

This is no fairytale...

RED & THE WOLVES



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RED & THE WOLVES

A DARK FAIRYTALE ROMANCE

WICKED EVER AFTER SERIES



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PROLOGUE



The blood moon was rising.

All throughout my village, there was a charge to the air, a morbid anticipation.

The change was small at first, almost inconsequential, then it slowly morphed into a creeping, insidious blackness. Neighbor stopped talking to neighbor. Mothers hugged their children tighter as they cast suspicious glances about them. A ripple of unease flowed through the village.

After the first eclipse, there were anxious whispers. Ancient prophecies uttered in hushed, guarded tones.

The second eclipse brought worried looks and talk of preparations to be made.

With the third eclipse, all doubt was removed. It was time.

The blood moon was rising.

The moment the moon was cast in a crimson glow on the night of the fourth eclipse, the village would have their chosen one. Their sacrifice...for the wolves must be appeased.

CHAPTER 1



From the time I was a little girl, I'd been told the story of the wolves. How they were to be both feared and revered.

Generations ago, our village was attacked by a dark force. An army so evil that, to this very day, no one dared utter their name. The dark force was the nightmare which tortured sleep. The foreboding chill down your spine. A shadow swallowing the light. Knowing that no weapon forged on Earth could defeat them, the elders of the village made the terrible decision to fight darkness with darkness. Reaching back to the wisdom of the ancients, to a time before religion or society...to a time when man was more beast than sentient being...the elders drew upon primeval magic.

Five men were chosen.

They thought they were chosen to fight.

They thought the elders were only blessing them before battle.

They thought wrong.

I'd always been taught the elders did what was best for the village as a whole; still, I couldn't help but feel sympathy for the men. Did they know what was happening to them as the elders circled them, chanting in a strange language? Did it cause them pain when they transitioned from man to beast? Did some spark of their souls remain, or was it extinguished? Devoured by the dark beast which took over their bodies.

The five men were turned into wolves. Enchanted animals. Ferocious beasts capable of fighting off the dark force.

Darkness fighting darkness.

The beasts prevailed but paid a horrible price. The enchantment was truly a curse. Trapping the men in the bodies of the beasts. Forever damning them.

They were cursed.

Cursed to protect the village they now reviled.

Cursed to live as immortal beasts in the forest which loomed near our village.

Now, hundreds of years later, they still drove back the dark force, keeping my village safe. But they demanded a price...a sacrifice.

When the moon was eclipsed four times in two seasons, there was said to be blood on the moon. It happened once a century. On that night, the wolves entered the clearing, a forbidden, desolate stretch of land between the village and the forest which separated us from both the dark force and the vengeful wrath of the beasts we'd created.

As the blood moon rose, the wolves entered the clearing to claim their sacrifice.

Whomever the village chose was never seen or heard from again.

* * *

“RED! RED! WHERE ARE YOU?”

Closing my eyes, I hunched my shoulders forward as I nestled further into the soft pile of leaves. I was hiding from... well...everyone. Hoping the wide, gnarled trunk of the tree I was leaning against would shelter me, I held my breath.

“There you are! Your grandmother has been looking for you. Honestly, Red, you act like you don't know The Selection is about to happen.”

Groaning, I laid my forehead against the cool pages of the book I was reading. My name was Raina but from the time I was a babe, everyone had called me Red. As a bright scarlet lock slipped from my loose bun and tumbled onto the page, I was reminded why. Out of a cloistered village of several hundred, I was the only one with red hair. So everyone called me Red...everyone except for my grandmother.

Hildegarde Reithaube had raised me from the moment I was born...and hated me long before I took my first breath.

As an elder of the village, my grandmother had special plans for my mother, plans that did not include her falling in love with a lowly blacksmith's son. My mother died giving birth to me. In her rage, my grandmother had my father put to death. His punishment was swift and merciless. Mine was equally merciless but painfully slow. My grandmother never missed an opportunity to remind me that my own life had cost the life of my mother. That I was a useless, unwanted burden. As a child, my only notion of love and protection was what I read in books—fairy tales. There, tucked between worn pages, was the love and feeling of belonging I craved.

Nessa grabbed the book from my hand. “Come on, Red. You know what she is like when you make her wait.”

Rising, I brushed the blades of grass and flecks of dirt from my dress. Nessa, a servant in my grandmother's household, was my only friend. The other villagers, taking their cue from my grandmother, looked upon me with cold indifference. It was why, though past marrying age, no one had ever offered for my hand. Despite my family's wealth and position, the men of the village knew there would be no benefit to marrying the Elder Reithaube's outcast granddaughter. Since there was no life beyond the walls of the village, it seemed I was destined to find my happiness in books and daydreams only.

Nessa took hold of my hand and dragged me along. “The Selection is about to begin.”

“I don't understand why we have to be there,” I protested. “This barbaric custom is for the elders and the men of the

village to decide.”

“You know it is decreed that everyone in the village must bear witness to The Selection,” tossed Nessa over her shoulder, her eagerness shown in her quick step toward the town square.

I found the entire spectacle abhorrent. The elders should be trying to find a way to free those men from the curse, not giving in to it. Once, many years ago, I’d accused my grandmother and the other elders of glorifying the curse of the wolves because even hundreds of years later, it gave them power over the villagers. The power of fear...of life and death. My punishment had been cruel and severe. I’d learned never to speak ill of the elders again.

The town square was paved with gray flagstones and flanked on all sides by large, dark gray stone buildings. I hated it. The ominous, unrelenting stone made me feel trapped, as if I couldn’t breathe. I much preferred the grotto with its freshwater spring, wild flowers, and old oak trees. Preferred the sweet, musty smell of the soil to the stale, perfumed scents of village.

A dais had been erected in the village center under the watchful gaze of a large, bronze statue commemorating the bravery of our ancestral elders who’d fought back the dark force. Seeing the stern visage and dramatic flowing robes frozen in bronze, I wondered...where was the statue thanking the men who had been turned into wolves?

“All must settle. The Selection is about to begin.”

This from my grandmother, looking regal in her purple robes laden with brocade and gold badges. She was in her element, I thought with a sneer. The Selection was supposed to be destined by the fates, but that did not stop the villagers from assuming she and the other elders had a hand in the final decision.

“As the sun sets, the eldest, unmarried child from each household must step forward.”

A ripple of unease swept over the crowd. While it had been a hundred years since the last Selection, we had all been taught the ancient texts. The text clearly stated that it was the duty of the eldest, unmarried male of each household to step forward, never a female. In all the generations since the curse began, they had never sent a female.

“With all respect, Elder Reithaube, you mean for the males to step forward, do you not?” asked one brave man from the crowd.

“Do not question me!” shouted my grandmother.

I could feel Nessa let go of my hand. Turning, I watched as she lowered her eyes and took a step back, distancing herself from me.

I was the eldest, unmarried child of my grandmother's household.

Swaying, I tried to hear past the pounding rush in my ears. Rough hands pulled on the sleeves of my dress as others pushed me from behind. Their touch became more insistent as my feet refused to move. Harsh hands gave me a shove. I stumbled forward. The crowd slowly parted. All I could see were hideously distorted faces as they swirled and danced before my eyes. Still, the hands pushed and pulled me forward. Finally, I was at the dais steps. I looked up to see my grandmother standing over me, a knowing smile on her thin lips.

A cold certainty fell over me.

She had finally found a way to truly punish me for my innocent sin.

Refusing to give her the pleasure of seeing me cower, I straightened my shoulders and held my head high as I ascended the staircase.

Several men with anxious faces joined me before I realized I was the only female to be judged for The Selection.

I watched in stunned silence as each man, one by one, was called upon by name to step forward and be judged.

Placed in the center of the dais was a massive white marble disk with the carved image of a fierce wolf with open jaws and polished pieces of amber for eyes. The chosen few must place their hand within the mouth of the wolf. If you felt the bite, then you were the selected one.

Several of the men had to be dragged in front of the selection disk as one of the elders forced their hand into the jaws of the wolf. Every last one broke down into relieved sobs upon learning he was not chosen.

“Raina. Step forward,” intoned one of the elders.

Standing before the effigy, I met my grandmother’s unfeeling gaze from across the dais. Sucking in a deep breath, I defiantly raised my chin and, without taking my eyes off her, placed my hand inside the wolf’s mouth.

* * *

WINCING from the sharp bite of pain as cold stone broke through my skin, I looked down and tried to wrench my hand free from the enchanted wolf’s mouth. The jaw stayed clenched. In a panic, I looked to my grandmother again. Her visage seemed warped and distorted. Her thin lips pulled back in a taunting sneer displaying sharp teeth as her large eyes glistened with triumphant hatred. In a rage, I pulled back and swung my trapped arm sharply. The heavy marble disk tottered on its pedestal and tipped backward, releasing my hand moments before it crashed to the dais floor, shattering. There was a collective horrified gasp from the crowd. Their shock turned to fear as I raised my arm. The back of my hand glistened with bright crimson blood as it dripped down my sleeve. It flowed from two small puncture wounds. The mark of the stone beast.

The sky itself burned a bright orange and red as the sun descended.

On the horizon was the faint outline of the moon.

The blood moon was rising.

The village had made their selection.

Me.

* * *

ONCE AGAIN, I was pulled and dragged through the crowd. Their sympathetic glances could not hide their relief that their own loved one had not been chosen. Better it was the red-headed outcast. The unwanted granddaughter of an elder rather than a son of a prominent family.

Led to the top of the square, I was pushed over the threshold of the sanctuary. The heavy wooden doors closed, silencing the harried noise of the crowd outside. The air was cool and musty smelling inside the enclosed chamber. Like the square, it was made entirely of stone. The floor, ceiling and walls, all hard, unrelenting stone. There were no furnishings or artwork, save for a large, water-filled stone basin decorated with a mirror image of the wolf from the selection disk. My chest constricted as I found it hard to breathe. I hated confined spaces such as this.

I turned to flee but my path was blocked by two large women. Refusing to meet my gaze, they nodded their heads forward. Turning once again to face the chamber, I watched as three women dressed in heavy, hooded robes of white entered from a hidden door tucked somewhere in the shadows.

“Disrobe,” came the stern command.

“Why?” I asked, clutching the front of my dress close to my body, heedless of the blood which now stained my bodice.

“The sacrifice must be prepared. Disrobe.”

I recognized the voice of one of the women. It was Marla, the kind lady who owned a bakery near my home. Yet, in this chamber, she was acting as though she didn’t know me... didn’t care.

“Marla, please. I don’t understand all this. You must know my grandmother planned—”

“The sacrifice must not speak. Disrobe,” came her even response.

“Stop calling me the sacrifice!” I screamed. “My name is Raina. Raina. Say it!” The shock was beginning to wear off as the gravity of my situation bore down on me.

“Place hands on the sacrifice. We must prepare her,” intoned Marla, her face obscured by the large hood of her robes.

The two women from behind snatched me by my upper arms, propelling me forward. My slippered feet kicked and dragged against the smooth stone floor.

“This is madness! Stop! Stop!”

My pleas and cries went unheeded as determined hands tore at my clothing. Soon I was naked and shivering inside the cold chamber. Furtively shifting my gaze from woman to woman, I tried to back away. Harsh hands grabbed me from behind. Pushing me forward, I felt the sharp edge of the stone basin scrape against my bare stomach before my head was forced under the water. Bubbles caressed my face and neck as I screamed in surprise. A strong hand gripped my hair and wrenched me backward. I had only a moment to choke on some air before my head was forced into the water again. My hands flailed as I tried to dislodge the grip on my hair. The cool water cascaded down my front to pool at my bare feet. I was forced under the water five times. I could hear the muffled sound of eerie chanting as it echoed around the chamber.

Two of the robed women stepped forward to place two poles with stretched canvas between them over the basin.

Exhausted from my struggles, I did not protest when I was lifted and forced to lay upon the makeshift bed. The women forced my legs open and stretched my arms above my head. Ruthlessly, they began to painfully pluck all the hair from my body from the neck down. Groaning, I tried to shift my hips, to protect my hidden core, but their grip was too strong. My water-chilled skin began to warm from the agony of the hundreds of tiny pricks and pulls. When it was over, they began to chant once more. Through half-closed eyes, I saw

one of the robed women approach me with a large flagon. Raising the clay pitcher over her head, she called out to the ancient gods before pouring the heavily scented oil over my body. It felt warm and soft. The earthy scent brought me strange comfort.

Looking down, I cried out and tried to rise before hands pressing down on my shoulders forced me back down.

The oil was a sick crimson red. My pale skin looked as if it were drenched in blood.

It was an omen of my fate.

My fate with the wolves.

“The sacrifice will rise,” came the monotone command.

Offered no assistance, I was forced to awkwardly shift my hips to the edge of the basin and stretch my legs till my toes could feel the cold, stone floor. Grimacing as the lip of the stone basin lightly scraped my bottom, I stood before the robed women.

Grabbing me by the shoulders, I was turned to face the south wall. One of the women pulled on a heavy, braided cord. From high above the chamber, a thick curtain opened to reveal a large window showing the dark night sky and the glowing red visage of the moon.

The slow chanting began again. The oil was rinsed from my body. Raising my arms, I allowed them to drape me in a soft, shimmering white dress. Unlike my usual garb, this flowed unrestricted down my body. I felt a heavy weight as they placed a hooded robe on my shoulders. I looked down to see the red brocade fabric. The red, hooded robe of the sacrifice. I had seen it many times in the illustrations of my school books as I was taught to fear the wolves who protected my village.

A frail, elderly woman appeared before me. Leaning up, she kissed my cheek, whispering in my ear, “You are more in control of your destiny than you realize, my child.” Her cryptic yet kind words startled me. Before I could respond, I

felt her place something in my hand before hurrying away. Looking down I realized I held the handle of a large basket.

“It is wine and cakes to help appease the wolves,” said one of the robed women, answering my unspoken question.

Obedying their command, I followed them out of the chamber down a narrow corridor which opened into a wide antechamber. Two massive iron doors dominated the space.

“This sanctuary shares a wall with the wall which surrounds the village. The sacrifice will move directly into the clearing. Never to step foot in our village again.”

“Please—” I whispered in fear as I watched the women pull on the iron rings which opened the heavy doors. My whole life I had been taught to fear the clearing, to never venture beyond the safety of the village walls, and now I was to be cast out as if I didn’t matter, as if I were not a human being...as if I were only a sacrificial animal to be slaughtered and forgotten.

The doors made a horrific screeching noise as they opened. Outside all was still and quiet. If I had not been taught otherwise, I would have thought it was nothing more than a placid pasture bathed in moonlight.

A hand placed between my shoulder blades gave me a shove.

Stumbling, I gripped the handle of the basket before sliding my foot forward. The moment the thin leather slippers they had given me touched upon it, I could feel the soft squish of the earth, a sharp contrast to the stone floor. I took another step forward. Despite my fear, my deep longing for the freshness of the open space, for the rich smell of grass coupled with the crisp clean scent of the night air, compelled me forward. Leaving the oppressive chamber behind, I felt as if I were being bewitched...pulled forward by the moon and the call of the forest.

The stillness of the night was broken by the reverberating sound of the iron doors slamming shut.

The spell was broken. Dropping the basket, I turned to bang my small fists on the door.

“Have mercy! Please! Don’t do this! Please! Open the door!”

Cold silence greeted my impassioned pleas.

I banged on the door and screamed till my voice was hoarse. Pressing my back against the cold metal, I slowly slipped to the ground. Scalding tears fell down my cheeks as I tried to figure out what to do next.

As I stared across the clearing, I could see the outline of the forest shift and move.

Shadows detaching themselves from the darkness.

Breathing heavily, I pushed myself upright as I strained to see past the trees. Was it fear or my imagination? No. The shapes were taking form.

Stepping into the clearing from the edge of the forest, I could see five distinct outlines.

The wolves.

No.

They were men. Men!

I knew from my lessons that the dark force, although never named, was like a black, creeping cloud. An evil rising smoke. Never the shape of a man.

The five men stalked forward. As they walked more fully into the clearing, I could see them in the bright moonlight.

Five large, beastly men. Their brawny bodies barely covered with fur pelts. Their amber eyes glowing in the dim evening light.

Not wolves. Men.

Completely confused and frightened, for some strange reason being faced with five beastly men seemed far worse than a pack of wolves.

Turning, I desperately banged on the door. “Help me! Help! You must open the door. These aren’t wolves.”

Through my cries, I could hear a low, collective growl.

Knowing my salvation was my own, I gave up all hope of rescue and did the only thing I could.

I ran.

CHAPTER 2



The worst fear of all was knowing there was no escape. That no matter how fast I ran, they were coming.

The beasts were coming.

I could hear them—their heavy breathing closing in on me.

I could smell them—an animalistic scent so powerful I could barely inhale fresh air.

I could see them—out of the corners of my eyes, I saw them closing in on each side of me.

I could taste them—taste the blood on my tongue from biting my lip in order not to scream as I ran.

I could feel them—a strong hand on my upper arm, seizing me, flinging me backward, capturing me, and ending any chance of hope that I had.

Yes...the worst fear of all was knowing there was no escape.

I should have heard growls. Maybe even low, guttural sounds belonging to creatures of the forest. Not words. I should not have heard words from the two-legged demons behind me.

“Do not run from us,” one demon roared as he pulled me hard against his chest.

This was a man. A man. Not a wolf. Not a beast. A man.

I turned my head to look up into amber eyes. Piercing eyes so fierce and similar to eyes belonging to a wolf, but instead they were the eyes of a man. Four other men with the same amber eyes, and the same fury present within them, stood on each side of us.

“The wolves,” I said, not much louder than a whisper. “Where are the wolves?”

The man who held my arm asked, “Can you hear me?”

I nodded my head as I looked at each man, all of whom appeared both confused and terrifying at the same time. Cloaked in furs, with unshaven faces and long, wild hair, these men had wolfly characteristics but were not animals. They studied every inch of me from head to toe, anger seeming to stem from more than just my running away.

The man holding me squeezed my arm tighter. “What do you see? Tell us now!” His hot breath fell upon my face as he shook me slightly. “Do you see wolves?”

I shook my head, unsure of why he would ask such a question. “I see men. I see nothing but five men surrounding me.”

The man’s grip eased up, and I could hear his breath hitch.

“Grimm,” a man from the left of us said, “If you don’t claim her, then one of us will. The...need...is strong regardless of what she sees or hears.”

“Resisting her...do something now or I will,” another man added. “I don’t know if it’s the fucking curse but her smell... the fucking pull is too great.”

“The hunger,” another said, stepping in closer to us. “My body feels as if it is starved.”

“Move out of the way. I want her,” the last of the men said, getting close enough that Grimm actually snarled at the man in warning.

“No,” Grimm roared. “She’s mine. I captured her first, so she’s mine before you all.” The words from his fellow men were clearly all that Grimm had needed to not only take a

stronger hold of my arm but to strip me of my clothes. Fast and furious, like how I imagined a wolf would claw at his prey, I felt every remaining shred of garment that stood in the way of what he planned to claim being ripped from me. I wanted to fight, or offer some sort of resistance, but the pure terror and shock of what was occurring paralyzed every quivering muscle in my body. Humiliation caused by my nudity was nothing compared to the suffocating fear I felt as I waited to be devoured by the man before me in the worst ways possible.

He might not be a wolf.

He might appear to be a man.

But, make no mistake...this man was a beast.

I saw it now. I saw the animal unleashed in the way he stared at me with hungry lust. He was not gently disrobing me as I'd pictured my wedded husband doing on the night I offered my maidenhead. He was not caring as my white gown fell to the ground with the red cloak piled beside it. Grimm was nothing more than a predator, I the prey, my red cloak acting as the blood I shed in this war already lost.

I stood naked before five men. Five men who, although they weren't wolves, were more brutish than anyone I had ever encountered before. Who would do this? Who *could* do this? Who could stand and stare upon a naked, shivering female, with no expression or sign of feeling other than the tenting of their manhood against the fur of their kilts.

Animals.

They were truly animals.

As I was positioned on all fours, I knew my path had been laid before me. The clouds looming were about to unleash a storm strong enough to rip apart the woman I once was.

The ground was wet beneath my knees and palms, and gave slightly with my weight. The cool air against the bare flesh of my most intimate places, made all the more obvious by the position I was in, was a jolt to my soul. I had to fight. I

couldn't just let this man take me like an animal mates with another.

Attempting to crawl away before Grimm mounted me from behind, my feeble attempt was met with a harsh slap to my vulnerable behind.

"There is no choice in this," his deep, husky voice said from behind me. "Accept the fate that has been presented before us. What is done is done. What has to happen, has to happen. You can't fight this and win. We are all cursed."

He slapped me one more time to accentuate his point, but I had already stopped trying to crawl away. His stinging correction was a warning, a warning that I didn't want to ignore.

"Please don't do this," I pleaded. Trying to flee was a lost cause, but maybe begging would cast some light on the man's shadowed conscience.

"Now, Grimm! Before we make the decision for you, and not wait our turn," a voice from one of the watchers called out.

Grimm took hold of my hips as he positioned himself behind me, spreading my legs wide as he kneeled between them. I didn't need to turn my head to know that his bottom half was bare. I felt the hardness of his sex press up against my ass, demanding so much more.

"Some things must occur," he said as his hand dipped between the folds of my sex, rubbing up and down in a soft caress. "We stopped resisting a long time ago. It's best you do as well."

"This does not have to happen," I argued, wanting to slap away his hand, but also feeling as if my palms needed to remain where they were.

His touch didn't hurt, but it violated everything I'd once believed to be right. He was a stranger. No vows had been made. No promises of forever. No commitment in a ceremony. And as my pussy seemed to welcome his touch, I gasped as the realization hit me that my body was betraying me. This

demon and his dark magic had taken hold, and a wicked delight throbbed in ways I had never experienced.

“Yes, my village sacrifice. Get that pussy nice and wet for me. The readier you are, the easier this will be for you.”

His vile words only seemed to make my sex pulsate more. The slickness of my arousal was spread all around. Without warning, Grimm’s finger penetrated my opening. The shocking invasion had me crying out, though the cry wasn’t one of pain or even disgust. It was unfamiliar just as the sensations sizzling over my body were.

Witchcraft? Sorcery? The darkest forces were clearly at play.

In and out, his finger pumped and spread my tight little hole. The stinging, but also delightful, bite forced a soft moan from my lips. I wanted him to stop. No...I wanted him to continue. No...stop. No...continue on.

“Why?” I squeaked.

Why was my body reacting the way it was?

Why was I no longer afraid?

Why was I consumed by sinful thoughts?

Why did this devil have a hold on me, and why wasn’t I convinced that I wanted to ever be released?

Grimm pulled his finger out of my pussy, leaned over me, and placed his fingertip to my lips. I could smell my musky scent as he pressed it into my mouth.

“Why?” he said in a low voice, so low I thought only I could hear it. “Because we all do what we must to keep the darkness away. Even if it means allowing the darkness to swallow up our souls.”

Feeling his finger move along my tongue, I tasted the depraved nectar caused by the mastery he had just performed on my body. It was so wrong and shameful, yet my pussy dripped even more.

“And because we are beasts. Though you may see us as men, trust me, we are as from from being men as any could be. Whether you like it or not, each one of us will claim you in all ways. The urge is too strong to deny.”

“All ways?” I asked as he pulled his finger out of my mouth, rubbing the wetness along my lips.

“Yes. We will claim this hole”—he plunged his finger back into my mouth—“and we will claim this hole.” He then moved his wet finger to the entrance of my anus. He pressed hard enough to apply pressure, but didn’t break the surface. “And then we will claim this pussy of yours. Each one of us.”

Not giving me time to process his words and what they all really meant, Grimm repositioned his member at my pussy and began to press inside. My traitorous body welcomed him but my mind screamed no.

“Don’t hurt me,” I said.

“Oh this will hurt, my sacrifice. This will most certainly hurt.”

I tried to lunge forward, but Grimm held firmly onto my hips, and I knew there would be no stopping this act. Inch by inch, Grimm eased his way in. I was grateful it didn’t all happen in one big thrust; the stretching of my hole was unbearable yet tantalizing at the same time. Pain and pleasure. Deep-rooted shame, but hidden desires emerging. The rest of the men stood at a distance and watched as Grimm stole my innocent grace.

Moans of pleasure—both his and my own.

And with a pop as a virginal wall collapsed, I wondered if my face would forever be stained with tears.

Tears that I couldn’t explain. Tears so full of passion and craving for more. Tears of disgrace and contrition. Tears of allowing this darkness Grimm spoke of to enter my own soul.

I wanted to peel my skin to avoid his touch.

Pierce my eyes to avoid watching the other men’s stares.

I wanted to sacrifice my outer being to save my soul.

But at the same time, I also wanted to push my hips back to meet each thrust of his cock as he claimed my body under the moon. The red of my hair hung in my eyes, reminding me of the blood of a battlefield—my battlefield. I watched the soil encrusting into my nail beds as I scraped at the dirt of the ground. Over and over, Grimm conquered my body, and I had no choice but to surrender. It wasn't Grimm who demanded it be so...it was my own body that did.

My eyes closed and opened as Grimm drove into me. Each time my eyelids fluttered open, I would stare into one of the other men's eyes. I don't know why I did, but the hypnotizing act felt right. Each driving thrust from Grimm would rock my body back and forth, but I would maintain my locked stare until I closed my eyes only to open and stare at another.

Five men.

Five sets of amber eyes.

Five wolves.

Me.

The cadence of Grimm's plunging in and out sped up until he was mating me as a dog would mate with another. Abandoned and wild as his nails dug into my hips, he drove in deeper and deeper. I was being fucked like an animal, by an animal. And with a final thrust, a deep, loud growl erupted from the sinister being behind me—so loud, so powerful, so dominating.

Claimed.

Claimed by the animal hidden in a man's skin.

But something happened to me as Grimm pulled his cock from my still-quivering pussy. I didn't feel the need to run as all the men stared down at my naked and used body on the ground. I didn't feel shame. I didn't feel hatred. I felt the need to continue this sacrifice to the blood moon. To protect my village from what lay hidden in the dark woods. Grimm was right. We all did what we must to keep the darkness away. Even if it meant allowing the darkness to swallow up our souls.

But I would fight this darkness with the ultimate light—commitment to not be broken.

My strength would rise in cloaked silence.

And I would be the fragile rose but with thorns so sharp that I would shred their inner beings without them ever seeing me coming.

This would be my silent vow.

I pulled my knees to my chest to try to retain some ounce of my dignity and waited to see who would come next. Would they all mount me one by one and take their turn in their claiming? How would I survive such an act? Fresh tears fell from my eyes in anticipation of a never-ending nightmare. After they devoured my body with their cocks, would they then change back to the wolves they were supposed to be and devour me with their fangs and claws?

Grimm reached down for my ceremonial gown and hooded robe that had been cast to the side. As he handed them to me, his once fierce, animalistic eyes softened. When I didn't take the clothing from his outstretched hand, he kneeled down before me, put the gown over my head, and dressed me as a father would a child. The amber in his eyes was now warm, his breathing calm and no longer ragged, his touch gentle as he placed the red robe over my shoulders. All terrifying signs of the animal were gone. Grimm was nothing more than a man kneeling before me.

I shook in fear but also because the throbbing caused from the claiming hadn't quite left my body, and Grimm noticed.

"I know you fear us. You should." He reached for the strands of hair that hung in my face and softly brushed them away, tucking them behind my ears. "I can't promise you anything, or tell you the lies you want to hear to make yourself feel better. I can't make the darkness go away. But you still need to come with us."

I had nothing to say. And he was right. I did have to go with them. I knew that. I knew I had no other options. Not yet.

“She dropped her basket when she ran,” one of the men said as he walked up to us after fetching the basket and all the goods. “Tonight we feast.”

“Oh yes,” another man said, staring at me with the same hungry eyes that Grimm once had. “Yes, tonight we will most definitely feast.”

CHAPTER 3



“Drink.”

Stubbornly, I turned my head away as I burrowed further down into the pile of furs they had placed me on.

“It wasn’t a request.”

Returning the beastly man’s glare, I snatched the bottle from his hand and took a long pull, immediately regretting it the moment the strong wine hit my empty stomach. Sputtering and coughing, I only had a moment to catch my breath before he tilted the bottom of the bottle, forcing me to drink again.

“Good girl.”

Not sure if the warm feeling enveloping me was from his praise or the wine, I once more settled back into the furs. Lifted over the one they called Grimm’s shoulder, I had been carried deep into the forest. There against the jagged rock face of a mountain, they had placed me at the entrance of a large cave. The floors were covered in thatch with large piles of furs in different shades of brown and gray stacked in haphazard piles. I watched in anxious silence as they built up a large fire, chasing away the cold darkness.

Each was crouched down on their haunches, tearing through the contents of the basket, eating the pieces of sweetened cake with their hands as they passed the bottles of wine around. The only sound, their grunts of pleasure. The warm glow of the fire cast strange shadows over the men surrounding it. Deep-set eyes, lowered brows and strong jaws

were made all the more fierce by the play of light. The heavily muscled brawn of their bodies was on full display as each wolf-like man wore only the barest of animal skins and fur to cover his frame.

I shifted my hips and winced from the soreness between my legs. Certain I had made only the barest breath of sound, I was startled to see five pairs of eyes trained on me, alert and still.

One broke from the pack and approached me.

“What are you called?” he asked. His voice was low and hoarse. His words halting and stilted, as if he were not accustomed to speaking.

Licking my lips, I answered, “My birth name is Raina, but I am called Red.”

“Red?”

I could only nod, feeling foolish for imparting even the sparest personal detail to these men. My mind and body were too bruised and worn to comprehend what was happening. I felt a distant numbness as if all that was occurring was happening to some other poor girl, not me. No. I was still under my favorite tree reading my favorite fairy tale. Perhaps I had fallen asleep and at any moment would awaken from this strange nightmare.

“Drink.”

This time, I didn’t hesitate. I took the offered bottle from his hand and drained what was left, welcoming the hazy feeling flowing over me.

“I tell you it is a sign,” said one of the men.

“You don’t know that,” said another.

“In close to five hundred years they have never sent a woman to appease us, and now they send us one with hair the color of the blood moon. Who can see us in our true form. It’s a sign.”

“It is remarkable that she sees us in our human form and not as wolves. Is it possible the village has finally learned a

way to break the curse?”

The others snorted in derision.

“Perhaps Beo is right. This may be the sign we have been waiting for.”

“They don’t care about you,” I called out, the wine freeing my tongue. Rising on unsteady feet, I kicked away the pelts and walked toward the fire. Swinging my arm in an arch, the bottle held loosely in my grasp, I began to laugh. “They don’t care about you, and they really, really hate me. Especially my grandmother. You think you’re cursed?” I asked as I hiccupped loudly. “I’m the one who is cursed. Cursed from birth.”

“What the hell, Canis! How much did you give the lass to drink?”

“I don’t know. The dregs of one bottle and half the other.”

“You should know a woman her size can’t handle that much wine.”

“Ease up. It’s been centuries since I’ve been around one,” complained Canis.

“You’re sup...sup.... Wolves! You’re supposed to be wolves!” I slurred as I desperately tried to focus.

Grimm rose to his full height, towering over me as he placed his hands on my shoulders to steady my swaying frame.

“You! You!” I accused as I pounded the tip of my finger into his chest. “You’re the one who hurt me...who made me...made me...feel...feel those things.”

Everything tilted and pitched as Grimm swung me up into his arms. Another of the men approached me and pried the wine bottle from my grasp.

“Don’t think you will be needing this anymore.”

A protest died on my lips as the warm strength of Grimm’s arms seeped into my bones. Without thought, I rested my head against his shoulder as he carried me deeper into the cave. Lowering me to the ground, he once more placed me on a bed

of furs. Softness caressed my cheek as I snuggled in deeper. I felt a hand pet my hair.

“Sleep, little one. I fear tomorrow will not be any easier for you.”

I closed my eyes and let the sweet oblivion of sleep carry me away.

* * *

“SHE STINKS.”

“Helm.”

“What? She reeks of the humans.”

“*We* are still human.”

“My brother. I accepted my fate long ago. You should do the same. We are cursed to roam this Earth as wolves, and wolves we will stay.”

“I am not resolved. There must be some reason why this lass has been sent to us. Some explanation as to why she can see our true form.”

“While you ponder the mysteries of the fates, I am taking the lass to the hot springs. She stinks.”

As I listened to their hushed conversation, I couldn't help but lift the collar of my tattered gown up and inhale. True, I smelled a bit like stale wine, but I would hardly say I stunk, I thought indignantly.

“Lass. It is time to arise.”

“My name is Red,” I grumbled.

“Your name is whatever I call you. Now arise and serve us.”

Leaving the comforting warmth of my fur cocoon, I wrapped my red cloak more firmly about me and followed the disgruntled man-wolf out of the cave. As the night before, the

fire still burned brightly in the hazy morning light. The rest of the men were crouched around its welcoming flames.

The one who woke me gestured to a large copper pot nestled above the fire. “Serve.”

Casting him a peevish look, I knelt down before the makeshift hearth. There was a stack of wooden bowls and carved spoons on a straw mat. Giving the porridge in the pot a stir, I began to slowly ladle out portions into the bowls. My mouth watered as the sweet, nutty scent of the cooked oats wafted over me. Handing each man a bowl, I took my own portion and settled close to the fire but slightly away from the intimidating men. Scooping a steaming bite onto my spoon, I stopped just as I raised it to my mouth, startled to see all five men digging into the hot porridge with their bare hands. Once again they were grunting in pleasure as they had done with the cakes the night before.

Noticing my regard, one of them stopped and elbowed the one next to him who nudged the one next to him and so forth. Each man slowly stopped eating. All that could be heard was the crackling of the fire and the morning birdsong from the trees.

With a sigh, Grimm leaned forward and picked up a spoon. Casting a meaningful glance at the others, they did the same. Then all eyes turned to me. Slowly, I lifted the spoon and sampled the porridge, watching as they awkwardly mimicked my actions. There was a strange, companionable silence as we all broke our fast.

Grimm spoke first. “You are here as the blood moon sacrifice from your village. Do you understand that?”

I nodded.

“You are payment for our protection and, as such, will bend to our will and serve us in any manner we demand. If you do not, the innocent lives of those in your village will suffer.”

Again, I could only nod.

“I am Grimm. This is Helm, Beo, Canis and Rood.”

During the chaos and fear of the night before, they had all seemed as one to me, brother beasts, with glowing amber eyes. Now, in the morning light, I could see the subtle differences.

Grimm was the oldest and the clear leader of the pack. He was tall with ink-black hair tinged with silver and had a forthright manner.

Helm was the brawniest of the five and by far the angriest. His massive chest was covered in thick swirls of chestnut hair. He seemed the most beast-like.

Rood had yet to speak. He was tall and sinewy. His hair was a light brown which only emphasized the amber of his eyes.

Canis was the only one who had smiled at me. True, I think it was because he found my drunken state amusing, but I clung to the notion that perhaps out of the five, he would be the most sympathetic to my plight.

I knew Beo by the deep rumble of his voice. As tall as the rest, his wide-set shoulders and sharp gaze gave him a fearsome air. He was the one hoping my presence was a sign. I trembled to think what he would do in his disappointment when he learned I was nothing but an unwanted orphan. A disposable member of the village whose only contribution to their lives would be my death.

My sacrificial death.

“Are...you...are you going to...to kill me?” I closed my eyes as I awaited his response. Not daring to breathe, I felt lightheaded and frightened.

“That depends on your obedience,” said Grimm.

I opened my eyes and met his stern glare. “Did you kill the others? Those who came before me?”

“Their fate is none of your concern. Worry about yourself,” grumbled Helm. “Enough talking. You have had your turn, Grimm. She is mine now.”

“Wait! No!”

Ignoring my cry, Helm grabbed my arm and pulled me up, placing a shoulder in my middle as he hefted me high. Beating on his back, I screamed and yelled as he carried me further and further away from the fire and deeper into the forest. Desperately, I kicked my legs out but that only earned me a stinging slap to my bottom, the power of his open palm felt through the heavy brocade of my cloak.

As the light of the fire faded into the distance, the chill of the forest crept in. I could see frosty puffs of air with every exhale. Long after I had ceased to pound on his back and cry out, he finally halted, unceremoniously depositing me on a bed of pine boughs. Searching my surroundings, I saw a wondrous site. Great boulders of ice and snow surrounded a steaming pool of water. It appeared like magic out of the forest floor. An enchanted grotto of fire and ice.

As I lay sprawled at his feet, Helm removed the fur pelt which covered one arm and part of his chest. I froze in fear when he reached for the stitched leather and fur kilt which was slung low on his hips.

“No! Don’t!”

With a smirk, he let the fabric fall, and a menacing extension of his body sprang free. As thick as a tree branch, it seemed to be made of sinew, pulsing with blood. Shaking my head, I tried to crawl backward. Helm stepped on my cloak. Undaunted, I dropped my shoulders so my arms would slide out of the sleeves. Knowing my thin gown would be no protection against the elements, I still would give up the warmth of my red cloak if it meant escape from the threat of the beast before me.

Helm gave a low-throated chuckle as he watched me struggle to free myself from the thick folds of my cloak.

“There is no escape, Red. Accept your fate as I have accepted mine.”

“Never,” I responded hotly.

His face broke into a morbid pantomime of a smile. “I was hoping you would have the spirit to fight me, for I am not in

the mood to be gentle with ye.”

Reaching down, he fisted the delicate fabric of my gown and lifted me bodily by it. As if I weighed no more than a sparrow, he tossed me into the warm water.

Sputtering and choking as my head broke the surface, I pushed the wet strands of hair away from my face as I struggled to stay afloat. The wet material snaked and twisted around my legs. With my every movement, the gown became more entangled. Desperately swinging my arms through the water, I was losing the fight. With an awful swoosh, I once again plunged beneath the clear blue surface. The sounds of frantic splashing, the frightened call of the birds all vanished. Underwater...silence reigned as I sank deeper and deeper down into the darkness.

A strong arm wrapped around my middle, hefting my weightless body upward. I could see sparkling flashes of light, the sun dancing over the water, just before I was lifted high.

Gasping as we broke the surface, I was carried across the hot spring to the edge. My toes touched smooth rock as he set me on some sort of underwater ledge. The water lapped around my body just above my hips. Helm stood before me. With his superior height, the water crested low on his hips. That menacing extension of his body bobbed up and down with the movement of the water. I tried to shift backward, but his hand around my waist prevented it.

“Foolish girl, why did you not swim?” Helm angrily chastised.

“I would have had my gown not prevented it!” I fumed back.

“If your gown is the problem, then we need to get rid of it.”

“No!”

His two large fists gripped the collar of the gown and viciously rent the simple, thin fabric in two. Grabbing at the sides, I tried to fight his hands and cover my nakedness with what was left. He only laughed. Pulling me forward, he pushed

the fabric off my shoulders and down my arms. I watched helplessly as the two pieces of fabric floated away. With its billowing folds and the ripple of the water, it almost looked like a pair of wings in flight, before the waterlogged cloth slipped below the surface and sank.

Wrapping my arms over my breasts, I glared up at the unmerciful giant before me. Though I'd been stripped the day before, I hadn't felt truly bared. Even when Grimm...when Grimm...even last night, I'd felt the cover of darkness had concealed me like a shroud. Now, as bright sunshine glistened through the dark trees and bounced off the water, there was no place to hide. Enduring his scrutiny, I could not help but see the stark contrasts in our bodies. Mine smooth, pale and slight. His darkly tanned, big and muscled. Dark hair covered his chest and...lower. The men of my village were short with the weak, lanky limbs that came from little manual labor.

Not so with these five wolf-men.

Despite my hatred of my enslavement to them, there was something deep and primal...an instinct...which responded to their display of strength and power. A core feminine ache to be protected and cared for.

The problem was, protecting and caring for me were the very last things on these men's minds.

Crying out in fright, I turned my head to the side and closed my eyes when he made a sudden movement toward me. I could feel the warmth of his body as he stepped closer. That...thing...brushed high against my stomach.

His only response was a deep chuckle.

Keeping my eyes closed, trying to block out the frightening and confusing thoughts his presence elicited, I could smell the fresh scent of sandalwood. Peeking through my lashes, I saw his large hands covered in fragrant foam as he lathered them with a bar of soap.

Placing the soap on the ice behind me, he commanded, "Open your eyes."

Fearing what my disobedience would bring, I obeyed.

“Now lower your arms. You need to bathe. It may have been hundreds of years since I have taken a woman, but I’ll not fuck one stinking of the village.”

Wondering if *fucking* meant what Grimm had done to my body the night before, I tearfully complied.

“Please, you don’t have to...to...fuck with me,” I begged.

Helm didn’t respond.

Reaching out, he placed his hands on my breasts. My mouth fell open in shock. Unable to form the words to protest, I could only feel. Caressing and kneading my flesh, he rubbed his hands in circles, leaving a sudsy trail of soap lather. My breasts felt heavy as my nipples tightened painfully into small buds. The scrape of his work-roughened palms over my soft flesh only heightened the sensation of his touch. When his hands moved to my shoulders then down my arms, I had to bite my lip to stifle a groan of disappointment. Slipping his hand beneath the water, he flattened his palm over my sensitive core. Still slightly swollen from Grimm’s touch, I winced as Helm’s finger pushed between the folds. His hand moving back and forth, the friction of his touch caused a fluttering sensation to settle deep in my stomach...and lower. My breath came in soft, harried gasps as his touch quickened. Sliding my feet to the sides of the slippery stone ledge, I opened my legs wider. His middle finger pressed into my body. Once, twice.

This time, I did groan when he pulled free. My now sensitive nipples were tickled by his chest hair as he leaned over me to reach for the soap. Working the soap into a heavy, thick lather, he placed it aside and pushed his fingers into my hair. Entangling his hands in my wavy locks, he rubbed my scalp and ran his hands down large fistfuls of hair, coating each curl in fragrant foam. His hands caressed down the curve of my back before settling low, just above my bottom. Pulling me forward, my hips pressed against his stomach, he trapped his engorged protrusion between us. Despite the warmth of the water, his skin felt hotter. As if he burned with his own internal fire.

Using his right hand, he grasped my hair and turned me to the side, forcing my body back. My breasts were thrust upward as my back bowed under the pressure of his grasp. The water lapped at the sides of my face as he rinsed the soap from my hair.

Feeling lightheaded and overwhelmed when he set my body upright, all I could think about was his touch and the growing ache between my legs. Leaning over me, he once again reached for the soap. Watching him handle it, his palms twisting and turning it, I couldn't help but wish he was soaping my breasts once more. Tossing the soap aside, he lowered his brow and held my gaze for a moment. Seeing movement, my eyes slipped lower. He was handling himself. Rubbing the protrusion up and down, up and down, covering it in soft lather.

“Do you know what a cock is, Red?”

I shook my head no.

Nodding to the protrusion in his hand, he said, “This is a cock.”

The word was so guttural and coarse. It suited him.

“Say it. Say cock.”

Licking my lips, I obeyed. “Cock.”

His full lips broke out into a satisfied smile. “Now turn around.”

Unsure, I just stared. I didn't want to take my eyes off this dangerous man.

“I said, turn around,” he repeated, his voice lowering with anger.

With no choice, I turned my back to him.

“Now place your hands on the ice and lean forward.”

Although encircled by great, jagged pieces of ice and rock, there was a large flat space cut out to form a stepping ledge. I placed my palms on its smooth, icy surface.

“Lean forward. I want your nipples to touch the ice.”

Hesitantly, I leaned forward, only to swing back the moment my nipples touched the cold surface. A restraining hand on my back forced me down again. I moaned as the ice sent sharp frissons of pain across my breasts. My nipples tightening painfully.

“Please, it hurts. The ice is too cold.”

“Up on your toes. I want your ass above the water,” he ordered.

Moving up on my toes would only force more contact with the ice. “Please don’t make me,” I begged.

Helm grasped a fistful of my wet hair and yanked on it sharply. I cried out in fear as he said through his clenched jaw, “Do as I command.”

I lifted my body up on my toes. The movement crushed my breasts and middle against the ice. My stomach clenched and twisted from the freezing contact.

Releasing my hair, his hand moved down my back. I could feel his finger push between the cleft of my bottom. Remembering the intrusive feel of Grimm’s finger *there*, I whimpered. Unlike Grimm who’d only teased my forbidden hole to intimidate me, Helm pushed the tip of his finger inside.

“Oh God! What are you doing?”

He refused to answer.

After swirling his finger along the rim, he pulled it free. I heaved a sigh of relief but it was short-lived.

Grasping my bottom cheeks, he pulled them open. It was both painful and humiliating.

“No! Stop!”

I tried to twist my hips away but the cold scrape of the ice on my nipples and his firm grasp kept me in place. I felt something warm and large press against my forbidden hole. I tried to turn to look over my back but his growl had me swinging my head obediently forward again.

“Can you feel where my cock is, Red?”

“Yes,” I whimpered.

“Where is it?”

“It’s pushing against my...my bottom.”

“Say ass.”

“What?”

“Say it’s pushing into my ass.”

“Oh God,” I moaned in agony.

“Say it.”

“Your cock is pushing into my...my ass.”

The awful pressure increased. I tried to clench my body tightly closed. He pushed harder. I could feel my body weakening. My hole began to stretch open. His cock started to slip inside.

“No,” I moaned.

There was a sharp biting pain as the pressure built then seemed to ease. I could feel him inside of me. I breathed heavily through the pain, thinking the worst must be over. I could feel his body shift behind me, then the pressure increased again. He was pushing his hips forward. I could feel his cock penetrating my body deeper. My inner passage stretched and strained to accommodate his bulk.

“Stop!” I screamed. “It hurts! It hurts!”

He gave a small thrust forward before leaning over my body. Grabbing my hair, he forced my head back. “Does it hurt? Good. I want it to hurt. I want you to feel pain. I want you to feel helpless.”

Hurt. Pain. Helpless.

Helm thrust his cock deeper inside me. Punctuating each word.

Hurt. Pain. Helpless.

“Why? I don’t understand. Why?” I cried.

“Because that is how I felt when your village cursed me for all eternity,” he ground out before pounding inside of me.

I was being torn apart. The piercing pain was agony. My stomach twisted as he forced himself deeper and deeper. I could feel him pumping his hips. Thrusting in and out. Forcing my body to accept his unnatural demands. He must have stretched me beyond what I could endure because I could feel the sting of the soap right at my entrance. The sting of an open wound. Still he continued to pound into me.

My mouth was open as I keened and wailed. My cries of pain setting the birds to screeching in return.

His hands released my bottom cheeks. One hand spanned my middle, sheltering me from the sharp edge of the ice. The other reached between my legs. He began to caress me in time with the rhythm of his thrusts into my bottom. My body began to respond. To use the pain for my own pleasure.

Everything was twisted and turned around.

The feel of the warm water on my legs contrasted with the harsh bite of the ice against my nipples. The pain in my bottom with the tingling pleasure between my legs. The sound of his harsh breathing intermingling with my cries and moans.

“I’m going to fill your ass with my cum. You will be tainted with my scent from the inside out,” he ground out as he pinched the hooded nub between my legs.

It was too much. Stars burst behind my eyelids. A deep, dark rushing sound roared in my ears as my body stretched taut then went limp with release. Leaning forward, I was grateful for the cool feel of the ice against my heated cheeks. My body rocked to and fro several more times before Helm gave a shout of pleasure. Grabbing my hips tightly, he thrust in to the hilt, his hot seed releasing deep in my bottom.

After he pulled free, he lifted my limp body into his arms and kicked his feet from the stone ledge, sending us into the deeper, even warmer, waters. The floating sensation as our bodies bobbed up and down in the water only added to the strange, lightheaded feeling which had invaded my thoughts

and limbs. Through half-closed eyes, I looked down at my body. My breasts and stomach were an angry red from being pressed against the ice. The bare lips of my core seemed swollen while my bottom's opening felt stretched and bruised.

Tilting my head back, I searched Helm's face. Sensing my regard, he turned his intense amber gaze on me. The tight set of his jaw had softened. His features gentled.

“My brothers in this curse may be right. You, my little Red, may be something special after all.”

CHAPTER 4



*R*eturning to the camp wrapped only in my red cloak, I was surprised when Canis handed me a simple skirt, blouse, stockings and slippers.

At Helm's questioning gaze, Canis said, "We ran into a few of the huntsmen while you were *bathing* Red. They dropped off their usual offering of flour and leather goods. Beo noticed they had two sacks filled with women's garb so he latched onto one of them. They fought him a bit, but once Beo started to growl, they decided it wasn't worth angering the wolves and released it."

I strained to listen while attempting to appear uninterested. *There were huntsmen in the woods.* Huntsmen who knew of the wolves. Apparently these huntsmen saw these men in their wolf state and gave them goods and food as some sort of offering. Would they help me?

Shivering, I went and sat on a log used as a stool before the fire. Though the heat from the flames licked my skin, I couldn't remove the cold that ran through my veins. Thoughts of how the dark force must have entered my body haunted me. It was the only explanation for the way my body responded to the touch of these men. Demons had to be lurking inside of me, and maybe I was becoming an animal myself. Would I too become one of the wolves? Was that why I saw men, because I had already become a beast like them?

I couldn't get Grimm, Helm, and the sinful acts that had occurred out of my mind. I should detest both of them, and yet...I also couldn't stop thinking of how the rest of their

bodies had felt around me as we had slept last night. Their bodies all touched me, protecting me in their warmth. I had felt comforted even though I was merely their captive. Each man's heavy breathing acted as a soft lullaby while I had the best sleep of my life.

The men seemed to be preoccupied with doing duties around the camp. Helm chopped and stacked wood near the fire. Beo sharpened a dagger in long fluid strokes against a rock. Canis expertly created a spear out of wood, shaving the end to a sharp point. Grimm worked on butchering a deer that had been hunted down earlier. Each one of them glanced at me from time to time, their amber eyes capturing me in their stare each time. I couldn't tell if they were looks of lustful hunger, or looks of concern for my well-being. They were men of few words, yet they all seemed to communicate in their own way.

Rood approached me and placed a heavy fur on my shoulders. It smelled like them. Man. The scent overpowered my senses, and I closed my eyes and inhaled. Something about their spicy, earthy essence gave me an odd feeling of comfort. The warmth blanketing me was from far more than just the heavy furs. It was like the fur that laid heavy on my back provided me with the battle armor needed to fight this inner storm raging inside of me.

He then kneeled next to me and placed a piece of leather full of berries on my lap. "You need to eat," he said. "The deer will be ready soon, but until it is, eat this." He then inhaled deeply and a soft, growl-like sound emerged from his lips. He quickly stood and walked off, leaving me alone once again.

Staring down at the display of gathered forest delights, my stomach rumbled. I wanted to grab a handful of berries and shove them into my mouth before Rood changed his mind and kept the food for himself. But then I paused. Why was no one else eating the berries? Why just me?

Poison?

Was that their intention?

I still didn't know what their intention was and what they would do next. What had they done to the other sacrifices who

never returned to the village? Would my fate be the same as theirs? And if so, what was that fate to be?

To kill me by poison? Deadly forest berries?

Or maybe it wasn't the kind of poison that would kill, but would simply act to cast me in a deep sleep so they could have their way with me with no resistance. Though they didn't seem to care if I resisted or not.

"Why aren't you eating?" Rood asked from the other side of the fire. The flames blazing in front of his frame gave off the impression that he was the devil himself. In leathers and fur with little coverage of his muscular frame, he could easily be mistaken for an ancient god, though I knew the animalistic nature that lurked beneath the chiseled flesh.

"I'm not hungry," I lied.

"Eat them anyway."

I shook my head, my mouth watering with how plump and inviting the berries appeared to be.

"Eat," he demanded as he stormed over to me. His insistence convinced me even more that the berries could indeed be poison.

"No," I somehow had the courage to say even though I saw thunderous clouds approaching before I could seek shelter from the storm.

I had just enough time to look at the other men as they stared on in curiosity before Rood gripped the back of my neck and squeezed.

"Do not mistake me as a weak man because I offered food," he warned as he forced my head down to stare at the fruit.

I placed my shaking fingertips to the berries and couldn't drum up the courage to eat them. If I were to die, it would not be by my own hand. No. They would have to kill me and face eternal damnation for the brutality. And if the berries were to pacify me or make me sleep through their violations rather than to have them face their acts, I would not submit. They

would have to taste my salty tears as they pressed their lips to mine. I would not make this easy for any of them.

Rood's grip on the nape of my neck slid to the base of my skull as he took hold of a handful of hair and tugged. With my head pulled back, Rood leaned down to my ear and said, "Are you going to eat the berries?"

I swallowed hard, which was difficult since my head was tilted back and my neck stretched. "I said I'm not hungry," I somehow said as my body shivered in anticipation of what would now come.

I knew Rood wasn't a weak man. He didn't have to say so. I would never consider any of the five men around this campfire weak. They were creatures of the forest to be feared and appeased at all costs. Every single villager believed it to be so, and I was no different. But I couldn't eat the berries. I just couldn't.

"Very well," Rood said, yanking my hair even harder as he stood to his full height once again. "If you won't put the berries in your mouth, then we will put something else in instead."

Pulling me to standing with his fist rooted in my hair, he cast the fur he had just placed on my shoulders to the ground. The berries that had been on my lap had fallen to the dirt, and now I wished I had just simply eaten them. I had a feeling my foolish mistake would be one I wouldn't soon forget.

He tugged my head back again, exposing the front of my neck. Lowering his mouth to my throat, he licked a path all the way to my ear where he whispered, "Take off your clothes immediately unless you want me to tear them off of you. It would be a shame to destroy the outfit you haven't even had for a day yet."

Remembering how Helm had effortlessly ripped my gown from my body at the spring, I quickly complied. I didn't want to have to be naked before these men all the time, and if this outfit got ruined by Rood, the possibility of me having nothing to wear but maybe one of their heavy furs had my shaking

hands fumbling with the material to remove it on my own terms.

“Hurry,” Rood growled. I whimpered when he yanked on my hair even harder.

I desperately wished for one of the other men to step in and help calm Rood’s growing temper. What I wouldn’t do for one of them to have mercy on me right now. But I had also started to see that they all respected each other completely. Not one of them was about to contradict or go against another from their pack. They would watch, but never intervene. I had to admire the level of loyalty they had to each other even though I wished otherwise.

When I stepped out of the last remaining item—my skirt—and stood completely nude in front of Rood with the fire roaring behind me, I held my breath as I waited for what would come. My sex was still so very tender from Grimm, my anus even worse from Helm, and my nipples still had a dull ache from the freezing touch of the ice. I wasn’t sure my body could take much more.

“Down on your knees,” Rood directed.

His hand was still fisted in my hair, but I didn’t need him to tug me down to follow his command. At this point, I was prepared to do whatever the man asked of me. I was not a foolish woman, and I had quickly begun to realize that resisting these men only made it worse.

When my knees made contact with the thatched ground of the cave, Rood pulled my hair and tilted my head back just enough that I had no choice but to look into his wolf-like eyes. They were like how all the others had been.

Predator.

Hunter.

Dominator.

“I was going to give you until tomorrow before claiming what was mine. I was going to give you some time to recover from what you have already endured. But you clearly *do*

consider my kindness as a sign of weakness, and for that you will be punished.”

“I don’t. I swear it,” I pleaded, though I knew deep down it would do no good.

“Your actions overpower your words, lass.”

“I don’t consider you weak at all. I was just afraid to eat the berries.”

“Afraid?”

“Yes,” I squeaked.

“Well, I am about to show you what you *truly* should be afraid of.”

Finally releasing my hair, Rood untied a piece of leather that circled his waist. It was wide and thick, and acted as his belt. The minute he did so, he looked over my shoulder at one of the men behind me. I knew they were all watching without even having to see for myself. I could feel their gazes searing into my skin.

“Canis, do you mind assisting me in teaching our sacrifice what happens when she defies one of us?”

I remained naked on my knees, trying to breathe through the overpowering feeling of doom. Canis walked up to Rood, and Rood handed him the leather strap.

“Use this on her while I fill her mouth with something far scarier than the simple berries I had offered in kindness.”

Rood then adjusted his kilt out of the way and sat on the stump that I had once been sitting on. His thick cock stood ready for what I assumed would be my attention. He reminded me of a mighty king sitting on his throne as I, a mere servant, kneeled before him.

“Come kneel between my legs,” he ordered.

I crawled the short distance to get there and did what he asked. As I did so, Rood kicked off the remaining clothing that had covered his bottom half. He then positioned himself in a way that the fire was beside us. I didn’t say anything, and I

tried to avoid his eyes. My only hope now was to show the man complete obedience in hopes he changed his mind and didn't feel he needed to teach me a lesson.

“Let's give you something else to feast upon rather than those berries,” he said, scooting to the edge of the stump. “Come put my cock in your mouth.”

I glanced at the scattered berries on the ground, and hopefully gathered them up as a sign of good faith. “Please,” I said. “I'll eat the berries. I'm sorry.” Fear of what was to come removed any earlier hesitation I had in eating what very well could be poison. Poison sounded so much better than what I had a feeling would come soon.

“Oh yes, lass. You will be eating those berries,” he said with a wicked grin as he took them from my dirty palm. “But now, you will have a much”—he looked down at his thick cock—“*larger* meal.”

He reached out and took hold of my hair once again. The sting from the pull had me crying out, but that only made it easier for Rood to lower my face down upon his rod. My open mouth was instantly filled with his girth as he shoved my face all the way down upon his lap. I gagged as the tip of his shaft went down my throat, and I panicked, thinking he would surely choke me to death. I tried to back off, but his hand on my head held me down. I pressed my palms down on his thighs to try to gain any type of leverage I could. I would suffocate by the size of this man pressing against the back of my throat.

“Shhh, my sacrifice. Shhh. Calm down. There is no reason to fight this.” He pulled out enough that I was able to catch the breath I worried I would never be able to obtain again. Rood didn't pull out all the way, however, only pushed back in once again. He did this a couple of times until I ultimately realized I would not truly die from lack of air or choke on his cock, and the more I relaxed the back of my throat, the easier it became.

“That's it. Up and down. Suck my cock like a good little sacrifice. Provide the kind of offering I truly want,” he said as he loosened up on my hair once I began to do the act of

bobbing my mouth up and down his length without the need of a hair pull to do it.

As my tongue glided along the silky flesh of Rood's sex, I thought of how this act was so much less severe than what the other men had done to me. If all I was expected to do was please the man with my mouth, I would surely hope the others wanted the same from me rather than to push into my tight pussy or my even tighter anus.

"Push your ass out," Rood ordered in almost a moan, as I had just taken his entire length to the back of my throat. "Stick it out and don't move."

I did as he asked, knowing that all eyes would be on my exposed bottom pressed out prominently and on display. But again, if this was the worst of my punishment, then on full display I would be.

Once I was on all fours, with my ass out and his heavy cock resting on my tongue, Rood said, "Canis, begin."

I had forgotten that Canis had been asked to assist Rood and was standing behind me with a leather lash in hand. I was quickly reminded of his presence when a stinging blow rained down upon my bare behind.

I screamed, though the sound became muffled by Rood's mass filling my mouth completely. I scrambled forward, but really didn't have anywhere to scramble to. Canis took hold of my hips and pulled me back into position. He used his hand to spank my behind once I was back in the precarious spot I was in before the surprising lash.

"Suck me, lass. Don't stop," Rood ordered. "The whipping won't stop until I'm satisfied, so you would be wise to make quick work of it."

Bobbing my head up and down, not sure what it would take to *satisfy* the man, I tried not to focus on the whipping as it began again. One, two, three—the leather fell upon my bottom. Tears fell from my eyes as I ran my tongue along the length of Rood's shaft. Four, five, six—the whipping continued as my whimpers blended with the sounds of ragged

breaths and moaning. Seven, eight, nine—I cried around the cock that thrust to the farthest parts of my throat. Ten, eleven, twelve—I howled from my inner core, still sucking with all my might. Thirteen, fourteen, fifteen—I pleased, while I suffered. Rood looked toward the roof of the cave with his eyes closed, while Canis delivered the discipline.

I continued to move my mouth up and down his salty shaft as I watched the intense pleasure blanket his face. Slowly his eyes opened and he looked down upon me. With a gentle touch—a complete contrast to what was occurring with Canis—Rood swiped at a falling tear with his rough thumb.

“Have you learned your lesson?” he asked in a much less severe and stern voice than before.

I nodded but didn’t dare stop sucking him as he had ordered.

Just as I was about to pull my mouth away and plead for mercy, Rood said, “Come sit on my lap now.”

To help me rise, Rood reached for my hair and yanked me up. I stood on wobbly legs, grateful to avoid any further whipping. Rood guided me onto his lap with my back to his chest. Lifting me slightly, he positioned his cock to my opening.

“Oh, you are nice and wet for me,” he nearly growled. “All the tears and whimpers were a guise, I see. My little sacrifice clearly liked every second of that lashing.”

I shook my head as I made eye contact with Canis who still stood where he had been while whipping me. I protested the fact, but the ease with which Rood’s cock slid into me revealed I was indeed wet. The moan escaping my mouth caused by my intense pleasure as he buried his cock deep within me also gave away how tantalizing the entire act of discipline by two men truly was.

Yes, I was possessed by the dark force. It was the only explanation.

“Ride me, little Red.”

With Rood's hands on my hips aiding me in my up-and-down motions, I bobbed on his cock with my body like I had just done with my mouth.

Pulling out just enough to then push his thickness back in all the way with the weight of my body, I mewled in wicked delight. The other men watched as I took my ride on Rood's lap. Their eyes stood out with the light of the fire shining bright. I couldn't hold back the feelings, the hunger, and the sinful lust that sent bolts of fire from every inch of my skin to my core. My pussy contracted around his cock as I cried out.

"That's right, Red. Cum for me. Allow that pleasure to rock your body. Coat my shaft with your juices."

I didn't need his command to obey. My body acted on feeling alone. Just as a deep, powerful wave of energy vibrated through my pussy, I heard Rood release a low, primal groan that blended with my own sounds of completion.

Rood pulled me back enough that he could nibble on my neck, his deep breathing tickling the hairs around my ear. He whispered, "You are far more powerful than any dark force the villagers fear. With that simple act, you nearly slayed me, Red." He released a deep breath and turned his nibbles into soft kisses. "Slayed me far more than any sword could do."

CHAPTER 5



Rood held me in his arms by the fire, feeding me the berries I had refused to eat earlier one by one. In what truly was an act of kindness, Rood had first placed a berry in his mouth and ate one before he had expected me to. The fierce intensity of the amber in his eyes had dissipated as he had done so. I no longer saw the animalistic nature of before, but instead saw a protective and nurturing one. The other men went about their business around camp as they had once done, but Rood had remained with me, offering his warmth and affection. The polar opposite in actions had my mind spinning, yet I was not going to argue or resist in any way. Not because I was afraid of what would happen if I did so, but because I truly was enjoying every minute of his time.

It was Grimm who eventually broke my spell of comforting delight. “Men,” he said harshly.

Rood’s body tensed, and his fingers dropped the berry that he was about to put into my mouth. I could hear and feel him inhale deeply. I could see all the men stop what they were doing and lift their noses to the air, all smelling the cool forest air. I sat upright, tense as well, but couldn’t smell or see anything. The only thing I did notice was that the sounds of the forest ceased. An eerie silence took hold, and I knew what that meant. It could only mean one thing. The calm before the worst kind of storm.

“It’s coming,” Helm announced. “I can smell it...The dark force is near.”

“The village. The dark force is going to attack the village now,” Beo added.

All the men turned to look at me as Rood quickly rose to standing. He picked me up before I could even process what truly was happening and carried me into the depths of the cave. “You stay here,” he ordered. “You’ll be safe here. But no matter what, do not leave this spot. Do you hear me? Do not leave this spot.”

He didn’t wait for a response but turned and joined the others instead. In an instant, I was left alone in an empty cave with only the howls of the wolves in the distance.

Running to the entrance of the cave, I frantically searched for any signs of the men. There was no trace of them, not that I truly expected there would be. In the short time it had taken for me to reach the mouth of the cave, they were gone. Reaching for my clothing and dressing as quickly as I could, I tried not to overthink what I was about to do. Yes, I should stay like Rood ordered. Breaking his order would surely lead to punishment, but...

No! I should run.

This was my time to escape. They were all gone, and I could safely be out of reach before they returned but...but I couldn’t just leave. Was it the dark force pulling me toward them? Was this a trap that would end in my death? Whatever the answer was, I couldn’t resist running full speed toward the sounds of the howls, the growling, and the high-pitched hissing sound that I remembered to be that belonging to the dark force when it would come close to the village. I could hear the men so well. Why could I hear them so well?

The shrill call of the dark force soon was joined by the warning bells of my nearby village. I didn’t have to be in the belly of the town square to know that everyone was scattering to seek shelter. A call to arms was not needed, for we all knew the only ones who could beat the dark force were the wolves. All we could do is hide and weather the storm until the piercing sound of evil and the howls of the wolves vanished.

Just before reaching a large clearing, I froze as I saw the men...the wolves. They had all changed into the wolves the villagers spoke of—the wolves I had originally expected to see—but the wolves I had yet to see. They had become beasts with thick fur coats, claws, fangs, muscled flanks, and those fierce amber eyes I had grown to almost understand in each one of them. They all were already in full battle against a dense, black, fog-like element laced with an evil green. A foul stench burned my nostrils and made my eyes water, but that was nothing compared to the sharp screams of the darkness that forced me to cover my ears in protection. The hissing grew even louder as it seemed the wolves were winning the battle with their large paws clawing at the thick black swirling vapor. With every bite from the wolves' massive jaws, or slice with their sharp claws, the blackness pierced the sky with the most wretched sound imaginable.

I didn't exactly know what I was expecting I would be able to do once finding the wolves and the dark force. I had nothing to fight with, and even if I did have a blade or a spear, the dark force appeared to be unstoppable by the makings of man. No...only the wolves had the power to fight off this malevolent presence.

In the thickest part of the black smoke, the green shone brightly. I could see that the wolves were making their way to the center of it with a ferocious determination. They would be victorious. I could see this. I could hear this. I could feel it with my entire being. These savage beasts holding me against my will were also my saviors. They were protecting the village as they had always done for years. They were creatures of duty and honor, and seeing it right before my eyes was absolutely breathtaking. It wasn't without effort that they were winning; the dark force swiped and knocked the wolves to the ground many times. Growls turned to yelps at times, but not one of the wolves stayed down. With grit and determination, they always rose and even would limp back toward the center of the green illumination within the black mist. My heart broke with every painful blow they encountered from this mythical evil opponent. I cried against my hand as I watched them be flung against the trunks of trees, or picked up high in the sky to then

be dropped to the hard ground below. But each time, the wolf would stand. Each time, the wolf would shake off the assault and attack again. These wolves risked everything for a village they no longer belonged to. To a one, they were sacrificing their entire beings and bodies in order to keep the dark force away.

Finally, the hissing stopped, the stench dissipated, and the black smoke turned to a fine mist and faded back into the depths of the forest. The dark force was no more. All that remained were five wolves who looked toward the sky and howled cries of victory.

I was so captivated by this display of raw beauty that I didn't try to run when all sets of amber eyes turned to stare at me. Instead, I took the time to look each of them in the eyes and gave my silent thank you. If only they could feel the immense gratitude I had for them at that very moment. If only they could hear how hard my heart beat for them. If only I could show them how forever in debt I felt.

* * *

I MARCHED to what very well could be my death with five naked men. Men who, just moments ago, had been wolves. I had defied them. Defied their order once again. I knew what happened when I angered them. I knew what they did to me, and yet...I still walked quietly back to the camp with them without the slightest urge to run for my life. They still hadn't told me what they were going to do to me. My future was still unknown, and yet for some reason, I had no fear of these warriors I had just watched save hundreds of innocent lives. I possessed only admiration and the desire to remain their sacrifice as The Selection had intended I be.

"You're hurt," I said as we entered the cave and I saw a large bloody gash down Canis' back. All the wolves had switched back to men, and in all their nude glory had walked back to the camp to gather their furs and leather clothes.

“It’s nothing,” Canis said as he bent before me to grab his pants. The firmness of his ass, bent right before me, caused my breath to catch in the back of my throat.

“I think I should clean that up,” I offered. “You don’t want that wound to get infected.”

“It won’t,” he said as he turned to face me. “As wolves, we heal quickly.” His cock was large and on full display. I knew he saw that my gaze fell upon his manhood because he said, “But if you want to pay attention to my body in other ways, I won’t argue.”

When I opened my mouth in surprise, followed with wide eyes, he was quick to give me a wink to show his jest.

“Let her clean the wound,” Grimm said. “You know the slashes caused from the battles hurt like hell. Let her try to ease it for you.”

Canis made direct eye contact with me and then nodded. “Fine.” He walked over to a pile of furs deeper in the cave and pointed to a jar sitting next to the cave wall. “There is a salve in there that we use to help with the healing.”

Grimm walked over to me with a cup of water and a rag and silently went back toward the other men who were washing up and getting dressed again.

Wanting to help, I followed Canis to where he waited for me. He never bothered to get dressed and sat on the furs completely naked with his back to me. His tanned and muscled torso was so perfect other than the long gash marring his flesh.

I knelt down behind him and took the jar from his hand. “Does it hurt?” I was scared to touch the wound. I didn’t want him to suffer any more than he already was.

“It burns. The injuries caused by the dark force sizzle beneath our flesh for a few days. But it eventually goes away.”

“And this salve helps?” I asked as I opened the jar. I could smell an herb I knew to be used to treat infections back in the village.

“It does.”

I dipped the rag into the water and gently began to dab at the bloody gash. “Thank you,” I said softly.

“For what?” he asked, not even flinching in the slightest as I tried my best to clean out the lesion.

“For fighting. I knew you protected our village, but until I saw it for myself...well, I had no idea the true sacrifice that was made on your part. Every villager would perish if it were not for you and the others.”

“Yes, they would,” was his short and harsh answer. “Every single one of them would die. They would be no match for the power the dark force has.”

By the tone of his voice, I feared I had angered him, which hadn't been my intent. So rather than continuing on with a discussion that didn't seem to sit well with the man, I tended to his injury in silence.

Canis was the first to break the quiet of the cave after I had most of his cut cleaned out. “You shouldn't have followed us. I remember Rood telling you to remain in the cave.”

I swallowed hard, knowing that I had indeed broken a dictate of Rood's, and also remembering what happened the last time I went against his wishes.

“Are you one to not follow direction? Stubborn, or a fool?”

“A fool, I suppose,” I said weakly. “But I'm sorry. I don't know why, but I couldn't just remain as I was asked. Something pulled me to you all. I should have stayed put. I know this. But I couldn't resist the urge to run toward your howls. I have no explanation as to why.”

He glanced over his shoulder at me, and my eyes locked with the amber color of his. I didn't see the fierceness in his that I had seen when he'd taken the lash from Rood and whipped me with it earlier. This time, there was something different. A connection. A bond of sorts. I didn't want to look away; if anything, I wanted to be lost in them forever.

“When I watched all of you fight,” I began, “I felt something. Something so strong that I wouldn't have been able to break away and run even if I'd wanted to. A wise

woman in my situation would have run away. Run back to my village and warned them the dark force was near. Or even run in a different direction in self-preservation. But I couldn't. All I could do was stand and watch...to feel. I could almost feel you all. I could feel the energy you all exuded."

As I spoke, I didn't hear the other men walk up behind me. Helm's voice had me turning in surprise to see them all in a line before me.

"We felt you too," Helm said.

"You being there seemed to give us a different type of strength," Beo added.

"You shouldn't have left the cave," Rood said, "but we understand."

"We'll leave you to be with Canis," Grimm said. "But we want you to know that we felt you. We welcomed your presence, and even needed it. What this means, we don't know. But we wanted you to know we aren't angry with you for following us."

The men turned and left me to finish with Canis' wound. Feeling a huge sense of relief that there would be no repercussions for my actions, and no punishment was in store, I released the tension I had been holding in my shoulders that I hadn't realized was there up until now.

I applied the salve with my fingertips as delicately as I could. When I was done smearing the creamy ointment on his skin, I closed the jar and said, "I hope this helps some."

Canis turned his body and took the jar from my hand. The connection of our hands sent a familiar tingle to my core. The fact that he was still completely naked was not lost on me, and as I glanced down at his hardened cock, I knew the sexual energy I was feeling was not one-sided.

Again, his eyes locked with mine. Unlike before with the others when I had to be ordered to remove my clothes, or even to have them ripped from my body, I began to voluntarily disrobe before him. Removing my clothing in silence, I never broke my stare with this man. It was Canis' turn. His turn to

claim me. But this time was different. This time, I would offer my body as a sacrifice for all he and the others did for me and the villagers. I would forever offer this sacrifice if the men so desired it.

Canis leaned forward and tenderly pressed his mouth to mine. Soft. Unexpectedly soft. With his tongue dancing inside my parted lips, he lowered me down to the pile of furs. Lying on my back with Canis towering over me, I felt no fear at all—only anticipation.

His mouth moved from my mouth to my breasts. I cried out when his lips made contact with my hardened nipples. Such a contrast to the sensation of the ice on them when I was with Helm. Canis licked and sucked as a powerful throb grew in my pussy with every ministrations of his mouth. When I moaned loudly, not being able to contain the fire building inside, Canis lowered his finger to my pussy and pressed it in between my silky folds. What once I'd felt was an intrusive touch, one violating every part of me, had now become one I craved. I wanted it deeper inside of me, and even a second digit added. I wanted him to stretch me, fill me completely. I wanted more.

He pumped his finger in and out of me as he continued to suckle my breast. I turned my head to the right in the throes of my growing passion to see the other men were going about their business as if Canis claiming me in the cave was completely ordinary. This was their way of life, and I was simply their mate. Not one looked on with jealousy or envy. Not one of the men anxiously awaited their turn. No. They were fine with it being Canis' time with me, and it was then that I realized how much of a pack they truly were. What belonged to one, belonged to all.

My attention went back to Canis when he added a second finger to the one already inside of me. The forceful thrust was all it took for my body to explode. My pussy pulsed as an intense sensation rocked my body. Crying out, my voice echoed off the walls of the cave, but I didn't care. I could release with wild abandon with these men. There was no shame in my pleasure. I felt they demanded it. They craved it

as much as I did. Yes, they gave me pain, but with pain came so much pleasure to follow.

“Yes, Red,” Canis growled. “Cum all over my hand.”

As my vaginal walls milked his fingers, I pleaded, “Claim me, Canis. I need you. I want you. I need more.”

I didn’t recognize my own voice. The primal lust inside of me was foreign, but powerful. I knew what I wanted, and that was Canis. Now.

Without hesitation, Canis positioned his body on top of me, guided his cock to the entrance of my pussy, and pressed in. I gasped as his girth spread me wide. Over and over, he pumped in and out of me as he placed kisses on my neck and face. Aggressive thrusts by his cock were countered by the tender affection of his mouth. As his dick drove as deep as he could go, I had no doubt that Canis was just as savage as the other men, yet his kisses showed he had a loving side as well.

The hard fucking, mixed with the gentle caresses, was all it took to toss me over the edge again. I thrust my hips up to meet his as my pussy tightened around his cock, making the stretch of my tight hole even more obvious.

“Fuck yes,” he growled. “Tighten that pussy of yours around me. Grip my cock with that tiny little hole. Fuck!” With a beastly moan, similar to some of the sounds I’d heard the men make in battle, Canis thrust one final time, filling me with his seed.

The full weight of his body on mine was followed by another soft kiss to my cheek. “The minute I first saw you,” he said huskily, “I knew you would be mine. I knew I would claim you. What I didn’t know was how you would claim me as well. How you would claim each one of us.”

I closed my eyes as I tried to regain my breath and allowed Canis’ words to sink in.

Claim me.

Claim him.

Claim them.

CHAPTER 6



Still curled in Canis' arms, I took a deep breath and finally asked what I had dared not earlier.

"Can you tell me about the curse?"

I could feel his body stiffen. He started to pull away. I held on to the arm wrapped around my waist. "Please don't. I want to know."

"It is not only my story to tell. If you are to be told, my brothers must agree."

Wrapping me in furs, he lifted me high. We moved out of the cave closer to the fire. I smiled shyly as Beo handed me a carved wooden cup with some warm broth. The fur slipped off my shoulder, exposing my upper body to their gazes, but I found I was not embarrassed or uncomfortable. It felt natural to be sitting before these men in my own skin as we shared a meal before the fire.

"She wants to know," said Canis. The others nodded, not needing more.

Beo stroked the backs of his knuckles down my cheek. "Are you sure, my little Red? It may change your opinion of those who raised you...of your own kind."

I thought of my grandmother and the other elders who forced their selfish moral idea of what was good and just on the villagers. I then thought of the mother I'd never known. The mother who'd fought against those ideas.

"Yes, I'm sure."

Beo nodded. They then all turned to Grimm.

His amber eyes seemed lit with sadness as he started to speak. “When the dark force first came, the village was unprepared. We tried to fight them off with fire and scythes. Nothing worked. It was obvious we were fighting some kind of evil magic. The elders said they had found a book filled with ancient wisdom which had a way to repel the dark force. They needed six men.”

“Six? I was told there were only five wolves,” I interrupted.

Clearing his throat, Rood responded softly. “One did not survive the transition.”

Lowering my eyes, I resolved to stay silent till they had finished their tale.

“So we did our duty and volunteered. The elders told us only that it would be dark magic to fight dark magic. At first it was magnificent. We all felt more powerful than we had ever before in our lives. We could see and hear for far distances. Run to the horizon and back without tiring. It was as if you were one with both the Earth and the beasts. That time when the dark force came, we were ready. It is hard to describe what happens when we fight them. It is as if the wolf in our beings takes completely over and the small part of our soul and conscience which is still human never fully comprehends.” Grimm stopped speaking and just stared into the fire.

“When we returned to the village, the gates of the wall were barred to us,” continued Beo. “It was then we learned we had been betrayed.”

“Would no one help or speak to you?” I asked angrily.

“Not at the village. Anyone we approached ran screaming from us. Anytime we tried to leave this realm, to leave the forest and the village behind, it felt as if our blood was on fire. The pain excruciating.”

“So here we have stayed. Forced by some cursed instinct to protect those who have betrayed us. Unable to return to our human form and unable to leave to learn why,” finished Canis.

“But I see you in your human form,” I offered.

“We know. Until you, we were the only ones who saw one another for our true selves. We cannot explain why you see us in our human form.”

“Perhaps the forest witch could?” offered Helm.

“No, my brother. It is too dangerous,” snapped Grimm.

“Who is the forest witch?” I asked eagerly.

“An old woman who lives on the edge of the forest in a protected glen just past the waterfalls. The whispers in the forest are that she has been around since before the trees and lakes formed. I have even heard tales that Merlin was an apprentice to her. She is extremely powerful. If anyone could break the enchantment, she could,” explained Helm.

“Then why have you not asked her?”

There was a chance of a cure for them all.

I wasn't sure what the future would hold but some small light lit within my breast at the thought of them returning to human form and then perhaps we could...we all could...no, I wouldn't think on it. No one in the village would ever accept such a scandalous arrangement as one woman with five men. Still. If we could overcome such a dangerous and powerful curse, would we really care what others said? As my thoughts spun and twirled in different directions, I realized I had been thinking of the men and myself as a *we*. When did we become a *we*? Is that what I wanted? Giving myself a mental shake, I pushed all thoughts of a future out of my mind. There may never be a future for me as human and them as enchanted beasts unless I could figure out a way to break the curse. The forest witch must be the solution.

“We have,” said Beo.

My heart sank.

Seeing my obvious disappointment, Beo gave me a tender stroke on the cheek. “You see, the witch is powerful enough to break the spell, but what then? Who will protect the village from the dark force?”

“You have been doing so for hundreds of years!” I cried out belligerently. “Let someone else volunteer!”

“And would you condemn them to our same fate?” asked Rood, as always his voice quiet and low. “Would you have us make that decision? To put our own needs ahead of those of another soul?”

Helm took a pull from the flagon of wine at his side, wiping his mouth he shook his head in sorrow. “No, Red, we have accepted our fates and have done our duty with honor and conviction. We will not tarnish that with such a selfish, ignoble deed no matter how much the injustice and anger may eat at our hearts.”

“Still, I—”

“This is none of your concern, Red,” Grimm sternly replied.

Grimm’s reply stung. Once again, I was reminded that they were the pack, the enchanted beasts who had fought time and time again side by side, becoming brothers if not in blood then in deed. While I? I was the village’s offering. The sacrifice. Their reward.

Despite their possible anger, I refused to be brushed aside so easily.

“Well fine. What about the villagers? It has been several hundred years. Perhaps they have learned some new knowledge which could free you? I’m certain if they were told that you are still human and not the enchanted beasts they think you to be, they would help.”

“The answer is no, Red. This is our fate. We accepted it long ago. Now it is time you slept,” said Grimm sternly.

Disgruntled, I stood up. Wrapping the furs around me, I stomped back into the cave. Grabbing some furs from the other piles, I created my own bed, not willing to sleep nestled against one of the wolves like I had grown accustomed. This was not right. The villagers were living their lives, safe in the protection the wolves were offering, unaware of the sacrifice these men were still making for them. It was not right. I

resolved to go in search of the forest witch myself. Perhaps if she heard an appeal from a woman on the wolves' behalf, she could think of something to help that would not require the sacrifice of another innocent.

The thought of venturing into the vast forest on my own to find a magical witch did give me pause. If I were to be taken over by the dark force again, there would be hell to pay with the men...that is, if I survived the encounter. No, seeing the witch would be my last resort. I would go to the village first. I would plead with the elders. My grandmother might be deaf to my plight but she wasn't the only one who wielded power in the village. I would head out tomorrow at my first opportunity. I would make them listen to me. I had to at least try.

* * *

A TWIG SNAPPED.

I froze, not daring to breathe.

Nothing. All was still.

I took another hesitant step. Then another.

When I was far away from the den, I stopped to put on the simple skirt, blouse and leather slippers the wolves had provided for me. Wrapping myself in my red cloak, I drew up the hood as protection against the frosty morning air. Rubbing my numb hands together, I took a moment to get my bearings, then headed in the direction I thought led to the village. It was so silly really. It had come to me last night. The wolves couldn't approach the villagers for help because all they saw were their beast forms. But I could! I would simply tell the elders that the men still lived inside the beasts. I would impress upon them the correct thing to do was to break the curse. The thought of my grandmother's reaction when I returned sent a shiver down my body which had nothing to do with the chilled air. There was no doubt in my mind she'd sent me away with the hope I would never return. Well, this wasn't about her. This was about righting an injustice. Somehow, somewhere, I felt as though my mother would be proud of me.

I continued to walk for what felt like hours. The warm yellow glow of the sun could be seen peeking through the treetops, but none of its warmth reached the forest floor below. My soft leather slippers were becoming tattered and torn, offering little protection from the rocks and branches littered about.

Beginning to doubt I had chosen the correct direction, I crawled atop a high boulder and looked around. The dark, gnarled branches of the trees seemed to move and shift. It was probably the wind, and yet...it wasn't just the branches. The trunks of the trees grew wider, closer to one another. Slowly the small glimmer of sunshine through the trees was blocked out. It was as if the trees were closing in on me.

The trees were moving!

With my heart in my throat, I tried to will my body to move. As I searched below for a soft spot to jump off the rock, a dark mist began to slither and swirl across the ground. Black with streaks of sickening green, the mist became thicker.

The dark force.

The air was filled with a foul stench as the mist turned into a thick smoke. Swirling and churning around the rock. Pulsing and writhing, the forest echoed with a horrifying hissing sound as the dark force crept closer...became stronger. I could feel its insidious effect on me. My lungs started to seize. Looking down at my hands, I could see the faint blue outlines of the veins beneath my pale skin start to turn a bright glowing green. The dark force was invading my body. Death would soon follow. I couldn't suppress a gasp of pained regret and horror for what was to come. Despite the protection of the wolves, there were times when the dark force took a villager. When they were found, their bodies were covered in green bulging veins. Their faces frozen in twisted pain. I closed my eyes and tried to keep the evil out with good.

My only thought was of the wolves. They may be gruff and stern and even frightening at times, but all I remembered at this moment was the feeling of having their strong arms about me, of feeling safe and warm and protected. As death

claimed me, I would cling to that thought. Grasp it tight within my mind. The vision of me nestled inside a cocoon of warm furs with my five wolf protectors leaning over me.

Just as I was feeling the cold touch of the dark force mist around my ankles, there was a hellish roar.

Beo broke into the clearing. Large and powerful in his wolf form. I knew it was him from the dark gray color of his pelt and the wide set of his shoulders. His amber eyes pierced the clearing till they alighted on me. Seeing the dark force surrounding me, he growled. The low rumbling sound made the very earth vibrate. His dark lips curled back, baring sharp white teeth. I could see the sinews in his body curl and bunch right before he pounced into the fray. The dark force swirled around Beo's neck as his jaws opened on another deafening roar. Beo flipped over and over. With each powerful swipe of his paw, the smoke seemed to break apart and dissipate. Till finally, there was nothing left.

Over my harsh breathing, I heard the call of a bird. I hadn't realized till this moment how silent the forest had become the moment the dark force crept below me.

Turning my gaze back to the forest floor, Beo was once again a man.

A tall, powerful, very angry man.

Stretching my hands before me in a feeble placating gesture, I tried to explain. "I wanted to help. The villagers need to know that, inside, you are still men."

"That is not your decision to make," he ground out as he stormed toward me. "You broke the sacred vow of the blood moon sacrifice."

"I didn't mean to. I promise. I was not trying to run away."

"That doesn't matter. We would have every right to tear through your village and devour each and every human."

"Please! Don't do that! Please! Don't punish them. Punish me," I begged. While I may have never been shown much love or care by many of the villagers, there were still innocent children and families behind those walls.

“Then come down here and face your punishment.”

Still perched on the boulder, I towered over Beo. Yet I knew the moment my feet touched the earth, the top of my head would barely reach his shoulder. Beo was the one wolf who had yet to claim me. Knowing how primal and intense those other experiences had been, I was terrified what it would be like when one of them was as angry as Beo was with me now. What I had done was far worse than refusing to eat the meal they provided, so I knew my punishment would also be far worse.

“I...I...”

“Red, I am losing patience.”

“Please, I...”

Before I could finish, Beo took a threatening step toward me. Grabbing me by the lower legs, he flung me over his shoulder and began to storm off deeper into the forest.

“You refusing to obey my command immediately will now add to the severity of your punishment.”

I could only whimper. A curtain of red curls obstructed my view as I tried to swallow the dizzying nausea caused by his shoulder pressing deeply into my stomach. He did not carry me far. As he placed me upright, my feet sank into the soft earth. Looking around, I could see we were in some sort of grotto. The bright green leaves on the trees seemed to glow as sunlight shone through them. There was a small spring, its bank covered with purple and white flowers. The ground near the spring was soft with moss and leaves.

“Take off those things.”

Wanting to show I was being obedient, I quickly undid the clasp at my throat and placed the crimson cloak over a nearby log.

“Everything, Red.”

My hands covered my stomach in a protective gesture. “Everything?” I asked as I tried to swallow past the dryness in my mouth.

“Everything,” he repeated, hands on his hips.

“But, I’ll be...I’ll be...”

“Naked. Yes. Now do as I command.”

Knowing I had no choice, I tearfully worked the buttons of my blouse. I knew if I hesitated, he would probably just rip the fabric off me and they were the only items of clothing I had. With no underthings, I made quick work of it and soon stood bare before him. Using my arms and hands, I tried to cover my breasts and core. I spared a glance at him through my lowered lashes. His bare chest still glistened with sweat from his earlier exertions. The fur kilt covering his hips was raised in front. I trembled knowing what was awakening beneath it. Training his golden eyes on me, he reached above him and tore down a branch from the nearby birch tree. Methodically, he stripped the branch of all its leaves. My mouth fell open when he swiped the thin branch against his own palm. It made a horrible cracking sound.

Using his free hand, he released the furs around his hips. As the pelts fell to the ground, his cock sprang free. His massive rod was thick and long, nestled in black curling hair.

“Please, I’m sorry.”

“You will be. On your knees.”

Choking back a sob, I hesitated.

He cracked the birch rod against his palm and barked, “On your knees.”

I fell to the ground.

“Now, I want you to crawl to me.”

Swallowing my humiliation, I placed one hand forward then slid my knee over the cool damp moss. Keeping my head low, I crawled on the forest floor till I was at Beo’s feet. Pushing my hair from my eyes, I looked up. All I could see was his large shaft as it bobbed between his legs.

Beo leaned down and ruthlessly grabbed my hair. Ignoring my cries, he pulled me forward till my head was between his calves. His legs tightened around my neck.

Terrified, I tried to pull back, but his legs squeezed my throat, cutting off my air. I was forced to relent and stay prone on my knees with my head locked between his legs.

There was no warning.

Only a soft swishing sound.

Then the painful crack of the branch across my bare bottom.

I screamed in shock and pain. Another crack landed across my vulnerable skin.

“Stop! Stop!” I screeched as I clawed at his calves, trying to free my head.

His only response was to apply several more swipes of the switch. Each one exploded like fire across my skin. My knees slipped in the moss and mud as I twisted my hips and kicked my legs. Each time I struggled, he would tighten his legs, cutting off my breath.

Still the punishment did not stop.

My own cries drowned out the warning swoosh of the switch so I had no way of knowing when it would strike my flesh. The moment it did, a thousand hot pinpricks would radiate across my bottom. In my agony, I would clench my cheeks together which only heightened the pain.

“Why are you being punished, Red?”

I could only keen and wail.

Beo struck me several more times, the tip of the branch flicking at the sensitive skin on the backs of my thighs.

“Why are you being punished?” he repeated.

“I was bad. I was bad,” I cried.

My hair was a tangled mess over my eyes and down my shoulders. Locks stuck to my cheeks as they grew wet from my tears. My hands and Beo’s legs were covered in mud from my struggles. I’m sure if I looked, I would see most of my body was covered in dirt.

Everything throbbed and burned. The cool air of the early morning only emphasized the heat radiating off my punished bottom.

After a torturous eternity, his legs opened. I fell to the ground. My tear-streaked cheek rested on the soft moss.

“Get up and crawl over to that log and bend your body over your cloak.”

Each movement of my knees forward stretched the skin of my bottom, bringing a fresh wave of heated pain. Unable to stifle my groans, I moved slowly to do his bidding. When I reached the log, I flung my body over the soft, heavy fabric of my cloak, seeking the warmth and comfort it could provide if only by cushioning me from the harsh bark of the tree.

Through my heavy breathing, I could hear Beo’s heavy footfall behind me. Still, I kept my eyes closed. There was a harsh thud. Looking over my shoulder, I could see his large, powerful form kneeling behind me.

“Your punishment is not over, lass.”

“Please. I’ve learned my lesson,” I whimpered.

“No. I don’t believe you have. But when I’m done with you, I know you will think twice before disobeying one of us again.”

A harsh hiss escaped my lips the moment his rough hands clasped my bottom cheeks. I reached back weakly to try and swat his hands away.

“Arms up front. Don’t make me tie you up.”

With no other choice before me, I obeyed.

His hands pried open my bottom cheeks. Memories of Helm doing the same at the hot springs flooded my mind.

Oh God. I knew what was coming.

“Stop! Not there. I couldn’t bear it.”

I cringed when I felt a glob of spit land on my bare skin above the cleft of my bottom. I could feel it slide to cover my

quivering puckered hole. Then felt the pressure of his cock as he tried to force his way into my resisting opening.

“Don’t! It hurts!”

Beo grunted over me as he placed his hands on my lower back. Pushing down, he forced my hips back, my bottom up. The small movement gave him the access he needed. He thrust harder, breaking through my tight, muscled ring to plunge deep inside my bottom. Screaming in pain, I bit down on a mouthful of fabric as my insides felt torn and scraped. He was not sliding in as Helm did, but pushing in. Inch by forced inch. My stomach clenched as his large shaft thrust inside. The pressure and discomfort increased.

“Bad girls get their asses fucked dry,” he ground out near my ear as he increased the pace of his thrusts.

“You’re tearing me apart,” I cried. The pain of his birch switching was nothing compared to the feel of his cock deep up my bottom.

“Have you learned your lesson?”

“Yes! Yes! Please!”

His thrusts slowed. Reaching under me, he grasped both of my breasts. Pulling me upright till my back was flush with his front, he caressed my breasts, teasing and pinching my nipples.

“Then I will let my little Red snatch some pleasure from the jaws of pain,” he whispered against my neck before scraping his teeth along the sensitive skin below my ear.

His right hand shifted down my body to between my legs. Moving his middle finger in soft swirls around my nub, I could feel a building sensation. Still there was the agonizing pressure in my bottom, but now my body seemed to hum and writhe from the duality of pain and pleasure warring inside of me.

“Soon you will know what it feels like to take our cocks in each of your holes at once. Shall I give you a taste of that now?”

Lost in my own body, my head fell back on his shoulder as I moaned my assent.

Beo thrust one thick finger inside my pussy as he pulled his cock almost free of my bottom before ruthlessly shoving it back inside.

Reaching my arms back, my fingers dug into his dark waves. Fisting my hands in his hair, I pulled his head closer to my neck, wanting to feel the threat of his warm breath as he violently fucked me.

His finger moved inside my pussy as his cock pounded into me from behind. The wetness between my legs dripped lower and coated the base of his cock, easing his way.

“Cum, Red. Cum now.”

In this, I obeyed him willingly. The scream of my release echoed across the forest grotto.

Beo forced my body forward over the log. Pressing his hands onto my back, he growled as he thrust into my bottom several more times before finding his own release.

Afterward, he lifted me to my feet by my shoulders. Looking down, I could see muddied hand prints over my breasts and stomach. My pale skin was covered in red scrapes and mud from his fierce claiming. Carrying me in his arms, he walked over to the small spring. Lowering to his knees, he held me aloft and allowed the cool water to flow over my heated and bruised skin.

It was not until sometime later that he carried me back to the den to face the rest of the pack.

CHAPTER 7



I stood on shaky legs before the pack. I was terrified of more discipline, but even more so of upsetting them. That had not been my intention when I had left for the village. I'd simply wanted to help. These men deserved so much more than to live as outcasts in the forest to fight the dark force forever. No one should endure a curse for the sake of others, but especially not men as good as these men. Through all their brute strength, aggressive behavior, and their stern and unyielding hand, I had seen the decency. Far more than I ever had among the villagers.

"I had to fight off the dark force," Beo added as he finished telling the story. "Red would have been killed had I not arrived when I did. Luckily, the dark force was still weak from yesterday's battle, or I wouldn't have been able to fight it off on my own."

"Do you have any idea the risk you put yourself in?" Grimm asked with crossed arms.

I nodded. "I'm sorry," I said as all angry eyes settled on me.

"She's been punished," Beo said. "I made sure she will think twice before wandering off into the woods without us."

"Maybe she needs to be punished by each one of us to make sure of it," Rood said as he glared at me. "Have you no idea how dangerous this forest is? We can't protect you if you leave us as we sleep! Have you any idea what we thought when we awoke to find you gone?"

“And we had to separate as a pack to search for you. That put each one of us at risk. If the dark force hadn’t been weak, Beo...” Canis said as he swallowed back his anger. “We don’t separate as a pack, and never have before you.”

“I just...well, after the story you told me, I felt the villagers needed to know the truth. You all deserve so much more. I wanted to help.” I looked down at my feet in shame. “If you all want to punish me individually, I would understand.”

I was prepared to take more punishment if it would mean having them all stop looking at me with anger and disappointment in their eyes. Anything but the looks. I hadn’t meant to frighten them, and I most certainly hadn’t intended to put Beo or anyone else at risk with my idea.

“Your penance has been paid with Beo,” Grimm announced as he approached me and took hold of both of my arms. He stared into my eyes, inches from my face. “Your life is at risk as long as you are in this forest. Don’t think we don’t know this. We don’t take that fact lightly. But allow us to protect you while you are here. Do you understand? No more running off. Are we clear?”

I nodded, feeling the tight ball of anticipation in my stomach release. “Yes. I won’t do it again.” I looked around Grimm’s broad frame at the other men, and added, “Please forgive me. Believe me when I say that I meant no harm to any of you. I just didn’t think it all the way through before I acted.”

Grimm gave a small smile. “Good.” He pulled away and looked at all the men and then back at me. “We have the smoked deer that we have been working on almost ready. Our friends, the huntsmen, left us some rabbit stew that Snow made for us. Let us go about our chores today, and then we can all have an early feast in celebration of yesterday’s victory and Beo’s successful fight today.”

* * *

I WOULDN'T EXACTLY SAY that I was a good cook, but I knew the basics around a kitchen. My baking skills were in need of improving, and I struggled sometimes at being creative with what meager food items I often had. But I knew enough about cooking to know that something was off about the stew the minute Helm removed the lid of the pot.

The slightly pungent odor had all the men sniffing at the pot in disgust.

“What is it?” Rood asked.

“I told you,” Grimm said, sniffing it again. “The huntsmen left it while we were all out searching for Red. There was a note that said Snow made her famous rabbit stew and to enjoy.” Grimm reached for a spoon and began dishing up the thick and slimy-looking matter into the bowls stacked up beside the boiling stew.

As the clumpy globs of meat fell into the bowl, Canis said, “It’s gray. The stew is gray.”

“It smells like death,” Beo added.

Feeling as if I needed to defend Snow for her kind gift, I spoke up. “I’m sure it tastes much better than it looks and smells.” I tried to soften my face and not appear as if the smell bothered me in the slightest. “You all have a heightened sense of smell anyway. I’m sure it’s just a delicious spice that was used that isn’t agreeing with you all.”

Grimm dished up the rest of the stew, and as we all sat with our bowls in our hands, I noticed all the men looking at me to take the first bite. Hoping that Snow knew what she was doing, and that my defense of her was all true, I took a heaping spoonful and shoved it into my mouth.

I was wrong. Snow did not know what she was doing.

Not only did the stew smell like death, it tasted like it.

But trying not to be rude, and frankly not wanting to suffer in this misery alone, I faked a smile and spoke with a mouthful of hell. “Tastes like rabbit stew.”

Having my approval, the men all dove into their stew and hungrily shoved in just as equally large, if not larger, mouthfuls as I did. The looks of utter disgust on their faces was enough for me to laugh out loud and spew the remaining stew in my mouth all over the fire blazing before me.

“Are the huntsmen trying to kill us?” Helm asked. He spit his mouthful back into his bowl.

“If this is how Snow cooks, I pity the seven men,” Rood added as he too spit what was in his mouth back where it had come from.

No one swallowed the food, and all tossed the contents of their full bowls back into the pot it had boiled in. Feeling as if I couldn’t defend Snow any longer, I did the same.

“Well, at least we have the deer,” Canis said. “We have a full jug of ale as well.” He moved to the cave to fetch the alternate meal for the evening.

“We are going to need every drop of that ale to wash away this taste,” Grimm said. “I don’t know if I want to kick the huntsmens’ arses for this or pity them.”

“I say we do both,” Rood said with a small chuckle.

Deer and ale sounded perfect, but anything besides the stew would be. Thanks to Snow, I now felt a whole new respect for my level of cooking. And I was fairly certain that nothing I could ever make for these men would ever be worse than this awful rabbit stew. I made a mental note to thank Snow if I were to ever meet her in person. She’d just made my job in pleasing the men with my cooking all the easier. If any of them ever complained or disliked a meal of mine, I would simply remind them of Snow’s famous rabbit stew.

CHAPTER 8



*M*y mind was hazy, but my body hummed. I felt alive and free, and maybe for the first time in my life, truly happy. Laughter, jokes, tales of a better time, and overall joy filled the camp as we finished our deer and drank the last of the ale. It was hard for me to imagine that I once feared for my life around these men. That I had once believed my life to be cast in the worst type of darkness imaginable being their sacrifice. So hard to believe that all had changed in such a short time. I almost felt...I almost felt as if I were somehow becoming part of the pack. Even if it was in feeling alone.

“You appear lost in thought, Red,” Grimm said as he ran his hand down the back of my head.

I turned my head to look at him and smiled, realizing I’d been staring into the fire while my mind churned. “I guess I was.”

“What’s on your mind?” Beo asked.

I shrugged, but my smile grew. “I feel like I’m becoming one of you. Like I belong. For the first time in my life, I truly feel as if I belong.”

“We’re wolves,” Helm said with a chuckle.

“I know. But I still feel it,” I said as I stood on unsteady legs.

With the help of the ale giving me courage, and my overwhelming sense of freedom, I shed my clothes as I stood before the fire. I didn’t care that the men looked on as I did so. I didn’t care that I was drunk again and clearly acting as a lady

shouldn't. I wanted to be wild and have full abandon. I wanted to be animalistic like these men I sat with. I wanted to feel alive as the blood pulsed through my veins.

Fully naked, tilting my head back and staring up at the sky, I howled. I howled as loud as I could and ignored the laughter it caused from the men. In fact, I didn't care that the men were all finding me amusing. Good. Let me amuse them. Let me give some joy to these men who were so deserving of more than simply being cursed, betrayed outcasts, and constant warriors forever cast out in a dark world.

"I think the girl has had too much ale," Rood said between bouts of laughter.

I ignored his comment and began swaying my body to the beat of music only I could hear. Lifting my arms and gracefully moving them through the smoke in the air, I began to dance. I danced without a care in the world around the fire while I knew the five men—the wolves—watched. I allowed my spirit to take over. I allowed everything bad in my life to escape freely from my fingertips and my toes as I danced under the moonlight. I danced away the hatred of my grandmother, the hatred of the village. I danced away my fear of the unknown, having faith that all would be fine. I simply danced.

None of the men tried to stop me, and allowed me to act as wild and foolish as I desired. They laughed, watched, and chatted lightly in the background, but not one tried to make me stop or shame me into feeling I should. I was naked, moving about without a care in the world, and it was the best feeling I could remember ever having. I danced until my legs decided they had had enough, and I collapsed back where I had been sitting, breathless and happy.

Grimm pulled me close to him and wrapped his arms around me. "You give us such pleasure, Red."

"Good," I said, winded. "I want that for all of you. Pleasure."

"We want that for you as well," Canis said, nodding at all the men as if that was a cue of some sort. "And as you were

dancing about, we came up with the best way to give that pleasure to you.”

I must have been sitting there in shock because Helm approached and said, “What big eyes you have, Red. Are you afraid?” His wicked smile should have been a warning that maybe I shouldn’t have been sitting before them all completely nude. The temptation would be too great. They were still cursed as savage beasts and would still act on their primal need.

“There is nothing to be scared of,” Beo said as he too approached and took me by the hand.

Grimm’s arm around me shifted, and he assisted me up to standing as he did so. All the men then led me toward the depths of the cave. My body instantly responded to a flurry of all the wicked thoughts of what these men would do to me. A small droplet of arousal dripped down my thigh as we walked. There would be no denying the power these men had over me.

“Lay down on the fur,” Grimm ordered as both he and Beo helped guide me down to a pelt blanket on the thatched floor.

The rest of the men gathered in a circle around me and knelt on furs of their own. Beo moved toward the outer circle and knelt like the others as Grimm positioned himself between my legs. Lifting my legs at the knees and spreading me wide, he made sure my pussy was on full display for not only him, but for every man around me. The position reminded me of women giving birth. The midwife would always spread the women as wide as their legs would go to make room for the baby coming. But I had no baby coming, and this position seemed unnecessary if they were all simply going to claim me again. I didn’t need to have my legs spread this wide to welcome the men and their cocks.

“It’s time we feast on something far better than that awful rabbit stew,” Grimm said as he lowered himself to where his face was only inches from my exposed sex. I tried to close my legs in embarrassment, but Grimm gripped tightly and held them in place. “No, Red. Keep your legs open wide, or we will

be forced to spank them raw if you refuse. Every man wants to see your pussy as we each take turns licking you.”

I glanced at all the men in surprise. “Lick me?”

“Yes, Red. We plan to devour this pussy of yours with our tongues.”

“Tongues?” I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. Each one of them?

“Oh yes. All the better to eat you with.”

Not wasting another moment, Grimm buried his face into the folds of my sex. The tip of his tongue circled around my sensitive bud and then dipped into the hole that had only been touched by finger or cock before. Unsure of the sensations, and feeling a strong sense of humiliation at having a man lick the most intimate part of my body, I tried to close my legs again.

Grimm looked up from his eating and said, “I warned you.” He then slapped each of my inner thighs harshly. The biting sting had me crying out, but also spreading my legs as wide as they were before. “Don’t make me spank these creamy and delicious thighs again.”

He continued on with the licking, tasting every inch of my pussy. I shouldn’t have liked such a wicked act, but I did. I couldn’t help the fact that I did. With every flick of his tongue, I began meeting his mouth by raising my hips slightly. I wanted more. I desperately wanted more.

“Take your last lick, Grimm. The rest of us are anxious to take a taste of that feast as well,” Helm said as I saw him crawling toward me.

With a deep growl, Grimm swiped his tongue from the bottom of my pussy all the way to the top, and then sat up. He looked at me with a devilish grin as he wiped his mouth and crawled back to join the others in the circle.

Helm positioned himself where Grimm had just been. As a preemptive warning, he swatted the insides of my thighs. “Keep these open nice and wide for me. It’s my turn to take a taste.”

Just as Grimm had done, Helm placed his lips on my pussy and began licking and kissing a trail over every inch of silken flesh. A deep inferno ignited inside of me, and I couldn't resist arching my back and moaning as wave after wave of ecstasy washed over me.

Before the last wave of pleasure could vanish, Helm moved out of the way for Rood. His act was no different from the others as he lapped at my juices like he was forever parched, never to have his thirst quenched. He darted his tongue into my opening in a rhythmic motion that had me thrusting my hips up and down in the same cadence. The intensity of nonstop attention to my quivering pussy was almost becoming too much to bear. My moans were slowly morphing into screams that bounced off the rock walls as my pleasure grew to epic proportions.

Canis was next as he spread my legs even wider and then put his hands under my ass, lifting me slightly. With my bottom upturned at an angle, Canis decided to not only lick my pussy, but to move his tongue to my tight, puckered hole. Circling my anus in wicked and taboo little swirls, his tongue was my undoing. I screamed out and allowed another surge of electricity to sizzle through my core. The intensity of the pulsating waves forced me to try to close my legs to alleviate some of the feelings in fear that I could truly pass out from too much pleasure. The act had consequences, however, because Canis spread my thighs again and delivered a volley of spanks on each thigh as I cried out, but also whimpered in delight. My body hungered for the pain to offset all the intense pleasure that was flooding in. I welcomed the searing heat with every delivered slap of Canis' hand.

“Keep those legs open. There's still one more who wants a chance to lap at this pussy of yours,” Canis said as he moved out of the way and Beo moved in.

“The last taste is always the best,” Beo growled as he lowered his head to my throbbing mound.

But instead of licking right away as the others had done, Beo began to nibble all around the sensitive flesh. I bucked

and hissed as the tantalizing pain gave me the much needed change I had been wanting.

When my hips lifted too high, Beo swatted my mound hard. “Remain still, my Red. It would be a shame to spank this pussy of yours raw.”

Juices uncontrollably squirted from my body and covered Beo’s face as he chuckled and raised his head enough to wipe at the moisture.

“Such a dirty girl you are. I see you like pain just as much as pleasure.”

He went back to his work at devouring my pussy completely. With every bite he gave, he followed with a lick. Bite, lick, bite, lick. It all became so intense that I screamed out again. Beads of sweat trickled down my back as I stared up at the ceiling of the cave and finally released a howl almost as primal and animalistic as the ones belonging to the wolves.

“Yes, there’s our girl,” Beo praised. “Her body responds so well to us.”

“Yes,” I heard them all agree. Though at this point, their voices all seemed to blend together.

My legs collapsed and I could do nothing more than lie on my back panting for air. Every single muscle in my body felt as if it had been worked to the extreme even though I had done nothing but lie in the same place the entire time. I couldn’t move, nor was I even going to try. Fortunately, I didn’t have to because I felt the weight of a fur being placed over my quivering body. A cup of water was brought to my lips as the back of my head was lifted to aid me in drinking. A gentle kiss was placed on the top of my head. I closed my eyes as I heard and felt the men circling around me to sleep. Each one of them moved in close, and I could feel parts of their bodies touching mine. I was cocooned with them, safe, protected, forever part of their pack.

Part of their pack.

I would never leave them. Never. I wanted to feel this way for the rest of eternity.

I drifted off to sleep as I heard them all talking softly to each other. Their low voices acted as a soft lullaby as my satiated body succumbed to complete darkness.

CHAPTER 9



I watched them all sleep. Each one of them. Grimm, Helm, Rood, Canis, and Beo. My wolves. Yes, they were mine. I couldn't allow this injustice to continue. Something had to be done. They deserved so much more than sleeping on the floor in a dank cave, cast out from society.

Trying to reach the village yesterday was foolish and had warranted me a punishment I wouldn't soon forget, but if I had to do it all over again, I would. Maybe the men had accepted their fates, but I could not. Though after truly considering it, I understood there really wasn't anything the villagers could do.

But what about the forest witch?

The men had said it themselves; she was powerful enough to break the curse. And though the men felt a duty to protect the village from the dark force and didn't want to curse any others to become wolves, I truly believed that something could be done. There had to be another way to fight off the dark force. If the forest witch was so powerful, then why couldn't she destroy the dark force herself?

Knowing I would surely suffer the consequences when the men woke from their slumber to find me gone again, I decided it was a sacrifice I was willing to make.

Tiptoeing out of the cave, I took off at a sprint the minute I was a few yards away. If the men did wake up, I wanted to be far gone. I was fairly certain I knew where the waterfalls the men spoke of were, and finding a glen would be easy enough once there. If I ran quick enough, I would surely be there

before dawn. And hopefully, my fast running would keep the dark force at bay. But even if I were to perish by the dark force, at least I would have died trying to protect the men I had grown to...love.

It was harder to navigate through the forest without the full morning light to guide the way. I stopped occasionally to listen for any sound of immense running water. I felt that the waterfalls would be easy to find on sound alone.

After running for awhile, feeling uncertain I was even running in the right direction, I paused to catch my breath. I remained as still as I could, straining to hear if there was any sign of a waterfall nearby. The sound of movement in the distance had me turning to see what had caused it. The dark force. The dark force had found me and would finish off what it had intended to do to begin with. Only this time, it wouldn't be weak from recently losing a battle with the wolves. I closed my eyes and waited for the stench and the hissing sound to commence, but was surprised when I heard something entirely different.

"She's over here," a voice called out. "I see her over here." Rood emerged from the forest with fury in his eyes.

The rest of the men quickly joined him with just as much anger sizzling around them. For a moment, I actually wished for the dark force. At least then, my pain would be quick. By the looks of these men, mercy was not in my future.

"What part of *do not leave the den* do you not understand?" Grimm hissed between clenched teeth.

Each man walked slowly toward me, and for a split second, I considered running. The fact that I knew they would catch me if I even tried, and that it would only make my situation worse, kept my feet rooted in place.

"I'm sorry," I said as they all finally reached me and glared at me with such venom in their expressions. I hated seeing them all this mad. No, they were beyond mad. They were furious.

“You better have a good answer as to why you would leave us again, because I am doing everything I can to not whip off my belt and give you a *real* whipping you will never forget,” Canis said, his voice deepening with every syllable he spoke.

I opened my mouth to speak, but fear paralyzed my vocal chords.

“Speak!” Helm demanded, moving forward and taking hold of my arm and shaking me slightly. “What reason do you have for running off again into the woods while we slept? Why would you do such a thing?”

“Had I not taught you a lesson the first time?” Beo asked. “I obviously was not harsh enough to get my point across.”

“I...” Swallowing hard, and trying to not focus on any of their eyes, I stuttered out an excuse the best I could. “I...I left to find the...forest witch. I know you all said no, but you all have to understand that though you may have accepted your fates, I have not! I don’t want to give up. I don’t want you all to forever be cursed. Maybe you all can accept defeat, but I can’t!”

“It’s not admitting defeat,” Grimm shot back.

“But it is! You all claim to be mighty warriors, and you are when fighting the dark force. But you all have lost the battle with fate. Why can’t you fight with the same level of ferocity when it comes to *you* as you do when it comes to others?”

“We don’t expect you to understand,” Beo said. “But we do expect obedience when we issue an order. A direct order.”

“But you can’t expect me to—”

“What we *expect* is to be obeyed,” Rood nearly growled out. “We *expect* submission. Especially when your life is at stake.”

“Yes, that is exactly what we need to teach you,” Grimm said, looking at each of the men, silently discussing my upcoming punishment with their eyes and expressions only. “Submission. It’s about time we truly teach you what submission is all about.”

Helm—whose hand was still wrapped around my arm—pushed me down to the ground. “Kneel.”

Yanking me back up, he said, “Wait. Remove all of your clothes first.”

Glancing quickly at the other men, but already knowing there would be no forgiveness from any of them until I paid for my crime, I quickly shed my clothes and cast them to the side. Helm then grabbed me by the arm and pushed me toward the ground.

I kneeled before him and watched him move the draped fur covering his already hard cock. I had been in this position before and already knew what would be expected of me.

“Shouldn’t we beat her first?” Beo asked. “I’m not sure this idea is severe enough for her to truly learn her lesson.”

“She likes pain. It makes her little cunt wet,” Canis said. “But shame...shame and humiliation will give her the submission we want to teach.”

As Helm pressed his cock into my mouth, I heard Grimm say, “Make quick work of it men. I don’t want to be here for much longer. I’m not in the mood for a battle with the dark force, nor an encounter with the forest witch.”

Helm did exactly that. In and out, he thrust his cock into my mouth. He didn’t pause in the slightest when I gagged as the head of his dick pressed against the back of my throat. With aggressive thrusts, he emitted a growl as he pulled out and released his seed on my neck. I looked down and went to wipe off the milky liquid, but he was quick to grab my hand.

“No,” he said. “You will wear my seed for the rest of the day. Naked. You will wear all of our seed and feel the shame of your actions. Let this be a reminder of how remorseful you should be.”

Beo approached next and repeated the exact same actions as Helm, forcibly jamming his dick in and out of my mouth until he too spewed next to Helm’s cum.

Each man took his turn, and one by one released his cum upon me next to where the previous man’s seed had been

deposited. They had formed a necklace of sorts with their semen, and with every emission, I did feel shame. I did feel humiliation. But more importantly, I did feel submissive as they had hoped would be the outcome.

Kneeling in the dirt, soiled with their bodily fluid, I licked my bruised lips caused from the claiming of my face and whispered, "I'm sorry. I truly am. I want to help so desperately."

Rood surprised me when he knelt down in front of me and held my chin in his hand. "We can't allow you to risk your life for us, Red. Our job is to protect. Not to harm."

"We've been selfish in keeping you," Canis said. "The sacrifice of you by the village was far more than we could have ever expected, but still..." He walked behind me and helped me to stand.

I reached down for my clothing, and Helm stopped me and grabbed them himself. "Like I said. You will remain naked the remainder of the day with only our seed hardening on you as a reminder of how you should submit and obey. It is for your own good that you do so. We only ask what we feel will protect you."

"But what if we can't truly protect her any longer?" Canis asked. When all the men scowled at him, Canis added, "I'm only speaking what we have all been thinking."

"Let's get back to the camp," Grimm said. "We have some serious decisions to make that have been long overdue. But I would rather have the conversation where we can have Red safe and protected in the confines of the cave."

We began the walk back to the camp. Cum dripped down my neck, my collarbone, and covered my hardened nipples. My pussy ached, and it dawned on me that maybe they were right. Maybe I did like pain. Maybe I did like punishment. I most certainly felt a sense of loss that no whipping, no spanking, no aggressive fucking was my penance. Out of all the discipline encountered up to this point, this one was truly the worst. But as I looked at my men with submission in my heart, I also knew it very well may have had the greatest

effect. I loved these men. But it was my duty to also learn how to submit and obey. It would be the only way to survive this forest and keep the dark force from claiming me as its victim.

CHAPTER 10



“*R*ed, we are sending you back to your village,” said Canis as he knelt before me, my hands in his.

“No. I want to stay here with all of you. There is nothing for me there.”

“You don’t belong here. You need to return to the humans,” reasoned Beo.

“Humans? You five have shown me more attention and care than any of the *humans* in that village.”

“We have decided.” Rood, who rarely spoke, wouldn’t meet my eyes.

“What about the blood moon vow? No sacrifice has ever returned to the village. It has always been assumed that you... that you kept them until...” I couldn’t finish. I realized that the stories told to me as a child about the wolves were just that... stories. Fairy tales with no basis in reality. They were not bloodthirsty beasts devouring the sacrifice the moment they crossed the clearing. “What really happened to each sacrifice?”

Helm smiled mischievously. “They were led to the edge of the realm and told to start a new life elsewhere. We couldn’t have them returning to the village spreading tales. It served our purposes to have the villagers fear us.”

“So you never killed them?”

“No.”

“But you said they all were men, I’m the first...female.”

“Yes, you are special to us, which is why we are allowing you to return to the village,” responded Canis.

“I’m also the first and only one to see you in your true forms. That must mean something. A sign!” I shouted, remembering their reactions when I’d first arrived at the den. “Yes, you said yourselves, I must be a sign.”

All five men just shook their heads.

The decision had been made.

They were sending me away. Back to the village.

“When?” I asked, defeated.

“Tomorrow.”

“So soon?”

“Although we cannot know for certain, the forest witch once said that if any human were to linger too long among the wolves, they themselves would become enchanted. The moon is shining brightly tonight. Soon it will be full which means you have already been with us for too long. You must leave tomorrow. For your own sake,” explained Grimm.

At his final pronouncement, I stood. Slowly, by the light of the fire, I mentally shed the symbols of humanity. I no longer cared that I was bare before them.

“If it must be, then I want to experience you all, one last time. Here in the forest where there is no civilization, no strictures. Just us.”

Helm stood, but Beo stayed him with a grasp on his upper arm. “Steady, my brother. Grimm, what say you?”

Grimm shook his head. “Red, we cannot. If we were to all take you, if you were to accept our mingled seed inside your body, you would be bonded to us...a part of the pack.”

“I trust you to be strong. You won’t let that happen,” I whispered as I walked toward the cave, sending them an inviting look over my shoulder.

Stretching out naked on the furs, I wondered if they would stick to their convictions or join me.

They did not make me wait long.

One by one, the men prowled into the cave. Naked and ready.

“We won’t be gentle,” warned Helm.

“I don’t want you to be. If this is to be our last night, then I want to carry the marks on my body as a remembrance.”

The men growled in unison.

“On your knees,” commanded Rood.

I obeyed.

“Suck my cock.”

Wrapping my hand around his thick member, I licked my lips before opening my mouth wide. The moment the wide head slid along my tongue, I moaned at the familiar musky taste of him. As I concentrated on relaxing my throat so he could slide in deep like he’d taught me, I could feel Beo slide beneath me, positioning his legs between my open knees.

“Is this tiny pussy ready for me?” he asked huskily.

I could only groan in response as Rood’s cock pushed against the back of my throat.

Beo guided his cock to my entrance before gripping my hips. “You know how I like it, little Red.”

Knowing he enjoyed entering me in one painful thrust, my body tensed in anticipation. Using his grip on my hips, he forced my body down onto his cock. Forced me to take him to the hilt. I couldn’t stop a scream from rumbling up my throat as my inner passage strained around his thick girth.

Rood growled low in his throat. “Someone make her scream again as I fuck her throat.”

Without warning, there were two harsh slaps to each of my bottom cheeks. I screamed in shock and pain.

Grimm and Canis had helpfully obliged.

As my mouth opened on the scream, Rood pushed in further. My shoulders hunched as I gagged and strained for

breath. Inhaling through my nose, I could feel spittle around my bottom lip as he used my mouth, thrusting in and out with abandon.

Hands on my back tilted me forward, pushing my face further onto Rood's cock.

I then felt a probing finger at my back entrance. Whimpering, I did not have to look to know it was Helm.

Beo thrust to the hilt then paused as Helm began to push against my small, puckered hole.

With Rood's cock in my mouth, I could not protest or beg him to go slowly.

Despite my anxious resistance, the head of his cock popped into my bottom with ease. I could tell he had slicked his member with oil.

The warmth of his chest pressed against my back as he leaned forward. "Ask us to make it hurt," he ground out in my ear before nipping at the lobe.

Rood pulled his cock free.

My throat was sore and swollen, my voice hoarse as I whispered, "Hurt me."

Rood shoved his cock back deep into my throat. Grabbing me by my hair, he began to force my head up and down the long, rigid length just as Helm pushed deeper into my bottom. Breaking Rood's grasp, I swung my head to the side and let out a low kean as the pressure of having both Beo and Helm's shafts inside me increased. I could almost feel Helm's cock slide up alongside Beo's.

This. This right here was what I had begun to crave...to need. The feeling of being overwhelmed. Overpowered.

Taken.

Claimed.

Beo began to rock his cock slowly in and out of my pussy while he sucked my nipples, using the sharp edges of his teeth to gently bite at the sensitive flesh.

Helm continued to push up my tight hidden passage while taking swats at my bottom cheeks as he commanded me to open for him.

“It’s...it’s too much,” I squealed as Helm seated himself to the base with one final thrust just as Beo also pushed in deep. My body was too small. They were too big.

“You can take it. You have no choice,” ordered Grimm as he grabbed my jaw and pressed his fingers into my cheeks, forcing my mouth open wide. Rood slid back in.

“She has the warmest, wettest mouth,” groaned Rood.

All three men began a slow, rhythmic cadence. Fucking each of my holes at once. The sweet delicious pain brought my body alive. Made it hum with awareness, opening the door for all-consuming pleasure.

Suspended between the three men, I blindly extended my arms out, reaching for Grimm and Canis. Each of them stepped forward and allowed me to grasp their thick lengths in my hands. Moving my hands up and down their rigid lengths, I felt a surge of competing emotions. With Rood, Beo and Helm all taking over my body, I felt powerless. Yet, with my hands pleasuring Grimm and Canis, I felt as if I were the one with all the power.

The air in the cave crackled with tension and high emotion. We were locked in a primal struggle. Male, female. Beast, man. Pain, pleasure. It all swirled around our writhing bodies.

By the low rumblings in their throats, I could tell all were close to completion. The thought brought my own release crashing over my body. Wave after wave of building pressure then release.

Helm sank his teeth into my shoulder as he poured his seed into my bottom passage.

Beo wrapped his arms around my middle and held me closer as his own release flooded my pussy.

Rood coated my tongue with his salty essence, ordering me to swallow his seed like his good little Red. I gladly swallowed it for him.

As the pressure inside my body eased, I concentrated on clenching my fists and pumping my hands up and down the lengths of Grimm and Canis till they both released into my palms.

We all collapsed among the soft furs. The only sound in the cave was our mingled heavy breathing.

“I need some wine,” I gasped, lying there sated.

All five men rose to retrieve wine and the warm bread I had left by the fire.

I waited till all their backs were turned.

Raising my hands, I could see both Grimm and Canis’ seed still coating my soft skin. Lowering my arms, I pressed my palms against my pussy, stifling a moan as I touched the still swollen and sensitive flesh. Biting my lower lip, I caressed myself as I pushed my fingers in deep.

Mingling their seed inside me.

I had just submitted to my true destiny.

Sacrificing myself to the wolves.

CHAPTER 11



The forest was still covered in a frosty mist the next morning when the men began to lead me to the clearing. There were tears in my eyes as Canis secured my red cloak around my throat, making sure to raise the hood against the cold. Helm handed me my basket filled with nuts and berries.

Beo's voice was gruff when he said, "Now remember. Don't try to return to the forest to find us. It is far too dangerous."

"Please don't do this," I whispered.

Clearing his throat, Grimm said, "Red, it is for your own good. You made a sacrifice by coming to us. It is our turn to make the greater sacrifice of returning you to your people."

I thought of my traitorous act of disobedience the night before. Apparently, he had been wrong, mingling their seed inside my body had not bonded me to these men of whom I had grown so fond.

Rood stepped near and hugged me close. Although a man of few words, he whispered in my ear, "Don't ever forget us, my little Red. We will hold the memory of you in our hearts for the rest of our days."

My eyes flooded with tears which streaked down my cheeks at his beautiful words.

Helm, the gruffest of them all, caressed my cheek as he wiped the tears away.

I took one last longing look at them. My five wolf-men. Their bright amber eyes, the only sign of their enchantment when they were not in wolf form, glowed with sorrow but most of all with conviction.

“I love you all,” I impetuously called out as I raised up on my toes and gave each one a quick kiss on the lips.

Then, taking a deep breath, I turned and took my first step into the clearing. I knew my men would guard my steps and keep me safe from the dark force until I reached the security of the village gate.

If they would not allow me to stay with them, the least I could do was work to change the villagers’ minds about them, I resolved. The elders would no longer use my men as leverage for their power. I would change the villagers’ minds about the wolves.

* * *

STRETCHING MY HEAD BACK, I looked up at the imposing oak and iron door which guarded the gates of the village. Grasping the heavy metal ring, I swung it high and let it fall. A loud resounding gong would summon the gatekeeper. After a few moments, a smaller door, set inside the gate, opened. A slight, beady-eyed man stepped out.

“Who disturbs this peaceful village at this hour?”

“It is Raina Reithaube, granddaughter to Elder Hildegarde Reithaube.”

“You...you’re the blood moon sacrifice!” the small elderly man croaked out in a shrill voice.

“I have survived the wolves. Now let me pass,” I ordered in my most imperious voice. My time with the wolves had given me courage and a raw sense of my own power.

In awe, the man stepped aside.

Making my way in the shade through the winding cobblestoned streets, I headed straight for the town square.

Judging by the carts laden with wares and makeshift pens filled with still-sleeping animals which were scattered around the square, today was market day. The square would soon be filled with villagers. Confidently, I strode to the center, standing just below the bronze statue celebrating the elders who'd first enchanted and imprisoned my wolves. Resisting the urge to spit on it, I watched as the square began to fill with curious onlookers. Instead of the harried shouts and calls of greeting normally heard, everyone spoke in hushed, cautious tones. It was clear word of my return was spreading fast among the villagers.

When the square was nearly filled with curious onlookers, I snatched my moment. Standing on a nearby crate of cabbage, I addressed the people.

“My dear villagers, you and the generations before you have been deceived!”

An anxious rumbling swept over the crowd.

“I am here to tell you the brave men your ancestors sent to fight the dark force all those centuries ago still live! They live inside the bodies of the wolves! They are flesh and blood men. What you see is an enchantment! They are not the violent beasts the elders would have you believe.”

“What about the blood moon sacrifice?” shouted an unknown villager from the crowd.

“What about the curse?”

“The blood moon sacrifice was created by the elders to give them the power of fear over you. The wolves have never demanded it. They have only gone along with it over the centuries out of bitterness for *our* abandonment of them. They don't want your fear. They merely want your respect and appreciation for the sacrifice they made for *you* to keep you and your loved ones safe from the dark force.”

“They're not really wolves?” asked a child standing near my feet.

“No. It is the curse of the enchantment which makes them appear so to humans.”

“Why should we believe what you say?”

“Has anyone ever returned from a blood moon sacrifice as I have? I have seen them in their true form.”

I could feel the energy of the crowd begin to change. Begin to question the age-old stories. Question the elders.

As I started to raise my arms to continue, I was snatched down from the wooden crate.

“What the hell do you think you are doing?” raged my grandmother.

“Righting a wrong,” I fired back.

She recoiled. “What is the matter with your eyes? Why do they flash that color?”

“My eyes have been opened to you and the other elders’ wickedness,” I sneered, my lips curling back from my teeth in disgust.

“Your teeth,” my grandmother screeched as she took a step back in horror.

“Seize the Elder Reithaube! She and the others must answer for their deception!” cried someone from the crowd.

The rest of the crowd began to chant, “Seize her! Seize them all!”

My grandmother was grabbed by the arms and roughly pulled back through the crowd. “No! No! Stop! Don’t you see! She is one of them now! She is a wolf! Stop! Listen, I tell you!”

The crowd was deaf to her cries.

Taking a few steps back, I retreated from the crowd as they surged forward. Curious at my grandmother’s words, I made my way to a hat shop near the edge of the square which I knew had a small oval mirror in their window display.

Upon seeing my reflection, I smiled.

It was time to return to my men.

* * *

INHALING DEEPLY, I took my first step into the clearing. I knew I was disobeying them. My stomach did a small anticipatory flip at the thought of what punishment I would receive from them for my disobedience. Would it be all five at once or one at a time? I wasn't sure which way I wanted more. Biting my lower lip, I wondered if it would be Rood's leather strap, or Beo's birch switch, or perhaps another trip to the hot spring with Helm?

My wicked thoughts distracted me till I was nearly through the clearing. In the bright sunshine there was no creeping black mist to signal the presence of the dark force.

Still, I saw shadows detach and prowl forward from the forest.

All five of them in wolf form slowly stalked toward me.

I lowered my head in supplication.

"Red. You may have just saved your village once more, for we had decided to snatch you back," said Grimm.

"We keep what is ours and you are now ours," ground out Helm.

"Does this mean I don't get punished for disobeying you?" I asked, my head still lowered, my features hidden by my cloak.

"Oh, my little Red. You will still be punished. By each and every one of us," purred Rood.

"Good," I said as I raised my head and lowered my hood.

My once bright blue eyes glowed a golden amber.

EPILOGUE



ONE YEAR LATER.

Helm strode up to the fire, his arms laden with several baskets as he crunched on an apple.

“What? More?” asked an astonished Canis.

“This is getting out of hand. We need to find a way to communicate to them to stop,” grumbled Grimm.

“Why?” Rood asked as he rummaged through the baskets, delighted when he found a boysenberry pie which was still warm. “We haven’t eaten this well in hundreds of years!”

“Red, looks like Nessa mended your cloak,” said Helm as he tossed me my favorite red riding hood. As I opened the folds to inspect my friend’s handiwork, a small bundle fell out. Lifting the brown paper packaging, I eagerly untied the string. Inside was a beautiful baby blanket of soft wool and several baby booties and sweaters.

“Who told?” growled Canis.

“How could they have known?” wondered Grimm.

With a slight shrug of my shoulders, I said, “I *may* have told Snow when she stopped by to visit with a few of the huntsmen and she *may* have told the villagers.”

Since transforming into a wolf, I had never been happier, although I was delighted to learn that Snow was able to communicate with me as well as some of the other animals in the forest. She couldn’t see me in my human form, only my men could, but still it was nice to be able to talk to someone in the outside world. Although I’m sure it would look odd if

anyone were to stumble upon the slight woman having an animated conversation with a bright red wolf!

It was Snow who was passing on messages to the villagers for me.

Ever since the day I confronted them, the villagers had begun to respect and admire the wolves for all they had sacrificed and done for them through the generations. With the elders no longer terrorizing everyone with the threat of a blood moon sacrifice, the villagers had shown their admiration in other ways, like leaving baskets of baked goods and sweets at the edge of the forest.

Now knowing it was an enchantment which kept them from seeing the wolves in human form but they were still in fact men, the villagers had even begun to leave gifts of trousers and vests...even a pocket watch. My men scoffed at the restrictive clothing and marks of society but every once in a while, just to make me smile, they dressed in human clothes and paraded about the den.

Upon hearing that Snow had recently visited, Helm groaned, "She didn't bring any more of her cooking, did she? I swear that boar roast she made the last time made the birds fall out of the trees."

I laughed. Bless her heart, Snow's cooking had not improved, although she tried...oh how she tried. At first the huntsmen dropped off the questionable offerings to get rid of them, all the while telling Snow they had consumed the noxious fare. When Snow learned they had been *sharing* her meals with the wolves, she happily made more. So the meals kept coming...and coming. Each worse than the last.

Thank goodness for the delicious fare from the village.

"Remember that one soup which actually belched green smoke?" asked Canis, trying to stifle a laugh. "What the hell was that?"

"Now! Now!" I gently admonished as they all shared a laugh. "She is my friend after all and she means well."

“Yeah, well, I’m still not convinced the huntsmen aren’t trying to kill us,” grumbled Helm.

Smiling, I looked over the men with affection as I patted my ever-expanding belly.

We had no idea if my baby would be born with the mark of the enchantment, but I didn’t care.

I was loved and in love and, like me, I knew my baby would be protected and well-cared for by all five of my fearsome wolves.

The End

ABOUT ALTA HENSLEY

Alta Hensley is a USA TODAY bestselling author of hot, dark and dirty romance. She is also an Amazon Top 10 bestselling author. Being a multi-published author in the romance genre, Alta is known for her dark, gritty alpha heroes, sometimes sweet love stories, hot eroticism, and engaging tales of the constant struggle between dominance and submission.

She lives in a log cabin in the woods with her husband, two daughters, and an Australian Shepherd. When she isn't battling the bats, and watching the deer, she is writing about villains who always get their love story and happily ever after.

Gods Among Men Series

Villains Are Made

* * *

Secret Bride Trilogy:

Captive Bride

Kept Bride

Taken Bride

* * *

Wonderland Trilogy:

King of Spades

Queen of Hearts

Ace of Diamonds

* * *

Dark Pen Series:

Devil's Contract

Dirty Ledger

Dangerous Notes

* * *

Top Shelf Series:

Bastards & Whiskey

Villains & Vodka

Scoundrels & Scotch

Devils & Rye

Beasts & Bourbon

Sinners & Gin

* * *

Evil Lies Series:

The Truth About Cinder

The Truth About Alice

* * *

Breaking Belles Series:

Elegant Sins

Beautiful Lies

Opulent Obsession

Inherited Malice

Delicate Revenge

Lavish Corruption

* * *

Gold In Locks

Sick Crush

Secret Bride

Spiked Roses

Captive Vow

Ruin Me

Delicate Scars



ABOUT ZOE BLAKE

Zoe Blake is a USA TODAY Bestselling Author
of Dark Romance and Romantic Suspense.

She delights in writing dark romance books filled with overly possessive billionaires, taboo scenes, and unexpected twists. She usually spends her ill-gotten gains on martinis, travel, and red lipstick. Since she can barely boil water, she's lucky enough to be married to a sexy Chef.

DARK OBSESSION SERIES

A Dark Romantic Suspense

Wicked Games

She's caught in my game... she just doesn't know it.

For weeks, I've been watching her. Stalking her.

Now it's time to start playing with my beautiful little pawn.

From the moment I first saw her from afar, I knew she would become my prized possession.

I will gaslight her into thinking she is my obedient ward, trapped in the Victorian era.

She is my unwilling captive, forced to play my sadistic game for her own survival.

She will have no choice but to bow to my rules and discipline.

In time, her memories of a modern life will fade.

If not, she will pay a painful price.

Her pretty mind is so caught up in my nightmare, she will never escape me.

The most wicked deception of all?

This isn't the first time we're playing this game.

Sinister Games

She's trapped inside my twisted game.

And I am never letting her go.

I've started a new game. This one more sinister than the last.

Every time she tries to fight what we have, I just pull her deeper into my deception.

The slightest disobedience to my rules brings swift punishment.

I've pushed her to the edge.

She wants to kill me.

The only problem is... she loves me.
Against her will, she loves every punishing, controlling thing I've done to her mind
and body.

She's caught in my web; the harder she struggles, the more entangled she becomes.
My beautiful girl will have no choice but to accept that I am her new reality.
She is just a pawn in my game.

Savage Games

She broke the rules of our game... she ran.
Now she will pay.
When will my pretty pawn learn that I am the master of this game?
And only I will be the victor.
She thinks she can hide from me.
She thinks she can escape my wrath.
She's wrong.
This time when I catch her, there will be no escape.
I no longer want her as just my beautiful captive.
She will now become my wife, even if I have to drag her down the aisle.
I want her under my complete control.
I want her every breath, her every movement, her every thought to be only of me.
This is no longer a game.
She changed the rules, but I will win.

RUTHLESS OBSESSION SERIES

A Dark Mafia Romance

Sweet Cruelty

Dimitri & Emma's story
It was an innocent mistake.
She knocked on the wrong door.
Mine.
If I were a better man, I would've just let her go.
But I'm not.
I'm a cruel bastard.
I ruthlessly claimed her virtue for my own.
It should have been enough.
But it wasn't.

I needed more.
Craved it.
She became my obsession.
Her sweetness and purity taunted my dark soul.
The need to possess her nearly drove me mad.
A Russian arms dealer had no business pursuing a naive librarian student.
She didn't belong in my world.
I would bring her only pain.
But it was too late...
She was mine and I was keeping her.

Sweet Depravity

Vaska & Mary's story

The moment she opened those gorgeous red lips to tell me no, she was mine.
I was a powerful Russian arms dealer and she was an innocent schoolteacher.
If she had a choice, she'd run as far away from me as possible.
Unfortunately for her, I wasn't giving her one.
I wasn't just going to take her; I was going to take over her entire world.
Where she lived.
What she ate.
Where she worked.
All would be under my control.
Call it obsession.
Call it depravity.
I don't give a damn... as long as you call her mine.

Sweet Savagery

Ivan & Dylan's Story

I was a savage bent on claiming her as punishment for her family's mistakes.
As a powerful Russian Arms dealer, no one steals from me and gets away with it.
She was an innocent pawn in a dangerous game.
She had no idea the package her uncle sent her from Russia contained my stolen money.
If I were a good man, I would let her return the money and leave.
If I were a gentleman, I might even let her keep some of it just for frightening her.
As I stared down at the beautiful living doll stretched out before me like a virgin sacrifice,
I thanked God for every sin and misdeed that had blackened my cold heart.

I was not a good man.
I sure as hell wasn't a gentleman... and I had no intention of letting her go.
She was mine now.
And no one takes what's mine.

Sweet Brutality

Maxim & Carinna's story

The more she fights me, the more I want her.
It's that beautiful, sassy mouth of hers.
It makes me want to push her to her knees and dominate her, like the brutal savage I am.
As a Russian Arms dealer, I should not be ruthlessly pursuing an innocent college student like her, but that would not stop me.
A twist of fate may have brought us together, but it is my twisted obsession that will hold her captive as my own treasured possession.
She is mine now.
I dare you to try and take her from me.

Sweet Ferocity

Luka & Katie's Story

I was a mafia mercenary only hired to find her, but now I'm going to keep her.
She is a Russian mafia princess, kidnapped to be used as a pawn in a dangerous territory war.
Saving her was my job. Keeping her safe had become my obsession.
Every move she makes, I am in the shadows, watching.
I was like a feral animal: cruel, violent, and selfishly out for my own needs. Until her.
Now, I will make her mine by any means necessary.
I am her protector, but no one is going to protect her from me.

IVANOV CRIME FAMILY TRILOGY

A Dark Mafia Romance

Savage Vow

Gregor & Samara's story

I took her innocence as payment.
She was far too young and naïve to be betrothed to a monster like me.
I would bring only pain and darkness into her sheltered world.
That's why she ran.

I should've just let her go...
She never asked to marry into a powerful Russian mafia family.
None of this was her choice.
Unfortunately for her, I don't care.
I own her... and after three years of searching... I've found her.
My runaway bride was about to learn disobedience has consequences... punishing
ones.
Having her in my arms and under my control had become an obsession.
Nothing was going to keep me from claiming her before the eyes of God and man.
She's finally mine... and I'm never letting her go.

Vicious Oath

Damien & Yelena's story

When I give an order, I expect it to be obeyed.
She's too smart for her own good, and it's going to get her killed.
Against my better judgement, I put her under the protection of my powerful
Russian mafia family.
So imagine my anger when the little minx ran.
For three long years I've been on her trail, always one step behind.
Finding and claiming her had become an obsession.
It was getting harder to rein in my driving need to possess her... to own her.
But now the chase is over.
I've found her.
Soon she will be mine.
And I plan to make it official, even if I have to drag her kicking and screaming to
the altar.
This time... there will be no escape from me.

Betrayed Honor

Mikhail & Nadia's story

Her innocence was going to get her killed.
That was if I didn't get to her first.
She's the protected little sister of the powerful Ivanov Russian mafia family - the
very definition of forbidden.
It's always been my job, as their Head of Security, to watch over her but never to
touch.
That ends today.
She disobeyed me and put herself in danger.
It was time to take her in hand.

I'm the only one who can save her and I will fight anyone who tries to stop me,
including her brothers.

Honor and loyalty be damned.

She's mine now.

For a list of All of Zoe Blake's Books Visit her Website!

www.zblakebooks.com



QUEEN & THE KINGSMEN

TEASER

Chapter One

The shrieks and cries grew louder as the choking green mist twisted and swirled around the princess.

“Grab her!”

“Seize the evil queen!”

“Guards! Guards!”

They were all fools.

Fools to think their little slings and arrows would have any power over me. These fragile mortal beings with their weak flesh were as wisps of air to me. I ruled over the ethereal realm, deep in the forest where magic and mysticism still reigned. How dare they think they could capture me, Queen Zelladine, ruler of the creatures and fairies of the forest? As if their human laws had any hold over me?

Plates of delicate china crashed to the floor as heavily laden tables were overturned. Platters of roast beasts, bowls of sugared fruits, and cups of fragrant wine spilled and splattered onto the pristine white marble floor, staining it a gruesome, mottled red. The screech of instrument strings and discordant chords could be heard above the din as the orchestra musicians stumbled over one another in their haste to escape. The tinny clatter of metal could be heard as the King’s Guard took up position, circling me.

“Oh my,” I exclaimed, raising one black wing eyebrow. “Have I interrupted the feast?”

“Release my daughter, Zelladine,” ordered King Basil.

Curling my lip in a sneer, I pointed one long, red fingernail at him. “That is Queen Zelladine to you.”

I watched as his face swelled, the skin turning an ashen purple in his anger. “Seize her,” he screamed as foamy spittle sprayed from his mouth.

The guards stepped closer. Bayonets drawn. With a flick of my wrist, the fire-forged steel of the bayonets curled and withered as the metal melted. With frightened cries of alarm, the guards took a step back.

“Where are my kingsmen? Send for the kingsmen!” ordered King Basil.

“My, my. You must be positively petrified of little ol’ me if you are calling for your elite guards. Should I be flattered?” I asked, my lips twisting in mockery.

King Basil took a lumbering step forward. The obnoxious bulk of his body belying the threat of his movements. Raising his fist, each finger clad in gold and jewels, he sputtered and tripped over his words.

“Tut, tut, Basil,” I warned, my gaze flicking to the center of the great hall. “Careful.”

A whirling funnel of green mist towered to the vaulted ceiling with veins of black smoke creeping along the sides and across the floor. In its center was the king’s precious only daughter, Briar Rose. All that could be seen were flashes of her blue gown and bright, tawny hair.

“How dare you invade the sanctity of my kingdom,” thundered King Basil.

“Your kingdom. *Your* kingdom!” Pacing away from his odious presence, I circled the green column imprisoning the princess. “How dare you claim this land for your own? We were here long before your silly stone castles, before you restrained and crippled the wilds of nature about you. As if

you had any right!” My hands fisted into the fine silken folds of my cloak as I tried to curb my anger.

The women of my clan had been ruling over the forest and its inhabitants since time immemorial. Then the humans came with their weapons of destruction. Ripping the stones from the earth, cleaving them into rigid little boxes to make their castles and ramparts, walling in what used to be open and free. Tearing down trees and ruining the homes of my beloved fairies to plant their vanity crops of tobacco and hops for the further debasement of their kind. With every season, I saw more and more torn from my grasp. With the death of every tree, every flower, every sweet breath of air choked by the smoke from their hearths...my power weakened. Several generations ago, I'd summoned the dark force to at least keep these wretched humans at heel. Yet, the dark force can only contain and restrain, it cannot recapture what I have lost.

Only the light of understanding will heal my realm and offer a chance of peace between my kind and the humans, a light that will never come from the likes of King Basil. Only interested in the tangible displays of wealth—gold, silver, jewels—he was incapable of understanding the true riches of existence, and if left to his disgusting devices, he would stifle and strangle my only hope.

I couldn't allow him to succeed in his plans. It would be the final ruination of my realm.

I must stop him at all costs. Even if it meant sacrificing the innocent.

Raising my arms high, my head thrown back, I called to the ancients. “Let a curse be upon the House of Basil. No child of his loins will further his withered and impotent lineage.”

A deep howling wind spun into the great hall, whipping the green mist into a tempest. The column rose higher and higher.

“Hear me now, oh ancients. Obey my command!” I called forth, my voice rising.

The green column spun faster as it closed in on itself. Squeezing tighter and tighter.

“You evil witch. You will pay for this,” spat King Basil. “I will see you punished.”

“You? Punish me? I’d like to see you try,” I said, chuckling at the man’s impudence.

I had yet to see an impressive human. They were all weak of mind and limb, more eager to engage in drink and sloth than anything of meaningful purpose. In my world, strength and power, the emotional embodiments of nature herself, were valued. Even this king’s guards hid behind their armor and weapons of tin and wood. *Pathetic.*

Curling my fingers into claws, I slowly brought my hands together. By my command, the green column of mist began to compress. As my hands came closer and closer together, the column became shorter.

“No!” cried out the king as he fell to his knees.

The green mist was now a spinning ball of dark light.

Clapping my hands together with a resounding snap...the green mist disappeared.

Along with the princess.

Glaring up at me from his prone position, the king growled, “You will pay for ruining my plans.”

Scraping my nails down his cheek, I laughed. “Do your worst.”

With a flick of my wrist, I was gone. Leaving the shattered remains of the feast in my wake.