done.”

Silva looked at him, narrowing her dark eyes. “Come on, Thompson. You never actually knew me. You never actually cared for me. You were among the loudest to protest me as your Luna.” She glared at me again. “Though it would seem you have accepted her nonetheless.”

Sparks flew before my eyes—a vision entrapping me inside myself.

“No!” I screamed as the flash of light fell back into darkness. “No, no, no. Not now!”

The vision began to swirl, taking form before my eyes as quickly as it came. I gasped in shock, shooting back into the present like nothing had happened. What felt like hours had now seemed to only last a moment.

“Thompson,” I gasped, looking at the Beta at my side.

“Why would I have rejected you as Luna?” Thompson yelled back at Silva, seeming not to have heard me call out to him. “I loved you like a sister! I still care about you!”

“You won’t remember,” she spat. “The spell I put over you to forget is still as strong as ever. But the rejection of the pack is not forgotten by me. The only one who was there for me was Lord Aidas. He accepted me as his chosen mate, and I accepted the power he offered me.”

“He tricked you!” I yelled, gaining back the attention of the Beta and dark witch. “He manipulated you and the pack. He forced you into solitude so he could be the only one there for you.”

She rolled her blackened eyes at me, dismissively flicking her wrist at me. “Aidas doesn’t have that power over me. You should know just as well as me that vampire’s compulsion doesn’t work on witches.”

“No,” I agreed. “But it does work on werewolves.” I pointed to Thompson, his eyes widening as he looked between me and who should have been his Luna. “He compelled the pack to reject you. Isolating you from those who cared about you the most and whispered promises of love and acceptance. But his words were empty.”

A sharp dart of magic flew past my ear, the buzz mixed with the whooshing sound of the air.

“Stop trying to distract me!” she shrieked. “He loves me! He loves me more than anyone ever has! He chose me!”

“Markus chose you!” I yelled back. “And even as your spell confused him, he still chose you! He wasn’t looking for me. He was always looking for you. The missing piece of his soul, darkened by the curse you placed on him to forget your bond.”

“No!” she screamed, hurling more magic at me. I narrowly blocked her barrage, pulling Thompson to my side to protect him from the ricochet of her powers. “Markus rejected me for his pack! He didn’t want me! He didn’t want a witch for a Luna!”

“And yet, he kidnapped me because in his confused state, he still knew that his Luna was a witch. Even with your spells, he still chose you!” I yelled back, pushing against her power. “To his dying breath, he swore that his mate was a powerful witch.

He threatened his own pack if they didn't accept that. He loved you so powerfully that all the magic in the world couldn't stop him!"

"NO! Stop it! Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!" the witch screamed, her attacks becoming more frenzied.

I could feel her panic in each burst of magic against my shield and her confusion at my words. The truth in my voice as I told her. They were the truth, I had seen it all. I saw the way the vampire lord slipped past the werewolves, whispering into their ears to reject the witch they had all grown up with.

He filled their minds with fear of the power she possessed — lies of how she could turn on the pack. She wasn't good enough for the pack. She was a danger to the pack. It was those words, compelled into the minds of the pack members, that had turned them against their would-be Luna. And the words that slipped into the mind of Markus were just as cruel and filled with lies. He had convinced him that she had cast a spell over the Alpha, leading him to believe that their bond was false.

"I saw it!" I yelled over the noise of her power going out of control. "The fates showed me it all in a vision of the past. He doesn't care about you, Silva! He never did! He just needed a witch to help him with his quest to return to the old ways—the way he lived before awakening to this new world. He felt your power and knew you were the perfect candidate to help him. He just needed you to trust him and only him!"

“You’re lying!” she screamed, a harder wave of magic hitting against my shield. She was so filled with fury and heartache as she knew deep in her soul that I was telling the truth. No matter how hard she was fighting against it. “You’re the one trying to manipulate me! I don’t believe you!”

I pushed a pulse of my magic at her, knocking her off her balance as I did. A rush of despair rushed through the bond from Nyte. I turned to look at the void, screaming out to him to not give up and reminding him that he could do this. He was the only one who could. My shield held as I reassured my mate, my attention returning to the dark witch on the other side of the spring water as I felt his confidence return. Her gaze was now on the vortex of miasma, fear sparkling in her eyes as she must have known what was about to happen. This was the end, but I wouldn’t allow her to go without knowing and understanding the truth.

“Silva, look at Thompson. Look at the emotions in his eyes. The compulsion is gone. Your spell to make him forget the bond ever existed removed the compulsions from his mind. He cares about you as only a Beta could care for his pack Luna.” I stepped closer to the water’s edge, sending my ice magic out to form a bridge to walk across. “He would never have willingly rejected you. He cares about you. Markus cared about you. I can see it in your eyes that you still hold love for them. That it kills you inside to be against them. Let me show you what the fates shared with me.”

I held out my hand to her, watching her eyes move from me to the vortex at the center of the cave as its winds began to slow,

the power inside shifting.

“Let me help you,” I begged, dropping my shield.

Thompson yelled for me to stop. Madi’s voice soon joined his on the other side of the spring, but I ignored them both. I stared into the inky depths of Silva’s eyes, willing her to trust me, if only for a moment. Her hand clasped into mine, the sparks of the vision flashing between us, and I showed her everything.

Memories belonging to Markus flashed around us. The moment he knew she was his mate. The joy filling his heart filled our chests. His adoration and admiration of her power and ability. I watched her eyes fill with tears, glistening like polished onyx stones. Then, the vision shifted, revealing the truth of the vampire she had claimed as her chosen mate—the darkness he leaked into her and how he accomplished it. She watched as the man she thought was her savior turned everyone she had ever cared for against her.

As the visions slowed, coming to an end, she watched as her true mate’s life ended, his heart shattered and mind scattered as he searched for the mate he felt but couldn’t find. She let out a shaken breath, releasing my hand as she fell to her knees and clutched at her heart. A pained scream filled her lungs. Markus’s name was on her lips as she mourned his loss.

“Do it,” she gasped out, looking back up at me with tears in her eyes. “Send me back to my mate. Cleanse my soul of this darkness so I can be with him again.”

I gathered the magic I needed in my hand, whispering the cleansing spell required to help save her. I closed my eyes against tears, feeling a tear escape.

“I fill you with light and send your soul to Summerland to rejoin with your other half. May the gods guide you safely.”



## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Nyte

Dust filled the air of the cave, the sounds of retreating vampires stampeding through the tunnels of the caves echoing around. Their leader was gone. The ancient vampire lord was nothing but dust in the wind. This fallen aura was proof of his end, and now his minions flooded the caves in an attempt to escape.

I could hear their screams as they met with the other packs at the entrance of the cave. If all went according to plan, no vampire would leave this forest alive. My attention moved in search of my mate, searching for her purple-streaked hair. Although I could feel her near, her life force strong through our bond, the lack of visuals spiked my heart rate.

“Paige!” I called out, jumping onto a large boulder to look over the darkened space. A few feet to my right, I caught the gleam of white light. Magic began to take over the scent of the cave, the stench of death disappearing with each vampire who turned to dust and dirt.

As the dust began to clear out more, I could see her standing near a pool of crystal-clear water, a layer of ice glistening over its surface as she stood at its edge. A woman in a white gown that nearly blended with her paled skin was kneeling at her feet. Black veins of power were receding from her body, chased away by the light emanating from Paige's palm.

I took a step closer, now able to see her lips move, both of the witches' eyes closed. On the other side of the spring, both Betas stood and watched. Madilyn's eyes filled with awe, while Thompson's were filled with regret and pain. I came to stand at their side, both turning to look at me.

"What's happening?" I asked, looking to Madilyn for an answer.

The she-wolf shook her head, but Thompson answered. "She is sending Silva to Markus. Cleansing her of the darkness that bastard vampire filled her with." His lips peeled back with a snarl.

"I see," I sighed sadly, turning to look at Paige as she continued to move her lips silently. "So, Markus was her mate."

Thompson nodded while Madilyn looked at him in disbelief. "She spelled Markus and the entire pack to forget about her. Right after that bastard vampire compelled us to reject her, he set all this in motion. A piece of Markus must have known. That's why he went after Paige when he saw her. Her magic is a close match to Silva's. A part of him must have seen that." Thompson looked at me, tears glistening in his eyes. "It

doesn't excuse what he did to Paige. However, it's an explanation that I can now bring to the rest of the pack."

I patted the Beta on his shoulder. "You are a good Beta, Thompson. I've never thought otherwise. Loyal to the very end and beyond."

"Thank you, Alpha," Thompson replied, turning his gaze back to the dark witch.

The woman turned her gaze to us, a small, sad smile touching her lips.

"I'm sorry, Thompson," she called out. "I'm sorry for everything."

The light in Paige's palm grew brighter, illuminating the entire cave and blinding us in the process. It took a moment for my sight to come back into focus, the sound of Thompson letting out a sob coming from my side.

"I'm the one who should be sorry," he whispered.

I looked back over to the other side of the spring just as Paige collapsed to her knees. I moved before I could think, bounding over the spring and pulling her into my arms. The dark witch was gone. Nothing but the white gown was left in her place. I looked back at Paige, seeing tears in her eyes as she stared at the abandoned gown.

"She's okay now," she told me, turning her flooded eyes towards me. "She's with her mate. All of the vampire's tricks and manipulations are gone. She is free now." I scooped her up into my arms, sensing the weakened state of her body from

using so much magic. My lips pressed to her forehead, turning to face the two Betas as they joined us on this side of the spring.

As the screams and cries of the vampires began to fade, the sounds of battle growing softer around us, I finally looked around. Behind us stood a large stone throne decorated with moss; to its left stood a smaller throne with a ring of mushrooms around it. To my right, a waterfall filled the spring at my feet. Really, this place was a beautiful oasis, and it was just too bad it had been filled with so much malice and cruelty.

“What are your orders now, Alpha?” Madilyn asked, standing at attention.

“What is the status of the caves?” I asked, folding Paige into my chest, her breathing softly as she drifted to sleep.

“The packs have all been rescued. Children and their mothers have been reunited and taken to safety, while those able to fight have joined in clearing out the vampires. None have gotten past Alexander and the Coronado pack outside. The Escondido pack has made their way into the cave, coordinating with the Oceanside Pack to clear the caves as we speak.”

I nodded my head. “Good. Continue as you are. I don’t want a single vampire left. Follow the scent of death throughout the caverns and make sure that they are all left to dust. If even a single vampire gets out, he can make his way to another Ancient, and all of this will happen again.”

Madilyn nodded, turning and rushing off through the cave to join the packs. Thompson remained at my side, his gaze on what was left of the dark witch.

“She’s gone, Thompson,” I told him.

“Maybe, but she never will be completely gone. I remember so much now. Her spell and the vampire’s compulsion are both gone. I remember how I felt when I learned she would be my Luna.” He looked back at me. “I was proud. I had known about the Rigel pack, and the thought of having a witch as our Luna had been the best news. Especially since it was her.”

I frowned. “You didn’t seem all that impressed by the idea that Paige was my mate. Even before, you and Markus had made snide remarks about her.”

Thompson nodded. “It was from the compulsion. Although I couldn’t remember Silva at the time, parts of those awful words he filled our minds with still remained.” He scrubbed his hands over his face, glancing at Paige. “We grew up close to Silva and her family; the pack took her in when her parents passed away. Even if she hadn’t been Markus’s Fated mate, he had considered taking her as a chosen mate. He loved her for as long as we could remember.”

I smiled at Paige, understanding precisely what Markus must have felt towards Silva.

“Why did he have to target Silva?” Thompson asked.

“From what I can tell, she was a strong witch,” I answered.

“She was what he felt he needed. Her witch family was gone,

leaving her without a connection to a coven. It left her vulnerable.”

“But she had us,” Thompson argued. “We were her family. We loved and cared for her just as well as a coven would have.”

I shook my head. “She still would have been missing that part of herself. It’s like a rogue. No matter how strong the wolf might be, without a pack, he is weakened. A witch needs a coven just as much as a wolf needs a pack.”

Thompson looked at Paige in my arms, tilting his head. “She has her coven then?”

I smiled. “Yes, she does. She will always have them. They are our family.”

Thompson nodded, walking over and picking up the dress from the cave floor. “Then her family is pack. We will accept them just as the Rigel pack accepts the witches of their city into their pack.”

I watched as he folded the dress, draping it over his arm. As he noticed me watching, a pink hue tinged his cheeks. “I would like to place this dress in a grave plot next to Markus. Although they are together on the other side, I would like for them to have some symbolic resting place for our pack to visit.”

I smiled at the Beta and nodded. “That is a great idea, Thompson. I’m sure the pack will be happy for the answers and to know their late Alpha and Luna are reunited.”

“Thank you, Alpha. Then I’ll join the others unless you need me for anything here.”

I shook my head. “No, go and help clear out the caves. You may spread the word of what had happened to the others. I think it’s only fair that they know the truth about Markus and Silva.”

The Beta nodded, turning and running to join the others, Silva’s dress folded delicately on his arm. I remained in the open cave, Paige resting in my arms. She looked peaceful, all the problems and worries gone from her face as she slept in my embrace. After some time, the caves began to quiet, the screams of vampires gone and the echoes of wolves reuniting replacing them. I decided then to rejoin the packs, careful not to wake my sleeping mate.

I gave the area one last look, my gaze following the flow of the waterfall, watching as the moonlight reflected off of the water at the top. It was a beautiful space, and I had every intention of returning. The cave needed a new energy, and making this a meeting place for all the San Diego packs seemed like the perfect way to do just that. When I stepped out of the cave, cheers greeted me, their sound waking Paige. She looked around the area and sighed with relief as her gaze landed on children clinging to their mothers.

“We did it,” she breathed, looking up at me.

I carefully sat her back down on her feet, smiling back at her. “You did it,” I said. “Without you, we never would have found them. We never would have known where to even look.”

“He’s right,” Alpha Alexander said, stepping forward with Chase and my uncle at his side. “We were at a complete loss before you came along. I’m sorry we didn’t trust you before; we could have saved everyone months ago.”

Paige’s smile saddened as she shook her head. “No, the fates decided that this was the time for me to help. I hadn’t known anything until Markus took me. I understand now why that was.” She turned to me, smiling with tears in her eyes.

We left the caves after that, making our way through the forest in the dark. Many of the packs shared space in their vehicles for the rescued wolves, each taking those who had lived closest to them before they had been taken. Madilyn and Thompson rode with Paige and me.

“Paige?” Madilyn asked once we reached the city. She and Thompson had been whispering back and forth since we started driving, seeming to try and understand what she had told the Alphas back in the cave.

“Yeah?”

“Why did the fates wait until Markus had taken you? You said you understood now. Is it simply because the witch Silva had been his true mate?”

Paige let out a sad sigh, tracing shapes in the window of the passenger seat. “Yes, partly.”

“Why wouldn’t the fates have revealed this to you after he chased you on the beach?” Thompson asked. “Markus could have been reunited with Silva then.”



Paige looked back at him and shook her head. “He never could have been reunited with her in life, Thompson. Not after she had taken in as much dark magic as she had. All it would have done is leave him broken-hearted. He would have been forced to watch her leave just as he had gotten her back. This was the only way for them to be together again in the end.” She looked out the window. “It was far less cruel for him to die first.”

The car grew quiet, heavy with her words on our minds. No one spoke again until I made the exit towards Point Loma and away from Oceanside.

“You’re going to the other packhouse, Alpha?” Thompson asked with concern. “The pack will want to see their alpha back at the packhouse.”

“All of my things are still at the Coronado Packhouse,” I replied. “As are Paige’s things. We need to grab a few things before we head back. This will also give the pack time to clear out Markus’s things from the Alpha’s apartments.” I looked in the review mirror at Thompson, raising my eyebrow. “They will also need to prepare a room for Madilyn. You and she will be co-Betas from here on out.”

Thompson pulled out his cellphone and typed out the orders to the rest of the pack. “I understand, Alpha. I’ll tell the pack to have everything prepared for your arrival.”

I smiled and nodded. “Thank you.” I looked at Paige beside me, her smile greeting me.

“I think we need to plan a stop at my parent’s house before we go to any packhouse,” she said, touching her stomach. “I still

have some special news to share with them.”

I smiled back, reaching over and placing my hand over hers.

“We’ll do that first, then.”

“I’m gonna meet Paige’s family?” Madilyn asked excitedly, poking her head between us.

I shoved her back into the backseat with a playful growl, the car filling with laughter.

“Ama is going to go nuts when she finds out we’re having a baby.” Paige sighed happily.

“Your mom is going to be just as crazy. And I’m pretty sure your brother might try to kill me,” I joked.

Paige smirked at me. “Tell me the truth, did my brother know that we were fated mates before I knew?”

My smile fell slightly, and I looked back at the road quickly. I swallowed the air before nodding. “Yes, I told him as soon as I knew.”

She chuckled darkly. “Then he will be too busy hiding from me to kill you.”

## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Paige

“Ama,” I called out from the front porch of my family’s home.

“Can you bring me some Agua Frescas?”

“I’m already ahead of you, Mija,” Ama said as she walked out the front door. “It’s thirsty work feeding a baby.”

She bent down and kissed the top of my son’s head, cooing at him in Spanish as she handed me the cold glass.

“Where is mine?” My mother asked her mother, a humorous smile on her face. “It’s hard work being a grandma.”

“Oh, don’t I know it!” Ama exclaimed with enthusiasm. “Just look at me, caring for my granddaughter as she cares for her baby. Maybe I should make you serve us instead.”

Mom laughed, holding up her hands in defeat. “Okay, okay. Yes, I will get the next round of drinks and snacks.” She stood up and kissed the top of my head. “I have homemade tortillas inside. What if I make you a quesadilla to go with the frescas?”

I smiled at Mom. “You don’t have to, Mom. I’m sure Nyte is going to show up with lots of food when he gets back.”

“Oh, a little snack now won’t hurt your appetite. Breastfeeding burns the calories so fast.” She argued back, my grandma chuckling as she took my mom’s seat on the porch swing beside me.

“That’s a good abuela,” she teased.

I smiled at my baby as Mom walked into the house, yelling at my brother to get out of the tortillas. I laughed at his whines, telling her he was hungry and reminding me of that morning when I woke up to Nyte, and my brother asking for food. Thinking about that day brought a smile to my face. It had been the morning after my premonition. I had been so scared and unsure of the future back then, unaware that I was falling into place according to the fates.

I stifled a laugh as I thought about how I had approached Nyte, unaware that he knew fully well that I was his mate and that he was mine. He and I often laughed over what I had said to him. My swearing that this was only temporary and explaining that I was searching for a way to escape my fated mate. He often teased me about telling my fated mate that I was planning to break the bond, even as I protested that I would never have considered rejecting him if I had known it was him.

“What is so funny?” Ama asked, pulling out a knitting project from her purse she had been working on.

I smiled at her. “I’m just reminded of a fond memory I have out here on this porch,” I explained.

I felt the baby unlatch, looking down at his sleeping face. Gently, I pulled my shirt back in place and lifted him to rest against my chest, careful not to wake the sleeping baby. Ama watched with a tender smile, cooing at his sleeping face turned towards her.

“He is just perfect, Mija,” Ama sighed, unable to help herself but to touch his hand. She frowned, looking at the red bracelet around his tiny wrist. “It’s fraying; you had best come to the shop soon and replace it. We don’t want any evil eyes on our little alpha prince.”

I nodded, glancing at the red braided bracelet. “It must be working extra hard; that’s his third one this month,” I commented.

“Heavy is the crown,” Ama sighed and returned to her knitting. “Speaking of the crown.”

Just then, Nyte pulled up in front of the house, climbing out of the driver’s seat and waving to us. I smiled at my handsome mate, the werewolf king of San Diego and Alpha of the Oceanside Pack. He strutted up the walkway and onto the porch with his Betas at his side, bending down to kiss my lips before brushing a gentle peck on our son’s head.

“How was your full moon?” I asked, smiling behind him at Thompson and Madi.

“It would have been better with you there,” he answered, smiling at Ama. “But I understand that couldn’t be done this month.”

“I promise, Nyte,” Ama said with a smile. “Next month, we will bring the coven out to that forest. Paige has told me so much about the spring inside the cave. It sounds like a wonderful place to spend the full moon.”

I smiled between my grandma and Nyte as I nodded. “On the full moon, the spring glows with so much magic,” I added with a sigh. “It’s beautiful.”

Ama grinned at me. “Then it will be the new tradition for the San Diego Coven to join the San Diego werewolves on the full moons. Moon water baptisms in the spring would be a wonderful way to cleanse ourselves of the old ways.”

I smiled at my grandma. “That is a wonderful idea, Ama.”

“Moon water baptisms?” Madi asked, leaning against the railing of the porch. “What’s that?”

“It’s a cleansing ritual,” Ama answered. “Full moons are meant for shedding old habits. Taking a dip in moon water is a perfect way to shed our belief of being separate beings. It’s a way of welcoming new habits and going into the future as one.”

Madi smiled brightly. “That’s beautiful. I wish I could be there next month for that.”

Ama frowned. “Why can’t you? Shouldn’t both the Oceanside Betas be there?” She looked between the two Betas expectantly.

“Madi is going to the Rigel Pack next month,” I explained.

“She is to train with them and shadow their Beta.”

Ama's eyes brightened. "You'll be working with the Crete witches too! Their coven is an inspiration, and I knew their Luna's parents a long time ago. Such wonderful witches. I'm so happy to see their dream of unity reaching out across the world."

Mom and Anthony stepped out then; Mom's eyes brightened at the sight of her son-in-law.

"Nyte!" she exclaimed, setting down the quesadilla she had made and grabbing his face to kiss both cheeks. "How is my favorite son-law? Are you hungry? I can make you some food." She looked at her mother. "Ama, would you help me make some tamales?"

Ama grimaced at Mom and rolled her eyes. "How much time do you think they have? Tamales." She scoffed, "If he's hungry, make him a burrito."

"I'm fine," Nyte laughed. "I actually grabbed some food on the way here. I have more in the car for Paige, too."

"I could use a burrito, Mom," Anthony mocked.

"Go make yourself one then," Mom told him, much to my brother's dismay. She leaned over me then, smiling at the baby. "Does this mean you are taking my baby home?"

I smiled. "Don't worry, Mom, Baby Baer and I will be back to visit in a week."

She smiled at me, touching my face. "I meant you, Paige." She kissed my forehead. "You will always be my baby, though I hate seeing my grandson leave too."

She helped me stand, both of us careful not to wake my sleeping baby. “I’ll be back soon, Mom,” I promised, kissing her cheek.

“Your dad is going to hate that he missed you,” she pronounced and sighed. “Maybe he and I will make a trip up to Oceanside to visit you sooner than a week.”

“You are always welcome to do so,” Nyte said, picking up the diaper bag. He turned to Anthony and punched his shoulder. “All of you.”

My brother smiled, punching Nyte back playfully. “I got the hint, and I’ll come visit soon.” He turned back to Mom. “Now, Mom, about the burritos. You know that I like the way you roll them.”

I laughed as Mom rolled her eyes and threw her hands up in the air. “This boy, will he ever grow up?” They both went inside, saying their goodbyes before closing the door behind them.

Ama chuckled, still swinging and knitting. “She asks, but the day will come when he has a wife of his own, and she will complain that he doesn’t need her anymore.”

I smiled. “Does she not need you, Ama?”

Grandma smiled at me and winked. “Oh, you know she does, mija. Just as much as you still need her. That’s what family is all about. Needing and helping one another.”

I smiled, turning to Nyte. “You are right, Ama,” I said, my gaze moving to the two Betas. “Family is all about helping,



even when we don't think we need it."

I kissed her cheek goodbye, letting her kiss Baer on his head before following Nyte and the others down the steps and toward the car. Nyte took the baby from me, fastening him between the two Betas in the backseat while I took my seat in front, waving up to Ama on the porch and thinking over what we had just discussed.

The pack was and had always been my family. They didn't think they needed me, and I didn't think I needed them, but in the end, we needed each other in order to reach this happily ever after.

I smiled, "And Little Riding Hood lived happily ever after."

"What's that?" Nyte asked, climbing into the front seat of the car.

I turned my smile to him. "Nothing, just talking to myself."

# THE END

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**Sneak Peek -**

**Chapter One**

**Brian**

*Undisclosed Location, POW camp*

Screams carried through the dark halls of the murky dungeon, the dripping of water from the ceiling accompanying their echoes. They were the screams of men and women trained to withstand the torture dealt to them, but even the most trained soldier couldn't hold back their own screams. All that mattered was they didn't spill the secrets of their missions, although if they did, I wouldn't find it in me to blame them. I've nearly buckled under their interrogations and the tortures they put me through for days, weeks, months? I wasn't even certain of the time anymore. They came at such wild hours, with no pattern to help me know if it was day or night. Even

my sleep and eating were randomized. It was just another form of torture to make me break.

Now, they didn't come at all, but my mind warned me that I wasn't out of the woods. I wouldn't be - not until I was out of there, be it by extraction or death, and the chances of extraction were slim. Not many even knew we were here. Our mission had been on a strict need-to-know basis. As far as the civilian world knew, we had no business here.

There would be no rise of protests to the elected officials to rescue us. There would be no truth behind any tale given to explain our disappearance to our families. We all knew it. It was part of the job, yet the reality of it still didn't settle well. It was one thing to agree to these terms. The clichéd voice in our heads were telling us, "it could never be me" so when it was us, we would fall prey to our emotions and desires to live and see our families again.

I winced at the sound of the young soldier's screams, and the sound of the enemy yelling incoherently at the boy. He was a probie, this being his first and likely last mission. What a way to start and end a career.

We had chatted before coming. He had raved about his family line of marines, telling us how his father was so proud that he had joined our ranks. I guess out of all of us, his father would at least understand that whatever they told him had happened would be bullshit. He may even have enough clearance or friends to know the truth himself. I wondered if he would still be proud of his boy's chosen path.

Was anyone proud of their child's death?

My mind wandered to my own family. They hadn't wanted me to join the military. My father wanted me to go to school and take over his company. He certainly wouldn't be proud of my untimely demise. My father would see this as a waste of my life and everything I could have received from being his son.

"What are you thinking about, Marine?" A cruel voice asked, my eyes moving to the man as he stepped from the shadows. My lip curled back in a sneer, my gums sticking to my lips from dehydration. The enemy soldier chuckled, kicking a cracked bowl of mucky water in my direction.

"I'm happy to see you still have some fight in you. You are a big man. We want to see what all that special training your military gives you looks like. I'm putting a lot of money on you to win. So, you better put on a good show for me and my men."

I didn't move, narrowing my eyes at the man as he walked away, whistling a show tune to himself as if the sound of torture was just another Sunday afternoon for him. It wasn't till he turned the corner that I reached for the disgusting water and drank as much as I could, ignoring the swampy taste and the dribbles down my chin. I felt like an animal - caged and drinking from a bowl like a damn dog. We all were. A kicked dog could turn one of two ways, either rolling on their belly and taking the abuse, or biting back. I would bite back the minute they gave me the opportunity.

I leaned back against the cold, stone wall, allowing my eyes to drift closed as I did my best to drown out the screams still echoing through the halls. I would need my rest if I was going to survive, or at very least take a handful of these assholes with me.

The sound of my cell lock clicking woke me from my rest, my eyes flying open in confusion. I couldn't tell how long I had been asleep, or if I had even slept at all. While I felt that I had, I couldn't shake that constant feeling of exhaustion weakening my senses. I had been trained for this, even if my body protested the harsh treatment.

Before I could make out the faces of the men entering my cage, they threw a hood over my head, undoing my shackles and forcing me to my feet with my wrists still bound together. I threw my elbow up at the man to my right, my elbow connecting with satisfying snap of his nose, followed by a howl of anger. The other man quickly shoved me back to the ground, proceeding to kick me in the gut as my wrists remained secured.

Angry Spanish rose over the sounds of my beating, the voice belonging to my tormentor from earlier. He was berating my assailants, criticizing the man who undoubtedly had a broken nose. I moved my head, barely making out the shadows of those around me through the hood they placed over my head. I could see the shadowy figure walking toward me, squatting beside me with a click of his tongue.

“Marine,” he mocked, “this is not the show I wanted to see. Save all that fight for the cage. You are going to need it more there than against these *pendejos*.” I heard his cold chuckle as he rose back to his full height. The other two grabbed me once more, yanking me back to my feet and forcing me forward.

They led me up the inclined slope to the surface as the dank, dark dungeon changed to the humid jungle above. Mosquitos buzzed around my ears, attempting to reach me through the burlap over my head. Cheers rang out ahead of us to the sound of fists pounding against flesh, a sound that I heard often in the dungeons as they tortured my men. But something felt different about this sound. Something wasn't right.

The closer we came to the sounds, the more I could make out what the voices were yelling. Someone was taking bets. Another was calling out names. Names that I recognized. They were the names of my men. Names of the winners and losers. There were groans at lost bets and cheers over new winnings. My heart dropped into my stomach as the realization came over me.

They wanted a show. They wanted a show from me. The bag was ripped from my head, my eyes squinting against the dim torch light; it was still far brighter than the lighting of my prison below.

“Here we are, Marine,” my tormentor sang, his smile glowing in the light of the fires. “Now, you be a good Marine and show us all just what the US Military taught to make you the best of the best.”

They pushed me into a pit, blood soaking into the ground. I looked around the makeshift ring, finding two men dragging a dead man from the ring and another man still standing, his eyes wild. He didn't look like the man that I knew. He was feral, growling and pacing along the edge of the ring like a lion ready to pounce on a gazelle. It was as though he didn't even know who I was.

"Corporal," I called out with authority, trying to find some form of recognition in my man's eyes. "This is Gunnery Sgt. Humphries. Stand down."

Laughter chimed from those surrounding us, my tormentor's voice rising above the noise.

"Don't bother, Marine. He is more beast than man now. Welcome to the jungle."

With his last line, the corporal charged at me with a snarl, his fist swinging into my cheek with a sickening crack that ricocheted through my body. I managed to catch his next swing, twisting his arm behind his back as I again attempted to reach the man who had to still live inside. I couldn't believe that their torture could break one of us so much. Giving up the little information they may know? Sure, I couldn't fault them for that, but turning into a rabid beast?

No, we were marines, the best of the best. Special forces. If boot camp couldn't break our humanity, nothing could. Yet, the corporal lacked any sense of a man. His head flying, connecting with my nose, forcing me to release him as I felt the cartilage break.



He was on me in a matter of seconds, his hands crushing my windpipe with a crazed look in his eyes. My hands grasped out, searching for something I could use. If I didn't act, I would be as good as dead. I could see that in his eyes. He was living for these kills. When he looked at me, there was no sign of recognition. No understanding of who I was to him. Of our times together.

I thought about the time he had joined the team. How excited he had been to make special forces. He had bragged about his skills that had earned him a place among us. I remembered his daughter's birth; how proud he had been to announce he was a father. Showing off her pictures to everyone who would look. There was no sign of that man in his eyes now. Not as far as I could see.

My hand touched something hard, my fists closing around it before I even recognized what it was. Lifting it over the corporal's back and shoving the knife into the back of his neck, the point pierced through the other side. I stared into his shocked eyes, his grip around my neck lessening as blood pools around his lips, dripping onto my face.

I shoved him off me, looking back at him with horror at what I had done.

It was one thing to kill the enemy: I was trained to do that. Defend my country, fight for their rights and freedoms. But that wasn't what I had done here. This wasn't an enemy I had been dispatched to kill. This was my friend. My fellow soldier. I was meant to protect him, not kill him.

I watched the blood drain from him, the life bleeding from his eyes. My body began to burn with rage as cheers lit up the stands, while my tormentor was cheering for “his” Marine. Claiming me like I was his dog. Still my eyes remained glued on my man, my body growing hotter until a loud crack came from my back.

I howled at the accompanying pain that came, followed quickly by another crack. The cheers turned to laughter and mockery. Some were calling for me to man up and get over the death, seemingly unaware of my body’s attack against itself. It wasn’t till my neck and shoulder joined my back, cracking the loudest, that the crowd quieted to a whisper.

“Ay, Marine!” my tormentor called out. “What’s wrong with you! Get up!”

I let out another howl, my face burning and stretching, loose teeth pouring from my opened mouth. A feeling of razor blades breaking through my gums was in their place.

The crowd began to scream. Gunfire lighting up the night around me. I could feel the bullets hitting me, the pain little more than pebbles against my already aching skin. My vision began to tunnel, darkness coming over me as the pain worsened. The sounds of yelling and gunfire faded with the encroaching darkness. Then nothing.

I woke to the sounds of birds squawking above me in the trees. I was naked and alone, covered in more blood than I remembered. I searched my body for signs of the pain, checking my teeth to find them in place, as though it had all

been a dream that they had fallen. However, as I looked around the empty camp, I knew that it wasn't just a nightmare.

Bodies lay strewn across the camp, ripped apart as though an animal had attacked. Everywhere I turned I saw nothing but blood and body parts. I pushed myself to my feet, wobbling toward the dungeons in search of other prisoners, watching for any of our captors who may have survived whatever happened after I had passed out.

The deeper into the dungeons I marched the more death I found. Cells were torn open, the prisoners within meeting the same fate as our captors. Still, I moved, searching for any sign of other survivors. I couldn't believe for a moment that I was the only one - that I had remained untouched.

Again, my fingers touched at my teeth, remembering the feel of razor blades replacing them as they piled below me on the ground. A fogged memory of my hands crossed my mind, my nails growing out, and hair covering my arms. I found a control room, discovering a radio with the frequency I needed to reach my command.

My head throbbed as I tried to push through the fog of the few memories I retained, bringing the radio to my lips and calling out the codes for help. I gave up on trying to remember as a response came through the radio, orders to return to the surface for extraction being given. I needed to keep my wits about me. I needed to continue to survive. I needed to get home.



## Chapter Two

### Selene

*25 years later, Montana*

I jumped at the sound of cracking glass, looking down at my hand to find the glass I was polishing now cutting into my palm.

“Shit,” I cursed under my breath, earning Eva’s attention on the other end of the bar.

“You okay, Selene?” She sat down the keg she had been replacing, walking over to me and taking my hand to inspect. “It’s not deep, but you should probably get it cleaned up before you touch any more glasses.”

I nodded, wrapping my hand in a towel and heading back to my office. I assured her that I was fine, hating the look of doubt in her eyes before I closed the door behind me.

Slumping into my seat, I opened our first aid kit, carefully cleaning the blood from my hand and making sure no glass remained in the wound. I had been distracted out there. I probably shouldn’t even be at work, but I never missed a night, and I would be damned if I gave David the satisfaction of knowing I was hurt.

Of course, I was, but in the five years of running this place, I never missed a shift. That’s what it took to build a business, even in a small town like this where everyone knew me since I

was a twinkle in my daddy's eyes. I had to show my face. I had to earn their loyalty as a businesswoman, and so far, I had.

I'm sure everyone in town expected me to hide away at my family's ranch. Hide my face from the shame of what David put me through, but Daddy didn't raise me to be weak. And I'd be damned if anyone saw me trip up over a man.

I quickly bandaged my hand and took a deep breath before I returned to the front with Eva. I avoided her eyes, hating to see the worry and pity in her eyes. I hadn't even had to tell her what had happened last night. The whole town knew before the sun rose this morning, no thanks to my mama. She told her sister, who told their cousin, who told her friend, who told her husband, the mayor. All before I even made it out to the ranch, crying on the phone with my dad.

David and I had been together since I was a teenager. He had been the only man I've known. Dad hated how much older than me David was, but I always found that I liked the older men, and he was only four years my senior. He had been a senior in high school my freshman year. Quarterback, prom king, and rodeo star, and out of all the girls in the school, he chose me. Or at least, that's what I had thought.

After what I walked into last night, I realized that I was never special at all. The worst part was knowing my father couldn't fire him, as much as he wanted to. Ranch hands were few and far between, and he was the best of them, so I would be seeing plenty of him even in my own home. That fact only cemented my desire not to appear weak to the town.

“Selene,” Eva called out, she was pulling stools from the top of the tables and pushing them under the tops. “Are you sure you are good? There is no shame in staying in. I can manage things here for you.”

I shook my head, opening the register and double counting the tender. “No, I’m good, Eva.”

She didn’t ask me again, moving to the back doors to let the karaoke host in with his equipment. I finished my count and moved on as well, double checking our stock and making sure we were ready before opening the doors for the evening.

Neither of us spoke again; opening time was coming before we knew it. The bar was busier than usual. I was certain most had just come to see if anything exciting would happen. Most of the people in this town were so bored with their lives that they did everything they could to find a real-life reality show to see first-hand. Tonight, that was me.

I kept myself busy, kept my smile on, and greeted everyone I served at the bar. On the outside, you would never know that anything had happened. I even caught a few gossiping together, asking if they were sure I was the one whose boyfriend had strayed. As much as it hurt to hear their overly polite way of saying I had been cheated on, it did make me feel good to know that my mask was convincing.

That was, until David walked in the bar with that damned bleach blonde on his arm. She wore too tight jeans tucked into overly pretty boots. Boots that never saw a day’s work on a ranch. Boots she had probably bought just for tonight. What

really caught my attention was the flannel shirt she had fashioned into a belly shirt for herself. It was the very shirt I had brought to give David last night. I didn't even remember dropping it when I entered the room. I only remembered seeing them in his bed.

I remembered the way she held him, her legs wrapping around him the moment she saw me enter the room, asking him who I was. But she knew. She wasn't dumb, everyone in this town knew who I was, and who David was to me. She had met him in this very bar for god's sake!

David had gone ghost white when he saw me, attempting to get out of her grasp and cover himself. He sputtered over his words, calling out to me as I ran from the house. My vision blurred with tears and shame. I hadn't even remembered getting home. One minute I was in David's room ready to surprise him, the next I was crying in Daddy's arms, telling him everything that had happened.

Why? Why did David bring her here? Did he hate me this much?

The bar fell hushed. They was looking between me and the new couple. The biddies in the corner began chittering excitedly; the show they all had been waiting for was starting to begin. And everyone was just waiting for what I would do next.

I just stood there. I couldn't believe he would show up here with her. As if he hadn't embarrassed me enough in this town.



The bucket bunny turned her gaze to me, her smile resembling a snake in the grass. She didn't even have the decency to have a rattle to warn of her strike. She was aiming a killing blow at me, but I'd be damned if I went down like this. No, I wouldn't roll over so easily.

I turned away from them, heading to the bar and whispering to Eva that to card the girl and not to give David his discount anymore. If he wanted to drink here, to bring his homewrecker here with him, then he was going to do so at full charge like everyone else. No more friends and family discounts. He wasn't either anymore.

Slowly, the bar began to liven up. People began to realize there wouldn't be much of a showdown between me and the Cali transplant hanging on David's arm. The karaoke continued as many off tuned Toby Keiths and Aretha Franklin's renditions filled the bar with the occasional Usher or Taylor Swift in between.

Every so often I would catch David looking my way, following me through the bar even as his new girlfriend rubbed up against him in search of his attention. I did my best to ignore them both, continuing with my nightly routine of running the bar. I even volunteered to go in the bathroom for the midnight cleaning just so I could stay busy and get out of David's eyeline. I was even able to lock the bathroom door behind me just in case he decided to follow me in and corner me.

It was a welcome break from all the eyes on me. Even with the normal function of the bar continuing, I could still feel most everyone watching me. Waiting. Still hoping that something big will happen. Something they can talk about for weeks, months even. They wanted excitement and as of today they wanted it from me.

I stole a few extra minutes in the bathroom, ignoring the couple of knocks from full-bladdered patrons. They could use the alley for all I cared in that moment, at least until I was ready to face that crowd again.

I looked in the mirror, taking a deep breath as I repeated my personal mantra.

“You are strong. You are powerful. You are invincible. Nothing on this earth can touch you.”

It was the only thing my mother taught me in my childhood that I still held onto. The only thing from her witch heritage that I felt good about keeping as my own. As much as she still tried to remind me of what she was, of what I was supposed to be, I rejected it. All of it. Except this mantra.

I felt its affects rushing through my body. I took a last deep breath before finally leaving the bathroom and returning to the bar to help Eva serve up some beers to the Branson boys. They used to be my neighbors, but recently they had sold off their ranch and moved into town. I smiled at them, asking how they were doing with their move.

“As much as I miss the ranch, I’m pretty sure the missus is happy to be next door to her mama,” the older of the brothers

answered. “You should be meeting the new owner soon. His move in date was yesterday.”

I was about to respond when a mixture of excited and appalled gasps filled the bar, stealing everyone’s attention back to David and his Malibu Barbie. She was in his lap, practically humping him for all to see. Another flash of what I witnessed last night appeared in my mind, but instead of tears burning my eyes like last night, tonight, I was filled with blinding rage.

All eyes flashed to me excitedly. Watching, waiting to see what I would do next. I could swear I even saw a couple of ladies pulling popcorn from their purses.

Fine, everyone wants to see a show? I’ll give them a fucking show.

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And he has the police on his side.

I'll do whatever it takes to get the story,

Even if it means batting a few eyelashes at the silver-fox shifter.

The more we talk the more my feelings change from hate to love.

Now, I can't get him off of my mind,

And I swear that my body is actually aching for his touch.

Bringing him down would make his child an orphan.

And my job is on the line.

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