



# CLAIMED MATE

FERAL SHIFTERS BOOK 4

CALLIE ROSE

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FERAL SHIFTERS: BOOK FOUR



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# AMORA



*WE NEED to take these shadows out*, Kian says gruffly through our mind speak connection. *As fast as we can.*

He's right about that. Quinton's army is relentless, and if we don't take out the biggest threats, we'll be toast.

And the biggest threats are the shadows he's brought to this fight.

My heart is still racing from the adrenaline that surged through me when the shadow that attacked me tried to rip me away from the earthly plane. I've never felt anything like that, and it terrified the fuck out of me. I felt like I was coming apart atom by atom, dissolving slowly as it pulled me toward the shadow realm.

As we renew our struggle against Quinton and his pack, the chaos of combat draws me away from my three men, tossing me into a skirmish with a Blood Moon wolf.

Jaws snap at my neck, the Blood Moon wolf lunging in coordinated motions toward my exposed throat. I spin in a circle and knock him over the head with my back legs, sending him stumbling away from me. Behind me, I can hear the sound of my men driving off wolf after wolf, shadow wolf after shadow wolf.

The Silver Crest wolves fight valiantly just around the perimeter of our battleground. Seeing them fight just as hard as my men and I are imbues me with strength as I try to shake off my encounter with the shadow.

*It wanted to drag me to the underworld*, I think, fear curdling in my gut. I bound over the wolf I knocked to the ground and lock onto the scruff of another. *What would have happened if it had succeeded?*

No, I can't think about that now.

My men need me.

The Silver Crest wolves need me.

Since Felicity fell at the hands of her mate, her pack was taken over by the next in command, Cormac. Quinton didn't waste any time showing up at our doorstep, clearly pissed as hell about our failed attempt to steal the stone that he draws his shadow magic from.

I snap my jaws tight around my opponent's neck, and his bones crack under the power of my bite. I'm not usually quite this vicious in a fight, but right now I'm being driven purely by fear, adrenaline, and the need to protect those near me.

A yip draws my attention, and my head swings to one side as my eyes search the horizon for the familiar ginger fur of Cormac. He's in the distance, staving off three wolves that threaten to overpower him and his pack.

He's holding his own, though, and while I watch, one of his pack mates leaps to his aid, joining him in the skirmish.

But my distraction works against me.

I turn my focus back to my own fight just in time to see a shadow form launch itself in my direction with an unearthly screech. Fear lances through my body, a fresh wave of adrenaline flooding me.

As the shadow beast barrels toward me, I duck to the right, snapping my jaws viciously at its inky skin. If it can even be *called* skin. Other than what I know from my men, these shadows are enigmas.

But my impulse to attack is a wasted instinct on this monster. My sharp teeth ripple through the shadow's hulking form like it's merely smoke. My men can actually make contact with these things because they're made of the same magic as the shadows—at least, partly. But I can't touch the damn things.

Fuck. I have to run.

Tricking the shadow to go right and then feinting left gives me an opening, and I sprint away from it, my claws digging into the dirt.

*Kian!* I shout.

I know he's locked in battle. I know he's helping his brothers. But I can't take this thing down alone.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

The shadow lunges after me. I run in a zigzag pattern, attempting to lose it or at least trying to slow it the hell down. I can't outrun the hulking creature for long.



It swipes at me once, and I almost go down as I cut sideways too sharply to keep my balance. I get my feet back under me and try to keep sprinting, but before I can make it more than a couple yards, the shadow leaps on me, clutching at my shoulders. I yelp and skid to a halt, shaking my head to loosen it. I try to pull back against the grip it has on me. No fucking luck.

And even as I struggle against the monstrous shadow form, I can feel that strange sensation in my body again, as if it's ripping me apart from the inside out, tearing at my connection to this realm.

*Kian! Fuck. It's taking me!*

Pain rattles my body as I try to shake the shadow off. A few seconds later, Kian's growl reaches my ears, and my heart leaps as I realize he's close. I smell him, whiskey and woodsmoke overwhelming my nostrils as he nears. Cold air whips around my body as his jaws latch onto the shadow.

A pained whine escapes me as a fresh burst of pain tears through my body. This thing is trying even harder to yank me into the shadow realm.

Kian attacks it like the feral shifter he is, snapping and snarling viciously. Piece after piece is torn from the shadow, but it doesn't let me go. It's still trying to swallow me up, making darkness creep into my vision. I shake and buck, trying to help Kian, but nothing is working.

I stumble as part of the shadow is torn away from my body. I land on my belly, snarling and fighting back with all I've got.

And then the creature screeches. Kian lets out a victorious snarl and lunges, wedging his body between the shadow and me. Everything in me aching as he straddles me, using his own large frame to create space between the shadow creature and me. All three of us are wedged together in a tight knot, but he manages to create a large enough opening for me to wriggle out from under both him and the shadow.

But before I can move to scramble out from beneath him, I smell it.

Blood.

It drips from Kian's neck, hot and metallic scented as it coats my fur. My eyes widen in alarm as I notice the shadow switching its attention from me to Kian.

*No.*

It's so much blood. Too much blood for him to lose.

I can't stand to see him hurt like this.

*Get out,* Kian snarls at me.

Anger races through my body. *No! You're hurt. You can't do this alone.*

He gazes down at me with those beautiful gold-ringed brown eyes that always seem to burn like fire, and I stare back up at him.

Time suspends itself as our gazes lock, capturing us in a moment far too intimate for battle. War rages around us, and yet I can't look away from Kian's blazing eyes. The shadow tightens around him, rippling over his body, and although his lips pull back in pain, he gives no other sign that he even noticed it.

*Please*, he says, his voice low and quiet in my mind. *Please go.*

My eyes widen as my jaw goes slack in surprise. He's telling me to go, to get out. How can he do that? How can he possibly expect me to just *leave* him here?

Like hell. I can't abandon him.

But I can't save him, either. Not on my own. I can't fight the shadow creatures the same way my mates can, so I'm powerless to try to drag the thing away from Kian.

So I snap my jaw shut and reply, *I'll get Malix and Frost.*

I roll onto my belly to crawl the rest of the way out from beneath Kian. With his body blocking the crawling, rippling shadow from reaching me, I manage to wriggle free. As soon as I'm out from under him, I spin around. The last of the shadow tendrils release me...

And latch on to him.

The metallic scent of blood invades my nostrils, and I watch with horror as Kian's wolf is slowly consumed by shadows. Darkness crawls over his chest, his bloody neck, and his snout.

Whining low in my throat, I launch forward. I have to stop this. I have to get Kian out of there before he disappears.

I can't lose him.

Not again.

*Malix! Frost!* I scream as Kian holds my gaze. *Get over here!*

No, no, no, *no.*

The shadow wraps itself around his body, swarming him until it covers him almost completely, pulsing with a powerful energy. The shimmering golden hues of Kian's eyes are the last thing I see before those are swallowed up too.

Then the shadow seems to blink out of existence, taking Kian with it. A single wisp of smoke curls from the space where they once stood.

Gone. He's gone.

No.

A vivid ache grows in my chest and spreads to every limb, the loss overwhelming. Grief latches around my heart, making my chest seize up so tightly that it's hard to breathe.

*He's gone.*

Malix draws up on my right side as Frost skids to a stop on my left. The two of them look around, confusion riddling their expressions.

*Where's Kian?* Frost asks. *I can't feel him.*

*Neither can I.* Malix's wolf huffs out a breath. *Amora, where is he?*

My paws can't hold my weight anymore. My legs feel wobbly like I've been running all day without a damn break. Fuck, we *have* been running. For so long. For *too* long.

*The shadow took him,* I tell my remaining mates. *It swallowed him up, just like it tried to do to me earlier. It took him to the shadow realm. He's just... gone.*

Malix snarls, shock and anger emanating from him. But he doesn't get a chance to say anything else before Quinton's pack regroups. A collection of them sprint in our direction, and shadow shifters circle us.

Although grief still grips me like a vise slowly crushing my heart into a mangled mess, I go on high alert, baring my teeth as I stick close to Frost. I can't do much damage to the shadow creatures, but these wolves, I can fight.

I focus on the Blood Moon wolves who are trying to take us down, channeling every bit of the horrified rage that courses through my veins. All I can see in my mind's eye is Kian's gold tinted gaze. All I can feel is the absence of our connection, as if a cord has been ripped from my body.

As if a candle has been snuffed out.

I tear through fur and limbs, drenching the earth with blood as my teeth snap like knives. My body is exhausted and spent, but I don't let myself stop, don't allow myself to feel the heaviness of my limbs. I force myself to keep going, using my fury as fuel.

Somewhere in the universe, my mate is suffering in a world of shadows—because he chose to save me.

After taking down the wolves around us, Frost and I dart forward to join Malix in the fray. All three of us put everything we have into it, but a few seconds later, Cormac's shouted command echoes in my mind.

*Retreat! Abandon the village! Follow me!*

Fuck, that's *really* bad.

I exchange a glance with Frost and then Malix, not hesitating to follow when they launch themselves through a collection of shifters toward Cormac and his remaining pack members. We fight on the way, snapping at limbs and knocking wolves over, shifter and shadow beast alike.

Quinton's minions lash out in frenzied lunges that slow us down, but they don't manage to stop us. We race after Cormac as a few Blood Moon members straggle behind.

When we reach a small clearing outside the Silver Moon pack's village, Frost and Malix turn around to take on a few of our pursuers who've gotten too close. I watch my mates tear fur and limbs apart, their rage evident in their movements, clearly urged on by the same grief I feel.

One of Quinton's new feral shifters stalks toward me, and I let out a dangerous growl that vibrates in my throat. Before it can leap toward me, Frost grabs the feral shifter by the throat, yanking the large wolf sideways so sharply that his neck breaks. As the shifter's body goes slack, Frost tosses it away, huffing as he joins my side.

*Let's go*, Malix calls as he takes out the last of our closest pursuers, then pivots to race after Cormac and the others again.

Frost nudges me, urging me to go ahead of him. Can I blame him? We already lost one member of our strange little pack tonight. Losing me isn't an option for him.

Just like losing him or Malix isn't an option for me.

But every second wasted puts us in more danger, so instead of arguing about who should go first, I sprint after Malix, trusting Frost to stay close behind me.

We quickly catch up to Cormac and his pack, or what's left of them, and our footsteps don't slow as we draw up beside them. We run until the air stings my lungs, until my legs are so sore that I can feel every pounding step, until the moon rises high in the sky.

Finally, when we've outpaced every one of Quinton's pack members who followed and are miles away from the site of the battle, we stagger to a stop. I collapse to the ground, my chest rising and falling as my tongue lolls out, my breath coming in choppy pants.

Cormac shifts back to human form and gathers his pack mates around him. Frost and Malix do the same, but I stay in wolf form, unable to work up the will to shift. While we ran, my mind went sort of numb, void of any thoughts except for the sound of my pounding footsteps. But now, all I can

think about are those last moments before I lost Kian.

*He's gone.*

A soft whine falls from my snout as the scent of warm spice draws my attention.

“Amora.”

Frost rests a hand on the back of my neck, his fingers delving into my blood matted fur. I don't need to hear him speak to understand that he's urging me to shift. We have wounds to lick. We have plans to make.

*We have to find Kian.*

Fur fades to skin and I roll to my side, still breathing heavily. Now that the adrenaline is receding from my system, I can finally feel the beating my body just took. Scratches and wounds burn all over my body, like they're furious at me for losing Kian.

Malix settles next to me as Frost helps me sit upright.

“Hey Kitty,” he whispers, his voice hoarse and gruff from sprinting as far as we did. “You okay?”

Do I look okay? No, of course, I'm not fucking *okay*. But snapping at him will only make things worse, so I seal my lips tight.

Nearby, I can see shifters huddling together for warmth, just as unabashed by their nakedness as the rest of us are. The cold creeps into my bones, making it difficult to move around. Frost's hand remains at the back of my neck, a touch of warmth among the frigid blanket resting over us.

“Quinton's attack wasn't rational,” Cormac grunts just a few feet away from us. “It wasn't strategic either.”

Without taking his gaze off me, Malix speaks to Cormac over his shoulder. “You're right about that. And it's a damn good thing it wasn't. That's the only reason we were able to get away.”

“He didn't have a plan,” says a Silver Crest shifter whose name I don't know. “He attacked out of rage.”

Malix nods. “I'd say so. It was pretty fucking stupid of him to do, in that regard.”

It doesn't matter, though. It may have been a reckless move, but he's so powerful that he still came out on top. Maybe it wasn't the complete victory that Quinton hoped for, but he still managed to drive the Silver Crest Pack from their land.

Numbness creeps over me. Where grief once sat, the chill of the air takes over. Malix and Frost stay close to me, sharing their body heat with me, but

although I feel the warmth superficially, I don't absorb it—just like I don't really absorb what Malix and Cormac are discussing.

My eyes go out of focus as I replay the scene over and over in my head. Kian wrestling the shadow from my body, struggling to put himself between the monster and me.

Between death and me.

*No. He can't be dead, I correct myself as my heart skips a beat. He must be alive somewhere. Even if he's in the shadow realm, he's not dead yet.*

I barely notice when Frost and Malix leave my side for a few minutes to help Cormac and some of the other Silver Crest wolves. When they return, they appear just as shell-shocked as I am, their faces haunted by the absence of their brother.

The looks on their faces cut through the numbness inside me, sending a rush of hot blood through my veins. Something coils deep in my gut as I stand and march to the edge of the trees that line the small clearing where we stopped, standing between the thick trunks as I clench my fists at my sides.

“How could this happen?” I rasp, my breath condensing in the chilly air. “How could the shadow have taken him? I thought the whole point was that there was a division between worlds.”

A shudder wracks me as my fingernails dig into my palms hard enough to draw blood. The warm scents of spice and sunshine infuse my nostrils as my two remaining mates surround me on either side.

“I don't know exactly how it happened, but we already knew that something like that was possible.” Malix lets out a shaky breath as he rests his hand on my shoulder. “The shadows Felicity and now Quinton control came from the shadow realm and are now on earth.”

I wheeze, trying to steady my breathing. Trying to keep myself from falling off the cliff into a full-blown breakdown.

“It's possible for things to cross the barrier,” Frost adds, his hand appearing on my left shoulder. For a moment, a soothing warmth radiates through my chest. My limbs relax slightly as he continues. “What Quinton is trying to do is *tear* the veil.”

“But there are some things that can slip through without the veil ever opening,” Malix finishes.

“Is he still alive?” I whisper. “Is that even possible? Can Kian still be...?”

“I'm not sure,” Malix replies in a tortured voice. “But since we don't know one way or the other, I'm choosing to believe that it's possible.”

I shake their hands from my shoulders. Not to push them away, but to stand at my full height as I turn around to face them.

My gaze locks on Malix first, his dark skin almost seeming to shimmer beneath the starlight and moonlight that shines down from above. His violet eyes look more serious than I've ever seen them. I turn to Frost next, resolve building inside me with every second that ticks by. His chiseled features seem sharper than usual because of the shadows cast around his face, and his blue eyes burn with intensity, a striking contrast to his cool exterior.

My jaw tightens as I clench my fists, nodding once.

“I believe it's possible too. So I'm going to go get him.”

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## MALIX



I GROWL, my shoulders tensing up at Amora's words. A primal instinct rises up in me so fast that the words are out of my mouth before I even consciously think them.

"No. I'm not letting you do that."

I'm not exactly surprised that Amora wants to go after Kian and risk her damn life, but she's out of her fucking mind if she thinks I'm going to stand by and allow her to jump into danger like that.

The shadow realm is far different than earth. I've never actually been there, but I've lived my entire life with shadow magic inside me, and that's enough to make me certain that the shadow realm is a dangerous place. And it's probably crawling with dark creatures who could literally tear her to pieces.

She could get injured. Worse, she could get *poisoned* again.

And how the fuck could we find a witch on the other side of the veil who would be able to whip up another batch of that antidote? The odds are none and *none*.

Amora's eyes go wide. "Excuse me?"

In true kitty fashion, claws extended and gaze sharp, she tilts her chin up defiantly as she meets my gaze, but for once, I barely notice how fucking gorgeous she is when she gets all stubborn like this.

Shaking my head firmly, I repeat, "I said no, Amora."

"What the fuck do you mean, 'no'? Who died and made you king?"

I cross my arms over my chest as the shadow tattoos covering my arms wrestle. Emotions war inside me, almost as vicious as our fight with Quinton and his bastard shadow pack. It's not like me to be the one to put my foot



down. Usually, going head to head with Amora is Kian's role. But without him here, someone has to step up to fill that void.

The reminder of Kian's absence feels like a knife through my chest, and I drag in a breath before letting it out. When I speak, my voice is a little softer, closer to my usual tone.

"Nobody died, Amora. But I'm not going to let you get yourself hurt. You want to get taken, too?"

Her lips pull back in a grimace, tears shimmering in her eyes. "That's not fucking fair. You and Frost would go after Kian *no matter what*. So, why can't I?"

She had a point. As if on cue, Frost and I look at each other, unspoken words passing between us. Of course we're going after our brother. That was never really a question. But...

"You're not coming with us," I say.

Anger floods her features, making her green eyes spark. "Like hell!"

I nod, my nostrils flaring. "Yeah, *like hell*. You're not putting yourself in danger. You can help us plan, but Frost and I are going alone. Without you. End of fucking story."

"You can't leave me out!"

For a second, it looks like she's considering launching herself at me—although whether it's to take a swing at my face or to wrap herself around me like a sloth so I can't go anywhere without her, I'm not sure. But before she can move, Frost steps behind her, wrapping his arms around her as he meets my gaze over her shoulder.

"She's right."

His voice is as level as always, calm and rational as it cuts through the silvery moonlight that drapes over us like a curtain.

"What?" My eyebrows shoot up. "Are you taking her side?"

"I am."

His face remains free of emotion as he speaks, although I can sense the destructive force of his shadows just beneath his skin, churning in agitation and eager to tear something apart.

Amora's posture shifts slightly, and I can tell his words surprised her too. Several locks of tangled dark hair have fallen over her face, and she pushes them behind her ears as she blinks at me in shock.

"We're Kian's brothers, but she's his mate," Frost explains, his hands digging into her hips a little as he holds her against his body, like he's

grounding himself through that connection. “She deserves to be part of whatever we decide to do to save him.”

Silence settles over all of us for a long moment as I wrestle with myself, torn by conflicting impulses. The bond between us snapped when we used the spell Erik gave us. We all felt it. But there’s no denying that something still exists between us—a remnant of that old bond, or a new sort of bond entirely—and that fact has never been more evident than it is now.

Gazing into Amora’s determined green eyes, I have no doubt that she would walk through hell for any of us.

Reaching out, I tug her into my arms. Her forehead presses against mine, our breaths mingling in the air between our lips.

“I don’t want anything to happen to you,” I mutter.

Her eyes gleam in the dim light as she tilts her head to look at me. “I know. I can’t stand the thought of losing you or Frost either. But I need Kian. And I know you both do too.”

“Fuck, kitty,” I whisper. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry, *I’m sorry...*”

I nuzzle into her neck as I keep murmuring the words. I’m not really apologizing for trying to keep her from coming with us, because part of me is still convinced that would be the best choice. But I *am* sorry. I’m sorry for every fucking thing I’ve ever done to hurt her, and I’m sorry for the pain that I can feel radiating from her like an aura right now.

Frost keeps a hand on her back, his fingers warm despite the chill in the air. I circle her waist and focus on the heat flowing between our bodies, skin touching wherever possible.

Having Amora in my arms with Frost right there on her other side helps ease some of the ache in my chest... but only a little. I can feel the length of rope that’s missing from the knot we’re trying to form.

Kian.

A part of us is missing. A part of her and a part of me. The very part that unites the four of us, that makes us a pack.

As we stay like that in silence for another long moment, my ears perk up at the sound of the Silver Crest wolves speaking in low voices back in the clearing. They’re probably figuring out their next move.

The same as us.

“All right,” I relent as I slowly loosen my grip on Amora. “You’re right.”

She huffs something almost like a laugh. “Wow. Must be hard.”

“What?”

“Admitting you’re wrong.”

A smile cracks my lips. It’s the first smile since before the fight, since we were snugly tucked in at the cabin on Silver Crest territory. That feels like a distant memory, even though it was barely hours ago.

I shake my head. “Nah, Kian’s the stubborn one. That’s why we gotta go get him.”

“Thank you.” Her fingers trace my jaw, and I lean into it for a second before I reach up to take her hand, pressing a kiss to the pads of her fingers.

“We need a plan,” I murmur.

“We should probably talk to Cormac first,” she says. “He needs to know what’s going on.”

My muscles scream for me to rest, but there’s no time. I have no idea what Kian is facing in the shadow realm, and we have to find some way to get to him before the shadows kill him. The clock starts now. We have to move.

The three of us walk back toward the clearing, staying together in a tight group. The eyes of several Silver Crest shifters follow us, heads swiveling to observe our interaction with the new alpha. Cormac, usually standing tall with an air of confidence around him, huddles near the flames of a small fire that’s been built with his shoulders bowed forward.

Defeat clouds his expression. He looks as beat to hell and exhausted as the rest of us.

“Alpha, we have to go,” Amora tells him when we reach his side. “We have to rescue one of our pack.”

He nods, standing to meet our gazes. “I understand.”

“I’m sorry we can’t stay and help you fight if it comes to that again,” I add, surprised that a part of me really does mean it. Nothing could keep me from going after Kian, but I feel strangely protective of the remaining members of Felicity’s old pack. It’s not something I’m used to.

“It’s all right.” Cormac rakes a hand through his hair. “We’ll do whatever we have to, and I’ll do my damndest to keep my pack alive.”

“Please, do,” I say. “Quinton is only going to grow more powerful and unstoppable now.”

“Where will you go?” Amora asks.

Cormac scans the area. His numbers have dwindled drastically, and the loss is evident in his gaze. When he settles his focus back on Amora, he shrugs one shoulder, his expression hardening a little. “We’ll keep running.”

My chest tightens at the thought of them being lost forever. No land to call their own. No territory to claim where they can rebuild their lives.

*I hardly even know these people, and yet I feel protective of them. Fuck. I wish I could protect them from Quinton.*

As my eyes follow the path that Cormac's just took, I can't help but notice the bleeding wounds, dirt streaked faces, and tired expressions on his pack mates. Something rises inside me, that strange feeling of protectiveness growing stronger. Silver Crest isn't even my pack, but I can understand their struggle and loss. I recognize those feelings now, more deeply and personally than I ever used to.

I want to protect them.

So I will.

As I gaze at the huddled shifters nearby, I swear it with my soul, whispering it to the ether.

*Once we rescue Kian, we'll stop Quinton once and for all.*

"We'll meet up again somehow," Amora tells Cormac. "Is there any way we could stay in touch?"

Dragging my focus back to the conversation, I wrinkle my nose. "I don't suppose you have a cell phone that survived that mess?"

Amora rolls her eyes, and I feel a surge of satisfaction at the familiar look of annoyance on her face.

Good. At least she can feel something other than utter loss for a moment.

Cormac hesitates before answering, his eyes narrowing in thought. Then his brows rise and he raises a finger, indicating for us to follow him around the fire. A tattered backpack sits near the flames, a little too close. He snatches it up before it can be consumed by the fire and pulls a pair of necklaces from a side pocket.

The necklaces are simple, each one made up of a black cord decorated with a charm that looks like a brass compass with a small button at the side. They're small, half the size of his palm, and almost look too delicate for Cormac's massive hands to handle.

He pops one of the little compass charm things open and holds it out to Amora. The inside is empty, and I frown as I lean a little closer to peer at it.

Amora accepts the necklace and turns it over in her fingers. "What's this?"

"A communicator charm that a witch made for me years ago," Cormac explains. "We'll be able to get in touch this way."

“How does it work?”

“Put it on.”

Amora does as he’s instructed, slipping the necklace over her head.

“Now hold your thumb over the center, there,” he tells her. “That’s it.”

He demonstrates the motion with the second necklace, slipping it on and pressing his thumb into it. The brass charm lights up with an unearthly blue, waves of color rising and falling from it like the aurora borealis.

The colors dance over Cormac’s skin and then sink beneath the surface, and my eyes widen as a small blue sigil appears on his chest.

“This will stay with you even when you shift, so you don’t have to worry about losing it the way we sometimes lose clothes or other things if we need to shift in a hurry. When you activate the magic, we’ll be able to speak like we do in wolf form,” he continues. “Through a sort of mind link. Let’s make sure it works properly.”

Amora repeats what we just watched Cormac do, pressing her thumb over the charm until the light flares from it and sinks into her skin to create a similar sigil.

The low chatter of the wolves behind fills the air as I stand quietly next to my mate and Frost. My palm itches with the urge to touch her, to comfort her. Grief and dread are still emanating from her in waves, and I want nothing more than to stamp those emotions out.

But I can’t heal the wound in her heart. Not without bringing Kian back.

Once she’s completed the spell, she and Cormac both take the necklaces off. Then Cormac presses a hand to his chest.

“Is it working?” he asks. “You should be able to hear and see me in your mind’s eye.”

“Yeah. I can. Can you hear me?”

“Yes.”

“Good,” I say. “Then we should get moving.” I glance at Cormac and add, “We’ll be in touch, okay?”

Seeing as we didn’t take anything with us from the cabin before we joined the fight, there’s nothing for us to pack up before we head out. So after a few more murmured words to Cormac, Frost, Amora, and I walk to the tree line and shift into our wolf forms. The thick fur that sprouts from my body provides an extra layer of warmth, helping to block out the chill around me.

Not that it matters much. We’re about to start running again, so I’ll be plenty warm in no time.

I shake out my fur, my wolf itching to sprint across the land, to sniff out precisely where we need to go.

We're ready. Now we can save my brother.

*Stay alive, Kian. We're coming.*

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# KIAN



DARKNESS.

Nothing but darkness.

Until air sharply invades my lungs.

I gasp as I raise my eyebrows, trying to pry my eyelids open. Something keeps me on the ground, a sticky weight that I can't identify. My head spins as I try to make sense of what's happening.

*The shadow... Amora... she got away.*

Straining to open my eyes hasn't felt this hard since the time I got completely shit-faced on whiskey years ago with my brothers. It was a vain attempt to forget Amora—and it didn't work. This is just like the morning after that drunken night, my eyelids completely resistant to opening and my muscles screaming at every attempt to move.

The fogginess in my brain lifts slightly as I recall Amora's horrified face.

That was the last thing I saw before I got sucked into...

Where the hell am I?

Slowly, with a hissed breath, I peel open my eyelids and stare upward as the world around me comes into focus. The sky is a midnight blue laced with gray, back-lit somehow with a sort of silvery finish. It seems like night, but I'm not sure if that's truly the case, or if the sky always looks like that.

I lift my head slightly, a throbbing ache in my temples warning me that I'm pushing my limits. Dead looking trees decorate the landscape, or what I can see of it. It *is* night, I'm almost certain of it. But it's the sort of perpetual night that one might find in a dream.

*Or a damn nightmare.*

The trees are dusty gray with gnarly branches jutting toward the sky.

They're barren of leaves or any sort of color, and their bark is the texture of burnt wood. Rocks scatter in every direction, some of the boulders piled into rough formation while others rest against the trunks of the gray trees. I lick my lips, and I swear I can feel a layer of dust coating them. The air tastes like ash.

And then I see them—the shadow figures that lurk near the horizon.

Some of them are as small as the rocks around me and others are gargantuan, inky blobs that float endlessly from one side of the landscape to the other. Everything looks the same. How the hell am I going to navigate this nightmare?

Pain sends my head back to the ground. I close my eyes briefly, hoping none of those shadow fuckers decide to float in this direction while I'm incapacitated. I take stock of my body, identifying which places are in the most pain and then opening my eyes to inspect them.

I shifted back to human form sometime between when the shadow sucked me down into its realm and when I woke up, and without fur in the way, it's easy to see the scrapes, cuts, and bruises that decorate my body. I turn my head a little to examine a ragged patch of skin on my shoulder, and as I do, a sharp burst of pain flares in my leg.

I look down sharply, my jaw clenching against the sensation. A snuffling, hissing sound reaches my ears as I register what I'm seeing. A small, inky black shadow caresses my left leg just over the knee, an opening in its form puckering over my skin—and *sucking*.

Like a damn leech, the thing suckles on my body, drawing blood from me.

No, not blood.

*Drawing life.*

A growl works its way up my throat, but I press my lips together to hold in the sound. I have no idea where the massive shadow monster that dragged me down here went, but considering that there are other shadowy forms lurking in the distance, drawing attention to myself will only worsen my situation.

Still, I'm not about to let this small shadow be the death of me.

I surge from the ground, shifting as I rise to my feet. Even beat up and weakened, I'm still driven by a need to survive. I snap at the shadow, and its thick form feels like rubber between my teeth. This one tastes like the one I fought back on earth.



Is it the same one, made smaller by the way I tore pieces of it away during the battle?

Who fucking cares?

*Fuck, I'm not on earth anymore.*

The realization makes another low growl rumble in my chest. A sudden rush of fury fills me, and I leap into action, my paws pressing against the shadow to pin it to the ground. The thing screeches and snarls, the sound so much more pronounced here without any wind. Shit, this hellscape really *is* from a nightmare.

My internal shadows hum victoriously at the slight advantage I've given myself by taking the shadow off-guard, and I can feel them lending me strength.

After all, part of me belongs in this place just as much as the shadow I'm fighting does.

Before the dark creature can get any leverage on me, my jaws tighten around its rubbery neck—or whatever the fuck it is, because it doesn't really look like a *neck*—and I swing my head side to side.

The thing hisses again, and I clamp down tighter, trying to shut it up. I need to take the creature out before it attracts the attention of the others. I can't take on much more in my weakened state.

The flavors of smoke and ash fill my mouth. I cringe at the disgusting taste as I tear the shadow to pieces, snapping repeatedly at every exposed surface of its form. As soon as the tougher skin-like bits are torn off, they dissipate in the air like smoke drifting away from a snuffed out campfire.

My paws scrape its body as my teeth rip and shred. If this creature was anything but shadows, blood would be coating the ground. Instead, it's just ink and shadow floating away on the wind.

*That's right, motherfucker. You drag me to your world? I'll fucking kill you.*

I take another large chunk out of the shadow beast, but it follows me when I rear back to lunge again. What remains of the creature wraps itself around my snout and neck, sticking its disgusting tendrils into my fresh wound. I bite back a howl, nausea churning in my stomach as agony shoots through me.

*Dammit, Kian. Don't attract attention. You can't fucking fight another one of these monsters.*

Dots swim in front of my eyes, and instead of focusing on the way it feels

as if I'm about to pass out, I think of Amora's face. Not the way she looked as she watched me get pulled away to the shadow realm, but the way she looks in those rare moments when she lets her guard down. The way her green eyes light up, dancing with joy or amusement. The way her full lips curve into a smile, and the flash of her white teeth as she laughs.

If I die here, if I let this creature end me right now, I won't ever see that smile again.

*No.*

Something in my chest hardens, and I force my jaw open, working against the tight hold the shadow beast has on me. I open my mouth enough to expose my teeth, then clamp down on the rubbery shadow that's still wrapped around my muzzle. I kick my back legs, scratching up the rest of the shadow as I shift my weight forward, pinning it to the ground again. Bracing one of my front paws on the monster, I rip my snout free of its hold.

Within seconds, I rip the fucker to bits, sinewy chunks of shadow rippling around me. The thing releases one final screech before winking out of existence.

I spit out the last few rubbery bits of its flesh. Those too shrivel up, slithering up toward the sky and becoming one with the scenery.

I glance around, breathing hard as pain radiates through me. The other shadows on the horizon don't seem to have noticed the scuffle between me and one of their brethren, thank fuck.

But I'm still here. Killing the shadow that I'm pretty sure was responsible for dragging me to this place didn't undo whatever the creature did to get me here.

I'm *stuck* here.

The shadow part of me thrums with excitement. This is the place where it belongs, the origin of its magic. But my earthly wolf groans with frustration.

And pain. So much pain.

Now that the fight is over and I can assess my injuries again, I'm starting to realize that not all of the discomfort in my body comes from cuts or bruises. Some of it goes a lot deeper than that, a bone deep pain that reminds me of what I used to feel back on earth when the shadows in me ached.

Only now, it's not the shadows that ache. For the first time in my life, they feel settled and content. It's the *other* half of me that hurts now, the regular shifter side screaming in agony as it struggles to adjust to this world.

I huff a breath through my nostrils, a combination of amusement and

annoyance rising inside me. *Great. I can't fucking win, can I?*

My mind drifts back to the old task that Quinton assigned us, the one that carried me forward for so many years with my brothers at my side.

Find the veil. Pierce it. Break it open.

He promised us that when we did, we would find relief for the constant pain of our shadows.

*Apparently, being half shifter and half shadow, some part of me will always ache, no matter where the hell I end up. Quinton failed to fucking mention that.*

The irony of it isn't lost on me. I can practically hear Malix in the back of my mind, joking about how we're always doomed to suffer.

Fate is a fickle bitch, and I have a bone to pick with her.

Although there are no new threats in my immediate surroundings, I still feel too exposed where I am, so I trot behind a formation of large boulders. Hopefully, they'll keep me hidden from the shadows on the horizon for a brief time as I heal.

Drawing my human form to the surface again takes almost more strength than I can muster, but I force the shift, magic rippling over my body in shadowy waves and revealing my naked body again. I don't even bother to look at my wounds. I just brace myself against the boulder nearest to me and shift back and forth a few more times, allowing myself to heal a bit more with each transition as the magic washes through me.

I feel better by the time I finally shift back to human form and stay that way. My injuries are less acute, although the exhaustion is worse now.

Sitting with my back against the rough boulder, I take stock of my surroundings. The rocky, barren landscape extends well into the distance, capped by distant mountains. *Are they mountains? They look like mountains.* It's hard to tell what's real and what's not in this realm. For all I know, this could be a fucking fever dream.

Frost would have a fucking field day with this place. I can already see him running around with a notebook, jotting down his observations and reporting back to me with his curious findings. That guy knows more about literally everything than anyone else I've ever met.

A new sort of pain seizes my heart at that thought.

*Fuck, I miss my brothers. I miss Amora.*

I close my eyes as I try to focus on the bond, or whatever it is that keeps us tightly knit together. There's always been an intangible connection

between me and my brothers, and although we tried to destroy the mate bond with Amora, I can't deny that there's still some thread that links us.

But I can't feel it right now.

I can't sense any of them.

Growling, I open my eyes and slam my fist into the ground. Plumes of dust rise and tickle my nostrils. I huff, blowing the dusty crap out of my nose. Who the fuck knows what might happen if I consume anything here?

Food. Water. Shelter.

*Shit.*

How the fuck am I going to survive?

After resting for a few more minutes, I muster my strength and stand up. My limbs feel slightly better, and the wound in my neck doesn't sting as much. When I touch it gingerly, I can feel that the skin has closed to form a tender, fragile scar.

I should move. Staying in one place too long is risky, and I can't afford to get into another fight before I heal a bit more. But where the hell should I go? Which direction will take me back to earth?

My gaze scans every last detail of the landscape around me, but I see no rippling holes, no tears in the ether. The shadow creature carried me through the veil between this realm and earth, that much is clear.

But I have no idea how the fuck to get back.

# AMORA



MY PAWS POUND the earth as I race alongside Frost and Malix, leaving behind what's left of Felicity's pack—which isn't much.

My stomach churns as I think of their loss, their struggle.

If we hadn't gone to her for help, would all those shifters who died still be alive right now? Would Felicity still be alive?

No. I can't think about that now. There's no way to know what would've happened, and ultimately, Quinton was always a threat to them. There's a good chance he would've gone after Felicity and the Silver Crest shifters before long no matter what my mates and I did.

I grit my teeth as I run faster. Malix and Frost flank either side of me in their normal wolf forms so I can keep their pace. Since we're not currently under threat from errant shadows, they don't need to be in their shadow wolf forms.

Adrenaline courses through my veins, carrying me forward. My body screams that it needs a fucking break, but I ignore it. I won't let it have one.

There's no time to waste. We have to find Kian.

Before we left the clearing, we shifted back and forth between wolf and human a few times to speed up the healing process. Although it helped, I'm still feeling shitty as hell. My bones ache, and my body sputters like an engine preparing to go out.

I'm in okay shape... for now. But my shifter healing didn't do much to help my exhaustion.

Or the quickly growing hole in my heart.

Emotions rattle my chest, bouncing off my ribs in a way that makes it hard to keep breathing steadily as I run. All I can think about is how Kian

saved me, how he put his life on the line just so I could get away. And thinking about that moment just highlights all the times he's done the same thing before. I can see it clearly now.

I feel fucking awful that it took an event like this to make me fully admit my true feelings.

Torment roils beneath the surface of my skin, clashing and cracking like lightning before a storm. I can't deny it any longer. My feelings for Kian run so deep that they go all the way to my soul. They're a part of my biology now, like a glue that fuses my molecules together.

*I need him.*

I'm way past caring about my previous mission to destroy him and the two men racing along on either side of me. Once upon time, I wanted to kill them all. Now the thought of losing them makes me feel like *I'll die*.

I was wrong about so much. Even if Kian is still a morally gray sort of man, he's not evil. I know that now. I feel it deep in my bones, lodged in the sinews of my muscles. My soul recognizes him—recognizes all the parts of him that are more like me than I ever wanted to admit. He looks rough and dangerous, the scar over his eye an outward mark of many battles fought and won. He's stubborn as a damn mule and grumpy as fuck, but deep down, he's just as susceptible to damage as I am. He can be hurt just like I can.

*I can't lose him.*

In the back of my mind, it occurs to me that I would be almost willing to let the world burn just to save him. Does that make me like him? His attempt to tear open the veil to soothe his pain once pissed me the fuck off, giving me every excuse I was looking for to hate him.

But now I find myself thinking along those same lines. I don't care what else happens, I'm going to do everything in my power to get him back.

*Any ideas on how to get to Kian?* Malix asks, startling me from my endlessly churning thoughts.

The sudden sound of his voice in my head makes me stumble a little, but I don't lose traction on the ground. I regain my balance quickly and keep moving.

*I don't know,* I reply, thankful that he either didn't notice my missed step or decided not to point it out. *Your guess is as good as mine.*

Frost huffs next to me, drawing my attention. The grace and fluidity of his wolf always impresses me, and I gaze at him for a second, comforted by the sight of his muscles working beneath his fur.

*We could try going to a weak point in the veil, he suggests. Attempting to break through it.*

*You're both made of shadows, I point out. Couldn't you travel between realms just like the shadows that came here?*

*I don't think it works that way, Malix says, his tone heavy. Believe me, I wish it did.*

*Can't you at least try?* I press. There's desperation in my voice, but I'm beyond caring.

*Yeah.* Malix sighs. *Of course we can.*

*We should stop if we're going to do that, Frost suggests. We need to rest soon anyway. We can't afford to run ourselves into the ground.*

As always, he's the voice of reason. I slow my pace to a trot and then flop onto the ground, peering at our surroundings. We're still in the woods, but we've put a lot of miles between ourselves and Felicity's old pack—and hopefully even more miles between ourselves and Quinton. We've been traveling since late last night, running for as long as possible. It's all we can do right now.

Well, except for resting, maybe. And planning.

I shift into my human form, letting the earth beneath me cool my hot, sweaty skin. Rolling over onto my back, I stare up at the sky as dawn pricks the horizon. The stars will soon disappear, but we still need a fire if we want to stay warm.

As if reading my mind, the men start gathering wood. I join them, giving my body a constant focus so I'm not swarmed by thoughts of Kian.

Fuck, who am I kidding? I can't get him out of my head. Even when he was right here beside me, even when we were butting heads constantly, I always thought of him. I always wanted him.

I sigh as I sink to the ground and watch Malix blow on the glowing embers nestled in the kindling. Soon, a fire dances before my eyes, and I shift my position, sticking my toes close to the flames. Warmth coats my skin, soothing me.

But it doesn't quite reach my heart.

"Okay," I murmur as I gesture to the two men. "See if you can find some way through the veil."

Frost's demeanor doesn't change as he stands on my left near a stand of trees. He studies his surroundings briefly and then turns his back to the fire, the firelight illuminating every gorgeous curve of his body and dancing over

his ever-moving tattoos. They're not clashing like before, but they're not resting either.

His features are set in concentration as he raises his palms, circling them in the air in slow movements. He pauses for a moment, then sticks his fingers in the center as if he's trying to open a set of heavy drapes. A few mimed motions later, he makes a frustrated noise in his throat.

"I... don't know how to do this."

It's the first time I've ever heard him admit a lack of knowledge. Or maybe he *has* admitted something like this before. It's hard to think clearly when my brain is a mess of mushy exhaustion and grief.

I glance at Malix, who licks his full lips as he rises to his feet and steps away from the fire. He rubs his palms together as he prepares himself to try to step through the veil, his violet eyes focused on the air in front of him as if he's trying to glimpse something that isn't there.

"It's not thin here, but maybe..." He rolls his shoulders and raises his palms like his brother just did a few seconds ago.

I hold my breath as I wait through several loaded heartbeats, but nothing happens. Malix's lips purse together, his brows furrowing as his shoulders tense up. Then he drops his hands, shaking his head.

"Fuck." He grimaces. "I can't do it."

Of course not. I don't know what we expected.

I drop my head into my hands. "It's not your fault. You're not entirely made of shadow like those creatures were, so it makes sense that you can't shift back and forth between earth and the shadow realm like they can. And I'm just useless."

"That's not true, kitty," Malix reassures me as he settles on the ground next to me. "You must have somethin' in that brain that can help us. Just think."

Despite the strain in his voice, a comforting warmth radiates from his body, making me think of sunshine and hot summer days. I put on a smile as I raise my head, my gaze settling on his hand where it rests on my bare thigh. The dark color of his skin contrasts with the pallor of mine as he gives my thigh a squeeze.

"I'm trying," I promise. "It's just... hard to think when one of us is missing."

He smirks, although it looks strangely out of place on his face right now, with worry still gleaming in his violet eyes. "I could always imitate Kian if



that helps.”

“He would hate that.”

“Exactly.”

I roll my eyes. “I don’t think that will help.”

“I can be quiet instead. Like Frost.”

A soft hum sounds from Frost, but his expression doesn’t change.

I chew on my lower lip, leaning into Malix’s touch. His hand grounds me, granting me a slight reprieve from the ache in my heart. As the fog in my mind lifts a little, I have a sudden thought of the witch who kicked this whole thing off when she told me about the vision she had of my three mates.

The one who told me that they could one day destroy the world, unleashing pure hell by bringing the shadow realm to earth.

“Gwen,” I whisper. “She’s a witch. Maybe she can help us.”

“Another witch?” Malix sighs, not bothering to hide the disdain in his voice. “After that wanna-be D&D character who demanded a chunk of Kian’s flesh as payment and still decided to betray us, I don’t know if bringing another witch into this is a good idea.”

I cock a brow in his direction. “Got any better ideas, Mr. Sunshine?”

He meets my gaze, that handsome grin carving his features like the statue of a god. “I suppose I don’t.”

“Consulting with a witch may be our only remaining option,” Frost says thoughtfully. “If it gets us closer to our brother, then I don’t care what she asks for in payment.”

“How well do you know this witch?” Malix asks me, releasing his grip on my thigh to add another piece of wood to the fire.

“Enough to know she’s a hermit who helped...” I trail off, thinking of Sable and Ridge and the life I left behind years ago. “...a friend.”

“So, can we trust her?”

I shrug. “As well as we can trust any witch, I suppose.”

Malix grimaces. “That’s not a great vote of confidence.”

I take his hand, linking my fingers with his. “Do we have a choice?”

His violet eyes drop to what little space there is between us. After a moment, he sighs, then meets my gaze and nods once. “All right.”

“Agreed,” Frost puts in.

“Okay. Then it’s settled.” I glance between the two of them. “We’ll find Gwen.”

With a course of action set, I wish I could feel better. I wish I could

loosen the tightness of the muscles around my heart.

But I can't. My chest hurts so badly that even though I'm not panting from the exhaustion of the long run anymore, I can barely breathe.

Malix lingers at my side as he finishes stoking the fire. I give him a tight smile—hardly convincing—and scoot away, standing up.

“We should get going again soon,” I say, trying to keep my voice even. “I just... I just need a minute. I'll be right back.”

Without waiting for a response from either of my mates, I head into the trees that surround us, walking away with even strides. I don't know why it matters, since they've already seen me at my worst plenty of times, but I don't want them to see me lose it. I don't want to make them carry the burden of my own pain when they're already carrying their own. But all I can feel is a tidal wave of emotions crashing repeatedly over me, and I can't hold it off any longer.

*I can't breathe.*

My lungs ache as my pace quickens. I wander into the thick woods, allowing the wide trunks to hide me from my mates' view, but lingering close enough that Malix and Frost won't freak out. Losing Kian is already doing enough of a number on them. Losing me would make everything worse.

A ragged, breathy sob escapes me before I even reach the break in the trees that leads to a small clearing nearby. The night's last beams of silvery moonlight dance over the surface of a small pond that ripples in the breeze. I drop to my knees near the water's edge, tears clouding my vision.

Oh god, there's a hole in my chest.

*I can't breathe.*

I clutch at my sternum, nails digging into the bare skin as I try to get ahold of myself.

What's Kian feeling right now? What is he thinking? Is he okay? Does he have food? Is he *alive*?

*Fuck.*

I bow forward and let my hair hide my face, tears dropping from my eyes and landing on my thighs before trickling to the ground.

The crack of a twig behind me makes my head snap up, and I brush the backs of my hands over my eyes as Frost appears between two trunks. He rests his hand on the tree beside him, seeming to be debating whether to step into the small clearing or hang back and give me space.

I should've known my mates wouldn't let me be alone right now. And

although the old me would probably tell him I don't need him here, that I *want* to be alone... it would be a lie.

Without saying a word, I stand up and turn to face him.

"Amora."

That's all he says. Just my name. Not empty words of reassurance, not platitudes that we would both know mean nothing. Just my name, in a voice as full of pain as I feel. The sound of it sends goosebumps over my flesh, and just like that, the hole in my heart shrinks just a little bit. Just hearing those syllables on his tongue, formed fully by soft lips, chases some of my sadness into the background.

But the relief is only temporary, like a band-aid pressed over the bloody stump of an amputated limb.

Fuck me, I'm so tired.

Exhaustion weakens my legs, making my knees buckle. Frost is at my side in an instant, stepping toward me so fast I can barely track the movement, then wrapping his arms around me. I blink back tears, and not just because I don't want him to see them. I don't want to fucking cry anymore. I just want to feel something besides pain.

"Kian cares for you," he whispers. "He's always cared for you."

I choke on a laugh, my voice thick as I say, "That's funny."

Because it *is* funny, when I think back over everything that's happened between us. Kian has a funny way of showing he cares.

*But I guess I do too.*

"It's true."

I look into Frost's eyes as blue starlight gazes back at me. His pupils glint with a mixture of adoration and concern, and there's such clear conviction in their depths that I can't deny what he's saying is true.

He doesn't say anything else. He doesn't need to. What he said was perfectly direct and straightforward, carrying with it a confidence that only Frost could embody. His reasonable and logical way of seeing things, his sureness, grounds me.

*He grounds me.*

I lean into him, wrapping my arms around his muscled body. Emotions overflow from me like a cup that's been filled one too many times. There's nowhere else for it all to go, so I spill over, letting him catch whatever falls from my heart.

"Fuck, Frost," I rasp out. "Fuck."

He doesn't speak, just keeps holding me. I cling to him, my fingers digging into his broad back as I feel his heart beating against mine. He's in pain just like I am. It's clear in each heavy thud of his heart.

I want to soothe his pain. I don't know how to ease my own, but I want to make Frost feel better somehow. So I raise my gaze to his as I unwind my arms from around his body and slide my hands up his chest, over his shoulders, and up his neck to cup his face.

Then I lean up and kiss him.

He lets out a shuddering breath as he returns the kiss, and I take that as a sign to keep going. Both of our lips are stiff at first, as if we've forgotten how to do this, but gradually, we start to melt against each other. My hands clutch at his face with more desperation, thumbs sliding over the line of his jaw as he opens his mouth and delves his tongue between my lips. His scent overwhelms my senses, making my head spin as his cock grows hard between us and twitches against my stomach.

Frost has always responded to the connection between us with a pure, overwhelming sort of focus, and even now, I can feel his need rising like a tidal wave, crashing over me.

Keeping one hand pressed to his face, I reach between us with the other hand to wrap my fingers around his cock, making him shudder against me. Stroking him in long, slow movements, I close my eyes and try to shut out everything else but the sound and feel and taste of my mate.

"Amora..."

He mutters my name again, and there's more raw emotion in it than the first time he said it when he entered the clearing. There's a salty taste flavoring our kiss, and I don't know if it's from his tears or mine—or maybe both—but it doesn't really matter. I keep kissing him, swallowing up the tears and sliding my tongue against his.

With a soft groan, he pushes me backward until my back flattens against a tree. His kiss is rough and almost out of control, hardly leaving room to breathe. But I don't need to breathe. I don't want to. It hardly seems important when he's nipping my lower lip like this, when his mouth is hot and wet against mine.

I grip the tip of his cock and squeeze, making Frost hiss out a breath. Precum leaks from the tip, slicking my movements.

"Do you like that?" I whisper.

He grinds his hips against me as he shudders again. "Yes..."

His hips roll forward to meet my strokes, and he curses under his breath as he starts to thrust into my hand, his movements jerky and animalistic. My heart hammers in the same rhythm as his as they crash against each other where our chests are pressed together.

Nothing about this is particularly sexy, but it feels *necessary*, the same way drawing poison out of a snake bite is necessary. We're both hurting, so broken without Kian that we barely know how to function, and touching each other like this eases some of that agonizing ache.

Frost mirrors my actions, sliding one hand down between my thighs to cup my pussy possessively. His fingertips move over my clit, making the hard little bud throb under his touch. As he dives in for another messy kiss, he drives two fingers into my core, opening me up with rough thrusts.

He might as well already be fucking me, the way he shoves his fingers into me like he's trying to split me open. I could probably come like this, and I know it wouldn't take long to make him spill all over my hand.

But that's not what he needs. Not what *I* need.

I want to feel him inside me.

"Frost," I whimper as he slides his fingers out and slams them back inside. I grip the base of his cock, whimpering at the tortured moan that spills from his lips. "Fuck me. Please."

He breaks away from the kiss, breathing hard as he leans back enough to look down into my eyes. There are still tear tracks running down his face, and the brightness of his blue eyes reminds me of a star that's about to burn out.

When he slides his fingers out of me, my core clenches desperately, as if it's trying to suck them back in. The empty feeling when they're gone is almost painful. My hips buck to follow his touch, but he lifts his hand to caress my left breast, rolling my nipple between his fingers as he stares down at me with an intense expression.

"How do you want me to fuck you?"

"Lift me up."

Heat flares in his eyes. It's the most emotion I've seen from him in a while that wasn't just raw pain, and I latch on to it, not even giving him a chance to hesitate before I wrap my arms around his neck and then wind my legs around his waist.

His nostrils flare as he sucks in a breath, and he grips my thighs in an almost bruising hold as my pussy grinds against his slick, hard cock. Keeping his gaze locked on mine, he uses his grip on me to drag my core up and down

the length of his shaft, letting my arousal coat his length. The way his cock grazes against my clit makes fire burn beneath my skin, and my eyes roll back as a sob falls from my lips.

“Please,” I beg as he nudges the tip of his cock at my entrance. “Please, Frost. Fuck me.”

“Slow or fast?”

My response is out of my mouth before I can even think about it. “Fast and *hard*.”

And that’s just what he does. As if the words I spoke were an echo of Frost’s own inner thoughts, he lifts me just a little higher, allowing the broad head of his dick to stretch my entrance. Then he pulls me forcibly toward him, impaling me in one hard stroke.

“Unngh!” The sound that bursts from my lungs isn’t even a word, just an inarticulate groan.

As soon as he’s buried inside me, he presses my back flush against the tree trunk again and starts to thrust in punishing strokes. Each one feels deeper than the last, breaking me open in all the right ways. The bark of the tree scratches my back, digging into my skin, but I don’t care. It’s not important. My entire focus belongs to Frost in this moment.

This is what I need—to belong to him.

Watching Kian disappear tore through me worse than a tornado ripping apart a rickety house. With Frost inside me, hips slapping against mine and cock splitting me wide open, I swear I can feel some echo of our mate bond growing, strengthening, becoming more tangible and real.

Frost has never been able to hold back when we have sex, losing himself to the wild fierceness of his need for me. But this feels different than *that*, even. This feels primal. Raw. Violent and healing at the same time, as our lips and teeth clash, drawing a coppery tang of blood that gets swallowed up just like our tears did.

“Need you, Amora,” he grunts out, his words choppy as he pounds into me. “Need you. Always. *Always*. Fuck.”

My heels hook around each other at his lower back, my nails digging into the skin of his shoulders as I try to hold on. Fucking Frost like this makes me think of the way Kian fucked me against the tree that day when all of us were worried that we would lose Frost to the shadows Quinton had forced into him.

So many close calls. So many times I almost lost them.

And now our luck has run out.

“Harder,” I groan, squeezing my eyes together as fresh tears spill down my cheeks. “Please, Frost. Break me.”

He growls like an animal, as if his wolf is so close to the surface that it’s the one in control now. His cock seems to thicken inside me as he grips my thighs, holding me steady as his hips snap against mine.

The base of his cock grinds against my clit every time he hammers home, and after a few more savage strokes, I fall apart. Heat rolls through me in a wave, making my nipples peak and my limbs go rigid as my orgasm crests. I clench around Frost, and he wrenches his lips away from mine to bury his face in the crook of my neck.

He keeps thrusting, but the pace of his strokes slows slightly. I know he’s having to fight his way inside as my body tightens around him, and I can feel the way he shudders every time he bottoms out inside my swollen pussy.

My nostrils flare as I draw in oxygen, my mouth dropping open a little to help my lungs get enough air. My eyes open too, and as they do, my gaze locks on a tall figure standing at the edge of the clearing.

Malix.

His violet gaze holds mine for a second as the last ripples of pleasure course through me, and there’s something like understanding in his expression—as if he knows why Frost is fucking me against a tree when we should all be resting. As if he knows how much we needed some distraction from our grief.

Malix gives me a small nod and then turns as if to head back to the fire.

But I don’t want that. I need him too, and my heart squeezes painfully at the thought of him sitting by the fire by himself, alone with all the thoughts cascading through his head.

Keeping my legs locked around Frost’s waist, I reach over his shoulder toward the other man and whisper, “Malix, come here.”

Frost pauses in his movements, keeping a tight hold on my thighs as he pulls me away from the tree. His cock throbs inside me as he angles us a little so that we can both look over and watch Malix as he approaches.

Malix didn’t even hesitate when I asked him to join us, and as soon as he reaches the two of us, he comes to stand behind me. His broad chest meets my back, sandwiching me between him and his brother as he buries his face in the crook of my neck.

Moaning, I arch against Frost and lean into Malix, the feeling of sunshine

joining the warm spice that already thickens the air around us. Together, their scents imbue me with a feeling that could almost be called hope.

I don't think that's quite the right word for it, but having the two of them here on either side of me makes me feel less adrift. It reminds me that even though one of my mates has been torn from me—torn from us—we still have each other.

And more than anything in this moment, I need to feel them both as close to me as physically possible.

I reach back to cup the back of Malix's neck, and I swear I can feel his wild emotions pulsing like an electric current beneath my fingers. His cock nestles between my ass cheeks as he presses in closer to me, and he groans low in his throat.

I need them both so badly to keep the pain of losing Kian at bay, to keep us from falling too hard into grief. If we become frozen by it, wrecked by it, we won't be able to do anything.

"Malix," I rasp out as I clutch at his neck. "I need you to fuck me. Now."

Frost's breath hitches as he registers my words. I watch his eyelids droop a little as his mouth slacks open, his tongue darting out to wet the edge of his bottom lip. He hikes me a little higher against his body and presses his forehead to mine as his fingers curl into my ass, parting my cheeks for Malix.

Malix bites my neck as his fingers trace a path to my back hole, his breath coming in warm waves on my skin. He leans back slightly and I hear him spit, then I feel the soft, wet trickle of his saliva sliding down between my cheeks.

He slides the tip of his finger inside my asshole. "Here?"

Need blooms in my core, expanding to fill my entire body. "Yes. *Fuck.*"

He keeps biting and sucking on my neck as he slides his finger deeper inside my ass, keeping his free hand perched on my hip to keep me steady. I can feel Frost shaking, his control clearly holding on by a thread. His hips start moving as if he can't fucking stop himself, the friction between us growing by the second. I meet his gaze and lick my lips, using my free hand to cup the back of his neck.

"You like it when I finger your ass?" Malix asks, his voice gruff and full of too many emotions to name. "You like being sandwiched between us?"

"Yes, I do," I gasp weakly.

Frost tilts his head a little as he claims my lips in a messy, hungry kiss. His tongue delves into my mouth, and I suck on it, making ragged moans



vibrate his throat. His fingers dig just a little deeper into my skin—just as Malix pushes his finger deeper into my ass.

He works a second finger in, more saliva slicking his entry as he stretches me open.

“Does this feel good?” he demands before biting down on my neck again. “This what you want?”

I hum in response, and the guttural growl that rumbles in Malix’s chest makes my pulse race. My pussy floods Frost’s cock, arousal soaking his shaft while Malix continues working my ass.

“You open up so good for us, kitty,” Malix praises huskily, sounding lost and almost dazed. “We’ve got you. We’ll take care of you.”

I break my kiss with Frost to whimper plaintively. “Just fuck me already. I don’t care if it hurts.”

He’s trying to warm me up and make sure I’m ready for him. Logically, I know that. But the same part of me that begged Frost to fuck me hard and fast, to split me open on his cock and make it hurt, doesn’t care about that. I don’t need it. I just need to *feel*.

Pain. Pleasure. Some combination of the two.

Anything.

The tip of Malix’s cock breaches my hole, stretching me open even more as he works his way inside. Having him inch his way into my ass draws my wolf close to the surface, and a guttural growl pours from my throat as I devour Frost’s lips. My moans are swallowed up by his desperate kisses, his tongue lunging into my mouth to duel with mine.

As if he can sense my desperation—or maybe driven by his own—Malix starts to thrust harder and faster, working his way in more quickly. My back arches as I cling tightly to Frost, my nails digging into his skin. He hisses, but he doesn’t stop kissing me as Malix draws partway out and then shoves back inside me in a swift motion, bottoming out in my ass.

My entire lower half seems to clench up as they establish a rhythm back and forth. When Malix thrusts, Frost withdraws. When Frost thrusts, Malix withdraws.

“You’re so tight,” Malix growls. “Almost like you’re trying to push me out.”

“No,” I whimper. “No, no, no. Never.”

He drags his teeth over my shoulder. “Damn fucking right, never. You’re ours. Always will be.”

Their pace quickens, and with each rough thrust in my pussy and in my ass, I can feel myself letting go. My tense muscles relax, allowing them both more access, and my head falls back to rest on Malix's shoulder, his hot breath brushing over my ear in choppy gusts. Frost nuzzles his face against the other side of my throat and bites the sensitive skin, making me cry out.

It's the kind of pain that feels so good. The kind of pain that Kian gives me when he fucks me, when he claims me.

*Fuck.*

I squeeze my eyes shut as a rush of grief joins the pleasure coursing through me. Tears surface, threatening to soak my face. I pinch my lips together and groan, focusing on the synchronized movements of Frost and Malix, their cocks stretching me to the limit.

*We've done this before. Kian and Malix fucked me when Frost was locked in that basement, lost to all of us in that moment.*

My clit throbs as I cling to both of the men surrounding me, one hand cupping each of their necks as I ride their cocks.

It worked back then, and it's working now, all of us grounding ourselves in this connection.

As my core clenches, I lift my head, meeting Frost's desperate gaze. The usual bright blue of his eyes are now a wicked storm, seeming almost gray in the early morning light. Behind me, Malix slams into my ass, his fingers digging into my hips as he bites the right side of my neck, sending shockwaves of pleasure through me.

I'm so close to the edge.

So close...

"Fuck!" The sound is ripped from me on a breathless cry. "Oh fuck, don't stop. Please, I—"

"That's right," Malix grunts. "Come for us."

I can't stay still anymore. My hips join the fray, bucking against my mates as Frost and Malix attempt to keep their pace. Heat bursts through me like a firework exploding, and my breath seizes as the orgasm rushes through me.

My pussy and ass are both clenched tight, making their thrusts more difficult. Frost doubles his effort, and I watch as his expression cracks, his brows knitting together as he holds my gaze. It's like he's daring me to look away, to see anything except him in this moment.

"Amora..." he groans. "I'm... *fuck.*"

He slams into me one more time, cum flooding my pussy as Malix groans behind me. I stroke the back of Malix's neck as I work my hips to the rhythm of his thrusts.

"Come for me, Malix," I whisper as pleasure overwhelms me. "Fill me up."

"Fuck, Amora. Your ass is so *tight*. It's milking me..."

He shudders, lodging himself deep as he throbs inside me. I whimper at the feel of him emptying himself in my ass, my body going slack between them in the aftermath of my second intense climax.

The three of us stay like that for a long moment, our sweat-dampened skin cooling in the breeze as our three individual heartbeats pound out an uneven rhythm together.

Malix slides out first, and I miss the feeling of fullness immediately. When Frost does the same, setting me gingerly on my feet, I slump against Malix, who catches me easily. I turn around to press a kiss to Malix's lips, and then he slowly lowers me to the ground with Frost's help. The two of them settle in on either side of me, Frost behind me and Malix in front, still sandwiching me between them as if it's the natural order of things. The way it should always be.

Frost's still-hard cock rests against my ass as he wraps an arm around my waist, and Malix draws gentle patterns over my arm, my shoulder, and my neck. Their solid, steady presence is enough to make me feel a little less broken.

For now.

# FROST



MY FINGERTIPS BRUSH over soft skin as I nuzzle my face into Amora's black hair from where I lie behind her. Her scent is comforting, familiar and addictive.

I still crave her, even in the aftermath of sex.

Because it's not just sex that I crave with her.

It's everything.

I'm used to being in pain all the time. It's an ever-present feeling, the sting and bite of shadows gyrating beneath my skin in perpetual battle with my shifter side. They're calm now, quieted by Amora and her touch. Since being broken is all I know, it's a relief to be freed temporarily from the storm that usually rages inside me.

Kian's absence hurts more than the shadows that possess me, but Amora eases that ache too. Just a little bit.

I don't ever want to let her go.

Dragging my fingers through her hair produces the softest of sighs. She's always loud and full of energy, an unstoppable force to be reckoned with. But right now, she's quiet and lax in our arms, more subdued than I've ever seen her.

"Amora," I whisper.

Her ear cocks in my direction, barely noticeable if I wasn't already paying such close attention to her like I always do. How could I ever look away?

"Yeah?" she asks.

"Do you feel better?"

There's a slight hesitation, and then she replies, "A bit."

“Good.”

Malix raises his head from the ground. Violet eyes rove over her body, absorbing the sight of her just as I’m doing, and I can see the worry in his usually relaxed expression.

“That *is* good,” he agrees. “Rest a little more, okay?”

“We have to get moving,” she insists, already starting to stir between us.

I squeeze her bicep. “Please, rest.”

“Just a few more minutes,” Malix urges. “Three minutes, if you want to get specific.”

“Kian wouldn’t rest.”

The sound of those words leaving her lips makes my stomach tighten. Invisible fingers clench around my heart, making it struggle to beat normally. I bury my face in Amora’s hair as I try to rein in my emotions. I’m used to being able to wrestle them under control fairly easily, but it’s harder now. Anger and longing and fear lash at me like the shadows once did when I was far too overwhelmed with them.

*Quinton*, I think grimly. *He’s to blame for this.*

Amora sits up, peeling out of the interwoven limbs that make us into a pile. She kisses Malix’s forehead and then turns to me to kiss my cheek. Although the kiss is chaste, my cock still jumps in response.

“It’s been three minutes,” she claims. “Let’s wash up.”

“All right, boss lady,” Malix teases. His humorous tone isn’t lost on me, and I know he’s trying to lighten the heavy mood that still hangs over all of us. I don’t smile, but I do acknowledge the hint of amusement that passes between my mate and my brother. “You’re in charge.”

“We’re *all* in charge,” Amora corrects as she stands up and steps toward the small pond nearby. Silt and mud pool up around my feet as I follow her.

I dip as deep as possible, the frigid liquid swallowing up my body. The intense shift in temperature edges out the pain hovering at the periphery of my awareness. As with Amora’s proximity, the pond keeps the ache at bay for just a brief moment.

We wash quickly and then snuff out the small fire, smothering it with dirt and stones so that the smoke won’t billow up and give away our location. *Quinton* and his shadow army might be following us, so it’s best to take precautions wherever we can. Since the witch Amora knows lives in Montana, we still have many days of traveling ahead of us.

Shifting into my wolf provides me a new burst of energy. I dart forward

after Amora, guarding her left side while Malix keeps watch over her right. Every so often, we circle her, shifting positions so one or the other of us is in the lead.

We slow our pace from time to time, but we never quite stop. After some time, a town comes into view up ahead as the sun illuminates our path, dawn having broken hours ago. We change course a little, trotting up into the foothills to observe the lightly populated area from a higher vantage point.

There aren't many people. At least not that I can see.

*There's an abandoned house to the right on the edge of that clearing,* Malix points out, jerking his snout in that direction. *Might be a working car in that garage.*

*Food,* Amora murmurs hopefully to my left. Her tongue lolls out of her mouth as her eyelids droop heavily. *Maybe there are clothes in the house too. It'll take a while to get to Montana, and if we shift into human form to drive, we'll blend in a lot better if we're not naked.*

I nod to them both, then share a look with my brother. He darts forward, loping gracefully down the mountain into the hilly thicket of trees near the clearing where the abandoned looking house sits. I watch his wolf form with concentrated intensity as he pads carefully around the house, checking for any signs of recent or current occupants.

*Please tell us it's officially abandoned,* Amora says in mind speak.

I can hear the exhaustion in her voice, and although it's not enough to make me regret what happened between us when we stopped last, it fills me with a strong determination to make sure she gets some real rest soon. If we're able to steal a car, hopefully Malix and I will be able to convince her to let one of us take the first shift driving so that she can sleep in the back. As long as we're still moving forward, maybe she'll be able to relax a little.

Down below, Malix lifts his nose into the air, his tail wagging slightly. *It's officially abandoned. Come on.*

He shifts and waves an arm over his head, indicating that the place is safe for us to break into. By the time Amora and I make our way down to the clearing, he's already broken through the back window and unlocked the front door. I shift as I climb the steps, pausing to extend my hand behind me to Amora.

She doesn't argue. She takes my hand with a grateful expression, exhaustion eating away at the determination in her face. She shivers as she passes through the threshold behind me. Instinct takes over, and I tug her

closer to my side as Malix shuts the door, offering a little of my warmth.

The floor creaks beneath our feet as we make our way deeper into the small cabin. Dilapidated wood and dusty furniture surround us, looking almost indistinguishable from some of the other places we've occupied over the years. Kian would probably say it smells like home.

Sorrow invades my chest as I hug Amora tighter to my side. She rests her head against my shoulder as we wander down the hallway, the two of us stuck together like glue. The closet produces a decent array of well-worn clothing, most of it too large for Amora, but warm enough that she won't freeze in the car. I grab a pair of jeans with a t-shirt and a flannel shirt to toss over it, then peruse the boot selection.

"Lucky you," Malix points out as I grab a pair that look like they'll fit. "You always find your size."

"Lucky me," I repeat in a deadpan voice.

I yank on the boots without lacing them, then head out the back door to where an old car is parked in what passes for the backyard. Oil stains coat the dusty, hard-packed ground, dried alongside patches of rust. The car is ancient and likely hasn't been driven for a while. I have no idea who used to live in this cabin or why the cabin is abandoned now, but it's clear that even before the previous occupants left or died, they didn't do a lot to maintain the vehicle.

After picking the lock on the door, I pop open the hood to inspect the engine and check the oil. I nod to myself as I lower the hood back down, satisfied with what I've found. With a top up of oil, hopefully it will be good enough.

Fortunately, I find a half full carton of engine oil in the trunk. Once I've refilled the oil, I slide under the steering wheel, thankful that old cars like this are easier to hot-wire. Within minutes, the engine roars to life and smoke spills from the exhaust pipe, the pungent smell making my nostrils flare.

My brothers and I always prefer to steal bikes whenever possible, but desperate times call for more convenient means. A car is better. It means the three of us can switch off driving while the others sleep. With one of us always driving the car, we'll cut down substantially on the time it will take to reach Montana.

I sigh as I slide out from beneath the steering wheel, sparing a glance at the decrepit tool table set against one side of the house. Rusty wrenches, gunk-covered screws, and a weathered saw are all that's left here. Whoever

owned this place definitely wasn't keen on up-keeping it. Or they died a long time ago.

"Ready?" Malix pokes his head out of the back door of the house, raising a brow. When he sees that the car is running, he gives a satisfied nod. "Nice work."

"Thank you."

I slide behind the wheel and wait patiently for Amora and Malix to emerge from the house. Amora climbs into the front passenger seat, so Malix takes the back.

"You good taking first shift?" he asks, tapping the headrest of the driver's seat. When I grunt in assent, he catches my gaze in the rearview mirror and nods. "Okay. I'll catch second."

"Get some rest," I tell them both. "I'll wake you when it's time to switch."

AS MUCH AS I miss the wind stinging my face and whipping my hair the way it would if I were on a motorcycle, driving grants me the silence that I crave as we travel. Amora and Malix sleep soundly, and only the hum of the tires on the highway breaks the quiet curtain that drapes around me.

We've been going hard ever since we left the cabin. Malix and Amora found some canned goods and an old can opener in the pantry of the cabin, so we haven't even had to stop for food, just gas, which we've stolen from the pump. Switching with Malix after several hours of driving gave me time to rest, but my restlessness woke me when it was time for Amora to take a turn.

Now it's my turn again, and I let myself focus entirely on the road as Malix snores softly in the back seat.

None of us talked much even when they were awake, all driven by a singular purpose.

Rescue Kian. Rescue my brother.

The rest of the day passes in a blur. Wide open fields are edged out from time to time by signs of small town life, but even those disappear in a flash, each miniature town breezing past us as we keep moving forward.

The hole in my heart seems to widen whenever I'm not touching Amora, so after switching with Malix again on the second day of driving, I invite



Amora into the back seat with me, holding her flush to my body to absorb as much of her energy as possible.

On the third day, we finally reach the end of the road that will get us to Blackrock Basin. We're traveling based on Amora's memory, no maps required, heading past the Two-Tone River and Wolfsbane Mountain. As Amora explains it, Gwen's cabin sits in a valley and is hidden by magic, only appearing when she wants it to be seen.

I hope she'll allow it to be seen by us.

Malix is still clearly uncomfortable with the idea of going to another witch for help, and I am too. But Amora says she's trustworthy, and I trust my mate enough to extend that same sentiment to anyone she vouches for. Less than a year ago, I wouldn't have put my faith in anyone but my two brothers. But now, it comes easily. It's second nature to follow Amora.

Truthfully, I'd follow her into the jaws of hell if I had to, and I'd be content just to hold her hand the entire way through.

Does that make me a madman? Possibly. But it doesn't matter anymore. I can't change how I feel, and I wouldn't want to. She's mine as much as she's Malix's and Kian's. And I'm hers, just like they are.

The car slows to a halt and Malix, who's behind the wheel, shuts off the engine. He whistles as he gazes through the front windshield at the path ahead.

"Shift from here?" he asks. "What do you say, Captain Amora?"

She rolls her eyes in his direction but nods. "Yeah. We should shift and run the rest of the way."

I slide from the backseat and slam the door shut, the sound echoing through the trees. My eyes scan the surrounding area, my ears sharp and alert, checking for any possible threats.

"All this running. You're going to turn me into a muscle man," Malix continues, making a show of stretching out his arms and legs in preparation. He waggles his brows lightly at Amora. "Not that I need more muscle."

She snorts, and my lips twitch slightly, a smile cracking through my controlled demeanor. I shove my hands into my pockets as I pass between them, walking a few feet from the car.

"Any more muscle and you'll be as thick in the head as..." She trails off suddenly, shaking her head, and I know she was about to say *Kian*. "Anyway, let's shift."

"After you, m'lady."

Malix's deep bow and sweeping gesture make Amora snort another laugh, and I'm grateful that he's around to lighten the mood. I can share in her grief and provide as much support as I'm able, but lightening the mood has never been one of my skills. Although worry still hovers in Malix's features, I can tell the rest we've gotten over the past few days has helped all of us. He seems more like himself, and Amora does too.

My wolf responds to my call, itching to stretch his legs. After I strip and shift, I trot up to Amora's side, waiting for her cue. She is the captain of this little group, despite the way she rolled her eyes at the nickname. This witch is her contact. We're trusting her to lead us.

When she lunges forward, Malix and I dart after her, the thick wilderness swallowing us up like the mouth of a great leviathan. Dense undergrowth gives way to more sparse vegetation as we sprint like the wind, using the reserves of strength that we built up over the days in the car.

It takes several days of travel before we near our destination, and the time passes in a repetitive loop of running, hunting, and sleeping.

Finally, we reach a valley bordered by tall peaks on either side, and Amora's ears swivel forward.

*We're close, she says.*

We sprint into the valley, barely pausing to absorb the scenery. I keep tight to Amora's tail as Malix brings up the rear. When we reach an empty clearing in the valley, Amora's steps slow, her voice filling my mind.

*I think this is it.*

Malix and I both glance around. I don't see anything, but I can smell a faint hint of magic on the air, which makes me think that Amora is right. The witch is in this valley or was here recently, but she's hidden herself. Where is she?

And then, as if forming itself out of a mirage, a cabin appears. Its shape is faint at first, but the plume of black smoke puffing from the chimney comes into sharp focus as I look at it.

Amora steps forward, and we follow suit, flanking her closely as we approach the log cabin. Freshly cut wood rests in a stack near the front door, and the cabin is small and squat, clearly only meant to house a single person.

My mate shifts and holds out her arm length-wise in front of us, indicating for us to stay back as she approaches. Cold air caresses my body as I shift, making me shiver slightly as I stand next to Malix on the cool ground several yards from the front door.

My hackles rise slightly, even in this form. I don't like that Amora is stepping forward without us, but I have to trust that she knows what she's doing. This is her witch. She'll handle the woman appropriately.

Considering what happened after our last encounter with a covenless witch, I'm not exactly excited to meet Gwen, but we don't have any other viable choice. Kian is lost in another realm—a dangerous one—and this is the only hope we have of getting him back. It may be a faint hope, but we have to try.

“Gwen!”

Amora's voice cuts through my thoughts as she calls out for the cabin's occupant. I watch her pause a few yards from the front door to listen intently, and I cock my head as I do the same, picking up the faint sound of the lock clicking as it turns. The dark wooden door creaks as it opens, and Malix tenses beside me.

A tall and willowy woman with pale green eyes and striking crimson hair steps over the threshold. Her hands hang at her sides, relaxed and loose, although wisps of black smoke curl from her fingertips. She's not threatening us, but it's a reminder of what she can do. Her face is youthful, although by her stance and demeanor, I would guess that she's likely in her early forties.

“Amora.”

Her voice has a light southern drawl, and surprise is clear in her tone. When her emerald gaze flickers in our direction, I feel the discomfort in her body. She wasn't expecting us, and it's clear she's wary about what our presence here means. As she should be.

She turns her gaze back to Amora after a moment, squinting lightly at my mate. “It's been a long time.”

“It has,” Amora agrees. Her voice is level and controlled, although I know her well enough by now to hear the strain in it. “We need your help.”

“Ah. I see. You and your...” Something flickers across Gwen's features, a wariness tinged with distaste as she regards Malix and me again. “... mates.”

“A lot has happened,” Amora explains. “Can we talk?”

Gwen's piercing stare stabs Amora, making me bristle. A growl rises in my throat before I can stop it from happening. As if on cue, Amora's right arm extends length-wise again, a sign for me to stand down. I can't help myself. My entire body—my whole *spirit*—wants to protect my mate.

I know she's trying to make sure this encounter stays peaceful, but I don't

know how to appear non-threatening. Any sign of aggression from me could easily be misconstrued by Gwen as an attack, and she seems like the kind of woman who has no trouble responding to such threats, even in the face of an old friend.

Assuming that she and Amora *are* old friends.

Malix plants his hand on my shoulder, a grounding motion that settles the shadow wolf in me. Regardless of the work Felicity did to merge the new shadows Quinton forced into me with the ones that were already there, the darkness inside me still sometimes yearns to devour whatever is in his path. That hunger can be all-consuming if I allow it to take over.

So I don't allow it. I lean into Malix's touch, allowing the solid feeling of my brother standing at my side to steady me as I regain control. I take a deep breath, unclenching my fingers as I keep my gaze focused on the two women staring each other down.

"All right," Gwen says, her voice tight with worry. "Then talk."

It's clear the witch won't be extending us an invitation to step inside until she knows what we came here for, and I can't blame her for that.

Amora doesn't hesitate, launching into an explanation of everything that's happened since she last saw the witch. She tells Gwen about how her original plan was to hunt down each of her mates and kill them, then describes the shadow that poisoned both of us, and how we joined forces to try to find an antidote.

She conveniently leaves out the part where we nearly destroyed her by breaking our bond with her. I drop my gaze to the ground, shame whipping through my body in a hot flash. Malix's grip on my shoulder tightens, and when I glance over at him, I can see that his jaw is tight.

"And what do you need now?" Gwen asks as Amora finishes speaking. "Why are you here?"

Amora hesitates. She turns to glance at us, a mix of emotions warring across her face for a moment. Then she turns back to Gwen, squaring her shoulders and lifting her chin.

"I need your help saving one of them."

# AMORA



THE WORDS SPILL from my mouth despite my hesitation. All I can think about is Kian, his eyes locked with mine as he guarded me from that shadow, and the warm splash of his blood as it dripped down onto me.

I can still feel the hot, metallic droplets clinging to my fur.

Chasing away the memory with a slight shake of my head, I watch Gwen as she processes my statement.

*I need your help saving one of them.*

She has no reason to trust these men—or me, for that matter, since I deliberately went against the warning she gave me—and part of me feels a little crazy for coming here.

I imagine it must sound like I abandoned my purpose, but I'm beyond caring about that. Fate can go fuck herself for all I care. Besides, how much truth can there possibly be in that prophecy?

My heart clenches, and I swear I can feel the weight of the *two* prophecies that could determine the course of my life pressing down on me. Maybe I'm not outmaneuvering destiny like I think I am. Maybe all of this is playing out just as it was always going to.

Where is it leading? Where will it end?

Fuck if I know. But I know I won't stop trying to save Kian, and I need Gwen to understand that things are different now.

“The real threat isn't my mates,” I continue, holding her gaze as I drop my voice a little. “The real threat is Quinton, a wolf shifter and the leader of the Blood Moon Pack. He's the man who made them what they are.”

Gwen's eyes narrow. “And how is he the real threat?”

I swallow around the lump in my throat as I launch into the second part of

my story. The cool grass beneath my feet sticks up between my toes, the blades tickling me slightly as I shift my weight from one foot to the other.

I spare no details while telling Gwen about Quinton's little shadow army project. Well, *some* of the details aren't terribly important, like all that mind-blowing sex with my mates, but by now, she can probably sense the connection between us.

Even as I speak, it's hard to shake the fear that Gwen won't believe me that my mates aren't the enemies here. After all, she's the one that showed me the vision that convinced me they were my enemies. But I hope hearing the full story will convince her that Quinton is the one who needs to be stopped—and that in order to stop him, I need all three of my men by my side.

When my long-winded explanation finally wraps up, Gwen hums skeptically. But she's been listening with a thoughtful expression, so she must be at least considering my words.

"I have to know," I whisper, taking a half step closer to her cabin. "Is there a chance that vision about my mates is wrong? The one where they bring the shadow realm to earth? The one where they open the veil between the two worlds?"

*Let it be wrong. Please, let it be wrong. Let her face light up like a damn Christmas tree with the realization that there's an alternate future where that never happens.*

Gwen shrugs as she glances over my head to study my mates with sharp, assessing eyes.

"Prophecies aren't always exact, but destiny is impossible to fight." She purses her lips, her expression serious. "What will be will be, no matter how hard one struggles against it."

I chafe at her vague response.

Fucking *witches*.

I want her to absolve my men, to admit that she's wrong and what she originally saw won't ever come to pass. But of course it's not that easy. When is it ever fucking easy?

That's not how life works.

"Please," I say, letting go of whatever pride might have kept me from begging as I reduce myself to emotional pieces in front of Gwen. "I need your help. *We* need your help. We need Kian's help if we're going to stop Quinton. And I just... I need him back. We all do."

Once again, her eyes drift to Malix and Frost. But this time, they're not sharp like daggers. They're... focused. Like spotlights illuminating the two men. She seems to be silently reading their energy or something, and I pray that whatever she sees in them won't make her send us packing—or worse, attack us outright.

A tense minute and a half passes before she finally nods and steps back. “Come inside.”

My shoulders slump with relief, and I wave for Malix and Frost to join me as I stride toward the door. They don't hesitate, flanking either side of me as they've done ever since we left the Silver Crest Pack. There's no pretense anymore about us showing our feelings openly.

And I like that. A lot.

I know they want to protect me. I know they're sticking close just in case shit hits the fan. Dealing with that sketchy as fuck witch who promised to make us a poison antidote was enough to leave a sour taste in my mouth. But I know not all witches are bad, and Gwen is the only one I know of who might be able to help us.

Fuck, I really hope she can.

Protective warmth radiates from either side of me as my men and I walk through the cabin together. It feels really good to have them by my side, but it also feels a little terrifying. It's a reminder that I stand with these men now, and they stand with me. And I don't know what that will mean in the end.

Will it be our destruction? The total annihilation of everything in the world? Will this realm be torn to pieces as a result?

Will I still die?

I don't know if being with me has made these men better, or if I've always been more like them than I want to admit.

The inside of the cabin hosts an array of herbs drying from the rafters, creating fragrant curtains, some of them which I have to part like drapes. A couch sits in front of a fireplace, looking cozy and inviting with the firelight dancing over the cushions. It's stifflingly warm, but it feels good for the moment, after being exposed to the chilly mountain air outside.

This whole cabin is definitely a place of magic. I can feel it humming around us, the scent of herbs intensified by the hot-box status of the room. I inhale the herbal air around me and exhale slowly. The wood burning in the hearth reminds me of Kian for a moment until I focus all my attention on Gwen.

“Why did you never form a coven?” I ask.

She shrugs as she gestures to the couch, black wisps of smoke swirling around the tips of her fingers. “I’m used to being alone. Old habits are hard to break.”

“Yeah.” I nod, thinking of all those lonely days and nights on the road as I hunted my mates. “They are.”

*I almost expected to find the cabin empty, I think as I settle into the couch. It’s been years since I’ve seen her, and part of me was certain she would’ve moved on.*

“Tell me more about what you need help with,” Gwen says as she walks over to a shelf near the hearth. Giant tomes rest upon the roughly crafted wood. “Explain what your mate needs.”

“He’s lost in the shadow realm.”

Her eyebrows rise as she turns to me. “Ah.”

What the fuck does that mean? “So, can you help or what?”

I shouldn’t push, but I’m too impatient to think about how my tone could be interpreted. I was ready to beg outside, and it’s taking all my self-control to remain as calm as I’m acting right now. It’s been *days* since Kian was taken, and every time I think about that, I die a little inside.

She hums curiously as her fingers flutter over the spines of the books on the shelf. She’s not even *looking* at them, but she seems to be scanning regardless of what her eyes can see. She plucks a large tome from the shelf and opens it, flipping quickly through the pages.

“I’m not deeply familiar with the shadow realm or all that it entails, but I have some resources,” she says.

I let out a quiet breath, leaning hard against Frost’s side as relief floods my veins. He doesn’t seem to mind, resting a hand on my knee as Malix does the same on my other side.

Gwen lifts her gemstone gaze to the three of us where we’ve settled on the couch. She nods toward the shelf. “You can help peruse this third shelf for any information about the shadow realm.”

The three of us stand in unison and join Gwen in the search for the right information. There’s not much we can do, since we’re not sure exactly what we need. I know we need details on the shadow realm and how to access it, but short of stabbing the space-time continuum and ripping open reality as we know it with some heavy repercussions, I have no idea how we’re going to accomplish that.



Anxious energy wells in my gut as I flip through books, setting them heavily back on the shelf with each failed attempt at discovering the right information. There's nothing here. Maybe this was a mistake. Maybe I didn't make the right call, despite how much Malix encouraged my leadership.

*I'm not like Kian. He always knows what to do. Or at least, he's better at bullshitting his way through until he finds the answer.*

But just as that thought flits through my mind, Gwen makes a noise that sounds like triumph. My heart clenches as a spark of hope flickers in my chest.

She holds up the ancient-looking tome in her hands. "Here. I don't know how to pluck him up from wherever he is, but I think there's a way I can send you to the shadow realm."

The spark of hope intensifies as I huddle near her. "How?"

"It will be an intense and difficult process, especially for you, Amora, since you're not made of shadows like the other two."

I shake my head, dismissing that. "But is it possible?"

"It's possible. I think your mate bond with these men will help you. Maybe even protect you." She keeps reading, studying the pages intensely. "Shadow creatures can move easily from this world to the shadow realm, but it doesn't work the other way. They can't just cross over from the shadow realm to our realm, unless they're summoned."

"That fits," I murmur. "The shadows that attacked us were summoned by Felicity, brought here to help her try to beat Quinton."

"So how confident are you that we'll be able to return to this world?" Malix asks, resting his hands on his hips as he glances at Gwen.

"I should be able to bring you back," she replies, sounding confident. "It's possible you could return to this plane on your own, but I'm less certain of that."

"All right." I nod decisively. We could spend more time debating the possible risks of what we're about to do, but there's no point. Nothing will change my mind. "What do we do?"

Her eyes skim the page in front of her as her fingers dance over the paper. "Nothing specific is required of you other than trust. I'll use magic to send you to the shadow realm, and I will have to act as a tether to bring you back to earth."

That's... a lot. It strikes me suddenly how much Gwen is putting herself on the line for us, and gratitude rushes through me, making my throat tighten.

“Thank you. We’ll do it.”

Malix and Frost both nod where they stand next to me. Gwen hesitates for just a second, then she nods as well. She carries the tome over to a small table near the couch and sets it down. As she gathers a few vials and studies them, she glances over her shoulder at me.

“Do you want to rest first? This will likely be very draining.”

I shake my head. “No, I want us to get there as soon as possible.”

“All right. Once you’ve finished your business in the shadow realm, you’ll need to return to the exact same spot where you arrived. Only when you’re in that place will the connection between us allow me to bring you back to earth.”

Without breaking her concentration, she starts combining ingredients in a cauldron the size of a coffee machine. Using a round stone, she mashes the ingredients and then strides past me to the jars that line the mantel of the fireplace. Seconds later, smoke spirals from the contents of the cauldron, a mixture of gray and iridescent blue.

“I need one more thing,” she says, shooting another glance at me. “Your hair.”

I blink. “Like... all of it?”

Malix snorts, nudging me in the side. “I think she means just a strand, kitty.”

“It’s a valid question,” I retort, flushing slightly as I pluck a strand from my head.

The pinch of pain hardly registers as I extend the dark strand to Gwen. She drops it into the cauldron, and a flash of light like a sparkler igniting on the Fourth of July echoes from the pot.

Her fingers dance through the smoke as her eyes roll back, her nostrils flaring as she inhales the smoke. It seems to be drawn to her, crawling over her arms and slithering around her body like snakes climbing a tree.

“Join hands,” she instructs us in a low voice that sounds different than her usual tone. “Hang on tight.”

I can practically feel how much Malix wants to make a joke, but he remains quiet, his fingers weaving through mine as I grab Frost’s hand. The link between us thrums like an electric current as Gwen chants in a language I don’t understand.

The room shifts as if I’m looking at a reflection in a broken mirror, and I feel a subtle tug just between my shoulder blades. The shifting and churning

intensifies until I can't catch my bearings anymore. Everything feels crooked and off balance as darkness starts to cloud my vision.

*Shit. Oh god. Oh fuck.*

I open my mouth to scream, but no sound comes out, the sound lodged in my chest as the floor gives way beneath me. I'm weightless as I drift into an inky blackness that feels thicker than night.

For a moment, I feel suspended in nothingness, and I can't tell if I'm falling or flying.

Then there's a strange, horrible rush as we're shoved toward the shadow realm. It feels like the same thing that happened to the room around me back in Gwen's cabin is happening to my body now—like I'm splintering apart, little pieces of me overlapping and splitting away from each other like reflections in a cracked mirror.

She warned me that going to the shadow realm would be rough, but as I spin out into nothingness, I have a horrible moment where I wonder if I'll survive the journey at all.

Then it stops. My stomach flips as my back presses against a hard surface.

My head aches, my temples pounding in time to my racing heartbeat, and I reach up to touch my face, half expecting it to be melting off.

*Did we make it?*

"Amora, open your eyes."

It's Frost.

When did I close my eyes? Do I even *have* eyes?

Yes. I do. I'm still in one piece. Forcing myself to believe that's true, I pry my eyelids open and stare up into my mate's starry eyes as he leans over me. The bright blue sheen of his irises reflects a drab grayness that surrounds us.

For a moment, all I can feel is relief that whatever spell Gwen did must have worked. She sent us across the barrier to the shadow realm.

Then I feel something else.

*Pain.*

It lances through my chest and invades each limb with a slow crawl that makes me hiss out a breath. I grit my teeth as Frost extends his hand. As I clutch him and allow him to pull me upright, I glance around, wincing at the steady, throbbing agony that's invaded my limbs.

God, this hurts. It feels like I've been running a marathon.

Well, we *have* been running a marathon since leaving Cormac's pack. But this is different. It's so much more intense, like I rolled down a mountain and landed on a bed of jagged rocks. Repeatedly.

It strikes me suddenly that this must be what Malix, Frost, and Kian feel on a daily basis back on earth. As if reading my mind, Frost nods.

"My shadows are calm, but my shifter side hurts," he says. His eyes flicker to Malix, who nods in agreement. Frost hums as he focuses on me. "I can feel it in you too."

"Will I adjust to it?" I ask, rubbing a hand against my chest as if that will banish the ache.

"It'll fade into the background eventually."

His words comfort me a little, as does the thought that my mates have managed to function through their pain for years. If they can push it down and keep going, so can I.

Trying to ignore the discomfort prickling through me, I turn my head from side to side to take in our surroundings. From what I can see, the shadow realm looks like a perpetual nighttime scene, minus the stars and the moon. A dark blanket hangs over us that seems to be backlit somehow, a shimmer in the distance that doesn't change as I move around to study the gnarled trees, the ashen ground, and the dull gray rocks.

It looks like a wasteland.

"The shadow realm," Malix says, grimacing as he looks around. "Home, sweet home, eh, Frost?"

Frost makes a sound in his throat that straddles the line between agreement and a snort. His eyes roam the scenery, ever alert. Goosebumps ripple over my shoulders as I get the feeling that we're being watched. There's no one around. *Are we being watched?*

Paranoia expands inside my chest, pushing out the hope that once sat there. Okay, now what? Gwen got us to this realm, which is something. But I have no idea what to do next. How do we even begin to comb this place for Kian? Can we tap into our connection with him somehow?

*Put that down on the list of things I should have asked before asking a witch to send me to a different dimension.*

The place is a vast nightmare that spreads out around us in every direction. Everything pretty much looks the same. There's no wind, and no way to sense the cardinal directions. It's nothing like earth. It doesn't *feel* like anything, except for the low vibration of emptiness that hovers at the horizon.

I rub my hands over my bare arms as I look at Frost and Malix. “We should get moving.”

“Good plan, captain,” Malix agrees. “Where do we start?”

“Fuck if I know.”

Frost studies the horizon and murmurs, “Wherever we go, we need to move as quickly and quietly as possible.”

“Yeah. That seems like a good plan. Do you want to lead the way? I think you or Malix should take point, since you’re more a part of this realm than I am. Maybe you’ll be able to navigate better.”

With a half shrug, Frost heads in a direction—to the left. It’s as good a guess as mine or Malix’s would be, so the two of us follow him without question.

“Do you think we can shift here?” I whisper to Malix.

He scrubs a hand over the back of his neck, pursing his lips. “Probably. My brothers and I could shift back on earth, even with the shadow magic inside us, so I don’t see why it would stop us from shifting here.”

“That makes sense. Maybe we should shift to wolf form. We’ll be able to move faster, and if anything attacks us, we can—”

My words break off abruptly as a group of shadowy forms appear from behind a rock, wisps of smoke rolling off their bodies as they chitter.

A screech cuts through the eerie silence in the air.

Then they charge right toward us.

# AMORA



MY HEART LURCHES, shock and defensive instincts rising inside me.

I didn't scent these shadows at all.

They came out of fucking *nowhere*.

They look a lot like the shadows that chased and attacked us back on earth, but they're much larger, seeming bulkier somehow. They're more fully formed here, with limbs jutting out from their wavering black bodies and snouts that extend with sharp teeth.

And they're charging right for us.

*Fuck.*

I shift into my wolf form, relieved that the magic washes through me as easily here as it did on earth. That answers my question to Malix, at least, although it will hardly matter, since I can never fucking touch these shadow creatures in a fight.

Malix and Frost shift at almost the same instant I do, morphing into their shadow wolf forms instead of their smaller lupine forms. The two men tower over me, their dark bodies covered with thick, flickering shadows that roil over their fur. At least being in the shadow realm will work to their advantage in this fight.

They both launch forward to clash with the shadow beasts before they can reach us, and I know they're trying to create a physical barrier between me and the monsters. I appreciate them trying to defend me, but I hate the fact that it's fucking necessary.

Snarls and screeches cut through the air, breaking the eerie silence. My ears flatten at the harsh sounds coming from the shadow beasts—they're so much louder and more intense here, like someone dragging their nails over an

old chalkboard.

I grit my teeth as I watch my mates hold off the shadows, studying the pattern of attacks. Because the shadows work together, their bodies overlap, making it difficult to tell exactly how many we're up against. But when there's a break in the skirmish, I notice a smaller form that wriggles just outside of the fray. As if it can sense my gaze, it turns sharply toward me, slipping past my mates to surge in my direction.

*Shit. Shit!*

I snap at the creature instinctively as it nears me—and shock ripples through me as my teeth make contact with its form. The texture is like burnt rubber, the disgusting taste making me whip my head back.

A chunk of the shadow comes with me and the thing springs back, snarling at me with a wide mouth full of onyx black teeth. I spit the rubbery bit from my mouth and watch the chunk of shadowy flesh dissipate.

*Holy fuck. I can touch them here.*

For whatever reason, in this realm, I'm able to actually make contact with the shadows in a way I can't on earth. A fierce sense of satisfaction floods my body as I square my gaze on the shadowy blob. My lips curl back in a snarl as a growl vibrates my throat.

*All right, fucker. Now that we're on even footing, let's dance.*

Circling the shadow creature, I look for my next opening, waiting until the thing attempts to lunge before darting to the left. There's a half second where its back is exposed to me as it tries to recover from its failed attack, and I leap, digging my teeth into where I assume its neck is supposed to be. The shadow screeches, a piercing sound like the tires of a car squealing. Keeping a tight grip on its neck, I tear it to shreds with my front paws, slashing at it over and over.

After ripping it to pieces, I watch what's left of the thing dissipate and rise into the air, swirling over us like a dark cloud before disappearing entirely.

I lick my chops, then turn and dive into the fray with my mates.

*Amora, no!* Malix calls when he sees me bound up beside him. *You can't*

---

I laugh almost viciously as I latch onto a shadow that's clinging to his leg. After yanking it from my mate's body, I spin around rapidly, pausing to shake my head from side to side. The shadow howls as I pin it to the ground, plant my paws in its body, and bury my muzzle in its dark form, chewing it to

pieces.

*Well, well, well.* Malix's voice echoes in my head, and I can hear the smirk in his tone as he glances over at me with pride in his glowing blue eyes. *Kitty's claws got an upgrade.*

*She must be able to fight the shadows since she's in their realm,* Frost points out. Then he swings his head around, snarling. *Amora, to your right!*

I follow Frost's instructions and plunge into action. As I dart right, a massive shadow the size of an elephant bursts forward to follow me. Frost intersects the shadow's path and bites one end as Malix bites the other. The two struggle to rip it in half, and I can see a tear beginning to form in the inky rubber, the places where it's thin enough to snap.

I snarl as I launch myself toward its center. I plunge my teeth into its shadowy hide, not letting the bitter and acrid taste deter me from my goal. With a chunk of it latched between my jaws, I throw myself backward, taking part of it with me. The shadow rips down the middle like weak fabric, its piercing scream echoing across the barren landscape around us.

But there's no time to celebrate our victory. Before the smoky remnants of the massive shadow have fully dissipated, another shadow creature snarls behind Frost.

*Frost, six o'clock!* Malix yells. *Amora, stick close to me!*

Following his lead, I jump forward to help Frost. We work well as a coordinated team, and it's satisfying as hell to actually be able to fight alongside my mates instead of cowering behind them while they protect me. And yet, even as we tear the thing to shreds, more shadows join the fight. Like moths to a flame, they swarm us.

*Fuck, we have to run,* I tell my men. *Come on!*

Once the shadow attacking Frost is handled, the three of us sprint away from the inky blobs, breaking through the tide of them like bowling balls knocking down pins. My lungs sting as I gasp at the ashen air, but I'm mostly okay, having emerged from the battle with nothing more than a few scrapes and bruises.

Good. Because I don't have time to stop and nurse an injury right now. Not with the shadow beasts tearing after us, screeching and hissing.

My mates and I run at a dead sprint, darting around the rocks and barren trees as we make our way across the hellish landscape, trying to put more distance between ourselves and our pursuers.

*Damn, Amora, you can attack them now.* Malix glances my way as he



repeats his observation from earlier. *That's so fucking badass.*

*Yeah, but they're so much harder to beat in this realm,* I shoot back. *And there are so many more of them. They just keep coming.*

Frost slows his pace in his shadow wolf form, since there's no way I could keep up with his larger wolf's sprint for long. Malix does the same, reducing his speed a little and falling into step behind me so he can block the shadows that are hot on our heels.

A wave of shadows appears to our left, and my heart seizes. *Fuck.*

But instead of clashing with us, they converge upon the flock behind us, a war erupting between the shadows as they intercept our pursuers.

I don't think the new shadows are protecting us. They're just acting on their violent and chaotic instincts, fighting because they can. Because it's all they know. But it gives us the opening we need. Without pausing to watch the fight play out, my men and I keep sprinting, racing away as shrieks and horrifying hisses rise up into the air.

*Where to?* I ask as the fight recedes in the distance behind us. *Anyone have any ideas?*

*Those cliffs over there,* Malix points out, whuffing softly as he jerks his muzzle toward a cliff that rises up from the ground in the distance. *Maybe we can find a cave near the base. Somewhere out of sight to hide.*

*Works for me.*

We leave the warring shadows behind, cutting left around a series of boulders and heading toward the cliffs that Malix noticed. I don't bother to look behind me. I can hear the screeching just fine.

My stomach turns as the shriek of a dying shadow cuts through the air. *Fuck, that could have been us.*

Dead trees appear up ahead as we near the rising cliff face. We follow the base of the cliff for a while, and then Frost's voice cuts into my thoughts.

*That might be a cave,* he says. *See that outcropping of rocks?*

We run harder, heading toward the spot he indicated. As my paws pound against the ground, dust spews up from beneath me, clouding around my men and me.

*We have to stop running before we attract more attention,* I say in mind speak, glancing back toward where we left the shadows fighting. I don't see them anymore, and we're far enough away from the spot that I don't hear their screeches either. But they came out of nowhere to attack us, so it's reasonable to worry that another group of shadow beasts could ambush us the

same way.

The cave that Frost spotted isn't really a cave. It's more of a small nook in the rock wall, but it's enough shelter for the moment. We stop when we reach it, all three of us panting hard. Dust follows us into the crevice and then settles to the ground, appearing as dead and lifeless as it did when we weren't high-tailing it the fuck away from those shadow forms.

*Fucking hell. This place is pure chaos*, I groan as I sink to my belly on the ground. My mouth feels dry, my limbs shaking from the heavy exertion. *And dangerous.*

*Did you see the way those shadows attacked each other?* Frost asks, although I think it's more of a rhetorical question, because he doesn't wait for an answer before he speaks again. *It's like they were made with only one purpose in mind—destruction.*

*Fuck me*, I whimper as I bury my nose into my tired paws. *The shadows here are stronger and more powerful than on earth. How the hell are we supposed to handle them?*

*I dunno, kitty. Honestly, you had me at the 'fuck me' part*, Malix jokes.

I'm too tired to roll my eyes, so I just shoot a look in his direction. His tongue lolls from his mouth as he exposes his teeth, making him look more like an over-sized goofy hyena than a dangerous feral shifter.

I sigh as loudly as possible in mind speak. *You're lucky I like you.*

*So lucky*, Malix agrees. He glances over at me, and I swear he manages to waggle his eyebrows even in his shadow wolf form.

Frost drops to the ground beside me, his hulking form of pure muscle and shadow strength seeming so much more at ease here in this desolate wasteland. He nudges my neck to check for wounds as he says, *Now that I've seen what it's like firsthand, I see how important it is to stop Quinton. We can't let him bring this entire realm to earth, or even attempt to open a seam between worlds.*

*We and what army?* I retort.

Despite my doubt, I sniff his fur, nuzzling him like he's nuzzling me. It feels good to be close to him, to be near Malix, in such an awful place.

*We'll stop him*, Malix states, padding over and snuffling at my fur. *Whatever army we can manage to gather will be enough. It'll have to be.*

The conviction in their voices soothes me. Whatever hesitation they might've once had about going up against their old alpha is long gone now. They've seen who he truly is, seen through the lies and manipulation he used

to control them for so much of their lives.

Once Frost is satisfied that I'm not hurt, he steps away from me, shifting into human form. I do the same, standing up as Malix shifts as well.

"We probably shouldn't stay here long," I say, running a hand through my tangled dark hair. "Where should we go next?"

"It's hard to say," Malix replies. "But I think heading away from that shadow war is a good start."

I huff a tired laugh, then look at Frost. "Ready?"

He nods once, and we all shift again, padding quietly out of the little nook in the rocks. I glance toward the left where we evaded the shadows and then to my right, noticing that the plains in that direction are wide open. No shadows in sight. Not yet.

*Let's go*, I say in mind speak, then dart forward.

We break into a slow run, scanning the horizon for threats as we make our way across the ashen wasteland. I'm not sure how we're going to find Kian. The shadow realm is so desolate, and there are hardly any places to hide.

Worry fills me, growing more insistent with every step I take.

*It was hard for the three of us to fight off those shadows. Kian is only one man. How has he been able to survive down here by himself?* My eyes prick as another thought invades my brain. *If he made it down here alive in the first place.*

As worry for my lost mate expands inside my chest, I feel a sudden tug.

It starts as a small, barely noticeable sensation just behind my breastbone, but it shifts rapidly to something harder and more insistent.

*Kian.*

Woodsmoke and whiskey invade my senses, the memory of his scent as clear and strong as if he were standing right next to me.

It's the bond between us tugging me in the right direction. Like a thread, it's leading me where I need to go.

I'm certain of it.

*I feel him*, I tell my mates, my voice shaking even in mind speak. *I feel Kian.*

*Lead the way*, Malix responds immediately, his ears flicking forward.

Neither Malix nor Frost questions how I can tell. Even *I* can't quite explain how I can tell. But I feel it deep in my bones, in the tendons that hold my joints, in the muscles now working overtime to carry my body across the

gray desert.

I feel him. I smell him. I *know* I feel him.

The pull of the connection guides us through a patch of dead trees, their crooked branches hooking toward the sky as if starving for water. Fuck, I didn't think about that either. What about supplies? Food? What about shelter?

*Doesn't matter. Keep moving.*

My paws beat the dusty earth, kicking up plumes of ash and dirt as we race toward what I hope is Kian on the other end of the invisible thread that feels like it's attached to my heart. We run for so long that my hope wanes, my heart aching in my chest as worry grips it like a vise.

*Maybe I've just been kidding myself, imagining a connection because I can't bear to face the alternative.*

I'm just about to slow my pace and ask Malix and Frost if they have any other ideas when I spot a figure in the distance. I tense, thinking it's another shadow beast. But when the figure turns toward us and I get a better glimpse of it, my body flushes hot and then cold.

*Kian.*

# AMORA



WE FOUND HIM.

We found him.

*We found him.*

My heart nearly stops when I see Kian. He's in his wolf form, the rich shades of his dark brown fur accented by a few golden strands scattered through his coat. I can tell he's beat up and exhausted like us.

But it's him. I *know* it's him.

My heart sings as I race forward, yipping and whining as we draw closer.

He swings his head toward us, and he takes a step back as if the sight of us has physically knocked him off balance. I keep sprinting toward him, Malix and Frost right behind me, and he shifts as we draw near. His fur recedes as he stands up, and the familiar scar over his eye is the first thing I notice. And then his eyes, gold-rimmed and heart-wrenchingly beautiful as he stares at me.

I barely even slow when I reach him. I shift back to human form mid-stride, stumbling slightly as I get my feet under me. I don't care that I probably look like a graceless cub who's just learned to shift. I don't care about anything except the need to touch him, to hold him, to prove that he's alive.

He's not a mirage.

He's *alive*.

And he looks... furious.

The rage on his face is the only thing that could stop my forward momentum, and it does. I skid to a halt a few steps away from him, jerking backward as if the force of his glare were a physical blow. My heart pounds

unevenly as I try to figure out what the hell I did wrong.

Is this the wrong Kian? Did the shadow realm just fool me into thinking he's alive? Maybe this is a shadow that can somehow change its shape and appearance.

But when he speaks, I know it's him.

“What the *fuck* are you doing here?”

Yup, that's Kian.

I narrow my eyes at him, taking a step closer. “What do you think we're doing? We came here to bring you back home, you ungrateful asshole.”

His nostrils flare as he steps forward too, mirroring my action. “Goddammit, Amora. I saved you from that shadow and traded my place with yours. And this is how you repay me?”

All of the grief and worry I've been fighting off for days transform into hurt and anger, and I curl my hands into fists as Malix and Frost shift to human form and come to stand behind me.

“I didn't realize I had to repay you *shit*,” I snap. “And that's not what we're doing. It's not about a fucking debt. Jesus.”

The anger in his expression hasn't eased at all. He has dark circles under his eyes, and his muscled frame looks a bit thinner than usual, giving me a small hint of what things have been like for him since he was dragged here. And yet the expression on his face is as stony as I've ever seen it, hard and uncompromising.

“You're a fool,” he snarls, then whips his gaze over my shoulder to glare at his two brothers as well. “You all are. Why would you put yourselves in danger like this? Why would you let her do this?”

“Excuse me?” I step closer to him, even though it means I have to tilt my head a little more to glare up into his eyes. “They're not my fucking keepers, and neither are you. We were a *team*, last time I fucking checked. Or did everything we've gone through together up until now mean nothing to you? Are you seriously going to put us back to square one *again*?”

He rears back as if I slapped him, then leans in, looming over me as his lips curl back in a snarl.

“Of course it means something to me. That's why I didn't let the shadow take you. That's why I kept it away from you—so you wouldn't end up here. And now here you are anyway. Are you trying to get yourself killed?”

“Were you trying to get yourself killed when you protected me?” I shoot back.

His rich brown eyes narrow. “No. Of course not. But I was willing to risk it—”

“And so am I!” I raise my voice more than I mean to, then lower it again, my heart pounding heavily as I shove at his chest. “Don’t you fucking get that? Don’t you understand?”

“No,” he bites out. “I don’t. I don’t understand why you chased after me when you were perfectly safe back on earth.”

I shove his chest again, the wild riot of emotions inside me finally boiling over. “Because I fucking love you, you son of a bitch!”

That admission silences him instantly.

To be fair, it silences me too. I didn’t mean to say it, didn’t know those were the words that were about to come out of my mouth until they were spoken. But now that I said them, I can’t take them back. Not just because Kian, Malix, and Frost all heard me, but because... they’re true.

The anger drains from Kian’s face, replaced by something like shock. For a long moment, he just stares down at me, his pupils expanding until they begin to edge out the gold-ringed brown of his irises.

Then, moving like lightning, he reaches up and grabs a fistful of my hair. He steps so close that our bare chests are almost brushing, tilting my head back so he can keep his gaze locked with mine as he lowers his face until our noses are almost brushing.

“Say that again,” he commands, his voice a low rumble.

I’m breathing harder, and every inhale makes my nipples skim against his chest. I blink, my eyes watering—but not from his grip on my hair.

“I said...” I lick my lips. “I fucking love you.”

His mouth crashes into mine almost before the words are out, a thousand lost moments suddenly rushing to catch up with us. The pressure of his lips is hard and bruising, and his free arm bands around my waist, pinning me against his body as he devours me.

“Goddammit, Amora,” he growls, then plunges his tongue into my mouth, nearly lifting me off my feet as he bends me backward. The entire front of his body is plastered to mine, not an inch of space between us, and my arms wrap around his shoulders, aching from how hard I’m clinging to him.

*Fuck, I’ve been waiting for this for too long.*

When the kiss finally breaks, he straightens up a little, pressing his forehead to mine. His voice is ragged as he whispers, “I fucking love you

too.”

The soft sound that escapes my lips is an inarticulate whimper, because I really don't have more words. I've already said the only ones that matter in this moment, and so has Kian.

We love each other.

That's why seeing the other person in danger makes us furious. That's why we'd be willing to go toe-to-toe over which one of us has the right to sacrifice ourself for the other. Because I don't know anymore if I can live without Kian, and it's clear he feels the same about me.

“Will you look at that. The two most stubborn people I know are having a moment in hell,” Malix drawls from behind me after a long moment. “Isn't that something, Frost?”

The reminder of where we are cuts through the little bubble that's formed around me and Kian, and I pull away from him enough to glance over my shoulder at Malix. “Leave it to you to make jokes at a moment like this.”

Malix winks. “Hey, I know my job here.”

He's got a point there. Malix has always been good at bringing a bit of levity to even the most dire circumstances, and now that I know Kian is still alive, I'm actually able to chuckle at his joke.

I step back to let Frost and Malix greet their brother, and the two of them step forward, murmuring their greetings to him in low voices. As they reconnect, I glance around at our desolate surroundings, my mind refocusing on the goal of getting us all out of here alive.

“We're too exposed out here,” I murmur, then snap my gaze back to my violet-eyed mate before he can make some bad joke about how naked we all are. “Exposed to potential *threats*, Malix.”

He holds up his hands innocently as a grin curves his full lips. “Hey, I didn't say a damn thing.”

“We need to get back to the place where we arrived in this realm,” I tell Kian. “That's how we'll return to earth.”

“All right.” He gestures with one arm. “Lead the way.”

Frost and Malix both nod their agreement, and we all shift back to our wolf forms. When we break into a run, staying in a tight knot, something in my chest unkinks, allowing me to breathe normally for the first time in days. It feels good to have my men—all three of them—running with me.

My body is still exhausted, but the lightness of my mood gives me a burst of strength, and I pick up my pace. My wolf is ecstatic to have her missing



mate back, and all she wants to do is roll around in the dirt with him. But now isn't the time. We need to get back to the spot where we first arrived in the shadow realm so that we can pick up our connection with Gwen and have her bring us back to the earthly plane.

I stick close to Kian, and although I can't really see his expression, I can tell from his bearing that he's still tense and maybe even a little angry. But it's from love.

Now that I've heard him say out loud that he loves me, so many of our previous fights make a hell of a lot more sense. We're both strong-willed, passionate people, and most of our clashes have been in situations where we were worried about each other.

*How have you been surviving?* I ask him as we race across the landscape, my heart twisting a little. *What have you been doing?*

*Running,* he replies as his feet thunder across the ground. *Hiding. I've been searching for a way out and avoiding the shadow beasts as best I can.*

*Food? Water?*

He huffs a breath. *Here and there. I've had a few close calls.*

Ice creeps over my skin, chilling me despite my thick fur. *What do you mean?*

*I've almost died a few times.*

My heart lurches, and I blink rapidly, trying to contain my emotions. Now isn't the time to panic about everything that could have happened. He's alive right now, and that's all that matters.

We run in silence for a few moments before Kian glances at me, curiosity reflecting in his wolf's eyes.

*How did you get here?* he asks. *I couldn't find a way to leave, so how did you manage to reach the shadow realm?*

*A witch is helping us. Gwen,* I explain.

Although he doesn't say anything in response to that, I can practically feel his frown through our mental connection. He clearly has the same hang-ups I do about asking a witch for help, and I can't say I blame him.

*Don't worry,* I say reassuringly. *I know her from a while back, and she helped my old pack when they were in a bad spot. She's our tether back to earth, and I believe we can trust her.*

*Are you sure about that?*

I heave a breath. *We'll get you back, Kian. We just have to make it back to the same spot where we arrived.*

*And where is that?* he asks, glancing from me to Malix and Frost on my other side.

Frost points his nose up ahead and to the left. *That way. It's not too far.*

*Good.* Kian's eyes glint. *Because—*

*Shit.*

Malix's strained voice cuts into their conversation, and all of us slow immediately. I don't even have to ask him what he means, because I see it a second later. Or rather, I see *them*.

More shadow beasts are rippling and swaying in the distance—a group of them at least as large as the one we had to run from earlier.

*Fuck,* I mutter.

*Yeah, that about sums it up.* Malix glances around, whining softly. *I don't think they've seen us. We should stop and hide out until they pass us by. I really don't want to fight another dozen of those fucking things.*

*Agreed,* I say fervently.

*There's probably a cave nearby,* Kian puts in. *A lot of the foothills have hiding places.*

He points his snout to our left where the rocky terrain slopes upward, becoming more jagged and full of cracks the higher it goes.

Without even needing to debate it, we all change course, heading in that direction. Within a few minutes, we locate an empty cavern with a trickle of light pouring through the small entrance. We shift into our human forms to make our way inside, sliding between the rocks where the opening is widest and then gathering at the entrance to peer outside.

“Yup. They're coming this way,” Malix reports, squinting into the distance as he presses himself against the rock. He glances over at the rest of us, wrinkling his nose. “Might want to make yourselves comfortable. Looks like we'll be here a while.”

## KIAN



*FUCK.*

Worry fills me despite the fact that I've been dealing with these shadowy fuckers ever since I got here—fleeing when I can and fighting when I can't, always doing my best to avoid large groups of them whenever I'm able.

It was fine when I was alone. But now that Amora and my brothers are here, I fucking hate it.

They can't fight forever if the shadows attack us. And I don't know if I'll be able to protect them all if it comes down to it.

A growl gets trapped in my throat, frustration rattling in my bones.

The first thing I remember feeling when I saw Amora racing toward me was a rush of joy so intense it almost knocked me on my ass, followed quickly by an equally strong surge of worry.

But even though I was pissed at first, I truly can't be angry that they came for me. I would've done the same damn thing if it had been any of them trapped down here. Blasting my protective anger in their direction won't help our situation, so I don't bother, choosing instead to peer over Malix's shoulder and study the forms floating just beyond the mouth of the cave.

Since my anger has nowhere to go, it crawls inward instead, picking me apart piece by piece. There's a possibility that I won't be able to protect the people I love right now, and that eats away at me.

*It's all right, I remind myself. The shadows haven't spotted us. We just need to hide out for a while longer.*

Now that we know we'll be stuck here for a bit, Amora steps deeper into the cave to scan for any threats inside it. I glance over at her tall, lean form in the darkness and then move to follow her, leaving Malix and Frost to watch

the entrance for the moment.

One of my hands slides against the rough rock wall while the fingers of the other work their way through my hair, my thoughts in a jumble as my gaze stays locked on my mate.

Making peace with the fact that I love this woman was easier than I expected. It's been building inside me so long that it's as undeniable as fucking gravity by this point. But what truly floors me—what scares the fuck out of me, if I'm being honest—is the fact that she loves me too.

*She loves me.*

*That's why she came down here.*

*That's why she risked her life.*

The intensity of my feelings for her overwhelms me. Right now, with the threat of destruction lingering just outside the cave, all I can feel is a wrenching need to be close to her.

I join her near the back of the cave, and she looks up as I near her, shaking her head.

“There's nothing back here,” she reports. “No shadow monsters hiding. It's empty.”

“Good.”

Malix and Frost are still stationed at the small opening just a few yards away from us, but it feels like it's only me and Amora, the two of us locked in our own little world as I step closer to her.

“How did you find me?” I whisper.

She blinks, her green eyes dark as night and vulnerable as she swallows. “The bond, or whatever is left of it, pulled me toward you.”

The reminder of the bond, and of the way I tried to break it, punches me in the chest.

Without thinking, I cup my palm around the back of her neck, gripping tightly as I drop my head to claim her lips. Our mouths crash together just like they did in that moment after she told me she loved me, desperation and love and fierce desire all blending into one.

I need *more*. That first kiss was hardly enough to catch up after several days of being apart. Hell, there isn't enough time in the world to make up for that separation. I can't get enough of her, and I can feel the same ravenous hunger in her as she stands on her toes to reach my height.

My grip on her neck loosens, and I trace the line of her jaw as my tongue slides against hers. Every inhale brings more of her scent into my nostrils,

and I binge on it, on *her*, kissing her over and over again.

“I’m sorry I broke the bond,” I murmur roughly. “I’m sorry I hurt you that way. I’m so fucking sorry.”

The apologies spill from my mouth before I can stop them. It isn’t like me, or at least, I wouldn’t have thought so. But being with Amora has shown me so many things I didn’t know about myself.

About her. About my brothers.

About our *bond*.

“I did it to save you,” I breathe as my fingers travel down her neck and over her shoulders, tracing the familiar lines of her body. “But that’s not how a real man saves the woman he loves.”

“And how does a real man do that?”

My jaw tightens, and I grip her shoulders as I draw back just enough to meet her gaze in the dim light that filters into the back of the cave.

“A real man would fight for you. Fight *with* you. He wouldn’t push you away. He’d fucking stay by your side every waking moment.”

“Kian...”

“That’s what I’ll do,” I swear. My voice is so low it’s barely audible, but every word is loaded with promise. “I swear I always will, Amora.”

The look in her eyes nearly breaks me. She looks stunned, and I hate that hearing me say what I should’ve said all along surprises her. Her lower lip quivers slightly as she tilts her head up, exposing more of her throat to me. Even in the dim light, I can see the beautiful curve of her neck, and it sets off the animal inside me.

Cupping the back of her neck, I fuse my lips to hers again, as if I can make her believe what I’ve said by claiming her like I fucking mean it.

She whimpers against my lips, arching against me as a soft mewl pours into my mouth. I swallow it up, my tongue stroking against hers as soon as her lips part to allow me entry. I give myself over to the need that flows back and forth between us as I deepen the kiss, gripping the back of her neck as I slant my lips over hers.

Everything I do is fueled by how much I’ve missed her, how much I fucking *need* her—not just in this moment, but always.

Still keeping a tight grip on her neck, I slide my other hand downward, shamelessly groping her ass. She lifts her leg and rests her thigh against my hip, and I grab it just behind the knee, keeping her hooked tightly to me as my cock hardens against her.

We're in a cave, hiding from dangerous shadow creatures. I've been through hell the past few days, and I get the feeling she has too. The smart thing to do would be to try to get some rest while we're stuck in here.

But there's something I need a whole lot more than rest right now. I need to remind her that she belongs to me.

And that I belong to *her*.

Ripping my lips away from hers feels almost impossible, but I do it long enough to growl softly to Malix and Frost, "Keep an eye out for the shadows. If they get too close, warn us."

The two of them glance my way, and understanding burns in their eyes as they nod. They station themselves near the narrow entryway as I drag Amora all the way to the back of the cave, so deep inside the small cavern that almost no light reaches us anymore.

Dipping my head, I let my lips brush her ear as I murmur, "You need to be quiet. Do you understand?"

"Yes." Her whisper is hardly more than a breath, and the way it shudders at the end of the word makes my dick throb even harder.

Dimly, I'm aware of Malix and Frost glancing back toward us as they keep an eye out for any threats, both of them fully aware of what Amora and I are about to do, but I don't care that my brothers are watching.

Fuck it. I wouldn't care if the whole world was watching me right now.

I don't give two shits who knows that Amora is mine. The whole world *should* know that nothing can keep me away from her anymore. Nothing can take her from me, and god help anyone who tries.

My lips are on hers again, and I kiss her until we're both panting for breath before I drag my mouth down the line of her throat. I bite down on the junction where her neck meets her shoulder, getting a savage sort of satisfaction from the way she grunts softly, biting back a noise.

It's still not enough, though. Moving quickly and silently, I wrap my arms around her waist, lifting her into the air before settling her on her back on the ground. Her body shudders as I force her legs apart and bury my face in her pussy, fucking done with any more preamble.

She's already wet for me, and I claim everything that's mine, lapping and licking at her folds. When I swirl my tongue around her clit, she hisses out a breath, a moan pouring from her.

Squeezing her thighs more tightly, I lift my head, staring up toward her face even though I can hardly even see it in the darkness. My jaw clenches as

I reach up to pinch her nipples.

“I said, *be quiet*. Or I won’t let you come.”

Her legs strain against my hold as I roll her hardened nipples between my fingers. In the shadows, I can see her brows knit together, her features straining as she works to control her reactions. Once I’m satisfied that she’ll be able to stay quiet, I return to my work.

She tastes even better than I remembered. I don’t know how the hell that’s possible, but it is. She’s the sweetest, most addictive thing I’ve ever eaten, and I binge on her like I’m never going to get a chance again. It’s ruthless and selfish, the way I eat her out, demanding more and more from her body as she shudders and writhes beneath me.

It doesn’t take long for her entire body to rock against my mouth as she comes, her breath hitching as the orgasm hits her.

“That’s one,” I whisper quietly as she pants softly in the darkness. “Now give me another.”

“Fuck. Kian—”

My tongue driving into her pussy silences whatever she was about to say. Another muffled mewl follows, and I hear her clap her hand over her mouth as I double down on reducing her to a shivering mess.

She needs to know how I feel.

She needs to fucking understand.

I’ve spent *days* without her—and I’ll make sure that never happens again.

As I alternate between fucking her with my tongue and teasing her clit, her fingers tangle in my hair, keeping my mouth planted on her pussy. But when she bucks and cries out, I halt my task to square my gaze on her.

“If you’re not quiet, I’ll have to stop.”

“Kian, I can’t...”

“Yes, you *can*,” I urge as I dig my fingers deeper into the strong muscles of her thighs. She whimpers with her lips tightly sealed together, her green eyes appearing glazed over in the dim light. I hold her gaze as I whisper, “Do you want to come again?”

She nods, her nostrils flaring.

“Then keep that gorgeous mouth closed.”

Her channel clenches around my tongue as I slide it as deep inside her as possible, and I smirk to myself as I retreat an inch, watching how the tortured expression on her face turns into one of pure surrender. I have her right on the edge. Right where I always want her, wet for me and unable to deny the

connection that burns like fire between us.

Dragging my tongue slowly up to her clit again, I whisper, “Did you miss this?”

“Yes,” she breathes, so quietly I almost can’t hear her. “So much.”

“Why?”

She bites her lower lip, shaking her head softly from side to side as she writhes beneath me. “Because... because I need you.”

“How badly do you need me?”

“More than air. More than water, Kian.”

I grin as I drag the flat of my tongue over her throbbing little bud. “So all this mess is for me? You’re this wet for me?”

“Yes, Kian. It’s... *oh, fuck.*”

I suck on her clit, and she drops her head back to the rocky ground. Her mouth widens in a perfectly shaped O, but before she can make a sound, I surge upward, draping my body over hers and clapping my hand over her mouth.

My cock nudges her slick entrance, and I press just the tip inside, watching in the shadowy darkness as her eyes roll back.

“Shhh, baby,” I breathe into her ear, withdrawing and then pulsing my hips forward again. “I told you we need to be quiet. Since you were too loud, I’m going to make you wait.”

She shakes her head, her eyes going wide as she stares up at me. Her hips buck, following after my cock to try to get me to drive into her, but I hold back, hovering over her until she stops moving and her breathing evens out a bit.

Once I’m sure she’s back under control, I press slowly inside her wet channel again, giving her only an inch of my cock even though it feels like I’m torturing both of us.

She’s wet as hell, and although I’m barely inside her, I can feel her walls clenching around me, trying to drag me deeper inside. She shudders beneath me, and I grin, dropping my head a little.

“There you go,” I murmur. “Good girl.”

A whimper vibrates against my palm, and I almost come inside her just from the feel and muffled sound of it.

“You like it when I call you that?” I ask gruffly. “You like being good for me?”

Shivers rip through her entire body, giving me the answer I want.



Still, I want to hear it from her.

I slide my hand from her lips enough for her to speak, staring down at her in the darkness.

“Tell me, Amora,” I breathe. “Fucking say it.”

“Yes.” Her voice is ragged and soft. “I like being your good girl.”

I cover her mouth before she can say anything else, drawing out of her and pressing the length of my cock against her wet slit. I roll my hips against hers, still denying us both the thing we want most, but giving her the friction I know she craves.

Her chest heaves as her hips buck wildly, and her nostrils flare as she sucks in air. She moans against my hand again, then stiffens beneath me, grinding against my cock as she comes hard.

I grit my teeth, working to keep myself from painting her stomach with my cum as my balls draw up tight. I could fall over the edge with her so easily, but I won't let myself. I won't let myself finish until I'm inside her.

Removing my hand from her mouth, I grip her chin and force her to look at me.

“Who do you belong to?” I demand quietly.

“You.”

“Who does this pussy belong to?”

Her lips quiver as she whispers shakily, “You, Kian.”

“Do you need my cock? Do you need me to fuck you?” I'm sliding fast over her folds now, the swollen bud grazing my shaft as I soak my cock in her arousal. Fuck, she feels so good. I can't last much longer.

“Admit it,” I grunt, my heart hammering wildly. “You can't live without me.”

“I can't,” she whispers. “I fucking *can't*. I need you so much. I need you to fuck me. To remind me what it feels like.”

The breath is nearly knocked from my lungs as I notch my cock at her entrance again, feeling her pussy throb with the aftershocks of her orgasm. Her mouth drops open, and I seal my lips over hers, cutting off her cry once more. I slam into her without giving her time to adjust, my cock throbbing as I bottom out in a single thrust.

Fucking her hard and deep like this is about more than just sex—it's a fucking *catharsis*.

I almost didn't have her. I almost *lost* her to that shadow, and then I was nearly lost to her in this shadow realm. Fucking her on the hard floor of this

cave is my act of reclamation.

She's mine. Mine to protect. To love and worship and argue with. To risk my fucking life for, over and over if I have to.

I growl as I bite her neck, sucking a hickey into her soft, perfect skin. This body belongs to *me*. Everything she is belongs to me, and nothing will ever get in the way of that again.

While focusing on her eyes and squinting in warning, I remove my hand from her mouth and grab her throat. Her pussy clamps down like a vise around my cock, making possessive satisfaction surge inside me.

"Don't come yet," I rasp softly. "Wait."

She tries to mumble something, but she can't get the words out. My grip on her throat isn't tight enough to cut off her air entirely, so I know it's the overwhelming sensations that have stolen her voice, not a lack of breath. She stares up at me as I drive into her hard and fast, and neither of us blink as our gazes lock in the darkness.

She's here.

She's real.

The way her pussy swallows my cock, the way her body bows toward me, the warmth of her thighs as I slam between her legs—it's all real. It grounds me. It reminds me that we're alive, that the connection between us is still alive.

That I didn't kill it, no matter how many mistakes I've made.

"Kian..." She wraps her legs around my waist, her chest rising and falling fast. "I'm gonna come. I can't stop it."

"Not yet."

I bare my teeth as I slam into her again, never wanting to stop fucking her. But she's not the only one who's close to losing it. My body is exhausted and strung out, so I don't have the level of control I normally would. After a few more thrusts, I press my palm over her mouth again and nod breathlessly.

"Come for me, Amora," I whisper. "If you love me, fucking *come* for me."

She doesn't cry out, but I feel her teeth sink into my palm as she arches up to meet my next thrust, her tight inner walls throbbing around me as she hits her climax. I bury my cock to the hilt and growl as I follow her over the edge, my body shuddering violently with every pump of cum that surges into her.

We're both still shaking by the time I go still, and I drape my body over

hers as I kiss her.

It's the softest kiss we've ever shared. Her lips feel like home, kiss-bruised and warm against mine. Tiny, barely audible noises fall from her mouth between kisses, and I find myself wholly lost in her. Nothing else exists. There's no danger just outside the cave. There might as well not even be a shadow realm. I don't give a fuck about any of that.

Because Amora is mine. And she loves me.

Her fingers draw circles over my scalp, the sensation drawing me into the present moment far more than the sex we just had. She gazes into my eyes, smiling a little as she whispers, "I love you."

My eyes close as I let that wash over me, and I nuzzle her neck, whispering my affection to her skin.

This isn't like us at all. We always slam our heads together and hardly ever get anything done with the level of stubbornness between us.

But this moment? This is cosmic. This is beyond shifters and shadows. This is far more alluring than fucking or fighting.

It's real love. I can feel it.

After a little while, I pull out of her and hold her hand as we rise to our feet. I help her clean up as best as I can, and then we rejoin my brothers near the mouth of the cave. They're still stationed where we left them, their gazes focused on the shadows roaming around in the distance outside.

Malix turns to our mate, taking in her well-fucked appearance with a raised brow. "So, did you two take care of what you needed to?"

Amora chuckles. "We absolutely did."

He smirks, shooting her a wink as he murmurs, "*Good girl.*"

I growl, but there's no real heat in it. However fraught our relationship with our mate has been at certain points, it's never been because of any jealousy between the three of us.

We all know how we feel about her, and none of us expects to claim more of her than the others. I don't know if she's said 'I love you' to Malix or Frost yet, but even if she hasn't, it's there for anyone to see. It's in everything she does, including the way she steps into Malix's arms now and nips at his lower lip before kissing him.

He gropes her ass a little, and when they finally break apart, she turns to Frost and kisses him too. His cock is half hard just from whatever he and Malix saw or overheard while we were in the back of the cave, and I wish like hell that we had time to gather around her and worship her all together.

But we don't. We need to get moving as soon as we can. I don't know how much I trust this witch that somehow managed to send Amora and my brothers to this realm, but the longer we wait to return to earth, the more things can potentially go wrong.

After the four of us have a short, whispered discussion about our strategy, we return our watchful eyes to the shadows outside. When one of them screeches, my muscles tense, my body getting ready to shift and leap into battle if necessary.

But instead of moving toward the cave where we're hiding, the group of shadow creatures begins to move away quickly in the opposite direction, their hisses and shrieks receding into the distance.

I don't know what they saw that drew them away, but it hardly matters. This is our opening.

We have to take it.

It's time to go.

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# AMORA



THE SHADOWY LANDSCAPE around us seems too fucking quiet as we emerge from the cave and shift into wolf form. Although the shadow creatures moved in another direction, I can still sense them. I can still hear their distant cries ringing out over the deserted land.

It's such a nightmare here. I can't wait to be out of this place.

I run alongside Kian as we set off, my wolf still basking in his presence. Every chance I get, I shoot a glance in his direction, drinking in the sight of his furry form loping next to me. His shoulder bumps mine, and I huff out a breath, turning my head to nuzzle his neck.

I'm alive. *He's* alive. I still can't believe it.

As we make our way to the portal, my mind buzzes just as much as my body did in the wake of the orgasms Kian dragged from my body. Having him inside me—claiming me—has settled something between us, even more so than the words we said to each other. I'm more exhausted than I think I've ever been, completely spent, but I feel lighter than air.

I have no idea what the future will hold, but at least all my men are with me. And as long as we're together, I have hope that we can make it through anything.

After all the initial fighting, the arguments, the head-butting, and the bullshitting, it's all out in the open. We don't need to hold our feelings in check any longer. We don't have to worry about anything except making it through this hellscape.

Kian's words echo through my mind. *I'm sorry I broke the bond. I'm sorry I hurt you that way.*

It shocks me how deep and sincere his apology was. The dominant, often

painfully stubborn man doesn't usually make apologies for *anything*. But he apologized to me. Twice. Actually, three times, now that I'm really thinking about it.

My eyes dart to him, studying his broad frame and the dark brown fur that ripples slightly as he runs. His muscles work beneath his dark coat, strong and durable even after everything he's been through.

I have a feeling he would have flayed his skin off just to make up for what happened between us. And I know that because of how he treats me. Because of what he's done for me, to protect me and try to make me happy. He would do anything to show me how sorry he is—and I would believe him. Fully.

*He may never forgive himself, I think as I turn my eyes toward the path ahead, but I'm done holding on to anger and resentment. Our beginnings were fucked up all around, but that doesn't have to define our relationship going forward.*

If anyone had tried to convince me years ago that I would fall in love with these men, that I would be willing to protect them with my life, I would have laughed.

And yet, that's exactly what happened.

*What will be will be, Gwen told me.*

But fuck what she said. We're in charge of what happens. *We* decide. Our destiny may be written in a general sense, but that doesn't mean we can't still make our own choices.

The ground gets dustier as we near our destination, and I know our pounding paws are kicking up a small cloud of it in our wake. That could give away our location to any shadow monsters that lurk nearby, but the risk seems worth it. Better to run flat-out and get out of this place sooner than to tiptoe slowly and risk being discovered anyway.

My paws fumble slightly as I step on a bit of loose gravel, and I nearly tumble forward. Frost catches me with his snout without ever breaking stride, helping me keep pace with him and his brothers.

*He's supposed to destroy me, I think. All of them are supposed to destroy me. How is that possible?*

I've already told them I don't care about the prophecy. I don't care if it kills me as long as I get to stay with them. It's not worth fighting the bond to avoid whatever the hell that cryptic message might mean.

But it also makes me wonder—does the solidification of my bond with

these men put me one step closer to whatever that witch's vision was foreseeing?

One step closer to... death?

Growling, I shake off the thought. I don't have time to worry about silly little visions from silly little convenless witches. My only concern is the positive things, what we've gained so far by leaning into the bond instead of fighting it.

Besides, the bond couldn't be broken by a spell. It's that strong. So how the hell would we be supposed to fight it even if we wanted to?

*I see the spot where we arrived, Malix calls out in mind speak. It's right up ahead.*

*Good.* Hope and relief give my lagging limbs another small burst of energy as I pump my legs faster.

But as we near the spot Malix indicated, which I recognize as well now that we're closer, an earsplitting screech nearly halts me in my tracks. Several shadow creatures appear on the horizon, their bodies warping and wavering as they race toward us.

*Fuuuuck, Malix groans. Couldn't something be easy for once? Couldn't it go right just one damn time?*

None of us have time to tell him that's not how the world works, because two shadow creatures intercept our path. Kian hauls ass toward one, shifting into his shadow form as seamlessly as he does into his wolf form. His body grows until he's nearly the size of a horse, and shadows crawl over his fur, wisps of smoky black slipping into existence as if they've always been there.

The second creature surges in my direction, looming tall over me and revealing a row of teeth. That's fine. I have plenty of teeth too, and in this plane, I actually fucking use them.

Without hesitation, I lunge for the shadow beast, slicing through its shoulder with a sharp snap. I tear away several chunks of its dark flesh, and it falls backward to the dusty ground below, bringing me with it. We both hit hard, and I wheeze as the breath is knocked from my lungs.

*Amora, roll out of the way! Malix calls. I'll hit his other side while he's distracted.*

I follow his urging and scramble away from the creature, watching as Malix's massive shadow wolf launches himself at the monster before it can recover. Frost is already locked in heated battle with another shadow, so I search around for Kian, making sure he's holding up okay. The past several

days are clearly catching up to him, and when he fumbles, I join him, attacking the creature that threatens to take him down.

Just as Kian latches on to the neck of the shadow beast we're fighting, a sharp pain tears through my chest. For a horrifying second, I think it's the mate bond signaling that one of my men is in distress, but then I realize that this feels different.

*Shit!* I huff out a breath, glancing around. *What the fuck was that?*

Malix snarls as he tears a shadow to pieces. *The tether back to earth—it's been compromised.*

*Fuck.* My eyes widen as I whip my head toward him. *How can you tell?*

Frost leaps up beside me and headbutts a creature before it can reach me. *Something is happening back on earth. I can feel it.*

My stomach clenches as worry fills me. If the connection gets severed, we'll be stuck down here—forever. And we can't keep fighting off these creatures that seem to roam in herds over the barren landscape. We're strong, but we're not *that* strong. Not as strong as the magic that resides in this place.

My mind races as I try to rip a shadow off Kian. It's not as big as some of the others, thank fuck, but it's using its smaller size to its advantage. It's stuck to his back, attempting to sink its fangs into his fur. As I tear at the thing, another jolt of agony shoots through my body.

*Shit.* What the hell is going on with Gwen? Did she betray us?

No. I can't believe that. Maybe she got tired. Maybe the magic is more difficult than she thought it would be, and she's losing control of it. Maybe—

A frigid ice pick of terror slices through me as a new thought occurs to me.

*Maybe it's Quinton.*

The only person who would interfere is that shadow-obsessed fucker. He must've found out where we went, or tailed us somehow, and now he's going after Gwen. Is he trying to kill her? Trying to trap us in this realm by destroying our link back to earth?

I can't let that happen. And I can't let him hurt Gwen. I don't have many friends left in the world, and I'm not sure she would count herself as one of them, but I owe her a lot. She's helped me more than I can ever repay.

*I can't let her die. I can't let my men get stuck here.*

Breathing hard, I tear through another smaller shadow creature, ignoring its shrieks as I toss its half shredded body aside. I don't even think it's truly dead yet, but I don't have time to finish the job. We need to get to the place



where we arrived in this realm. It's just past the shadows that are attacking us, so close I can almost taste it.

Fighting as a unit, my mates and I work together, rupturing the line of shadows that attempt to block our path. We surge through them with a massive push and sprint toward the spot where the connection to Gwen is strongest. I can see magic wavering in the air, rippling like a pond whose surface has been disturbed by wind.

*So close. So close. So close...*

Frost stumbles, and I nudge him upright just like he did for me earlier, keeping a tight formation with my mates as we run. Kian is close to my right and Malix is in the rear, howling for us to keep moving.

*Almost there...*

Deathly shrieks erupt from behind us. The sound draws closer, making my heart seize as we reach the spot where the magic shimmers in the air. We all pause, and I close my eyes as I press in tightly against Kian, focusing on the tether keeping me attached to Gwen. It doesn't take much, just a simple nudge to yank us away from the shadow realm.

As before, my vision tilts and then I spiral into darkness, the thick and inky blackness swallowing the four of us. My stomach rolls violently, and when the world comes into focus, I feel as if I'm staring through a fish-eye lens, my mind still reeling from our journey between worlds.

I'm still trying to shake off the effects of it when a harsh shout draws my attention. I blink rapidly, scrambling up onto my haunches as I growl.

It's Quinton.

I fucking *knew* it.

He's clearly been locked in battle with Gwen, because the interior of the cabin is absolutely trashed, broken furniture and shattered dishware scattered everywhere. Dark smoke hovers in the air in small wisps, indicating that Gwen put up a good fight, but with his superior physical strength and access to shadow magic, Quinton won. He's straddling the red-haired witch on the couch with a dagger in one hand and her throat gripped tightly in the other.

The gurgle that rises from her makes me queasy, and I surge to my feet as my men growl viciously around me, the sound rumbling through the cabin.

Gwen looks over at me, barely able to turn her head. Her arms are pinned at her sides by Quinton's knees, and his grip on her throat must be keeping her from casting any defensive spells.

*No. No!*

I lunge forward—but I'm too late.

With a savage roar, Quinton plunges the dagger into her chest, making her entire body jerk from the impact. Blood dribbles from the corner of her mouth as her eyes open wide. A horrifying gurgle rises in her throat, her chest heaving as she attempts to draw air into her lungs.

Fear freezes me in place as Quinton pulls out the bloody dagger and leans back, admiring his work for a second as if it's a fucking abstract painting rather than a dying woman.

*You son of a bitch. No!*

A howl pours from my muzzle, fury and anguish filling me as I throw myself at Quinton.

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# AMORA



CHAOS EXPLODES in the cabin as my men and I all leap toward the Blood Moon alpha at the same time. The four of us knock him over the back of the couch, and he tumbles to the floor, landing with a thud. Herbs that once hung from the rafters spill onto us, a medley of scents invading my nostrils as I focus on trying to tear out Quinton's neck.

I don't get a solid bite in, but my teeth graze his flesh. His furious shout cuts through the air, putting me on edge. Even the blood from his neck tastes wrong, like he's made of rubber with oil for blood. I cringe as the acrid taste hits my tongue, snapping at him again.

But he moves like lightning, dodging my second attack even as he whips a hand out and knocks Malix sideways, sending my mate's large wolf form hurtling sideways.

*Holy fuck. How did he do that?*

The memory of Quinton snapping Felicity's neck sends a shiver of fear through me.

He's not just insane, he's also so fucking strong. Even though he's in his human form, he looks more massive than he used to. I can see the shadows warring over his skin, his biceps double the size they were when I first met him. Whatever the shadow magic is doing to him, it's going to make him hard to take down.

I shake myself and refocus on the fight, darting left to avoid a swipe of Quinton's large fist. He tries to grab me again, screaming like an animal when Kian tackles him to the floor.

The two roll across the cabin, sending pieces of furniture flying, and my heart lurches when Kian lets out a pained yip.

His two brothers join him immediately, throwing themselves into the fight as they try to take down Quinton. Their old alpha shifts into his shadow wolf form, and the three of them face off with him, their combined bulk making the cabin feel tiny and claustrophobic as they stand between him and me.

Quinton lets out a rumbling growl, his gaze darting from my mates to me and back. He snarls again, pawing at the floor, and then turns and darts out the door, racing away.

My muscles bunch, everything in me screaming at me to go after him... but I can't leave Gwen. I don't know if she's dead yet, and I have to try to help her. Leaving my men in the small clearing outside the cabin, I turn and run back inside, ignoring the mess around me as I drop to my haunches next to Gwen. The couch got overturned during the fight, and now she's sprawled out on the floor, blood soaking into the wood and darkening the color.

My hands shake as I shift back to human form. I lean over her still body, pressing a hand to the wound on her chest to try to stop the bleeding.

"No," I groan. "Come on, Gwen. You can't fucking die. Please."

But she's already lost too much blood.

Way more blood than I can work with. I wish I knew a fucking spell to help her, but I'm not a witch like she is. I don't have the power to heal her.

Tears make my vision blur as Gwen's eyes flutter open, her gaze focusing on me. She's already fading. I can tell by the way the color of her irises dulls.

"Gwen," I whimper weakly. "What do I...?"

It's no use. She's bleeding out. She might as well already be dead at this point. I didn't stop Quinton in time to save her.

Gwen grabs for me, reaching blindly for my shoulder. She tugs me close to her lips, her voice raspy as she whispers in my ear.

"Quinton... sold his soul..." She sucks in air, struggling to make the words come out. "...to the shadow realm."

I press my hand harder to her chest, trying to keep her with me for as long as possible.

"Gwen, I'm so sorry," I choke out. "Don't try to speak. Just stay still. We'll get help. We'll—"

She shakes her head weakly, as if she's already accepted the truth that I'm trying to deny.

"*Listen.* That's how he... how he could... use the stone," she continues with a wheeze. The next gulp of air she sucks in is brief. She's losing strength

quickly. “That’s how he manipulated... the shadows... in the stone.”

I shake my head, staring down at my blood-soaked hands as they rest on her chest. When I pull back a little, I see an almost peaceful look on her face, and it breaks my heart. She knows she’s about to die—and she’s made peace with it.

But goddammit, I haven’t.

She *can’t* die.

“No,” I tell her firmly. “Don’t let go, Gwen. Fight. I need you to stay with us.”

“Can’t...” She coughs weakly. “Too late...”

“Gwen, no!”

She groans with frustration, a bubble of blood clinging to her lower lip as she parts her lips to speak. She’s trying to say something else, but I can’t hear her. She’s not speaking loud enough.

Her nails dig into my skin, a deathly grip that makes my stomach flip over. She tugs me close again, and as I strain to hear, I catch the last of her words.

“...I lied. You have the power... end this.”

Her grip goes slack as she finishes speaking, and her hand falls to the floor. I sit up and stare down into her face as she exhales, and when her chest doesn’t rise again, something inside me seems to snap.

“Gwen, we’ll save you. We can help,” I murmur frantically, gripping her shoulders to shake her gently. “You just need to stay awake!”

She doesn’t respond. A sob pours from me as I shake her again, unwilling to accept this awful ending for her.

“No. Gwen!” I shout.

But it’s too late.

She’s gone.

Horrified, I stare down at her body. Her eyes are lifeless and dull as they stare at the ceiling, her red lips parted slightly. Her chest is soaked with blood, and when I look up, I see the dagger Quinton used to murder her lying on the floor nearby.

Something buzzes beneath my skin, and I stand up and take a few steps back as anger, pain, and exhaustion seethe in my chest.

This is all Quinton’s fault.

And I’m going to make him pay.

My fury boils over as an unholy scream pours from my lips. I shove the

table sideways, spilling whatever was left in the cauldron from the spell Gwen performed earlier. Liquid splashes on the floor and sizzles, burning out quickly in little wisps of black smoke. I shove the table again, hoping to shove down the pain that continues to rise and rise...

But it doesn't abate. It grips my heart like a vise, choking me, making it impossible to breathe. I stalk out of the cabin, shoving past my mates and into the cool night. Dawn glows on the horizon, and I stare in the direction of the rising sun.

If I leave now, I can trace Quinton easily, following in his tracks. I can hunt him down like the fucking animal he is and end him.

I hate him for hurting the people I love.

And most of all, I hate *myself*.

I can't protect anyone. Whatever I try to do fails massively. It nearly happened with Kian, and now it's happened with Gwen. Her life is—*was* too precious to lose like that.

And it's all my fault. I led that monster right to her cabin. If Quinton hadn't been after us, she would be alive right now.

*I'll find him. I'll find him and I'll rip his fucking spine out through his mouth. I'll end him once and for all.*

Those thoughts play on repeat in my head as I start to move toward the tree line, sniffing the air to pick up Quinton's disgusting scent.

"Amora!"

Malix's voice cuts through the air behind me, but I don't listen or stop. I continue to march into the trees, picking up a jog as I head after Quinton.

But I don't get far. Strong arms squeeze me, and a new scent fills my nostrils—something warm and bright that makes me think of sunshine.

Normally, Malix's touch would calm me down, but nothing could do that right now. I break his grip on me and whip around, my hands clenching into fists.

"I'm going after him," I snarl. "You can't stop me. I'm going after him so I can end this. I'm *sick* of seeing people die just so other people can have power."

"I know. I get it. I want to help, kitty," he tells me in a level voice. "We want to help. We want to take Quinton down."

"How the fuck are we going to do that?"

Uncertainty passes over his features, and his shoulders slump a little as he lets out a breath. "Honestly, I don't know. I want to stop him, but I don't

know how to be a hero.”

“You don’t need to be a hero,” I say, my voice tight with all the emotions still bubbling inside me.

He cocks his head. “That’s not what you want?”

“No,” I tell him. “It’s just a word. It doesn’t mean anything. You’re already enough, just as you are. You don’t need to change, not for me or anyone else. You don’t have to be a hero. You just have to be the kind of villain that the world needs.”

His eyebrows lift in surprise at that. He studies me for a moment, his violet eyes absorbing every inch of me—and not in the hungry, seductive way they usually do. No, this is different. This is more like him *memorizing* my face, my body, my stance. Maybe he’s even trying to imprint my voice into his brain.

After a long moment, he meets my gaze, looking almost dazed.

“Amora,” he whispers. “I love you.”

My breath catches as if I just had the wind knocked out of me. “Malix…”

“I know it’s not a great time.” He laughs suddenly, running a hand over his short-cropped black hair. “It’s never a great time, but that’s why I had to tell you now.”

He shakes his head, looking almost vulnerable as he reaches out and tugs me closer.

“I’ve wanted to protect you since the moment I met you. I never really thought I was capable of loving anyone except my brothers, but I think I started falling in love with you the first day I saw you. Having you by my side makes me a better person. Fuck good and bad. Maybe I’ll never be a hero *or* a villain. But I want to be the kind of man who deserves someone like you.”

My throat tightens as his words wash over me.

Fuck me, I almost left my men behind on a wild goose chase. We can hardly handle Quinton together. What makes me think I can handle him by myself? I was being an idiot.

We’re supposed to be a team. I need to learn to act like it, just like my mates do.

“You *do* deserve me, Malix,” I whisper, pressing my face against his chest. “I know you do, because I love you too.”

He makes a low noise in his throat, pulling me tighter into his embrace. I slump into his comforting touch, allowing it to transport me away from the

dark clearing where we stand as I imagine a warm and sunny afternoon in a dazzling meadow. Tree branches creak around us as the wind picks up.

Fuck, *wind*. I never thought that would be something to miss, but being in the shadow realm made me miss a lot of things. Time is weird down there. It feels like ages have passed, but it's been less than a day.

Resting my hands on Malix's strong back, I breathe in his scent and let everything go. I lean into our bond, the one strengthened by pure love and sunshine.

Finally, I lift my head with a shuddering breath.

"Thank you for coming after me," I whisper. "I'm sorry I tried to run off."

"You know, you looked just like Kian when you did."

I make a face that draws a chuckle from him, and when we separate, he turns and leads me back through the trees to the cabin. Frost and Kian stand near the door, waiting expectantly. The look Frost gives me makes tears sting my eyes again. His brows are drawn together, sympathy shining in his eyes, a contrast to the lack of expression he typically wears. He gestures into the cabin.

"We covered her for now," he tells me in a low voice. "What would you like to do?"

I look at Kian, who bows his head respectfully. When I glance back at Frost, I whisper, "We send her off into the other world."

"Tell us what you need us to do, Amora," Malix says in a low voice. "We'll help you."

For a moment, I hesitate. Sending Gwen to the beyond means accepting her death. But I have no other choice. I'm not leaving her here to rot inside her cabin, despite how hard it will be to carry her to a nearby lake.

I lick my lips and whisper to Malix, "Find something that will float. I doubt Gwen had a boat, so see if you can find a long plank of wood. Something big enough to hold her body."

He nods and disappears around the side of the cabin.

I look at Kian. "Can you... can you wrap her body—"

I choke on a sob before I can finish, but he just nods and disappears into the cabin. He knows what needs to happen. He's doing it, whether I say it or not.

Frost touches my arm lightly, his cool exterior contrasting with the warmth that radiates from his fingertips. Warm spice lingers in my nostrils as



I draw in a breath.

“What do you need from me?” he asks.

“Find a body of water. A lake. Something.”

He kisses my cheek before retreating into the trees nearby.

My only task is to find oil that will burn hard and bright, something spectacular to give Gwen the proper respects. She deserves so much more. She deserves a goddamn procession through every town where people benefited from her magic.

But that’s not possible. So this will have to do.

Malix returns a moment later with what looks like an old door. It’s beat up and has clearly seen better days, but it will be big enough to hold Gwen. He sets it in front of the entryway as I make my way into the cabin. Kian is already wrapping Gwen’s body carefully in a white sheet. He knows what to do. I’m glad I don’t have to say anything.

I rifle around in her cupboards until I locate enough oil to set the whole damn cabin on fire and then watch as Malix and Kian carry Gwen to the makeshift boat. After grabbing a lantern and making sure it’s lit, I step back outside to watch my men work. They set Gwen on the door, looking up as Frost approaches. His white-blond hair gleams in the moonlight as he nods toward the trees, indicating to follow him.

We walk quietly through the woods to a lake that stretches into the distance, flanked by massive cliffs and hills brimming with trees. It’s perfect.

Once the door is settled on the water, I wade into the shallow part, guiding the makeshift craft with me. My mates remain by my side the entire time. Kian’s hand rests on the small of my back, catching me when I slip on algae and loose sand. I cling to the edge of the door, unwilling to let Gwen go.

But I have to. We have to lay her to rest.

My jaw tightens as I stand in the frigid water, the water lapping at the wood and creating a peaceful sound.

“Say something,” I beg Kian quietly. “Please.”

He clears his throat, his whiskey and woodsmoke scent tickling my nose as he rests his hand over mine on the wooden door.

“Gwen was a witch without a coven, a fearless woman who faced each challenge brought to her,” he says. “I didn’t know her, but I will remember her well. I will remember her help.”

“I’ll remember her courage,” Malix adds as he rests his hand on the door.

“I’ll remember her commitment,” Frost whispers as his hand joins Malix’s.

My eyes burn as I whisper, “And I will remember her friendship.”

I set the lantern close to the end of the blanket covering Gwen’s body. I turn up the flame, making sure the cotton catches before I gently push the door toward the center of the lake. It drifts aimlessly forward as the smoldering embers shift into a growing fire. Soon, the entire makeshift raft is swallowed by the flames.

With my gaze still locked on Gwen’s pyre, I make my way back toward the shore and shift, sitting in my wolf form next to the water. My men do the same.

And when I howl my sadness to the night sky, they join me.

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# AMORA



I SIT on the shore for as long as my guilt will allow. Seeing Gwen viciously killed right before my eyes—the second person I’ve seen Quinton murder—has opened up a hollow pit in my soul.

I’m sick of death.

I’m sick of running and fighting and always being a step behind that fucking monster.

My mates surround me in silence, and when the flame flickering in the distance finally disappears from sight, I heave a sigh and press to my feet. Water laps at my paws as I spin around and head back toward the cabin. Nobody says anything. Nobody stops me or asks me to rest. They know I’m too upset to do much else except walk.

I don’t want to go inside the cabin, but being outside makes me feel far too exposed. So I step inside and shift, going to the far corner of the large space where Gwen’s cot sits. I sink onto the soft mattress and plop a plush pillow into my lap, hugging it to my body. Malix sits at my feet while Frost sits on my left and Kian sits on my right.

“It’s fucked up for Quinton to want to bring that shadow realm here,” Kian says, his voice gruff. “We spent years trying to find a weakness in the veil between this realm and that one, but now that I’ve seen it? Fuck. It really would destroy the world if the veil was broken.”

Malix shakes his head. “Why the hell would he want to unleash that? For what purpose?”

“And what makes him think he can control it?” Frost murmurs thoughtfully. He scratches under his chin, his cool blue eyes glittering as he adds, “What makes him think he won’t be swallowed up by the shadows if he

allows them to run free on this plane?”

“I dunno. Maybe because he’s unhinged,” Malix comments with a grimace.

“Not to mention drunk on power,” Kian adds.

Malix snorts. “He’s *sloshed* on power, brother. It’s so bad he thinks he can control whatever comes through from the shadow realm.”

“We need to hunt him down,” I say resolutely. “It was stupid of me to chase after him on my own before, but we need to stop him. We need to figure out where the rest of his pack is right now, then we can coordinate an attack on them. Somehow.”

“We all need to rest a bit first,” Kian declares as he stands. “Then we should head out. I doubt Quinton will come back here, but I’d rather stay on the move anyway.”

Malix stands up and stretches his arms over his head. “Aw, I miss kitty being in charge.”

I roll my eyes at him, and he shoots me a dashing grin—the same dazzling smile that swept me off my feet when I first met him, even if I never would’ve admitted it at the time.

Before I can say anything in response to his words, I feel a strange pressure in my chest. I freeze up for a moment, worried that it’s some kind of attack, then relax as I reach up to rest a hand against my sternum.

“Shit,” I breathe. “I forgot about the communicator charm. That must be Cormac.”

The men all gather around me as I open up my mind to the magic, and just as it did when we tested it, an image of Cormac’s face appears in my mind.

“Amora, are you there?” the image asks. “Can you hear me?”

“I can hear you, Alpha Cormac,” I say out loud. “What’s going on?”

He scrubs his fingers through his ginger hair, concern twisting his features. “We have bad news.”

“Fuck me,” I groan.

Malix nudges me with his shoulder, a question burning in his violet eyes.

None of the men can hear Cormac, so all they’re picking up is my end of the conversation. But it’s obvious that both my words and the expression on my face have clued them in to the fact that it’s bad.

“Where are you?” Cormac asks.

“We’re in Montana. In the mountains north of the Montana Pack lands.

What's happening? Why did you contact me?"

The Silver Crest alpha clears his throat, and the haunted expression on his face makes my stomach drop. I have no idea what he sees in his mind's eye while he talks to me, whether I look as wrecked as I feel, but he looks like he's been through the fucking wringer since I saw him last.

"We've been trying to regroup after the fight with the Blood Moon Pack," he says slowly. "I hoped that more of our pack members survived and would rejoin us, but that hasn't happened. And just recently, I discovered why. Quinton has turned every captured or injured Silver Crest shifter into a shadow wolf."

My grip on the charm tightens, fear burning the back of my throat like acid. "How?"

"Some members of our pack scattered during or after the battle, and he's been targeting them one by one."

"He's building an army," I whisper.

Malix's eyebrows shoot up toward his hairline. "*What?*"

Cormac clears his throat. "I know only you can hear me, so you must explain to your mates that Quinton is going after *any* wolf he can find. He's figured out how to force shadows into any shifter, and those who have been turned follow him blindly, their minds infected by the darkness. Please. You need to be careful. If my intel is correct, he may be headed your way."

I grimace as I turn to my mates and relay the information.

Kian snarls when I finish speaking, fury twisting his features. "He's already *here*, alpha."

My skin prickles. I thought Quinton came to Montana because he wanted to hunt us down, but maybe that wasn't the only thing that brought him out here.

"Shit," I whisper.

*My old pack.*

The three packs—North, East, and West—joined together years ago into a large community called the Montana Pack. They're strong, possessing plenty of strength in numbers, but that's a lot of wolves sitting in one place.

*Sitting like goddamn ducks in a row.*

What if Quinton decides to attack? What if he decides to use his growing army to try to take down the Montana Pack and turn *those* wolves into shadow shifters too?

"If he's already made it out that way, then you need to be careful, all of

you,” Cormac says. “I’ve lost so many of my pack. Some of them have died, but more have been turned into shadow shifters. They answer to Quinton now, ravaged by the same shadow magic that he controls.”

I hear his voice crack, and it breaks my heart. The sight of him struggling through his losses is almost too much for me.

I bow my head. “I’m sorry, alpha.”

Cormac speaks again, and I have to focus to hear what he’s saying as worry twists in my gut. Everything that’s already happened to his pack could potentially happen to my old pack too. And then what? Once Quinton has enough minions, he can try in earnest to create a tear in the veil between the earth realm and shadow realm.

With the amount of feral shifters he’s creating, he’ll be able to search for it so much more effectively than with the original three he created.

And if he does succeed in bringing the shadow realm to earth...

I shudder as I think about the shadows we fought down there. Before, my fear was simply based on Gwen’s vision. But now, I have personal experience with the danger and darkness of that realm and the creatures that inhabit it.

After promising Cormac that I’ll do what I can to keep Quinton from changing any more shifters, I remove my hand from my chest, letting the magic fade away. Then I turn to my men with the kind of terror in my heart that comes directly from nightmares.

This *is* a nightmare. And we’re stuck right in the middle of it.

“We have to go to the Montana Pack right now,” I say. “We have to warn them.”

“All right.” Kian nods as I meet his gold-rimmed eyes. “We’ll leave now. We can hunt on the way.”

“Thank you.” I reach for his hand, giving it a small squeeze. “I’m sorry. I really hoped you’d be able to rest for a while after we brought you back.”

A small, wry smile curves his lips. “It’s all right. You brought me back. That’s more than enough.”

“Lead the way, kitty,” Malix says, giving me a little salute.

I groan, but there’s more affection in the sound than annoyance. Without his charm and humor, I have a feeling I would’ve already been sucked down into the whirling maelstrom of my emotions. His ability to remain lighthearted in even the worst of circumstances is something I envy. I’ll probably never be that kind of person, but it makes me grateful to have Malix

in my life.

Frost rests his hand on the small of my back as we step outside the cabin, then turns to tuck a lock of hair behind my ears.

“We’ll follow you,” he murmurs. “Anywhere.”

When I shift, my men shift with me.

When I run, they run with me.

We move as a unit, darting around boulders and weaving between trees as we race our way down the mountain toward my old pack lands.

I hope with all my heart that it’s not too late.

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# FROST



PAWS BEAT the earth ceaselessly as my small pack and I sprint across expansive valleys, high cliffs, and rolling hills. After hunting to put food in our bellies, Amora sets a hard pace—but it's not difficult to keep up. My brothers and I are accustomed to traveling hard and fast over various terrain.

This is not new for us.

And it's not new for Amora either.

I can *feel* the urgency in her. Her lithe wolf form runs without complaint, fear and love brimming from her body for the people we're trying to save.

Her emotions echo in my chest, an overwhelming sense of *purpose* blocking out everything else.

This is strange. I don't know these people, and I'm not the type to feel attachment or worry for people I don't know. Why do I care? Why do I feel like we're running out of time to save complete strangers?

*It's Amora, I realize. I care for her so much that the things she cares about are my cares as well. Her fears and loves and needs are mine. They're mine because she's mine.*

I will do anything for her.

My love for her is unburdened and unconditional. There's no doubt in my mind about my feelings as I race up next to her and match her pace, easily keeping up with her rhythm.

*My mate, I think. My love. Mine, mine, mine...*

After a long stretch of running, Amora slows her pace. So do we, falling into step behind her. Kian, Malix, and Amora shift back to their human forms, splitting up with a few murmured words. Kian goes with Malix to collect wood for a fire and Amora heads toward a small path to the right that



winds between a thicket of trees. I can hear the trickle of a stream just on the other side.

She must be going to clean up.

I shift too and run my fingers through my blond hair, feeling a stickiness in the strands that indicates the need for a bath. That's not a bad idea.

Orbiting my mate comes as easily as breathing. I'm always aware of Amora, always in tune with where she is and what she's feeling. I linger in the trees as I approach the stream, allowing the wide trunks to hide my presence for a moment as I watch her kneel next to the water.

Her hands dive into the stream and lift handfuls of water to her face. Trails of liquid trickle over her bare shoulders, her arms, her elbows. She crouches toward the moist earth and hiccups, shoulders tensing as her body stiffens.

A pang rips through my heart as I realize she's crying.

And she's doing her best to do it quietly.

Without a second thought, I emerge from the trees and kneel beside her, tugging her into my arms.

"Amora," I whisper, stroking her hair. "You don't have to hide from me. From any of us."

She lets out a shuddery sigh, clinging tightly to me for another moment before she leans back. She wipes her face, determination filling her features again as she gives a small shake of her head. "I'm fine."

"You're not fine."

"You don't have to worry about it."

My gaze roams her profile, studying her body and the taut lines of her face. Her posture is stiff, as if she's attempting to hold herself together by sheer will alone.

I know why. I understand what she feels, the aching sense of loss that infects her.

It's much like the shadows that infect me.

A tear escapes her eye, and I gently stroke her cheekbone, swiping it from her face with my thumb. Her eyelids flutter and then fall shut as she bows her head.

"What can I do?" I ask. "Tell me."

"Nothing," she replies in a low voice, then clears her throat and chuckles humorlessly. "I'm just sad."

My fingers drift over her skin, feather-light. Goosebumps rise wherever I

touch, and her breathing steadies, slowing from erratic gulps to long inhalations. I don't say anything. I don't need to. I know she'll speak in her own time.

Finally, she licks her lips and whispers, "I hate that Gwen died just for trying to help us."

A soft hum vibrates my throat. "I know."

"Going back to my old pack is bringing up a lot of... fucked up feelings too," she adds. "A lot of grief."

"You rarely speak of your old pack."

She snorts. "For good reason."

My brows knit together. I've never gotten the impression that she dislikes her old pack, so that isn't the reason she doesn't talk about them. Which means it must be because...

"It's painful for you."

"I lost them when I left. I mean, in a different way than we lost Gwen, but I still lost them. I became a lone wolf, giving up all the connections and friendships I had just to chase some stupid prophecy."

Placing my fingers beneath her chin, I tilt her head so that her gaze can meet mine. "You're not a lone wolf anymore."

The green of her irises looks as vibrant as grass as tears brim in her eyes. I find myself aching to kiss her, to hold her. To wrap myself around her. Although Amora has always been far from fragile, I see her vulnerability in this moment, and it makes me want to protect her more than ever.

"You have a pack," I continue. "With us. Always."

As a single tear spills over her lower eyelid, I lean forward, my lips grazing her mouth. She softens under my kiss, and I pull her into my arms, circling my hands around her waist and keeping her flush against me. Sitting back on my heels, I pull her into my lap and cradle her body, her curves perfectly fitting against my form.

Our lips never break apart, and we kiss slow and deep, hardly moving toward anything more. I will always crave Amora, and my cock twitches to life at the feel of her body nestled against mine. But that's not what this moment is about.

Even when the kiss finally ends, she stays right where she is, burrowing deeper into my embrace. I cradle her in my arms, letting her rest her head on my chest where my heart beats in tune with hers. My fingers draw curving shapes onto her back as I stare at the stream in front of us.

“When I lost my mother as a child, I felt untethered,” I murmur. “Broken. Lost.”

She shudders, and I hug her tighter, keeping our skin pressed together wherever possible.

“If it weren’t for Kian and Malix,” I continue. “I don’t know what I would have done.”

“I can’t imagine Quinton was a particularly great father figure.”

I hum in agreement. “He was relentless in our training. Everything we did was meant to hone our skills in our shadow wolf forms. He told us over and over that we must never forget our purpose. Our task.”

“That’s awful. Did you ever get to play?”

Memories swarm my vision. Laughter floats into my ears, the kind of hearty sound that come from teenage boys sneaking out and exploring the land around our cabin. Even with the pressure of meeting Quinton’s expectations, our hearts occasionally found lightness, fueled by our brotherly love and connection.

“Sometimes,” I reply. “But we were fucked up. And we were fucked up for a very long time. We held each other together, kept each other afloat, prevented each other from falling into the darkness entirely.”

“It sounds so sad, Frost.”

I drag my fingers slowly up and down her spine, still staring at the water. “It was, sometimes. But we made it through. And I realize now why we all worked so hard to survive, refusing to give in or give up even when it was difficult. What we were all waiting for—what we were all staying *alive* for—was you.”

She lifts her head to focus on me, her bright green eyes shining, and I lose myself in the sight of them as more words slip past my lips.

“It was always you, Amora. Even before we knew you, you were what we longed for. And I promise, you’ll never be alone again. Because no matter where you go, you’ll carry a piece of each of us with you.”

“I will?”

“Of course,” I murmur. “You have our hearts.”

The smile that spreads across her face is more beautiful than any sunrise I’ve ever seen. She lifts her head, and the smile on her lips transfers to mine as our mouths meet in a soft kiss. My shadows slow nearly to a halt, practically purring inside me. My aches and pains drift into the background of my consciousness, forgotten for the moment.

Amora wraps a hand around the back of my neck, the tip of her nose brushing against mine. When she speaks, her breath gusts gently against my lips.

“I love you. Fuck, I didn’t know it was possible to love someone as much as I love you, but I do.”

Love.

That simple word hits me like an avalanche. I heard her say it to Kian back in the shadow realm, and it didn’t surprise me at all. I had seen everything she was willing to do to get him back, the lengths she had gone to and the depths of her grief when she thought she might lose him. Of course she loves him.

But he’s not the only one she loves.

She loves Malix too.

She loves me.

I caress Amora’s face, gazing down into those beautiful, glittering irises that hold so much behind them.

“I adore you,” I whisper, the truth of it buried in my bones. “And I always will.”

# AMORA



WITH FROST'S arms tight around me, I feel a little less haunted by the loss of Gwen and the fear for my old pack. I feel more in tune with my surroundings, with the rushing river beside us and the cool breeze lazily caressing our bodies.

I'm not alone.

I'll never be alone again.

After what they did to me, I never thought I would hand over my heart to these men so willingly. Their attempt to break the bond nearly killed me, creating a hole in my chest that felt like it could swallow me up.

Yet here we are.

Even after they hurt me so badly, I've given my mates the power to hurt me again by giving them my trust. They could smash me to pieces, use me, tear me apart...

But they won't.

I know they won't.

My heart tells me they would walk across coals for me, but they'll never willingly cause me pain again.

They've earned my trust, proving themselves not just with their words, but through their actions. Even in the way Frost touches me now, his fingertips grazing my skin in tender strokes, I can sense his dedication to me, to our pack.

*Our pack.*

That thought draws another smile to my lips. *I have a pack again.*

When I finally draw back from Frost, I trace a hand down his cheek, my brows furrowing a little.

“I wonder how fate knew that all of us, as broken as we are, would fit perfectly together,” I murmur.

As he absorbs my words, Frost does something I rarely see him do. He smiles. It lights up his face and makes the blue of his eyes warm like a summer sky.

“Maybe it’s because when we’re together,” he whispers, “we form something that’s *not* broken.”

FROST and I linger by the stream a while longer, taking our time cleaning off in the frigid water, and my heart feels much lighter by the time we return to our small encampment to rejoin my other mates.

Malix and Kian have started a fire, and the wavering flames lick the air. They’ve also gone hunting again, as evidenced by the rabbit carcasses lying beside the fire.

Murmuring words of thanks, I shift into wolf form, promptly digging in. There isn’t much time to spare. I want to get to the Montana Pack as quickly as possible. Knowing Quinton, there’s a possibility that he beat us to the pack lands, and he might very well be tearing everything apart right this second.

*We’ve been moving fast,* Frost says next to me, his snout hovering over a fresh rabbit. *We’ll get there soon. I promise.*

I don’t say anything in response, but I grin internally. Even though I’m sure I didn’t speak my worries through our mind speak connection, he always knows what I’m feeling. At this point, I don’t bother trying to determine how. He just *knows*.

When the four of us are sated and sufficiently rested, we snuff out the fire with dirt to prevent smoke, then resume our sprint toward the Montana Pack.

Another night and half a day pass before we reach the edge of pack lands. The landscape becomes more familiar, the scenery shifting in predictable ways that encourage me to pick up my pace. I know this area. I know where we’re going.

Home.

It’s been a long time since I’ve said or even thought that word. I got so used to life on the road that I stopped thinking of anywhere as “home.” Every hotel was just a convenient spot to lay my head, one of many stops on a

never-ending road. But now I'm returning to a place that holds so many memories. A place that once truly felt like a home.

*We're getting close, I tell my men. Not much farther now.*

I catch a whiff of another wolf's scent and put my nose to the ground, trying to determine if the tracks are fresh or stale. It's likely that Sable and her alphas send out scouts to keep an eye on the perimeter of their territory, but this seems too far out for a scout to be patrolling. Maybe I'm catching the scent of a wolf who went out for a lone hunt.

I lift my head to ask my men what they think, but before I can, a large wolf lunges toward us from the trees up ahead, snarling loudly. For a split second, I think that maybe my first guess was right—that it's one of the Montana Pack members guarding their territory—but then I see the shadows rising up from his fur.

*Fuck.*

The wolf *is* from the Montana Pack, I'm almost certain. But he's also full of shadows, wild and dangerous. And if he's been recently turned, then that means Quinton is nearby.

Which means we're running out of time faster than I realized.

I halt in my tracks as Kian, Malix, and Frost transform into their feral shifter forms, their snarling maws and long limbs matching that of our opponent.

It's not entirely clear whether the wolf was sent by Quinton or escaped from Quinton's bonds, but either way, he's vicious, strong, and clearly out for blood.

But my men are stronger.

As Kian darts forward, the newly turned feral wolf dances back, the two of them pouncing whenever they can. Malix lunges from the right and knocks the wolf over. Frost joins the fray, throwing himself bodily on the Montana Pack wolf and pinning him to the ground.

*Don't kill him!* I scream in mind speak.

All three of my men hesitate, and as Malix leaps forward to help Frost keep the wolf pinned, Kian shifts back to human form and grabs a large rock. He brings it down heavily on the back of their opponent's head. The wolf yips and then slumps to the ground, out cold. His shadow wolf form slips away as he shifts back to human, and I step forward, huffing out a breath as I examine him.

Kian's control is impressive. He hit the guy hard enough to knock him

out, but he barely even broke the skin on his scalp, leaving only a small trickle of blood sliding down his temple.

Good.

We can't kill him. I don't *want* to kill him, even if he does pose a threat. We have to handle this the right way. Murdering a member of my old pack, even in self-defense, wouldn't be the best way to announce my return home.

I shift to my human form once I'm sure no more wolves are coming, then nudge the unconscious man with my foot. "Where the hell did he come from?"

Kian comes to stand beside me, crossing his arms over his broad chest as the shadow marks slither over his skin. "I don't know. I'm not sure when Quinton turned this one. Was it before or after he killed Gwen?"

"And was this man sent here on a mission, or did he escape Quinton?" Malix muses out loud.

"Either way, it makes our task that much more urgent," Frost observes. "We should take him with us."

"Like fucking hell," Kian growls.

"Maybe we should ask Amora, since this is her old pack member," Malix points out. He turns to me, violet eyes bright. "What do you say, kitty?"

I study the man who's now resting in human form on the ground. His breathing is steady, and I don't think he's in any danger from the blow to the head, but if we leave him out here, who knows what could happen to him?

Chewing my lip, I glance up at Kian. "I think we should bind him and take him with us."

"All right." The scruffy man sighs. "I'll carry him, since I'm the strongest."

"Wait a second, who voted *you* the strongest?" Malix purses his lips, looking put out.

"It wasn't up for a vote," Kian says with a slight smirk. "It's empirical fact."

"Sure. Just like it's empirical fact that my dick is the biggest—"

I roll my eyes. "It was your idea to ask me whether we should bring him," I tease. "So why don't *you* carry him, Malix?"

"Oh, I wasn't volunteering." Malix holds up his hands with a chuckle.

"Sounded like volunteering to me," Kian says gruffly as he grabs some vines from a nearby tree. He uses them to bind the hands and feet of the unconscious man, wrapping them around the guy's limbs several times before



tying them off. He's already hoisting the man up when he adds, "I mean, if you can't handle it, then—"

"I can handle way more than you think," Malix insists. "We'll settle this later."

"Can't wait," I drawl. "We can have our own little Shadow Olympics. You know, to prove who's the strongest. And maybe we'll even have a dick measuring contest afterward. I promise to be a fair and impartial judge."

Malix grins, looking excited at the prospect, and Kian groans. The four of us shift into our wolves and sprint forward, drawing ever the closer to the edge of the Montana Pack lands.

My heart thunders as we race toward the perimeter. We're so close now, and I'm intensely aware of our proximity to my old stomping ground. It feels strange, in a way, to be back here, but it's exciting too. I haven't seen this place in years, and so much has happened since I left.

It's been so long since I called this stretch of Montana home that I almost feel like a stranger here, an invader. Is that what I've become? Have I been gone so long that I'm no longer part of the pack?

Will I be welcomed back, especially when they find out why I've come?

I honestly don't know.

A howl cuts through the air a moment later, interrupting my thoughts. There's no more time left to sort out my insecurities as a group of wolves come loping in our direction, scouts for the Montana Pack having picked up our approach.

*Well, here goes nothing.*

Shifting back to human form, I place myself firmly in front of my mates and the approaching wolves, holding out my hands.

"We're not a threat!" I shout. "It's me, Amora!"

## MALIX



TENSION RIPS through the air as Amora guards us against the approaching wolves. Her hands are extended in the universal gesture of *I'm not a threat*, and her features are relaxed, no malice and aggression in her posture at all. She's the perfect ambassador for our little group.

You know, until shit hits the fan.

Despite my trust in her to handle the situation, I'm tense and alert, ready to spring into action in a heartbeat if any of these wolves attempt to hurt my mate. I don't want to do that. I want to help these shifters because Amora wants to help them, but if they hurt her in any way, I won't hesitate to take them out.

*I hope that's what she meant about being the kind of bad guy the world needs*, I think as I crouch to my haunches, my teeth bared slightly. *Because I don't think I could change that about myself if I tried.*

Amora makes me a better man, but I know deep down that I'll always be willing to murder on her behalf. Anyone who tries to hurt her is as good as dead in my books. And I don't *want* to change that. Not a damn bit.

A blonde woman accompanied by four men approach from the distance as the four wolves who first spotted us slow to a near halt. One of them trots forward, keeping a strong stance as Amora lowers her hands. But her fingers remain splayed and her palms exposed, a continued sign of surrender.

"I want to speak to Sable, Ridge, and the other alphas," she calls over the gap between us and the wolves. That's all that's separating us now—about five yards. "I have something important to tell them."

The wolf in front of her cocks his head toward the group behind him, seeming like he's communicating with the other three. I don't like that I can't

hear them. I don't like that there are more people approaching.

What kind of terms was Amora on with her pack when she left?

We all remain frozen in a quiet stand-off as we wait for the woman and her men to reach us. Silence fills the woods, the sound of the birds chirping in the trees disappearing as sunlight filters through the leaves overhead.

As they near us, the blonde woman gasps and mumbles Amora's name. She races past the wolves that are blocking our path and throws her arms around Amora, practically lunging into my mate's arms. The two of them cling tightly to each other, and although I can't glimpse her full face from where I'm standing, I can see a medley of emotions in Amora's expression. Happiness, guilt, sadness, and then relief rapidly flit over her features.

As the two women cling tightly to each other, the four men who accompanied the blonde woman linger close by, their gazes examining us one by one. Tension coils thickly in the air around us as I force my muscles to relax. The way this woman greeted my mate tells me she's a friend—but I'm not sure about the others. Not yet.

The man strapped to Kian's back groans, drawing the focus of the dark-haired man standing closest to us.

"What's going on?" he asks as the two women part. "Who are these wolves?"

Amora shakes her head, seeming to break herself from whatever daze she might have been in while hugging the blonde woman. She points to us. "This is Malix, Frost, and Kian."

I shift into my human form when she says my name and bow my head respectfully. Kian and Frost shift too, and Kian sets the man he was carrying down on the ground. As they're introduced, Kian grunts in the usual Kian fashion and Frost nods lightly.

"Malix," Amora continues, catching my attention. "Kian, Frost—this is Sable." She gestures to the blonde woman before pointing to the dark-haired man. "That's Ridge. Next to him are Archer, Dare, and Trystan."

I smile handsomely, not sparing any charm as I say, "Delighted to meet you."

Kian growls low in his throat, a warning to me to be on my best behavior. What can I say? I can't help myself. I'm made of pure fucking sunshine.

"The man Kian was carrying has been taken over by shadow magic," Amora explains to the onlookers. "He attacked us. We did our best to defend ourselves without causing too much harm or killing him. He's unconscious,

but he should be fine.” She pauses for a moment, darkness clouding her features as she glances at Frost. “Well, as fine as he can be right now with all those shadows pumped into his body.”

“Shadow magic?” Sable repeats, her brows knotting. “What the hell is going on, Amora?”

“A man named Quinton is responsible for this,” Amora replies. “He was—*is*—the alpha of these men’s old pack. He’s gone mad with power, and he’s trying to build an army of shifters infused with dangerous shadows that enhance their strength and turn them into violent monsters.”

“And these men?” Ridge narrows his eyes at us. “What about them?”

My mate dives into a recap of how we learned about Quinton’s plans and what led us here. She leaves out the part about how we’re mates—I suppose there’s a time and a place for that.

Once her explanation wraps up, Ridge’s jaw tightens. He motions to two of the shifters who first intercepted us, gesturing for them to gather up the unconscious man. They leap into action, collecting the bound man from where he’s slumped on the ground near Kian.

Trystan, a man with blue-green eyes and shiny brown hair, focuses his gaze on Amora as he inclines his head back the way they came. “You and your men should come with us.”

No argument there. The whole point of busting our asses to get here as quickly as possible was to help these people—and I’m as committed now as I was when Amora suggested the plan. Sure, I joked about how kitty is the captain now, but it really is true. She’s leading us forward into battle, and I trust her with my entire damn soul.

Frost and Kian fall into step beside me as we join Amora. The tension from the stand-off dissipates just enough for me to get comfortable. We stick close to Sable and her men as they lead us into a fairly large village. Cabins of various sizes line the dirt roads that cut through the village, just like most packs that live off the grid. The streets are relatively empty, but people are gathering in clusters around the edges of the hard-packed roads, obviously curious about the people who are accompanying their... alpha? Who’s the alpha here?

*Amora said alphas, plural, I think as I hear hushed whispers echo around us. Interesting.*

We pass a sizable barn, big enough to be a warehouse, where I assume they hold their pack meetings. It likely acts as a mess hall, a recreation center,

and a school as well. Although this place looks similar to a lot of shifter communities I've seen over the years, I can tell they do well with what they have, building and hunting and growing a lot of what they need on site.

We veer toward a house near the middle of the village a few moments later, a rustic log cabin that's a bit bigger than some of the others we've passed. As we make our way up the steps and follow Sable and her men inside, I stick close to Amora's side, watching her glance around with wide eyes that are alert and filled with memories. So many memories. I can see an expression of familiarity flash over her face, especially when we walk into the expansive living room.

Fur rugs decorate the ground as a small child, a boy, plays quietly in front of a fireplace. The back deck hosts a patio set that shows signs of wear and tear, making it clear that it's used with frequency. Couches flank either side of a coffee table, and portraits hang on every available wall space. I even spot Amora in a few pictures.

A woman with a round, friendly face holds an infant as she sits on the couch closest to the little boy. The two of them swivel their heads around, glancing at us with curious eyes.

Amora blinks at the little boy, her breath catching in her throat. She looks almost shocked to see him, and I wonder if she got a chance to meet him before she left the pack to hunt after Kian and the rest of us.

"Please, sit," Sable urges as she draws my mate toward the couch. "I'll grab some clothes. Same size?"

Amora clears her throat. "Uh... yeah."

"And for the men? Well," Sable chuckles, glancing at us. "I'm sure we can find your sizes here as well."

She disappears from the room, taking a lightheartedness with her that I didn't realize was present until she was gone. Although Amora remains a comforting presence at my side, the atmosphere in the living room grows decidedly more frosty as the four men size us up.

I guess that's fair, since we're doing the same damn thing to them.

Ridge in particular seems wary, his jaw never having relaxed since it tightened back there at the perimeter of the village. His honey-colored eyes remind me a bit of Kian's, and so does the hard look on his face. I can't tell if he's more suspicious of us than the others seem to be because that's just his personality, or if it's because he's more protective of Amora than they are.

Either way, the tension in the air seems to crank up steadily until Sable

returns, bringing a large laundry basket full of clothes for us to peruse. We dress quickly, and I let out a sigh as I tug a shirt over my head. I'm just fine with being naked, seeing as I was raised in a pack that didn't care much about nudity, but being in foreign territory makes me feel too vulnerable. Clothes help.

"We need to talk," Amora tells her friend as she tugs down the hem of her own borrowed shirt.

Sable nods. "Come with me."

My legs ache as we follow her into another room. My body wants rest, but I know we can't stop. As long as Quinton is still going, we have to keep going. We have to protect Amora and her old pack.

Whatever it takes.

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# AMORA



SABLE DRAWS US into a dining room situated off the living room and separated by a sliding door. It's a little easier to breathe knowing that her kids won't overhear what we're saying, but at the same time, I'm not sure I can speak at all.

There are so many memories flying through my head, and so many new things to take in as well—including the two kids that Sable and her men have had since I was here last. Somehow, the sight of the baby and the toddler only highlights how long it's been since I've been back here.

Entire little people have come into the world in the time I've been gone.

Malix rests a hand on my thigh after I take a seat at the oak table. I smile weakly in his direction and then turn to Frost, who gives me a brief nod. That's his way of encouraging me. Kian's face is set in grim lines—when is he *not* wearing that expression?—but I can still see support glimmering in his eyes.

“Coffee?” Sable offers. She doesn't wait for us to respond before she nods decisively. “Yeah, coffee.”

“Got any power bars? We ran for a while,” Malix says.

I shoot him a look that makes him crack a handsome grin. After rolling my eyes, I turn to Sable and give her an apologetic smile.

“Actually, if you have anything to spare, we could probably all use a snack.”

She doesn't seem fazed at all. “Of course. On it.”

I'm relieved and impressed that Sable is so... well, *Sable*. I don't know what I was expecting when I first got here, but I also wasn't sure if anything had changed significantly.

You know, except for those cute kiddos in the living room with their nanny.

*Fuck, I missed so much.*

Sable returns with a pot of coffee as Trystan carries some mugs to the table. The snacks she brings over next are doled out by Malix while I pour coffee. The smell hits my nostrils, and I swear I moan a little. Fucking hell, actual *coffee* that hasn't been sitting in a damn tin can for ages in a musty old cabinet. This is like fucking paradise right now, and I can't help the easy smile that crosses my lips as I sip it slowly and munch on a granola bar.

Sable waits patiently across from me. I catch her glances every so often, noticing how she appears as stunned and relieved as I am. We have so much to catch up on.

"Well," I sigh as I cradle my mug between my hands. "I suppose I have a lot of explaining to do."

Ridge snorts. "That's a start."

Sable waves a hand at him briefly before turning a softer expression toward me. "Whenever you're ready, we're here for it."

I bite my lower lip, nerves suddenly rising inside me. After a steadying breath, I say, "When I left our pack lands years ago, I set out to find these men. Just before I left, Gwen showed me a vision of the shadow realm coming to earth, and I was determined to try to stop that from happening."

I pick over my next words carefully. I don't want Kian, Malix, and Frost to seem like bad people, but I also don't want to skip over what drove me to chase after them in the first place.

Sable nods, listening intently. Ridge and other alphas pay close attention too, their gazes serious as I tell my story.

"The vision Gwen showed me made me think that these three men were behind all of this, that they were the ones who wanted to merge the two worlds. I hunted them down with the intention of stopping them from bringing the shadow realm to earth, but it turned out not to be that simple. Once I spent more time with them, I discovered that the only reason they wanted to pierce the veil was to stop the pain they were feeling caused by the shadow magic inside them."

Pausing for a second, I take another breath. My knuckles have turned white from gripping the coffee mug too tight. I'm doing my best, but fuck if I'm not nervous as hell about this.

"I discovered that they were acting on the orders of their alpha, and that



they weren't the monsters I assumed them to be at first. In fact, they were..."

I trail off as I glance at my mates in turn. I receive a supportive smile and nod from each of them, even Frost, who typically remains stoic. It strengthens me as I continue.

"They were—they *are*—so much more than that. So we joined forces. We started working together to fight against their old alpha, Quinton."

Sable's brows draw together as she leans forward, clearly drawn in by my story as I continue on, explaining all about the shadow realm and how the three men with me were born half shifter and half shadow, created purposefully by Quinton in order to help him fulfill his goal.

My friend has plenty of experience with magic, and although the kind of magic she controls isn't the same as shadow magic, I hope it will help her understand what I'm saying.

"Their shadows don't control them. They were *born* with shadows, not fused with the shadow magic in the way that Quinton does to wolf shifters now. I know them, and I trust them. I've seen what they can do." I feel Malix squeeze my thigh beneath the table. "I've experienced their protection. That's why I brought them here."

I can feel everyone watching me as I speak. Sable's eyes never leave my face, and Ridge's gaze seems to pierce right through me. I can practically feel his shock at the fact that I've returned to the village after so many years, and I hope he doesn't hate me for leaving. I mean, fuck, he was my best friend for the longest time. We were so attached as kids that people thought we were meant to be mates.

But we weren't. We *aren't*. Because my mates are right here, and Sable is right there.

My voice trails off as I finally run out of words, and I look down at the remnants of my coffee, which has gone cold. I've said as much as I can say, and I hope I've made it clear what kind of threat they'll be up against if the Blood Moon alpha decides to come after the village.

"Anyway, Quinton is very likely already nearby. He's going to target this pack. I know it."

Ridge bares his teeth, and I swear I can already see the gears grinding in his head. "We'll need to get the whole pack involved in defense. We beef up security around the pack lands right now, although it'll be a band-aid for the time being. We'll need to be ready to fight if and when Quinton comes to our village."

Sable leans forward. "How do you know he's going to target us?"

A flash of Gwen's bloody chest and face rush through my mind, and I blink rapidly. "Gwen."

Frost squeezes my shoulder, easing me out of the spotlight as he explains, "Our brother, Kian, was taken to the shadow realm. It's a desolate place brimming with darkness that would overwhelm our world should Quinton succeed in his effort to create a tear in the veil."

"We went to Gwen for help rescuing Kian," Malix adds. "That's when we were sent into the shadow realm and got a first-hand view of what could come here."

"It scared us," I whispered. "It *scares* the hell out of us, Sable. It's awful there."

"We were able to rescue our brother," Frost continues. "But not without consequence. Quinton traced us to Gwen, and he attacked us there."

"Gwen didn't make it," I blurt. "Quinton killed her."

Sable shudders, her eyes widening. But just like Ridge, I can see her analyzing everything I've told her, thinking things through analytically. It's part of why she and her mates make such a good team, and such good leaders for their pack.

"And the shadows?" she asks. "How does he wield them?"

I let Frost take the wheel on shadow explanations, since he's our personal encyclopedia on all things paranormal and magic. That makes him the best person for the job. Besides, my mouth is dry and my throat is tired from talking so much already.

Sunlight shines brightly on the other side of the wide windows, having turned from brilliant yellow into hues of orange and pink as the day has worn on. We've been in this kitchen longer than I realized.

Sable glances over at her men when Frost is finished speaking. "I'll strengthen the protections around the village and redo some sigils with stronger magic. I have no idea if that will help against this kind of threat, but it's worth trying."

"What can we do?" I ask, gesturing between myself and my men.

"You can rest and recover," she says immediately. "From what you've said, you all could use it. My mates and I will do what we can tonight, recruiting some of our strongest wolves to help us, and tomorrow, we'll begin preparing in earnest. We can put you in a cabin nearby. We'll stock it with some food and supplies as well."

I open my mouth to argue, then shut it again. I can't turn down her kindness, and she's right. We'll be better able to help tomorrow, after we recover a bit.

"Thank you," I say instead.

She turns to Ridge and Archer. "They can use the empty cabin next door to Grady's place, right?"

"Of course." Archer nods.

He places a kiss on her temple, a sign of easy affection, and Ridge brushes his fingers over her hair in an almost unconscious gesture.

Dare steps forward, jerking his chin at my men. "We'll show you to the cabin where you can stay."

All four of Sable's mates clearly intend to escort my men and I to our cabin, and I would grin at their obvious protectiveness over Sable if not for the fact that I recognize the same thing in my own men.

Kian, Malix, and Frost stand up, following the alphas toward the door. I start to go with them but stop when Sable takes my wrist.

"Would you mind staying for a little bit?" she murmurs.

"Oh. Yeah, of course." I nod, feeling a little torn.

My gaze follows my mates as they leave with all four of Sable's mates right behind them, and worry grips me like a vise. There's no reason to worry about the seven of them going off on their own.

Logically, I know that. I distrusted my mates at first, but I trust them now. And I hope that the Montana Pack alphas will trust them too. It wouldn't be like Ridge or the others to pretend to be allies and then imprison my men. I have nothing to be concerned about.

Yet still, I worry.

"They'll be all right," Sable assures me as though she's read my mind. "Let's sit on the couch. It's cozier there."

We make our way into the living room, where Sable exchanges a few friendly words with the nanny. Regina is her name, and she's as sweet as she is warm. After she leaves, Sable cradles her infant child and gestures for me to settle on the couch across from her. The toddler that crawls into her lap looks just like her.

Fuck, this is awkward. I can't stop staring at the kids even as I try to pull my gaze away from them. So much happened while I was gone. So much *life* has erupted without me around.

What else did I miss?

Sable raises her eyebrows at me as she settles the toddler onto the couch, clearly noticing the way I'm staring. "Do you want to hold her?"

My stomach dips. "Hold... the baby?"

She chuckles as she leans over and settles the infant into my limp arms.

"It's easy," she says. "Just cradle her head and put your arm right under her body."

"God, she's tiny."

Sable laughs. "Yeah, they sort of come out that way at first. And then..." She shoots a glance at the little boy who's sitting by her side, ruffling his hair and then gently squeezing his shoulders. "Ben, why don't you sit next to your aunt?"

"Ben?" I repeat. "And this is...?"

"Cora."

I stare at the infant, who peers back at me with curious eyes. Those are Sable's eyes. God, this is such a fucking trip. "Cora."

Ben crawls into my lap, and as I attempt to balance the infant and the little boy at the same time, Sable covers her mouth to stifle what I'm sure would be a laugh.

"Uh, she's drooling," I point out as a bubble forms on Cora's mouth. "Is that... do they... what do I do?"

"I wish I had a camera."

I shoot her a hard glance. "Sable, help."

"You're doing great. Just relax."

Once Ben settles into my side and under my arm, I find a decent position, cradling him and his sister at the same time. It's awkward, but I want to hold them. I want to be close to them. Cora smells like lavender and lemongrass, a delightful mixture that seems to put me at ease. Ben smells much like his sister, but with a hint of something piney like the way the trees smell on a snowy mountain.

I grimace awkwardly as I look back at Sable. "Is this okay?"

"It's great. You're a natural."

"Ugh, hardly."

She grins and sits on the edge of the coffee table, her knees touching mine as she leans forward. "You've been gone for a long time, Amora."

"Too long. I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to—"

She holds up her hand to cut me off. "No, it's okay. I understand why you needed to go. You had a mission. That's so very like you."

“I guess some things don’t change, huh?” I smile down at Cora, who has closed her eyes and started to snore a little bit. “How are your mates? How’s everything going with them?” I chuckle. “I mean... I can see the results here, but tell me about it.”

She blushes, a slight pink tinge creeping up her cheeks, but happiness twinkles in her eyes. “We’re doing well. Being in charge of a pack suits me. I love having multiple mates, and our personalities complement each other perfectly.”

“You seem to be in sync.”

She nods. “We are, especially with the kids.” She laughs. “Although the kids sort of have us wrapped around their little fingers.”

“It’s good to be here,” I say quietly. “I’ve missed you so much.”

Her expression turns more serious, and she gives me a soft smile. “Yeah, I’ve missed you too.”

I glance toward the window, thinking of the village that bustles around us, three packs having come together to live as one. “Anything else happen while I was away?”

“Plenty. But I’m more curious about you.”

“I already told you everything.”

She shakes her head, a knowing look shining in her eyes. “Not everything.”

“I don’t know what you mean.”

“Really? Because I’ve never seen a guy touch you like the three of them did and not end up with his hand wrenched behind his back.”

I choke back the urge to laugh. She has a point. “It’s nothing. The four of us have gotten close over the past months. We’ve been through a lot together.”

“Traveling alone like that is tough.”

“I’m not alone when I’m with them.”

Her eyebrows launch right into her hairline. The satisfied smirk on her lips makes me realize how pointless it is to keep denying the truth.

“Fine,” I groan. “I’ll tell you.”

“You know you can’t lie to me.”

“Yeah, I realize that.”

She crosses her arms, leaning back a little. “So, go on. Tell me everything.”

For some reason, I’m nervous to say it. I managed to tell her and the

alphas pretty much the entire story of our battle against Quinton and his shadows without ever mentioning that the men are my mates. I'm not sure why I'm so nervous to say it.

No, wait. I know exactly why.

Because I'm not sure exactly what to call them anymore. After everything we've been through, what's the right word for what we are to each other?

In the time since they saved me from being executed by Quinton, I've started to think of them as my mates again, but saying the word out loud feels so big.

"Things are... complicated between us," I say slowly. "I was drawn to the three of them since the moment I met them all, when I woke up tied to a bed."

Her eyebrows shoot straight up. "Hmm, kinky."

"Not like *that*."

"Sorry." She makes a show of zipping her lips. "Go on."

I shake my head and keep going. "They're... my mates. I met Kian a long time ago, before I learned about the vision from Gwen. He left me after one night together, and I tried to forget all about it. But then I learned from Gwen that my mates could bring darkness to the entire world, so I set out to hunt them down. There's so much bad blood and angst between us."

"What do you mean?"

I lick my lips, the words sticking at the back of my throat before I force them out. "They tried to break the bond."

"Holy shit." Sable visibly winces, pain settling in her gaze as I pause to let her absorb that tidbit of information.

"But they only did it to protect me," I add quickly. "Because another witch had told them that they would all share a mate, and that she would be destroyed if she stayed with them. So they tried to break the bond."

"Whoa." She twists a few strands of her blond hair around her fingers. "That's... a lot. A mate bond isn't something that can ever be broken, no matter how hard you try to resist it. But deliberately trying to do that? Holy crap, it would take such a strong spell."

"It almost worked. I felt it snap."

She grimaces, her hand extending to my knee and offering a gentle squeeze. "But you said they did it to protect you from the prophecy, right?"

"Yeah, that's what Kian said."

"Do you believe them?"

I met her gaze, weighing my answer for a moment before I speak. “Yes,” I say finally. “I believe them.”

Her delicate pixie-like features relax a little, her expression warming. “Well, that counts for a lot.” She chuckles, shaking her head. “It’s funny. I didn’t know the rest of it, but from the first moment you all showed up here, I knew they were your mates.”

“You did?”

She lifts a brow. “Of course I did. They care about you so much—anyone could see that. It’s written on every line of their faces.”

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# AMORA



IT TAKES me a moment to process Sable's words, and as I do, I swear I can feel them resonating all the way down to my soul.

*It's written in every line of their faces.*

When we stopped by that stream on the journey here and Frost came and pulled me onto his lap, he stared down at me with a kind of adoration that made my heart both race and settle in my chest. Malix gazes at me like I'm made of sunlight, and Kian looks at me like I'm the only woman he ever wants in his life.

Despite everything that's happened, I'm lucky. Three men want me in their lives. Three men want to protect me, cherish me, *keep me*.

The infant in my arms stirs, and I glance down as Cora wakes up again, rounding her mouth in a yawn before making a few curious cooing noises. I hand her off to Sable, whose entire face lights up like a Christmas tree as she accepts her daughter back into her arms.

"I never used to think something strong and good and pure could come out of something as awful as my origins with my mates," I tell her. "But then again, I know myself. I've always been stubborn. Maybe if our love had been easy, I would have never been able to accept it."

"Not everything has to be painful to achieve, but sometimes, the things that are the hardest are the ones that are most worth it."

"Maybe I had to work this hard just so I could know beyond any doubt that it's real." I puff out my cheeks with a messy exhale. "I love them, Sable. Beyond just the mate bond, I love them."

"I know," she says softly. "That's obvious too."

Cora punctuates her mother's words by letting out a quiet cry. Sable



immediately turns her attention to her baby, soothing the little girl with soft words as she stands up to bounce her gently.

“I’ll get out of your hair,” I say as I carefully move Ben to the couch cushion. “I don’t want to keep you from your kids.”

“Don’t worry about it. When my mates get back, we’ll have a lot of planning and work to do. I just wanted a few minutes to catch up with you before all of that happened.”

Before I can protest, Sable pulls me into a one-armed hug as Cora snuffles a bit in her other arm. I return the hug, allowing more of the armor I’ve built up over the years to fall away as I squeeze her.

I missed this. *So much.*

My stomach growls as we separate, and I grimace. The snacks helped, but I’m looking forward to a real meal. It’s nearing dusk, and the guys are likely wondering what I’m doing. After giving Sable another quick hug and saying goodbye to the kids, I follow her out to the porch, and she points out the cabin where my mates are waiting for me.

I can feel her gaze on my back as I walk away, and I can’t help replaying our conversation over in my head.

The cabin isn’t far away, but I take my time, letting my thoughts spin aimlessly as I glance around at the familiar scenery. Everything Sable and I talked about is still sitting in my chest, infusing my heart with a whole new set of emotions. She’s always been more optimistic than me, more likely to see the good in people than the bad, and when I look at everything that’s happened through her eyes, I can see that she’s right.

Malix, Frost, and Kian are exactly what I need.

They’re my protectors, my guardians, my *mates*, as much as they’re my friends, my lovers, and my pack.

When I step inside the unfamiliar cabin, I’m surprised how much it feels like coming home, but I know it’s because of who waits for me inside. Footsteps echo through the house, floorboards creaking as my mates walk around. Utensils and plates clink in the kitchen as something sizzles on a pan.

I sniff the air. *Steak.*

Fuck, I haven’t had a good steak in ages. Spices overwhelm my senses as I follow the narrow hall to the kitchen and take in the scene unfolding in front of me.

Kian is bent over the stove, his massive hands handling the saucepan and spice bottles with a practiced ease. Frost dices steamy potatoes and sets them

in a bowl, then grabs a tool to mash them up. Malix is setting the table, moving with an easy, effortless grace.

He's the first to notice me, and his grin widens as he gestures to the feast being prepared.

"Check it out. The alphas hooked us up with some good food. We don't have to eat out of any cans tonight, thank fuck."

I chuckle, but surprisingly, my focus is no longer on the food.

I'm definitely hungry, but I can't stop thinking about his lips and the way his violet eyes sparkle as he holds up some fresh vegetables. So I ignore the food and march up to him, grabbing the back of his neck and crushing my lips to his.

A confused hum escapes him, but he doesn't argue much. Why would he? I'm laying it on thick right now, curling my fingers over his shoulders and keeping him tightly pressed to my body. Before long, his arms circle my waist, the vegetables that occupied his hands falling to the floor and rolling in every direction.

Everything I've been feeling—everything that's been building inside me ever since my talk with Sable—coalesces in this fervent kiss. All my emotions pour through my lips as I moan softly, and Malix responds with a hungry growl.

He parts his lips, allowing my tongue to tangle with his, and I swear I can feel the heat of him infusing every part of my body. That's how it feels to kiss him—like I'm being worshiped by a brilliant, magnificent star.

Malix's fingers dip beneath my shirt but don't drift north or south. Our kiss is heated and satisfying, but it's enough for the moment. I don't need anything else from him.

His lips are enough. *He's* enough.

When we finally separate, his eyes are sealed shut, and he's got a dazed, pleased look on his face. I run my fingers over his jaw, enjoying the way he turns his head toward my touch.

Kian and Frost are standing nearby, and when I glance over, I notice that the steaks are done, and the potatoes appear to have been abandoned. Frost still has the masher in his hand, but all of his focus is on me and Malix.

Good. I like that. I want their attention on us. On me.

Without hesitation, I grab the front of Kian's shirt and yank him toward me. He delves his fingers into my hair, tilting my head back as his lips war with mine, fighting to take over.

That's how Kian has always been. His gruff exterior masks a fiery interior, the kind of passion that might scare a woman if she wasn't prepared to handle it. But I know I'm his equal, and he knows it too, which allows him to never hold anything back with me.

His hands move over my back and grip my ass, squeezing wherever they land as if he's trying to press me as close to him as possible. His tongue claims me, plunging possessively into my mouth. The rough texture of his stubble scrapes my skin, but I hardly care. It's the kind of pain I like, especially when it's from him.

Whiskey and woodsmoke assault my senses, and my eyes roll back as I realize this scent has stuck with me for ages—ever since that first night in that shitty-ass motel.

*I could never get rid of him even when I tried, I think, my heart beating heavily. They've always been with me, and they always will be. In my heart. In my thoughts.*

I hum as I pull away from his devouring lips, still gripping his shirt as I reach for Frost. His arm circles my waist as I stand up on my toes, desperate to taste him, to touch him.

With Frost, I always felt like we were actively experiencing each other instead of trying to show off. And right now, he's exploring me, taking his time to dip his tongue into my mouth, to suck on my tongue, to nip my lower lip.

Although my lips are bruised from kissing, it feels like I'll never get enough. I whimper as he deepens the kiss, and when we break apart, I realize I'm swaying a little on my feet. Malix catches my waist as Frost takes my hand to steady me.

I turn to Malix, smiling with satisfaction as I say, "All right, so what's for dinner?"

He raises his eyebrows. "Are you fucking kidding right now, kitty? You can't just march in here and kiss your mates like that without expecting to get fucked twelve ways from Sunday."

"It's Sunday?"

He snorts a laugh. "Sweetheart, who gives a fuck what day it is?"

"Seriously, when is dinner going to be ready? I know we're all hungry."

"Starving," Frost exhales next to me.

As he speaks, I notice that his ice-blue gaze isn't on the food in the kitchen—it's on me.

A rush of desire surges right down to my pussy, making it throb. When I glance back at Malix, his smile is devious, his eyes glittering with the kind of mischief that makes me bite my lower lip.

“I’m starving too,” he agrees, his voice husky as he glances at Kian. “Are you hungry, brother?”

“I feel like I haven’t eaten in weeks,” Kian replies without looking at him. His gold-rimmed eyes are only on me. Just like Frost’s. Just like Malix’s. “There’s been a change in dinner plans, Amora.”

“Is that so?” I ask softly, unable to keep the heat from my voice.

Kian growls low in his throat. “Yes. Now there’s only one thing on the menu.”

They’re closing in on me like a pack of hunters getting ready to pounce on their dinner.

Fuck.

That’s *me*.

My mates are surrounding me now, trapping me between the three of them. Their hands roam my body, massaging my breasts and teasing my clit through my borrowed pants. Arousal floods me, and I whimper as my knees wobble, threatening to give out.

I grip the first shoulder within reach. Frost’s. He holds me steady as his lips seek my neck, peppering kisses up to my jawline. Malix shoves my shirt up and finds my left nipple, dragging it between his teeth in a slow, sensual motion. Kian holds my gaze as he grips my chin, his thumb sliding into my mouth in a dominant, possessive gesture.

Like a pack of ravenous hunters, they devour my skin—except for Kian, who seems intent on watching my reaction. Ragged groans pour from my mouth, and I wrap my lips around his thumb, sucking on it greedily.

“Do you like that?” he growls. “Do you like feeling your mates devour you?”

“Yes.”

The hungry hum that vibrates his throat makes my clit pulse, my eyelids drooping.

“Eyes open,” Kian commands. “And stay still.”

His thumb disappears for a split second as Malix removes my shirt. In the same instant, Frost drags my pants down my legs, kneeling beside me and pressing a kiss to my hip as his hand slides between my thighs. Cool air sweeps over my nipples, making them pebble as Malix returns to his task.

While he laps my nipples with his wickedly talented tongue, Kian drags his thumb over my lower lip again.

“We’re going to fuck you now, Amora,” he murmurs. “All three of us. And then we’re going to feed you. Then we’re going to put you to bed. In that order. Got it?”

“Yes,” I repeat, darting my tongue out to lick the tip of his thumb.

“The first course is almost ready,” Malix says as he tugs at my nipples, chuckling when he makes me hiss. “Yup. Juuust about ready.”

Frost captures my waist as Malix steps back, giving Kian room to close the space between us. He claims my mouth possessively, the kiss bruising my already swollen lips. But it’s not too much. It’s *never* too much with him.

In fact, it isn’t enough.

He breaks the kiss and nips at my bottom lip. “Let’s set the table.”

Warm fingers drift over my exposed pussy, causing another shiver to run through my body. The room spins suddenly as Kian lifts me and plants me on the table, using his other arm to shove the plates, cups, and silverware out of the way. A few things clatter to the floor noisily, but the sound barely registers in my brain as he presses me back and rounds the table to stand on my left.

“Open your legs,” he demands. “Now, Amora.”

I obey his command, moaning as I notice his cock pressing against his pants. But when I reach for him, he pushes my hand away.

I pout, huffing with frustration. “I want to play.”

He grips my chin, forcing me to look at him. “Didn’t I tell you to stay still?”

“I don’t *want* to stay still.”

“Then I’ll make you.”

As he hooks his hand under my knee and lifts my leg, Frost does the same with my other leg, and I realize that they’re *literally* about to feast on me. Desire courses through my veins as Malix approaches the end of the table where my pussy is on full display. His violet eyes dance over my thighs, my pussy, my torso, and my neck as his hands trace a path from my ankles to my knees.

I’m acutely aware of how his fingers drift idly past the hands of his brothers, goosebumps rising in the wake of his touch. I reach above my head, searching for something to grab on to, something to keep me from moving. My fingers hook over the edge of the table as Frost runs his free hand over

my breast.

“You’re wet,” he whispers, making a soft noise fall from my lips. “You’re so swollen and ready for us.”

“She is wet,” Malix observes with a wicked grin. His hands rest on my thighs, thumbs grazing my pussy lips and nudging them open. A groan reverberates in his throat as he watches my core clench. “You smell so sweet, kitty. I bet you taste sweet too.”

My brain is too fuzzy to think of a clever retort. I can’t focus, I can’t breathe, while I’m receiving so much attention. Kian pinches my right nipple between his fingers, and I cry out as Malix flattens his tongue against my clit. My pussy pulses as heat radiates through my core, spreading through every limb.

While Malix consumes my pussy, his tongue exploring every inch of me, Frost bends his head to claim my lips in a messy kiss.

Between my legs, Malix makes a satisfied sound. “Very sweet.”

Frost traces his tongue over my lips. “Her mouth is sweet too.”

A hungry growl comes from my right as warm, wet lips consume my nipple. I arch my back as Kian draws my breast into his mouth and nips the sensitive flesh, sending a spark of pain and pleasure shooting through me in jagged waves. Gasping for breath, I practically hump the air, begging for Malix to put his tongue where I need it most.

Kian presses a hand to my stomach, holding me still for his brother, and I mewl softly as Malix dives back in, his tongue lashing my clit with firm strokes that push me over the edge.

Flashes of light dance in my vision as I explode, my orgasm ripping through me so hard that my body writhes and bucks. But Kian keeps my legs open with Frost’s help, the two of them still worshiping my tits, my neck, and my lips.

Malix lifts his head, slickness coating his mouth and chin. He drags his bottom lip through his teeth, smirking at me before he glances over at Kian. “Our dinner is squirming too much.”

“Hmm, we’ll have to do something about that,” Kian notes as Frost chuckles.

I squint up at them, the haze of my orgasm making it difficult to focus. I’m mildly annoyed at not being able to touch any of them the way they’re touching me, but honestly, I kind of love how they all work together to bring me pleasure, how much they like sharing me.

The kitchen blurs around me again as Kian flips me to my stomach. He pins my hands above my head as he smooths his hand over my spine, tracing a path toward my ass. A smack to my left cheek echoes in the kitchen, and I grunt as heat blooms through me.

The men switch positions, and I lose track of whose hands are where as they drift over my body.

“Fuck,” I whimper.

Kian growls as he tightens his grip on my wrists, keeping them pinned above my head. “Not yet, sweetheart.”

“But I—”

Malix trails the tip of his tongue over the ear that’s still exposed with my cheek pressed to the table. “No squirming, kitty. That’s against the rules.”

The groping, possessive hands on me make their way down to my ass, and I realize they belong to Frost when he lets out an almost tortured sounding groan. He kneels behind me, and the only warning I get is the soft gust of his breath before his tongue is on me, sliding from my pussy to my ass before teasing my tight back hole. My stomach clenches, my toes digging into the floor, and I whimper plaintively.

I never really thought I’d be into something like this, but I love when Frost does it. I love how hungry he is for me, and how even the dirtiest things have a sort of innocence to them when Frost does them, as if he has no idea what a turn-on they are.

My clit throbs as he laps at my ass, hungrily devouring me. I get a little friction against the table, grinding against it and clenching my inner walls to get a little relief for the pressure building inside me.

“Amora, you’re squirming too much,” Kian warns. “If you don’t stop...”

Whatever he was about to say is lost as a second orgasm rushes through me. I whimper softly, squeezing my eyes closed as Frost turns his head to one side and bites my ass cheek.

“God,” I groan. “Fuck.”

I’m clinging to the table, breathing heavily as I go lax against it, and I’m vaguely aware of the men moving around me again before Kian’s voice cuts through the muffled sounds in the kitchen.

“My turn,” he rumbles. “You look so fucking beautiful like this.”

Hands tug on my hips, pulling me back a little. Kian releases his hold on me to undo his pants, and I hear them hit the floor with a soft *thump*. His thick cock traces my pussy lips, and I bite down hard on my lower lip.

I'm dying to move, to make him sink inside me. Every inch of me is burning with desire and an overwhelming need to have my mates claim me in every way.

The rest of the world barely seems to exist when the four of us come together like this. It's madness, and also pure bliss. My heart thumps heavily as Frost worships my skin, his warm hands roaming over every available part of me. His cock is tenting his pants, and I lick my lips hungrily, my imagination running away with visions of one of them fucking my mouth as Kian fucks my pussy.

"Do you want this?" Kian rasps as he slaps his cock against my pussy.

The burst of sensation makes my back arch. "Yes."

"How much?"

"So much."

He hums, resting his shaft on my pussy and sliding up so he grazes my ass. "Beg."

"What?"

"I said, *beg*."

My wrists burn from being in the same position, but I embrace the pain, letting it fuel the heat building up in me again. "Please, fuck me, Kian. Fuck me like you own me. Fucking claim me."

He slams his cock into my core, the fullness of his thick shaft filling me completely. Frost slides his hand between me and the table and searches for my clit, the tips of his fingers circling the little bud and pushing me right to the edge again.

Rough thrusts rock me against the table, the edge of the wood biting into my hips. My legs are worn out from all the running, and I'm pretty sure I'd be a puddle on the floor if it weren't for the table beneath me. Frost continues to circle my clit, drawing my orgasm closer with every stroke of his fingers.

Kian's breath teases my ear as he leans over me and whispers, "You're so fucking tight. You're choking my dick. Are you close?"

"Yes," I breathe. "Oh fuck, yes..."

He picks up the pace, driving into me hard and fast and sending me tumbling into another climax. He grunts and buries himself deep as I come, flooding me with his release as I shiver on the table. The world blurs around me, my mouth dry and my limbs sore as I pant for breath.

"Good girl," he murmurs. "So fucking perfect."

He draws out, and I whimper at the sensation of emptiness. The men



work together to put me on my back again, my legs dangling over the table, and Kian's gaze drops to the place where his cum trickles out of me. In a possessive gesture, he shoves the thick liquid back inside me, meeting my gaze with a heated expression before stepping back.

Frost settles between my legs next, and I realize he got naked at some point. Shadows ripple over his lean, muscled frame, waving sluggishly. His nostrils flare as he presses the head of his cock against my messy entrance, and both of us groan as he presses inside.

Once he bottoms out, he barely hesitates before pulling back and thrusting in again. Malix steadies me with hands and lips on my shoulders as Kian plays with my tits, pinching my nipples hard and making me cry out. The combined sensations make me rock harder against Frost, meeting his thrusts with eager rolls of my hips.

“So good. So fucking good. The way you feel...”

“Yes,” I beg. “Yes, keep going. Come inside me, Frost. I want to feel you.”

Frost's brows knit together, and he bows forward as he buries himself to the hilt and pulses inside me.

I'm practically boneless now, my body worn out from excessive use. But I'm hardly at my breaking point. I can keep going—especially since I'm still craving one more man.

Frost drags his mouth over the skin of my throat in dazed, slow movements as his cock starts to soften inside me. He traces my pulse with his tongue, then pulls out and steps away, his body covered in a sheen of sweat and his shadows resting in beautiful patterns on his body.

“Malix. Come here.” My voice is husky as I turn to look at my gorgeous mate, crooking a finger to beckon him closer.

“Mmm, I fucking love when kitty purrs for me,” he murmurs as he steps between my legs. “You look so fucking delicious like this, you know that?”

He licks his full lips and strokes his cock, nudging my pussy gently with the tip of it. I reach for his shoulders, holding him close as he slides into me, following after his brothers. A messy mixture of his brothers' cum slicks his entry, and he groans when he feels how tight being fucked twice has made me.

In a swift motion, he lifts me into his arms, cupping my ass as he brings me down on his cock. His fingers dig into my flesh, and he fucks me in languid strokes as I cling to him with my arms and legs.

“That’s right, kitty,” he whispers, his voice strained. “Move your hips with me. That’s a good girl.”

“Malix...”

My voice is a raspy whisper, and I bite down on his smooth dark skin, dragging my teeth over his neck and shoulder. He starts to bounce me more roughly on his thick shaft, and one of my other mates—Kian, I think—growls softly behind me. They’re still watching us, right here with us.

Knowing they’re about to see me climax for a fourth time makes me tighten around Malix. I work my hips against his, meeting his thrusts as he holds me in his arms and fucks me.

He must feel the first ripples of my orgasm before I do, because just as I start to come, he sets me back down on the table and spreads my legs wide. My upper body sprawls against the smooth, cool wood as he thrusts into me madly, drawing out the aftershocks of my release.

“Fuck, baby,” he groans. “Fuck, you’re gonna make me come.”

I expect him to finish inside me like his brothers did, but he surprises me by withdrawing his cock and pumping it fervently with his fist, broken breaths following each grunt as he fucks his hand. He spurts all over my stomach a second later, hot cum coating my skin in sporadic bursts.

We’re both fighting for breath as he leans over me, lazily kissing my lips. When he retreats, Frost is next, worshiping my mouth with slow movements. Kian steals a kiss last, his lips just as hungry and insistent as they were at the beginning of all this.

“Now, we feed you,” he says firmly. “Just like I promised. And then we’re taking you to bed.”

## KIAN



I WAKE up sometime in either the late night or early morning. Even without opening my eyes, I can tell the sun isn't up yet. A warm body presses against my torso, and my hands wander mindlessly over smooth skin.

Memories of last night surface in my tired mind—*Amora on her belly with her ass in the air, Amora on her back with her legs spread wide, Amora bouncing on Malix's cock*—making my heart beat fast as I nestle closer to the body in my arms.

Someone lets out a contented sigh, and I smile lazily as my eyelids slowly open, my vision still blurry from sleep. My hands wander around a tapered waist, a plane of abs, chiseled pecks...

And I snap awake so fast that I shake the mattress.

Malix. That's who I was touching. That's who I practically fondled in the state between wakefulness and sleep. A surprised sound vibrates in my throat as Malix rolls over and flashes me a sly smile.

"Well, I had no idea you felt that way, brother," he teases, cocking an eyebrow.

I purse my lips, giving him a narrow-eyed look in the darkness. "Don't get any ideas."

"Don't worry. I'm not into you that way."

"Good. Because it's not happening."

He smirks. "But I suppose we'll have to get used to mornings like this, seeing as we've all fallen for the same woman. That means a lot of nights in the same bed."

I roll my eyes, noticing the first hints of gray-blue light creeping through the blinds on the windows, a sign that dawn isn't far off. Frost is on my other

side, and Amora is on the other side of him, both of them stirring awake as Amora chuckles at Malix's and my banter. Deciding that we've slept in this configuration long enough, I reach over Frost, snake an arm around Amora, and pull her over his body and into my space.

Frost adjusts his position without complaint, rolling over onto his other side so that he can face Amora as I nestle into her back. My cock throbs against her ass, aching for more of what we had for dinner last night.

And I don't mean the steak.

Amora chuckles in my arms, grinding her ass against me even as she leans forward to kiss Frost. "Well, good morning."

"Hello," Frost whispers, his gaze glued to her face. "Did you sleep well?"

She lets out an easy sigh. "I did. Fuck, I needed that."

"Is anyone going to ask me how I slept?" Malix interjects playfully. His arm slides over my torso and reaches for Amora, resting his palm on her shoulder. "Because I slept like a damn dog."

"Not surprising, considering you always act like a puppy," Amora teases. "But I'm glad to hear it."

"That wake-up call was a little strange though." He drops his voice to a fake whisper. "I think Kian tried to make a move on me."

"Shut up," I growl. "Both of you."

"Ooh, somebody got up on the wrong side of the bed," Malix retorts, humor lacing his words. "Maybe I should make coffee."

"I haven't even gotten out of bed yet," I complain. "How can I get up on the wrong side of the bed if I'm still *in* the bed?"

"It's a figure of speech," Frost explains. "You see, most colloquial phrases originated from proper English being—"

I lift my head, glaring at my brother. "Frost, I will end you."

He breaks off, his eyes going wide as Amora breaks out into laughter. When she recovers, she wiggles her ass into me, sighing as she laces her fingers with Malix's and cups Frost's face.

"Don't listen to him," she tells him, her fingers sliding through his blond hair. "He just needs coffee."

Malix lets out a muffled noise. "Mmm, coffee."

Getting out of bed seems to take monumental effort for all of us, although I can tell we're all much more well-rested than we were. Once Malix finally rolls out of bed, Frost follows, leaving me with Amora. The extra few minutes with her in my arms feel like a gift, reminding me of how close we

came to losing each other when I was dragged to the shadow realm.

“You know, I think I can stand cuddling with my brothers if it means I get to sleep next to you more often,” I tell her, reaching out to wrap a lock of her dark hair around my fingers and tugging on it gently.

She chuckles. “Good. Because that was the best night’s sleep I’ve gotten in a long time.”

“Me too.”

Our gazes stay locked for a moment, then I clear my throat, tearing myself away from her as we slide out of bed.

My mood becomes more serious as I dress and pull on a pair of borrowed boots. For the first time in a while, the boots actually fit me, unlike the ones I’ve stolen from various farmhouses we’ve broken into over the years. We all make our way into the kitchen, and Amora hands me a mug of piping hot coffee, nearly as black as the shadows that decorate my skin.

“Thanks.” I accept it and take a sip.

She smiles and nods, grabbing her own cup and blowing on the hot liquid. Although she’s just wearing torn blue jeans and a t-shirt, she looks absolutely ravishing, the kind of woman who I would want to greet me every single morning.

Before I met Amora, I was satisfied with quick one-night stands. I didn’t care for anything more than that—actively avoided it, in fact, always on the move with my brothers.

But she’s changed all that. She’s changed *me*.

“Ready to go meet with the alphas?” I ask, glancing from Amora to my brothers.

When the alphas escorted us to our cabin yesterday, they told us to head to the meeting house in the morning so that we could join the defense efforts. And although I’m not eager to leave the little bubble the four of us have created in this little house, I’m eager to see what they’ve already done to fortify their defenses, and what still needs to be done.

“Sure, why not?” Malix shrugs. “If Quinton is planning an attack on this pack, at least he let us get a good night’s sleep before he invaded. It’s the only thing that makes me hate him a bit less.”

A few moments later, the four of us file out onto the porch, slipping into the flow of people moving toward the barn. It looks like a large portion of the pack has been recruited to help with the preparations, which is encouraging to see.

Villagers teem at the entrance to the meeting house, and Trystan, the alpha with the charming smile and cocky demeanor, is delegating tasks to various pack members.

Sable and the other alphas are inside the large barn-like space, and Sable looks up as we approach. She doesn't smile, but her blue eyes warm a little as she glances from Amora to the rest of us.

"You all look better. More rested," she comments. "Ready to get to work?"

"Yes," Amora answers immediately. "Where can we help?"

"Well, I've bolstered the spells we've got protecting the village, but since we're not sure if my magic will hold off the shadow shifters, we're focusing on physical defenses next." She gestures to me, Malix, and Frost. "The three of you could help with that. Amora, we're also working on boarding up the windows of the cabins where the young and elderly will take shelter in the event of an attack. Can you assist with that?"

"Of course."

Amora gives a somber nod, and my brothers and I echo the gesture.

We split up after that, each of us heading out to help the villagers with their preparations.

As I follow a group of shifters toward the edge of the village to fortify the perimeter, I'm keenly aware of the tension hanging over the village. These people are committed to protecting their own, and they're allowing us to help them do it. I'm glad the alphas took our warning seriously, but it would be impossible to miss the feeling of doom hanging over all of us.

How many times has this pack done exactly what they're doing now in the past? I grit my teeth as I witness the ease with which they set up a perimeter of tripwires, sharpened spikes, and other security measures.

They *have* done this before.

And that makes me worry.

I'm not used to worrying about people other than my brothers. Hell, when I started worrying about Amora, I felt like I was losing my damn mind. But now I'm worrying about complete strangers, people I met less than twenty-four hours ago. These shifters are good people. I can tell by how they interact with me, how they speak to me, how they seem to trust and support each other.

Shock resonates in my chest as I realize that I feel more at home with these shifters than I ever did in my old pack.

The Blood Moon Pack raised me, but they never treated me like I was one of them, just as they never truly embraced my brothers. We were Quinton's favorites, his pets, both feared and resented because of that.

But here, no one treats me like a pariah.

No one stares or whispers behind my back.

It feels... good.

While wandering the perimeter to check for weak spots a few hours later, I spot Amora helping a group of women hang shutters over the windows of a cabin. Something lights in my chest, and I glance over at the three Montana Pack shifters I've been working with.

"I'll be back in a few minutes."

One of them nods in acknowledgement of my words, and I jog toward Amora, taking her hand and tugging her away from the cabin.

"Come with me," I murmur, leading her away from the group of women.

She gives a quick excuse to the women, and I hear them whispering as we leave them behind, but I pay no attention to what they're saying.

The village is quiet around us. Most of the Montana Pack members are working at the perimeter and in the forest surrounding the pack lands, so the heart of the village is fairly empty.

*Good.*

I lead Amora to the space behind the meeting house under a low-hanging awning covered in rust and soot. As soon as we're alone and out of view of anyone else, I pull her close, press her flush to my body, and press a hard kiss to her lips. She kisses me back, her body responding to the connection between us even though I can still feel the surprise resonating through her.

When I break the kiss for a second, letting my forehead rest against hers, she makes a noise in her throat.

"What's up?" she asks. "What was that for?"

My breath shudders as I exhale slowly.

"I shouldn't have left that night," I whisper, drawing back a little. "I did it to protect you, but I never should have left the best thing that ever came into my life."

She stares back at me, not blinking, not saying anything, a million emotions dancing in her eyes. Her mouth drops open, a soft sound falling from her lips before she presses her lips to mine again, hot and hard and fierce.

Fuck, I could kiss her forever.

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# AMORA



WITH KIAN, there's almost always an edge to the way he kisses me, a harshness to the way we come together. We usually fight each other for control, and I'm used to the sharp taste of anger tingeing our kisses, but this is different. This is... sweet.

This kiss is deep, smooth, and overwhelming, like an entire ocean rolling over me. My head dips beneath the waves, cool water rushing into my lungs, and I don't have any desire to stop myself from drowning.

I finally drift from the kiss, my lips swollen and my heart thumping wildly.

"You broke my heart when you left," I whisper.

"I know."

My stomach clenches as I bite my lower lip, cupping his face in my hands and letting my fingertips graze the familiar scar that cuts through his eyebrow.

"It almost wrecked me when I woke up and saw that you were gone," I continue. "But only because I knew, even back then, that what existed between us could be incredible—that it could be *life-altering*."

And it's true. It *is* life-altering.

It's the most incredible connection I've ever experienced, right next to what I feel with Malix and Frost.

In the back of my mind, I know that Kian—that all of them—might doom me. If the prophecy is true, accepting the bond fully and falling for them could seal my fate, ending in my destruction.

"You're right," he whispers as my thoughts race a mile a minute. "You've changed my life, Amora. You've changed me. For the better."

My heart stutters in my chest, thumping hard against my breast bone as I drag my hands up and down Kian's muscled back.

Would I change any of what's happened if I could? Would I rewrite my fate so that I never met these men, just to avoid the possibility of death?

Like hell.

No matter what happens, even if death comes for me for choosing to embrace my bond, it will be worth it.

A sort of grim peace fills me as I close my eyes and listen to Kian breathe, his steady, rhythmic inhalations grounding me.

I don't want to waste another second of our time together. If Quinton truly plans to add the Montana Pack shifters to his shadowy army, we're facing one of the most frightening battles of our lives.

Standing on my toes, I kiss his lips softly, almost chastely. Then I drop to my knees, looking up at him with a wicked grin as I unzip his jeans. I hold his gaze as I reach inside to fetch out his cock, and his nostrils flare as he runs his fingers through my hair.

His cock is already hard in my hand, and I drag my tongue up the length of it, licking from base to tip.

"You taste good," I whisper.

His eyes blaze, the gold rings around his irises glowing like liquid metal. Entranced by the way his throat moves as he swallows, I wrap my lips around the head of his cock. The salty taste is familiar on my tongue as I draw him into my mouth.

His fingers work their way deeper into my hair as I bob my head up and down before sliding my lips to the base of his cock, taking him into the back of my throat. The hum I release around his shaft makes him curse, and my core clenches in response.

"Fuck," he groans, his hips jerking forward to chase my mouth. "Those lips belong around my cock."

I drag in a breath, breaking contact with his thick length to whisper, "Remember what you called me that night at the bar?"

A grin curves his lips. "I called you a filthy fucking angel. And I meant every word of it."

My hand joins my mouth, saliva slicking my strokes as I whisper, "Fuck my mouth, Kian."

"Only if you say please."

I make a frustrated noise, moving my hand a little faster. Sometimes I

hate that I love how fucking bossy he is.

“Please,” I say, pulling away from his cock just long enough to say the word.

At least he doesn't make me ask twice. The head of his cock shoves past my lips, sliding all the way to the back of my throat. I gag as tears well in my eyes, everything around me fading to a blur as I hollow out my cheeks to suck him.

His fingers curl around a fistful of my dark hair, making my scalp tingle as his hips buck harder, thigh muscles flexing with the motion. Every time he pulls out, I suck air into my lungs, flooding them with fresh oxygen.

He pumps harder, his veiny shaft sliding over my tongue with frantic thrusts that tell me he's close to losing it already. Tilting my head just a little, I gaze up at him through my lashes, watching his features contort, his controlled expression falling away as he comes undone.

This is just like the alleyway behind the bar, except... not.

It's *better*.

It's so much fucking better, because of all the things that have happened between us. Because of all the things that now exist between us.

My eyelids flutter as he buries himself in the back of my throat. I gag a little this time, choking on his length as he slips back a few inches, giving me room to breathe.

“A filthy fucking angel who can take it all,” he groans as he readjusts his grip on my hair. “Such a good fucking angel.”

I whimper when his thrusts slow, each pump dragging out over my tongue, steady and even. His nails burn into my scalp as he grunts, bows forward slightly, and then drags my mouth down on his cock, eyes piercing right into my soul as he pulses inside me.

I clutch his thighs to steady my position, knowing instinctively that he's about to finish. I've seen Kian come so many times by now that I can read it in his expression, in the way his breath hitches and his breathing grows labored. His chest heaves as he huffs air into his lungs, and then he explodes, shooting cum down my throat.

I swallow it down, drinking every last drop without breaking eye contact. When he pulls back, I drag in a deep breath before leaning forward to lap at the tip. I lick him clean, enjoying the way his cock pulses every time my tongue drags over the sensitive skin.

He pulls me up, eyes blazing, and then crushes his mouth against my lips,

groaning as his tongue invades my mouth.

“Fuck,” he growls as he releases my lips. “I love tasting my cum in your mouth.”

“God, you and your filthy mouth,” I moan, whimpering softly.

A noise like thunder rumbles in his throat as he pins me to the metal door at the back of the meeting house. “Your turn.”

I don’t have time to think. He whips open the door, drags me into the barn’s back room, and slams the door shut, cutting out daylight. Inky shadows crowd my vision as he yanks my jeans off and hoists me in the air.

“Grab that beam,” he commands. “Above your head. Now.”

I glance up and see a shadow above me. As I reach for it, he adjusts his position, seating my legs over his shoulders—and propping my pussy right against his lips.

I gasp when his tongue finds my clit. I’m already wet from going down on him, and as little lightning bolts of pleasure shoot through me, I have to focus hard to keep my grip on the beam above me so I don’t fall and crack my head open in the middle of being eaten out.

Massive hands grip my thighs as his teeth scrape against my clit, and I tighten my legs around his shoulders to steady myself. My hips have a fucking mind of their own, bucking to meet his rhythm as I get lost in the way he consumes me. I bite back my moans and whimpers as best I can, hoping like hell that no one is using the front part of the meeting room.

Because if they are, they’re definitely getting an earful.

Kian’s tongue stiffens and spears into me, and my fingers slip on the beam as I yelp. I gasp as I recover my grip, sparing a glance downward to take in the sight of him. He looks like he’s fucking possessed, his face buried so deep between my legs that I wonder how he can breathe.

My clit throbs as my thighs clench around his head, and for once, he doesn’t make me wait for permission to come. He just pushes me relentlessly toward the finish line as if he can’t wait to feel me fall apart.

“God, Kian,” I groan. “Fuck, that’s so... oh shit!”

My fingers slide over the beam again as my head tips back, my breath coming faster. When he clamps his lips around my clit and sucks, my stomach flips over with a combination of arousal and fear that I actually *will* fall.

But I should know by now that Kian will always take care of me.

He wraps his arms around my upper back, pulling me away from the

beam so that I slide down his body. My clit drags over his chest and his stomach, coming to rest on his hard cock, as he pins me in a tight embrace, and I whimper as I realize he's hard for me again already.

Fumbling a little in the dim light, he backs me against a wall and drags my right leg up, holding it just under the knee as his cock grazes my pussy.

"Shh," he whispers as he slides his thick shaft into me. "Just like that, baby. Good..."

My moans get trapped behind my lips as he fucks me slow and deep for a few strokes, making sure I feel every inch of him. But neither of us has the patience to wait. Kian didn't make me come while I was hanging from that beam, and I can tell he's still hungry for it.

"You feel so fucking good," he grunts, drawing back and slamming in harder.

When he drops his head, I clutch the back of his neck, our mouths colliding so hard that our teeth bang together. The pain hardly registers as he surges into me, the base of his cock hitting my clit over and over as he starts to piston his hips forcefully.

"That's right," he growls. "Choke my fucking cock. You're so goddamn tight."

"Kian," I whimper. "Fuck. Fuck! Oh god..."

Black dots swarm my vision as I let go. Firecrackers explode in my veins as I squeeze around him, the force of my orgasm nearly making me dizzy. With a muffled grunt, Kian buries himself to the hilt and empties himself inside me, slamming so deep that I feel like he might crack me in half.

Fuck, that wouldn't be so bad. I've had worse—and from Kian, too.

Getting split open by my mate during a hot quickie in the meeting house is a far more welcome end than getting destroyed by him because of some stupid fucking prophecy.

I slump against the wall, tilting my head back as my pulse races and I try to catch my breath. "Brain. Dead."

He chuckles as he pulls back and sets me down, his partially erect cock slipping from my pussy and making me whimper. His kiss is light, affectionate, and slow. As his lips graze my mouth, he whispers something so quiet I almost don't hear it.

But I feel it.

All the way down to my soul.

"I'll never leave again, Amora," he breathes. "You're it for me. My

endgame.”

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# FROST



MALIX and I work side by side on defense fortification as we try to prepare the Montana Pack to fend off Quinton and his minions if they attack. We've always functioned well as a team, and this is no exception. Our movements are coordinated and repetitive as we place traps around the edge of the village, and I lose myself in the steady rhythm of it.

When I glance over at him, I notice his tattoos flickering lightly over his dark brown skin, and a moment later, I feel my own shadows shifting inside me.

I glance over my shoulder to see Amora and Kian making their way toward us. The two of them are talking in low voices, their heads seeming to bow toward each other as though they're made of magnets. A smile crooks my lips at the sight.

Citrus invades my nostrils as they near us, laced with a hint of whiskey. There's another scent mixed in with it, an aroma that reminds me of sweat, ecstasy, and primal hunger.

*Sex.*

A smile crooks my lips. I like that.

Maybe it's strange to be pleased to see my mate showing up alongside my brother with the scent of sex still wrapped around them, but knowing they were together makes me happy. She seems more relaxed than she did even this morning after a good night of rest, and knowing that she's been taken care of puts me at ease. Kian seems less tense too, which is a welcome sight.

Malix looks up with a crooked grin. "Ah. There they are. Our two fearless leaders."

"Hello to you too," she retorts playfully as her hand sweeps over his

bicep. “Can we help? I finished up with boarding the windows earlier.”

“Of course you can help,” I reply. “We’re just fortifying the defenses.”

She and Kian step forward to join us, and we work for several minutes in comfortable silence before Sable approaches. Amora falls into a quiet conversation with her friend, checking in on how things are going with getting the young and elderly into some sort of shelters, and I listen with half an ear as I pause my task momentarily and look up.

My gaze sweeps over the forest around us, noting every spot where jagged metal spikes protrude from the ground or from the trees, set at just the right angle to impale any invaders who aren’t paying attention.

*Hopefully, Quinton will meet his end that way, I think. But I doubt we’ll have such luck. The spikes may bring down some of his newly made feral shifters, but our old alpha is smarter than that—even if he is a madman.*

Aside from the spikes, there are sigils that appear to be burned into the bark of several trees. They’re imbued with witch magic, I’m fairly certain, although I don’t know exactly what the protection charms do. As I study every inch of the forest, a phantom battle rages in front of me, my mind conjuring up images of Quinton and his army and anticipating how they’ll attack.

“You can see it, can’t you?”

The feminine voice behind me is different than Amora’s, much softer, although far from weak. Sable steps up to stand beside me, having finished her conversation with my mate. Her blonde hair is woven into a braid that hangs over her right shoulder, and it reminds me of Felicity for a moment. My shoulders tighten as I think of Cormac and the pack we left behind, the pain that infects them.

I shake my head to banish that thought. “What can I see?”

“Everything,” she responds. “All the defenses we’ve laid out. How effective they might be. The way you focus is... different from other people. From other shifters.”

I make a noise in my throat as I bend to situate a few spikes in the right place. “It’s a gift.”

“One that we’re grateful to have on our side.”

I can’t help the small half smile that quirks the right side of my mouth. I like Sable. I’m not sure why, other than the fact that Amora likes her, but maybe it’s her positivity, optimism, and kindness that draws me in. It’s much different than the way my mate draws me, of course, but it also surprises me.



Because I never like anyone I meet.

Then again, I haven't been meeting a lot of particularly savory characters lately.

"Thank you," I say. "How are the rest of the preparations faring?"

"Decently, considering the circumstances." She tucks her hands into her pockets and bounces on her toes for a moment, surveying the trees in front of us before she turns to me. "Can I ask you something personal?"

I nod, keeping most of my attention focused on my task.

"Your shadows... how do they feel?"

I pause, my hand going still as I reach down to place a spike.

People rarely ask about my shadows, mostly because they're afraid of them—and of me. But the way Sable inquires about how they make me *feel* is odd. Because no one except Amora seems to care about how the shadows make me feel.

"I ask because you and your brothers managed to somehow not get taken over by the shadows that reside in you," she continues, and I straighten to my full height. "You're not broken by them or controlled by them. How did you manage that?"

She's worried. I can read it in the way she searches my expression for something, *anything*, that can give her the right information, the things she needs to hear.

I fully empathize with that feeling. One of her own has already been infected. How will he beat back those shadows when the time comes for him to rejoin his pack? *Will* he be able to overcome the shadows?

And even beyond that pack member, all of her people are at risk. Quinton is likely going to attack with an entire army of feral shifters who will rip everything in their path to shreds. She probably wants to know what to expect if the worst happens, as any good leader would want to know.

She wants to know what will happen if she, her mates, and all the rest of their pack are forced to become vessels for the shadow magic that Quinton controls.

I bow my head, uncertain of how to explain it to her. "I don't know how to say it."

"It's okay." She tilts her head a little. "Just try. Take your time."

Ah, that must be what Amora likes so much about Sable. She's patient.

Unlike Kian.

Shrugging, I try to find some way to describe what it's been like to live

with shadows inside me, and why they haven't overtaken me. Why I found my way back to myself even after Quinton forced more of the toxic magic into me.

"I..." I lick my lips, embarrassed by my sudden silence. "I'm not sure..."

Like a moth searching for a flame, my eyes seek my mate and find her instantly.

*Amora.*

She calms my shadows. She tames them—she tames *me*—and puts me at ease, even when I'm at my worst. Even when it seemed like I would be at my worst forever.

Without her by my side, I wouldn't be who I am today. I wouldn't have control over my shadows, or the willpower to even want to control them.

When I glance back at Sable, she's wearing a knowing smile. I lower my gaze to the ground as she says, "Love can do a lot of things."

*Love.*

"I'll check in with you later," she assures me. "Thank you, Frost, for answering my question as best you could."

Sable gives me a sweet, solemn nod, then turns to leave. I watch her go, her words sticking in my mind.

Love. That's what I feel for Amora. That's what compels me to protect her, to hold her, and to keep her close. I know it's what I feel for her even though I have no real experience with the emotion, with what it means to *be* in love.

My teenage years were spent training with my brothers. We didn't have time to fool around and explore like other kids our age. While most shifter wolves were taking trips into the nearest town, getting drunk, and getting laid, my brothers and I were stuck with Quinton and an arsenal of lesson plans that would make us the most vicious fighters alive.

He was using us. He was manipulating us.

For the first time, I truly understand why we can't allow the shadow realm to come to earth. It's not a matter of preventing it because that's what Amora wants.

It's a matter of stopping it from happening because it's what *I* want.

I want this world to be a peaceful and happy place for my mate. I want to see her smile, hear her laugh, and feel her warm skin on mine every single night. I want this place to be safe for her—and for our children.

The strangest desire grips me, the kind that makes me want to drag her

away from the group and fuck her until she's sore and exhausted, until I collapse.

*That's what I want.*

Having children never crossed my mind. All I ever knew before Amora was pain and suffering. But now that I'm free of that, and of Quinton's hold on me, the image of her with our children in her arms lodges in my brain, boring into the deepest recesses of my mind.

I step toward her, feeling like an addict going through withdrawals as my senses crave another hit of her delicate, perfect scent. Her name is on the tip of my tongue, and I'm about to call out to her, but before I can, a piercing howl cuts through the air.

My body tenses, a surge of adrenaline flooding my veins as I glance toward the source of the sound.

That's a warning howl.

We're out of time.

Quinton is here.

# AMORA



THE SOUND of a howl rising in the distance makes my skin prickle. Malix freezes at my left as Kian tenses at my right. Frost is ahead of us, already racing toward the perimeter where our fortified defenses barely keep shadow wolves at bay.

The Montana Pack bursts into action, people shifting as they dart after Frost. I leap into action after them, my wolf heeding my call and bursting forth as I shift mid-run. My front paws hit the ground and carry me forward with Malix and Kian at my side.

Alarms blare in my brain as I watch the first wave of shifters collide. Quinton and his minions are coming in hot, and I can tell that his army has grown since the last time we clashed with them. Vicious teeth tear chunks of flesh as furious claws scrape throats. Terror and battle fury blend inside me as I study the battle strategy ahead, realizing that there *is* no battle strategy—it's pure fucking chaos.

Sable's face pops into my mind as my paws thunder over the earth. Her sweet kids, Ben and Cora.

*Fuck, I can't let them all be turned by Quinton.*

The memory of their innocent faces urges me to lunge into the fray with Kian at my right. Quinton's shadow wolves breach the perimeter, howls signaling their rapid approach. Paws rupture the dry earth and kick the dust up in spirals behind them, making the feral shifter army look more like tornadoes than living creatures.

This time, I don't see any shadow monsters. We're fighting physical things, so I can help more than when those shadow beasts came after me during our fight alongside the Silver Crest Pack. But the newly made shadow

wolves are vicious and powerful.

Kian and I lunge toward a large, shadowy wolf, working together against the massive thing. As Kian digs his claws into the wolf's neck, I go for one of its legs, clamping the limb hard between my teeth as I shake my head. Skin tears, and the limb pops out of place, sending the wolf to the ground.

While Kian takes advantage of the momentary opening and pins the wolf to the ground, another shadow wolf swipes at his head. Malix growls and lashes out at the new shadow wolf, knocking it toward me. I pounce on its back and sink my teeth into the back of its neck, and it screeches loudly. Shadows roll over its fur and peel away in wisps like smoke.

As I wrestle the shadow wolf to the ground, I hear Malix's shout in my head.

*Watch out!*

I throw myself away from the wolf's back just as another shadow wolf races toward its pack mate. In a flash, Malix inserts himself between their furious, snapping jaws and me. A growl vibrates my throat as I work with Malix to fight the two shadow wolves off, their hulking masses making me feel like a fucking miniature figurine in comparison.

*Amora, check your six!*

That's Kian.

I flip around to see another shadow wolf racing toward us. Kian launches forward, catching the wolf by the neck and spinning it around in the air before hurling it away. For my mates, it's a much more even fight against Quinton's minions, considering how huge and strong they are in their shadow wolf forms.

Fuck, if I was alone, I wouldn't make it. Not without them.

And that means the Montana Pack needs them too.

Frost joins my side and sprints with me to another collection of shadow wolves that threaten to take over a few Montana Pack members. The battle rages on, each of us doing our best to keep the fight from drawing any closer to the heart of the community. We're still a good distance away from the center, but I don't want these shadow wolves to get any nearer to where the most vulnerable members of the pack are sheltering in place.

Some of the wolves we fight are familiar—they're Montana Pack wolves. They're overtaken by shadows, wearing masks of furious pain that make my heart ache as I realize what Quinton has done, and what he continues to do.

Dark shadow magic rages inside them. All because of Quinton and his

selfish desire for power, these wolves have lost their willpower. They're totally feral, incapable of controlling their vicious, violent urges. Pure fury rules them now.

Rage lights in my own chest at the sight of these wolves lost to the shadows that have been forced into them. When I swing my head to the right, I spot Quinton just on the other side of the melee, hanging back.

He's not even fighting with his people, just using his magic from behind the lines, infecting Montana Pack wolves that his minions bring to him.

That fucking *coward*.

I'm going to fucking destroy him.

*Quinton is there!* I call to my men.

*I see him*, Kian growls, lifting his head to glance in that direction. *Let's go. We've got your back.*

Dodging snapping jaws and swiping paws, we charge forward, intent on killing the man who's made too many wolves suffer. I'm a few steps ahead of my men, running faster than them even though they have longer legs in their shadow forms. I dart around battling shifters and finally burst free of the flurry of fur and teeth, howling as my paws beat the earth. My heart beats thunderously in my chest as Quinton's ears twitch and he turns to face us.

Sable and her men are fighting alongside their pack behind us, everyone giving it their all. But they can't keep battling forever, and as long as the man responsible for the attack is still alive, the feral shifters will keep coming.

That's why he has to die.

A few more feet put me within pouncing distance. My hind legs send me forward—

But before I can reach Quinton, a collection of shadow wolves leap out of hiding and intercept me. Fear lances my chest as two of them collide with me, and I hit the ground hard. Massive paws dig into my body, pinning me to the dirt. I struggle against them, snapping at every limb within reach and flailing all over the place.

*Amora, no!*

My head snaps up to where my mates are battling a line of wolves who've ambushed them too, cutting them off from me.

The sounds of my mates howling in the distance mixes with their furious, panicked shouts in my head, and I renew my struggles against the wolves holding me down. If I was only up against one shadow shifter, I might be able to get away, but there are *five*. I can't take five shadow wolves at a time,

no matter how much experience I have under my belt.

No matter how much fury fuels me.

No matter how powerfully the need for vengeance runs through my veins.

I'm fucked. I'm so fucked.

They're going to kill me. Or worse, they're going to force dark magic into me.

My gaze darts around to take in the shadow wolves hovering over me, their blue eyes glistening with feverish rage. As they hold me down, I wait for Quinton to appear, to reveal his ugly fucking face full of smug satisfaction. But instead, one of the shadow wolves swings a massive paw at my head.

Pain explodes in my skull, and everything around me fades to darkness.

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## MALIX



AS AMORA'S body goes limp beneath the shadowy shifters that hold her down, pain shoots through me as if I've been stabbed through the chest.

*Amora, no!* I shout in mind speak.

My brothers howl next to me, vicious snarls that rise above the chaotic sounds echoing across the landscape. The three of us fight harder against the mass of feral shifters that have us surrounded, shoving our way through the barrier of their bodies as we attempt to make it to Amora in time.

She's unconscious. I can no longer hear her shouted cries inside my head. And is that blood seeping from her head?

*Fuck, this is bad,* I tell Kian. *Come on! We have to get her!*

*I'm trying!* he shouts back. *Frost, I see an opening on your left. Go ahead!*

*I'll try,* Frost replies as he lunges forward.

But he isn't quick enough.

*None* of us are quick enough.

Amora shifts into human form, her gorgeous and delicate skin shimmering under the rays of sunlight that shine down from above. Long dark hair drifts over her back in waves and then flutters around her face as she's lifted and propped over the shoulder of one of Quinton's lackeys.

I grit my teeth and slam my body into a shadow shifter, but several more join him, keeping me and my brothers from reaching Amora.

Then Quinton tips his head back and lets out a loud howl, the sound carrying over the battlefield like a blaring alarm. He and his wolves turn and race away, a phalanx of them surrounding the one that holds Amora on his back.



Our mate is being carried away from us.

*Fuck, fuck, fuck!*

Several of the wolves standing in our way peel off, racing to follow Quinton and his minions. In my periphery, I see other shadow wolves doing the same, their paws thundering over the earth as they follow their master. But there are still too many in our way for us to go after Quinton too. So I dive into battle, ripping through flesh and fur as I try to figure out where Amora will be taken.

Will Quinton hurt her? Kill her?

Or worse, will he pump her full of shadows?

Roaring, I bite and tear my way through two of the shadow wolves blocking our path, not bothering to try to leave them alive. They gave up that privilege when their friends took my mate. I'm full of fury, overwhelmed by adrenaline, hovering on the brink of madness, fighting and fighting and fighting until...

There's no one left to fight.

I look up, breathing heavily as blood coats my snout. Beside me, Frost's fur is spattered with blood too.

*The fight is dying*, he informs me, glancing back toward the village. *Look.*

Adrenaline is still flooding my limbs, and I feel like I'm grappling to hang on to any shred of sanity as I turn to follow his gaze. Quinton's pack and the Montana and Silver Crest Pack members he stole are leaving, retreating into the distance in the same direction Quinton and the others went. In the blink of an eye, the last ones disappear amidst the trees.

A stunned silence settles over the village.

What the *fuck* just happened?

I shift into human form and turn back to my brothers, who draw in close around me as they shift too. Frost grips my shoulder, his usually blank features twisted with the kind of shocked horror that only Kian and I can understand.

I know, because I feel it too.

It's like a muddy tidal wave, crashing down over me and making my limbs feel weak and too heavy.

We lost her. Quinton took her.

"Fuck," I grunt. "We have to do something."

"We're *going* to do something," Frost reassures me. He looks at Kian. "What are you thinking, brother?"

Kian shakes his head, his eyes wide and haunted. Around us, the Montana Pack shifters that survived and weren't turned by Quinton are picking themselves up, tending to their wounded, and surveying the torn up earth. A flash of blond catches my attention, and I see Sable and her men coming toward us, but I keep my attention focused on Kian.

"I'm thinking we were wrong about Quinton's attack on the village," I murmur, my stomach churning.

His jaw clenches. "Yeah? You fucking think?"

"It wasn't about turning more wolves into shadow shifters. It was about Amora. It was about capturing her."

"They left as soon as they grabbed her," Frost adds, running a hand over his face. "It must be true. She's what they wanted this whole time."

"And back at Gwen's cabin," I recall. "He lunged for her, remember?"

"Fuck, I'm so glad you stopped her from running after him then." Kian mutters a curse, his hands clenching into fists. "If we had let her go..."

I swallow hard, thinking back to that fight at the cabin. Quinton tried to snatch Amora then, but we held him off. And he's such a coward that he clearly decided to come back with an army rather than face us on his own. He practically raised us, after all. He knows how strong we are, and how well we fight together.

Sable reaches us a moment later, flanked by her mates. They're all beat up and bruised, but I'm glad to see that all four of the men with her survived the battle, and that she did too.

That's good. The Montana Pack won't be leaderless. There will still be people here to protect the young and old, to help refortify the defenses and rebuild what's been destroyed.

Because right now, my mates and I can't do any of that.

We have to find Amora.

Kian and Sable speak in low voices, and I'm sure he's telling her what we just realized about the true motivation for Quinton's attack. I can't quite focus on their words though, fear for Amora pulling at me like a hook around my heart.

"We have to go after Amora," he finishes. "I'm sorry, but we can't stay to help here."

She nods, pain and fear clear on her face. "If kidnapping Amora was their end goal, then I doubt they'll come back for us. At least not for a while. So go. Bring her back safely. *Please.*"

Kian nods silently. There's not much else to say.

Without another word, I shift into my shadow wolf form and take off running, careful to weave around the wolves lying injured in my path. Frost and Kian join my side, the three of us racing toward the edge of the pack lands. We're barely past the line when I catch the first whiff of a shadow wolf.

If we were regular shifters, we wouldn't be able to track the shadow wolves at all. Part of the benefit of being able to shift into a shadow form is being able to cover your tracks easily—unless, of course, another shadow wolf is coming after you. Then you're fucked.

But these guys? They're triple fucked, because my brothers and I are skilled at hunting shadows.

Our collective love for Amora, the need that binds the three of us to her, surpasses that of any magical spell. I know that, because we tried our fucking hardest to break the bond with Amora using that witch's potion.

But the bond held.

And I'm grateful as hell that it didn't break.

Using the tendrils of the bond that attach me to Amora to draw me forward and relying on my expert nose, I race into the trees with my brothers at my heels, urgency shooting through my limbs like pure fucking electricity.

Nothing will stop us from finding our mate.

Nothing will keep us from her.

I'll make fucking sure of that.

# AMORA



LIGHT DANCES IN MY VISION, but I can't tell if I'm looking at a sky full of stars, or if my eyes are still closed and those glittering spots are painted across the insides of my eyelids. I'm groggy and out of it, my thoughts fuzzy and indistinct.

Slowly, the lights fade away, leaving only darkness behind.

My eyes must be closed, then.

I try to open them, but they're too heavy to lift. Whimpering softly, I attempt to grasp on to something, *anything*, to rouse me from the heavy weight that keeps me under.

A body jostles underneath me. I hear the sound of paws pulsing against the earth, a rhythmic thrum that nearly lulls me back into unconsciousness.

My head aches. I'm vaguely aware of the fact that I'm traveling, my body slung over a furry back and my head throbbing with every footstep as my hair whips around my face.

Then, a scream cuts through the inky blackness.

The sound rouses me from my stupor, and I pry my eyes open, craning my neck in time to witness a group of shadow wolves chasing two humans out of what looks like a remote, luxury cabin. The body beneath me flexes as it moves, carrying me forward faster than my brain can process. I try to force a shout, some kind of warning to those humans, but it hardly matters. They're helpless against these beasts.

Fuck, I'm helpless too.

Bile rises in my throat as another scream rises up and then is cut off abruptly. The shadow wolves tear into the humans as they try to flee across the snowy ground, spattering the white landscape with red blood.

The wolf who's carrying me stops, and I manage to slide off his back, landing hard on my side on the stone path leading to the cabin. Gasping for air, I prop myself up on my elbows and shift, drawing my wolf to the surface even as she actively fights me.

She's tired.

Fuck, *I'm* tired. But we have to keep fighting if we want to survive.

*Come on*, I urge her. *Just one more shift.*

Fur explodes over my skin and my bones crack, the shift taking much more effort than usual. I growl at two approaching shadow wolves, terrified and pissed off that I've been taken away from everyone I love. I snap my jaws as my hackles rise, watching amusement glitter in their eyes as they circle me.

They're toying with me.

Fucking assholes.

My mates and I have crashed in plenty of cabins during our time together, having no compunctions about breaking in and stealing their food or clothes. But we've never invaded a cabin that's already occupied, much less slaughtered the people inside.

Do those people they murdered have a family? Kids?

*Ben and Cora.*

Their images flash in my mind, and the worry that rises in my chest distracts me enough that I barely manage to avoid a massive paw swinging in my direction. I duck left and crouch to prepare for a lunge, but I'm taken down before I can move again, the shadow wolf to my left pinning me to the cold earth as he snarls loudly.

I whine, huffing in defeat.

This is fucking useless. I'm still so woozy I can barely stand up straight, and if I keep fighting, I'll probably end up dead. I'm all alone, surrounded by my enemies, and for all I know, everyone back at the Montana Pack has been wiped out as ruthlessly as those poor humans.

I shift into my human form just as Quinton saunters up to me. The smile on his face is one of victory, a terrifying hint at how the battle ended back in Montana Pack lands.

Fuck, everyone might actually be dead.

I growl as he leans forward, observing me with a critical eye that makes me think of a mad scientist.

"What the *fuck* did you do?" I growl. "Did you fucking kill everyone?"

He shakes his head, clicking his tongue against his teeth. “Pitiful.”

“You’re fucking pitiful, you mate killer!”

Quinton’s body stiffens slightly, as if being reminded of what he did to Felicity is like a slap to the face, but he keeps his expression neutral as he shrugs. “Keep lashing out if it makes you feel better.”

“Did you kill everyone back at the Montana Pack?” I whisper harshly. “Tell me, you son of a bitch.”

That gets a bigger reaction out of him, and he scowls. “No. I tapped out of power on my shadow stone.”

He holds out the fist-sized chunk of rock, and although I’ve never been as connected to its magic as he is, even I can sense that no more power seems to emanate from it.

“I was in the process of building my army when the magic in the stone ran out. I didn’t have enough power to turn all the wolves I wanted to.” He palms the stone, a slow smile spreading across his face. “But I’ll fix that soon.”

“What the fuck does that mean?”

“Take her inside.” He waves his hand at several of his minions with the imperious air of a king. Three shifters in human form gather around me, hefting me into their arms. I struggle against their tight grips, but they lift me with ease, reminding me that I’m outnumbered, exhausted, and completely at their mercy.

Flakes of snow drift from the sky, landing on my naked skin. I shiver as I’m hauled into the cabin, where remnants of a movie night remain in the living room. A movie plays on the flat-screen television with surround-sound pumping whimsical music through the room. Popcorn rests on the coffee table in a huge bowl next to two half full wine glasses.

And the humans—their scent is everywhere. Brown sugar and vanilla, fine leather, the unique musk of sweat, a hint of warm bodies left on the cushions of the couch. We’re in their cabin, while their bodies are cooling in the snow outside.

Fuck, this is bad. This is so bad.

My stomach turns at the sight of the cabin. It’s a gorgeous structure, brightly lit with plenty of lamps to illuminate the rooms. Pale wood expands in every direction, with modern décor, family photos, a giant fireplace, and beige furniture accented with navy blue. Heavy drapes guard the windows. These humans really didn’t have a chance when the shadow wolves came.

And I can't even bury them. I can't offer them peace. I'm totally useless here.

Quinton is a fucking madman.

His lackeys carry me up the stairs as the television continues blaring whimsical music with indiscernible dialogue on top. A laugh track plays, followed by the sound of applause. It makes me so sick that I have to fight the bile that's rising in my throat. When we reach the top of the stairs, the three shifters hauling me between them step into the first room off the upstairs hallway, plop me onto the bed, and step back.

Quinton followed us inside the room, and he steps forward as I sprawl out on the bed.

Aside from the mad look in his eyes, he looks totally composed, which is terrifying as fuck.

The way he switches between personalities reminds me of Jekyll and Hyde, the rapid shift as easy for him as shifting between human form and his massive shadow wolf.

Despite his cool, smug expression, I'm well aware of the shadows that roil beneath his skin. He can't control them, not like he can the wolves he commands. And soon, he'll give himself over completely, losing every bit of what might have made him partially human.

Assuming that hasn't happened already.

He snaps his fingers, and another shifter steps forward with several lengths of rope. Quinton takes them and leans over me as the other shifters hold me down, expertly knotting my hands above my head to the posts of the bed. He works on my feet next, speaking as he works.

"I'm rather pleased you've joined us, Amora. We thought we might leave that pack's village empty-handed."

I bite my tongue, hoping that if I stay quiet, he'll keep talking and give me some hint of where the hell he's brought me. I didn't recognize any of the landscape outside, but the fact that it's night makes me think they've carried me a far distance from the Montana Pack lands.

"Those wolves put up a better defense than I thought they would," he continues. "I thought my feral shifter army would wipe them out easily, but they fought harder than I expected. Fortunately, your rage knows no bounds, does it? You hate me so much that you threw yourself at me at the very first opportunity. What luck."

He chuckles, a smile curving his lips before his expression snaps back

into seriousness.

“Have you ever wondered how I managed to use the shadow power of the stone?” he asks as he checks his knots. He pulls the final rope taut, then smacks my thigh, making me growl. “Have you wondered why I used it more effectively than Felicity ever could?”

I don’t want to hear his voice. The deep sound grates on every nerve in my body, but I bite my tongue and keep listening. I can still hear Gwen’s whispered final words in the cabin where she died, so I’m pretty sure I know the answer to his question, but I’m not going to let him know that.

Quinton stands upright and folds his arms over his chest, studying his work for a moment before looking up to meet my gaze.

“I sold my soul to the shadow realm in exchange for the ability to control this magic.” He draws in a deep breath, his broad chest expanding. “I made that sacrifice because I knew it would be rewarded with great power.”

My lips curl back in a snarl, anger drawing the words from me. “You *just* said your stone was tapped out. What fucking power? I guess the joke is on you, because you’re out of shadow magic.”

“It won’t be tapped out for long,” he says with a satisfied smile. “Before your witch friend died—Gwen, wasn’t it?—she gave me a valuable piece of information.”

“Don’t you dare say her name,” I hiss.

I don’t know why, but I hate that he knows her name. It feels too personal. Her death still weighs heavily on my soul, and I choke on the bitter taste of acid that rises up my throat, clenching my jaw so hard that my temples ache with a fresh burst of pain.

“She showed me a prophecy,” Quinton explains in a low voice. “Before you and your mates returned to her cabin, I demanded that she tell me how I could win this war. How I could succeed in harnessing the power of the shadow world entirely and reigning over every shifter pack in the world. And she told me. She showed me a vision. I wasn’t sure what it meant at first, but now I understand.”

I blanch.

*Another* prophecy? No. No, goddammit. I can’t handle another one of those. I’m still struggling with the vision of the future my mates saw where the four of us being together leads to my destruction. None of the visions of the future I’ve ever heard about have been *good*, and I very much doubt this one is going to be the exception.



My stomach twists, but I try to keep the fear off my face as I grit out, “What the fuck are you talking about? What did Gwen show you?”

“You’re the key to it all.” Quinton smiles, looking pleased and almost proud. “The original three shadow shifters I created are capable of far more than merely finding a thin spot in the veil between realms. They’re capable of tearing it open from anywhere, of bringing the shadow realm to earth.”

*No they aren’t*, I think triumphantly as I glare at him. *They told me they’ve already tried that, and it didn’t work.*

As if he can read my thoughts, the stocky man’s smile widens. “They don’t think they’re capable of it, but I assure you, they are. They can do it—because of their link to you. You’re the lynchpin of it all. The key to unlocking that power inside them and becoming a conduit for shadow magic. The stone was just a little thing compared to the amount of power you’ll be able to give me.”

I jerk, shocked by his words. Goosebumps scatter over my skin as fear rises in my chest.

Me? The key?

Before I can fully process what he’s saying to me, a faint howl rises up from outside the cabin. Another joins, and then another, and my heart lurches as I recognize all three of the sounds.

Those are the howls of my mates.

“Ah, they’re here,” Quinton announces, cocking his head slightly as he listens to the sounds. He looks down at me, his eyes burning with a sick sort of pride. “Excuse me. I should go welcome my sons home.”

# AMORA



MY STOMACH DROPS like I'm on a roller coaster as Quinton turns on his heel and leaves the room.

Maybe I should be pleased to hear the sound of my mates coming, relieved that they're here to try to rescue me. But I can't be. Not after what Quinton just told me. Not with his words still swimming fresh in my mind.

They're capable of doing what he's wanted all along, tearing a hole in the veil between earth and the shadow realm.

And he's figured out exactly how to get them to do it.

I yank against my restraints, desperate to get free, wanting to protect my men. They're likely heading right into a trap, one laid out by the man who was once a father figure to them. They're going to get ambushed trying to rescue me.

Just like Quinton wants.

Just like he planned.

The army of shadow shifters that Quinton has put together was a lot for the Montana Pack to fight—how on earth can my three men win against them by themselves?

Despite the fact that they're made of shadows, they can't handle all these shadow wolves. There are too many of them. They're too powerful. I know from personal experience.

Screaming furiously, I twist and turn my wrists, trying to find a weak spot in the knots. Just because the shadow wolf army is bigger and stronger than my three mates, it doesn't mean that'll stop my men from trying to reach me.

And that terrifies me.

I *have* to break free.

Rope burns my flesh as I twist, kicking my legs as hard as I can. I try to pull my wolf to the surface again, regardless of how tired I am. With the way I'm bound at the wrists and ankles, it'll be difficult to shift, but it's worth a shot, even if I break my bones trying.

Another howl goes up, and when I hear snarls outside, I imagine my men tearing through wolf after wolf, shadow after shadow. Quinton must be down there by now. The only ones left upstairs are the two lackeys in the doorway and me flailing on the bed.

A growl sounds in my throat as I manage to shift at last. Fur blooms over my skin and my bones twist, the ropes digging painfully into my skin before finally giving way.

*Kian, Frost, Malix! Get out of here! It's a trap!* I scream in mind speak. I have no idea if they'll be able to hear me, or if it's already too late for them to heed the warning, but I have to try.

The first wolf guard launches himself at me, and I scramble up and leap from the bed with my jaws wide. I latch on to his neck and swing his body sideways just as the second guard runs toward us. They collide, stumbling slightly as I let go and slide off the other side of the bed, crouching beside the mattress and snarling viciously.

They both recover in an instant, attacking me at the same time. Blood spatters as teeth bite, and I don't know who's it is—mine or theirs. My whole body already hurts so badly that I can't even tell if I've gotten a new injury or if the pain is all from old ones. Red droplets spatter on the fine wood of the bedroom, the polished sheen making the blood seem so much brighter. A paw knocks my head, and my snout bounces off the wooden post of the bed.

Fuck. That hurts.

Pain blossoms at my temples as white splotches dance in my vision. I try to regain my footing, but another blow knocks me to the ground, making me whine. I'm on my side, but I can still kick my legs, so I latch on to the neck of the nearest shadow wolf and kick my rear paws, trying to do as much damage as possible.

The second wolf butts my head, sending sparks dancing through my eyes again as I go limp.

I'm completely spent. I can't fight anymore.

But I can't stop either.

The wolf that knocked me with his head wraps his massive jaws around my neck and drags me out of the room. At the top of the stairs, I spot my men

stumbling through the door in their human forms. Frost goes down first, with Malix following, and Kian drops in after them, his head bleeding profusely.

Fuck, I hate seeing them injured.

They're surrounded on all sides by shifters in their shadow wolf forms, so badly outnumbered that I know Quinton could have them killed with nothing more than a nod of his head.

I whine, and the shadow wolf guard who's dragging me digs his teeth deeper into my neck, nearly cutting off my air supply as his canines press into my fur. He pulls me down the steps, making pain radiate through me as my body slides roughly down the stairs.

I'm tossed the last few steps, landing next to Quinton, who hovers over me possessively. The sight of it prompts a vicious growl from Kian, and even in his human form, he sounds animalistic.

Fury burns in Kian's eyes, and I know there's a good chance that he and the others are about to risk death trying to defend me, so I shift back to my human form with strained effort, kneeling on shaky legs with my hands held out toward them. "Wait!"

Quinton chuckles next to me. My head spins, making me wobble in place. White spots dot my vision once more, threatening to make me pass out.

"You know," Quinton drawls, shifting his focus to my mates as two of his minions haul me up to my feet, their hands tight around my biceps. "I never wanted my prized feral shifters to form a mate bond. Look how it has weakened you, how it's made you vulnerable." He snorts. "It's pathetic. But now, the mate bond will serve me well."

Kian growls, whipping his head toward Quinton. Rage lights in his eyes, even though I can tell that small movement hurt him. "What the fuck are you talking about?"

"It's time for the three of you to fulfill your purpose. You're going to create a breach between the shadow realm and the earthly realm," Quinton instructs.

Malix lifts his head, glaring at the wolves who surround him and his brothers. "We can't do that."

"Yes, you can."

"No, we can't," Kian bites out, anger lacing his words. "We've tried, you fucking moron."

"Many times," Malix adds.

Frost gives a short nod. "It can't be done. Not by us."

“Yes, it can,” Quinton says firmly. He points to me. “Through her.”

Kian, Frost, and Malix all blink in unison. I can tell Frost is attempting to sort through the more logical pieces of the puzzle, his hyper-focused mind working overtime to understand what Quinton is saying. Kian and Malix just look fucking pissed.

“How the hell are we supposed to do that?” Malix growls. “You’re insane, old man.”

“Hardly,” Quinton drawls, looking so self-satisfied that I wish I could punch his smug face. “The witch told me that your bond with your little mate will allow you to open the veil.”

Malix and Kian exchange a look as Frost shoots a wide-eyed glance in my direction. Fuck, I wish I could hug him. I wish I could just *touch* him. Being this close to my mates without being able to help them at all is driving me crazy.

“You’re going to do it now,” Quinton continues evenly. “Or I’m going to kill her.”

Kian lets out an inarticulate roar of anger, and the feral shifters move in around my mates, growling warningly.

My throat goes dry as the horrible inevitability of our situation strikes me. There’s no way out of this.

The vision I saw of the feral shifters unleashing destruction on the world runs through my mind, flashes of images that have haunted me ever since I first witnessed them. And alongside it come thoughts of the prophecy my mates were given, the prediction that bonding with their mate would destroy her.

Of course it will destroy me—because it’s the key to the *world’s* destruction.

This is how it ends.

My heart clenches, seeming to shatter in my chest, and I sag in the hold of the men gripping me as I struggle to breathe, overwhelmed by my fate and what I know is to come.

*What will be will be, no matter how hard one struggles against it.*

The prophecy.

The vision.

The *destruction*.

It all starts right here with the veil ripping open—and me dying along with it.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

I close my eyes, allowing air to enter my lungs in shaky, controlled breaths. If I lose my shit now, I'll be completely useless to my men. And then the world will end. And then I'll have had a fucking panic attack for no goddamn reason.

But it's hard to keep myself from spiraling. Thoughts race through my mind in a wild rush, moving so fast that half of them hardly register. I was willing to risk my own life to be with the men, but I never meant to put the entire world in jeopardy.

How can I stop it, though? What can I do?

*Wait, Gwen said something else, I recall, forcing myself to sort through my disjointed memories of that night. While she was dying. It didn't make sense. It still doesn't make sense.*

My glare falls on Quinton.

*But it means something.*

She said... she lied. She said I have the power to end this.

Quinton already told me about the vision she showed him. A vision of him winning this war, of using my mates to open a tear in the fabric of the ether that will allow the shadow realm to invade earth, and using me as a conduit for that power.

So which fucking part was a lie?

My stomach drops suddenly as an idea flits through my mind. I don't think she could manufacture a completely false vision of the future, so I have to believe that she truly did see Quinton using the connection between me and my mates to bring the shadow realm to earth. But maybe the part she lied about was the *outcome*.

Maybe this isn't the way Quinton wins the war.

Maybe it's the way he loses it.

I look up sharply, licking my dry lips as I address the Blood Moon alpha. "They'll do it."

"Amora, what the fuck?" Malix blurts, his violet eyes widening.

I shake my head quickly, meeting his gaze for a split second. Kian and Frost look just as horrified as their brother, but I can't explain what I'm thinking to them right now.

"It's the only way," I whisper. Then I look Quinton in the eye and nod. "My men will do what you want."

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# AMORA



“KITTY, you’ve lost your damn mind,” Malix growls.

Pure shock mixed with fury fills his face, the expression echoed on Kian’s and Frost’s features as well. I understand what they’re feeling, what they’re thinking.

On the surface, my agreement to go along with Quinton’s demands seems insane.

But it’s our only hope. The only way to end this.

“No,” Kian growls. “Fucking *no*.”

They clearly have no intention of going along with this. And why would they? They know that my bond with them is fated to destroy me, and they know that I’ve seen a vision where they bring the shadow realm to earth. There’s a good chance that doing what Quinton asks will lead to my death.

But they don’t know everything. They have no idea what Gwen said to me before she died. I was too fucked up in the aftermath of her death to think much about what she murmured in those last moments, but now I think I understand.

Or at least, I hope I do.

I’m about to gamble my fucking life on it.

Kian growls again, surging to his feet. Frost and Malix are right behind him, all three of them surging toward me as the shadow shifters close in around them. The fight is brutal and vicious as Quinton’s minions push them back, swiping out with paws and teeth. I know Quinton doesn’t want to kill my mates, but it’s clear he’ll let them get beat to fuck if he has to.

“Wait!” I scream, struggling against the men holding me. “Wait!” I turn to Quinton. “I need to talk to my mates!”



The scuffling continues in the foyer as Quinton scoffs dismissively. “No.”  
“You want the veil to open, right?”

He focuses his hard gaze on me, pursing his lips into a thin line. A hum rumbles from his throat, but he doesn’t say anything else.

“You want them to do what you say?” I sway on my feet, realizing how much energy I’m losing just by trying to lie. Well, it’s not *entirely* a lie. “You’re trying to convince them to do something huge. The only person they’re going to listen to right now is me.”

“And? Standing here is just as good as standing over there. You’re losing me with your point, girl.”

I cringe at the name he calls me but ignore it as I say, “I need a moment alone with them. The bond makes it easier for me to convince them to do things.”

Quinton scowls as more shadow wolves flood the foyer. It’s getting hot in here from all the damn bodies, all the goddamn breathing and yelling. My mates are putting up a good fight, but they’re outnumbered. It’s only a matter of time before one of them sustains an injury they can’t come back from.

“Just a moment,” I ask in a low voice. “It’s obvious we won’t escape. You have your shifters everywhere. It’s impossible to flee. We would be dead before we even made it three feet beyond the porch.”

This makes Quinton purse his lips again as if he’s thinking. Good. I’ll take that.

“Point made,” he finally says with a nod. He steps aside, motioning for my mates to approach me. “Make it quick.”

Relief floods my body as Kian, Malix, and Frost shift back to human form and scramble toward me, wrapping their arms around my shoulders. We huddle together, our heads touching lightly, our breathing steadying together as we finally get to make physical contact.

But only for a moment.

We don’t have much time.

“We need to do what Quinton says,” I tell them urgently in a low voice. “You have to trust me. It’s the only way through.”

“You’re out of your damn mind,” Malix retorts.

“Fucking insane,” Kian adds.

“We won’t do it,” Frost says simply.

“You *have* to,” I insist, my heart pounding so hard against my ribs that I feel like its shaking my whole torso. I don’t dare tell them what I’m planning,

or why I hope this will work—I can't risk Quinton overhearing and stopping us. So I just lean back enough to meet their gazes, letting everything we've been through together fill the space between us.

"You have to trust me," I whisper. "Please. This is the only way."

A long, heavy beat of silence hangs over us, and I'm terrified that they're going to say no. That no matter how much they've come to trust me, it won't be enough to follow me blindly this time—especially when all our lives are at stake.

But finally, Frost nods. After another pregnant pause, Malix and Kian do too.

None of them speak. I have a feeling they can't force themselves to say out loud that they agree to something like this, but their silent gestures of assent will have to be good enough.

Stepping away from our tight huddle, I look over at Quinton and nod, my shoulders squared.

"All right. They'll do it."

His smile stretches wide in a way that I hate. "Wonderful."

My mates' faces are rigid and set, and Kian clenches his jaw and swallows hard before he shifts his focus to Quinton.

"We still don't know how to do what you want," he growls. "How are we supposed to tear open the veil if we don't know how?"

"Giving up before you even try? I raised you to be stronger than that. You should never back down from a challenge," Quinton says silkily. He shakes his head, stepping forward as he gestures with his hands. "It's quite simple. To unlock the power you need, you must fully embrace your bond with Amora. You must close the circle."

# AMORA



*CLAIM HER FULLY.*

Quinton's words hit me hard. A rush of emotions fills my chest as I recall just how much my men and I have been through—breaking the bond, finding our way back to each other, forming a new kind of bond.

We've all admitted our feelings for each other by now. We've made love, we've fucked, we've fought, and we've made up. We've done everything a family is supposed to do together, and so much more.

Having Kian, Malix, and Frost by my side has taught me many things, one of them being that some bonds simply can't be broken. No matter how much I fight, argue, or shout, I can't ever shove them out of my heart. And I don't want to.

But to fully embrace the bond—the mate bond they tried to *break*—is a powerful, intimate, and vulnerable thing.

I swallow as I gaze at my mates.

"Please," I whisper.

I'm practically begging them to do what needs to be done, even if it ends up killing me. But I hope to hell and back that I've interpreted Gwen's strange words correctly, that I'll have a chance to stop Quinton even if I *do* die in the process.

"Breaking the bond didn't work," I say in a low voice. "We all know it never fully went away. We just need to reaffirm it. To acknowledge what's already there."

The three of them hesitate, their warring emotions clear in their expressions. Even Frost's face is contorted with a mixture of love and pain.

I take a deep breath and step forward, approaching Malix first. The

shadow wolves around my mates all react to my movement, their hackles up and teeth bared as if they're ready to attack any moment if they sense a threat. But I ignore them, focusing only on Malix. His arms wrap around me automatically, as warm and comforting as the breeze on a summer day.

His forehead drops to mine as he sighs. I sense his relief at our proximity, the way that simply being close to me puts him at ease. It does the same for me. I lean into this part of our bond, focusing on the invisible strands that connect us. I can almost see them in my mind's eye, golden threads that connect my chest to his.

I hold that image in the forefront of my mind as I draw back to meet his gaze. The deep violet of his irises burns with sadness and love.

"Amora," he says quietly, his voice choked. "I've never met anyone like you. I like to call you kitty, but the truth is, you stormed into our lives like a goddess, and that's what you'll always be in my eyes. I love you." His breath brushes over my lower lip as he leans in close. "You're mine."

"I love you too," I breathe. "I accept you as my mate."

When Malix steps back, Frost takes his brother's place, the scent of dirt and blood and his unique spicy musk filling my nostrils as he takes my waist gently. Just as Malix did, he drops his forehead to rest against mine, the lightest touch.

Despite his muscular arms and his chiseled body, he's the most gentle of all my mates, showing me with feather-light strokes from his fingers precisely how he sees me: as the most beautiful and precious thing in the world.

"Frost," I whisper. "My sweet mate."

A grin quirks his lips. The sight of him smiling makes my heart expand, and I try to let the sight of it banish some of my fear.

"Before you, all I ever knew was pain," he murmurs, the tips of his fingers trailing over my skin. "And that pain made me think that I would never experience anything good in my life."

I stroke his cheek lightly, noticing how his rolling shadows seem to ease as I touch him. So I keep doing it. I keep touching him as much as I can—because if my plan fails, this might be the last chance I ever get to do it.

"Everything I ever experienced came from a book," he continues. "I had no idea what love was, and I didn't even think I *could* love anyone except for my brothers." He closes his eyes for a moment, pain rippling across his face. "But then I saw you."

I shudder as I feel the threads of our bond tighten, binding me to him in a way that almost makes it feel as if our hearts beat as one. He opens his eyes, the blue so intense I think I might drown in those irises.

“You saved me from a fate worse than death. You give me peace, and you accept me as I am,” he whispers. “I love you, Amora. You’re mine.”

The way his lips close over mine reminds me of all the kisses we’ve shared before. His hands rove up my back, cradling me to his chest where I belong, where his heart beats for me and for his brothers.

“I love you,” I whisper when we separate. “So much. And I accept you as my mate.”

When he steps back from our embrace, I miss the feel of him immediately. We’re all dirty and bruised and covered with streaks of blood, but I don’t care. I’d keep hugging him forever if I could.

Malix rests a hand on Frost’s shoulder as Kian moves to stand in front of me. My hot-tempered, sexy biker with the scruffy appearance, the gold-rimmed eyes, and the body of a goddamn god.

“You have driven me up a goddamn wall every chance you got,” he tells me in a husky whisper, a small smile appearing on his lips. “And I’ve loved every fucking second of it.”

I huff a breath that can’t decide if it wants to be a laugh or a sob, resting my forehead against his as my arms settle loosely around his body. His voice is pitched low as he continues, as deep and gruff as gravel.

“But you make me see things clearly, you keep me on my toes, and you fuck like your life depends on it.” He hesitates, his fingers tightening on my hips. “No one could have opened up my heart like you did. No one could have shown me I have a place in this world. I fucking love you. You’re mine.”

“I’m sorry for all the time we spent hating each other,” I whisper. “I love you even harder now to make up for that lost time. I’ll love you for as long as I can. I accept you as my mate, Kian.”

He kisses me, just a slow press of his lips against mine, like he’s trying to impress the feel of me into his memory.

My gaze follows him as he releases his hold on me and steps back to join his brothers.

And then something clicks into place.

The mate bond between us—between the four of us—solidifies fully.

Consummated.

Unbreakable.

*Real.*

“I’m yours,” I tell them, truth echoing in every word. “And you’re mine.”

Malix stiffens suddenly, his eyes widening. He raises his arm, looking down at the way his tattoos are swirling on his arms. I notice it happening with Kian and Frost as well—and then the black ink swirls into the air, leaving their bodies to float like wisps of smoke over their skin.

Power charges the air as I watch, hypnotized by the sight. Blank skin is left behind as the shadows continue to rise, as if they’ve taken on a life of their own. They slither like snakes in the air, creating an amorphous cloud as they mingle together.

“I command you to open the veil,” Kian says in a raspy voice.

Malix keeps his gaze focused on the cloud as he adds, “I command you to pierce through the veil to the shadow realm.”

“I command you to bring the shadows to this realm,” Frost finishes.

My eyes widen as light ripples in the center of the foyer. Where the shadows roil is where time and space breaks, my bond with my mates fueling their magic. The connection between us is giving them more power, allowing them to open up a breach between the shadow realm and earth.

And then it cracks open.

Beyond the milky light, I can see the desolate wasteland we left behind when we rescued Kian. Shadow creatures rush toward the opening with an unearthly screech, the sound like a thousand nails on a thousand chalkboards, filling the living room and making my hair stand on end.

Another sound cuts through the whirlwind of chaos as the veil breaks—the sound of Quinton laughing.

My stomach drops, doubt rising up in me and making my stomach knot.

*Oh fuck.*

*Can I really do this?*

# AMORA



SHADOW CREATURES AMASS at the opening in the veil, crowding around the jagged, uneven entrance to our world.

My thoughts race as I clench my fists at my side, paralyzed by a sudden, horrible fear. Fuck me, I must've been crazy for telling my men to do this. How could I risk bringing destruction and mayhem to earth, thinking that I could somehow stop it?

*No. Gwen believed in you. You can fucking do this, Amora.*

I will stop this destruction from happening, even though I have no idea how I'm going to fight off thousands of these shadowy creatures when I can't even make contact with them on this plane.

But then a new thought occurs to me.

If I can't fight them, maybe I can do something else.

I step toward the tear, raising my hands as the shadow creatures start to spill through into the living room. Kian, Malix, and Frost are all locked in their spell, their eyes glowing a shimmering blue as the power of their shadows holds the gap open in the veil.

*You have the power to end this.*

Gwen's words reverberate in my head as the shadow creatures rush toward me, shrieking and hissing.

But I don't fight them. I don't even try.

Instead, I *absorb* them.

Drawing on the power of the bond I have with my men, I become the conduit Gwen saw me as in her vision. Shadowy wisps of smoke crash into my chest and stomach, my shoulders shaking with the force of the impact as my body draws them in.

More shadow monsters burst forth, and I spread my arms wide and let my head fall back as I pull them all toward me.

*More. More. I can't let a single one escape.*

Vaguely, I'm aware of Quinton shouting at me, trying to draw the power from me the way he used to do with his precious stone. But I don't let him.

No other sounds meet my ears except the hurricane-like flood of shadows rushing into this realm. Wind whips around my body, as if someone opened the door on an airplane while it was airborne. The living room around me seems to waver as my body floods with dark power, my every atom screaming as I take more and more of it in.

"No!" Quinton screams raggedly as he finally starts to realize what's happening. "No! Stop her!"

He shouts to his shadow wolf army, commanding them to attack me, but they hang back, whining and pacing. They're afraid of me, I realize hazily. They're frightened of my strength, too wary of all the shadows churning inside me to attack.

*You have the power to end this.*

Gwen's words repeat on a loop in my mind as I release a harsh cry, my voice sounding like the echo of every shadow I've swallowed up so far. My limbs vibrate as my power grows, as I swell with a kind of strength that I've never felt in my life.

But something else comes with the power—pain.

A terrible rage accompanied by sharp agony lances through my body in a wave that crests at my shoulders. Again and again, the waves crash over me, a frightening ache that never quite ceases or reaches its full potential. It must be the same pain that plagued Frost when he was overrun with shadows.

*So this is what it feels like.*

I clench my teeth as I struggle not to collapse, my shoulders bowing toward each other as I clutch my arms tight to my sides. Madness calls to me, urging me to give in to the chaos and violence.

No.

Fuck. No.

The madness might want me, but I'm already mad. I'm enraged by all the events that have led to this moment, the suffering that led to this outcome. If Quinton hadn't been so hungry for power, so many people would still be whole and alive.

I turn toward the man I hate more than anyone in this world, focusing all



of my rage toward him.

All that matters is stopping Quinton.

Shadows float over my skin and whip around my fingers as I flex and extend them. The ends of my hair float around me, swirling like shadows themselves, dark and thick and laced with the same fury that courses through me. I raise my hands as I launch myself toward Quinton.

“You fucking *bitch!*” he screams as he raises his arms to block me. “I’ll kill you!”

His shadow rock might have run out of power, but he’s still infused with plenty of dark magic himself. He raises his hands together in between us and shoves them toward me, sending a burst of shadow magic hurtling in my direction.

I send my own magic out to meet his, and the two opposing energies collide with a loud crack, whipping and twisting around each other.

Quinton is a vicious fighter, and he’s not holding anything back, but I have one little bit of leverage on him.

My shadows are fresh—and they keep coming.

He pushes forward, making me stumble a step, but I dig my bare feet into the floor and renew my efforts. My power overwhelms his, and the line between us snaps, bolts of dark magic shooting in every direction. They scorch the fine wood of the walls, the floor, and the staircase, leaving behind blackened burns that reek of ash.

Quinton’s eyes bulge from his head, and he doesn’t look smug anymore. He looks *scared*. His gaze darts side to side as if he’s looking for a way out, and that small movement calls forth the predator in me.

I sprint toward him and hurl myself through the air, allowing the power of the shadows to carry me farther than I ever could’ve jumped without them. Before Quinton can raise his arms to block me, I tackle him. My hands wrap around his neck as I straddle him, fingers digging into his throat. Shadow magic spills from my fingertips, infecting his skin and turning it a bluish purple that reminds me of bruises.

He chokes, wrestling to break my grip as we go down to the floor with a heavy thud. “You... fucking... *bitch.*”

“This is for my family.” I dig my nails into his darkened flesh. “This is for my pack.” My fingernails break through the skin of his neck, allowing me to push even more of the magic inside him. “This is for my *mates.*”

He’s clutching my wrists, trying to break my hold, but I’m too strong for

him to do it. I have so much fucking shadow magic pouring through my veins right now. I can feel the creatures fighting under my skin, their rage and fury and distress fueling the magic that leaks from my fingers. I pump Quinton full of the deadly shadows, instructing them to wrap around his organs, to squeeze his heart and invade his lungs.

He struggles in my grasp, but his movements grow weaker and weaker. His entire body is ashen now, dark streaks spreading over his skin like broken veins.

I bare my teeth at him, leaning down as I stare into his bulging, bloodshot eyes.

“You said you sold your soul to the shadow realm,” I whisper hoarsely. “I think it’s time you paid that debt, old man.”

Then I shove one last burst of dark magic into his body.

He convulses beneath me, his mouth opening on a silent scream. Or maybe it’s not silent at all, and I just can’t hear it over the sound of the shadows shrieking inside me. It doesn’t matter, though. I keep my grip on him as he gives one final shudder, and when his body goes limp, his jaw hanging slack, I shove his corpse away from me.

Huffing, I press up to my feet, taking a few steps back toward the opening in the veil. I glance at the shifter wolves around me, the ones with haunted faces and wide eyes. They can’t look away.

I can’t blame them.

I see the shadows inside the feral shifters now—I can *sense* them beneath the skin and fur of the wolves’ bodies. I extend my arms and curl my fingers, drawing the shadows out of them and into me, just like I’m doing with the shadow magic that still pours from the tear in the veil. More of the darkness pours into my body, lancing my soul with a deep, overwhelming pain that makes my vision swim.

*Not yet*, I beg myself, even as I feel my strength waning. *You can’t let go yet. Almost done.*

“What are you doing?” Malix calls out. “It’s too much. Amora, *stop!*”

I don’t listen.

Bracing myself as if I’m standing in the middle of a hurricane, I pull hard, drawing every shadow in the room—every shadow in the fucking vicinity—into my body.

My eyes burn as I close them, drawing in another ragged breath so I can scream. The pain is overwhelming now, the shadows producing so much dark

magic that I can't control it anymore. I'm too full.

I'm going to die.

My men are shouting at me, and I can tell that their control over the tear in the veil is weakening. The rift will close soon, and I can't be on this side of it when it does.

I can't hold the shadows inside me for much longer.

But I can bring them home.

Baring my teeth, I step toward the opening in the veil, absorbing the last of the shadow creatures as they spill into our realm. My body and mind bend, twisting at the whim of pure, dark chaos magic.

"Amora!" Frost screams. "No!"

Forcing my heavy limbs to follow my commands, I leap through the opening in the veil as it begins to shrink, bursting into the shadow realm on the other side. The sound of my mates calling out after me slices at my soul, but I ignore it, focusing only on keeping the shadows contained as they struggle to escape the prison of my body.

The rift closes behind me, cutting out the light that emanates from the living room.

Finally, I don't have to hold the shadows anymore. I don't have to hold in the pain. I can let it all go.

I tilt my face toward the back-lit dark sky and erupt. Shadows burst from my body, inky tendrils crawling over the horizon and blocking out the sky. Darkness blots my vision as I detonate like a bomb, and the force of the torrent spilling from my body sends me sprawling to the ground.

It's a thousand hurricane winds. It's a million tsunamis. It's twelve billion explosions going off all at once at the center of the universe, creating a brand new big bang that threatens to destroy time and space itself.

And then... there's nothing.

# KIAN



SILENCE.

That's what's left when Amora is gone.

So much silence that it's deafening, a horrible echo of her absence that hits me like a blow to the chest. I take a staggering step forward, moving toward the place where I saw my mate disappear.

But there's nothing there now, just a broken coffee table and a scorched rug.

The breach is closed.

The fight is over.

And even though Quinton's lifeless body is sprawled on the floor nearby, I still feel like we lost. I stare down at my hands, my palms slick with sweat as the dark tattoos settle back on my body, the shadows I was born with returning to their original places.

The shifters around us whine softly, drawing my attention, and when I glance around, I see faces—both lupine and human—that stare back at me with shocked expressions. None of the people in the living room take threatening stances toward us, and I'm almost certain the change in their demeanor isn't just because their leader is dead. It's because they're no longer infected with the shadow magic Quinton filled them with.

*She took the shadows into her, I think as I glance at my brothers. She absorbed every shadow that Quinton forced into these shifters. She took it into herself.*

"The extra shadows," Frost whispers as he stares with wide eyes at his hands and forearms. "The shadows Quinton pumped into me when he was experimenting with his magic. They're gone."

“Amora took them,” I state flatly.

Malix nods, his throat working as he swallows. “She took all the shadows with her.” His eyes roam the room. “Every last one.”

“We have to fucking get to her,” I grit out, a hard edge to my voice.

She rescued me from the shadow realm once. Now I’m going to do the same for her. I saw her step through the veil, and even though part of me knows she’s probably dead, I don’t care. I’m going to find her.

Frost approaches the area where a tear in the ether once sat. He drags his hands through the air, moving his fingers as he hums under his breath.

“It’s gone,” he says quietly. “And so is she. Without her at our side, we can’t open it.”

“Like hell,” I growl.

Malix rests a hand on my shoulder. “We’ll get to her. I promise.”

“We have to get to her *now*. We have no idea what all that power did to her body.”

“Which is why we’re going to work together.”

My jaw tenses as I bow my head. “What do we do?”

“We can’t breach the veil without her,” Frost says. “She’s the conduit that connects us, the missing piece that makes ripping open the veil possible.”

“So what do you suggest?”

I can’t help the anger in my voice, the rage. My mate sucked up so many shadows that it’s hard to tell whether or not she’ll be herself when we finally get to her. We saw what that power did to Quinton.

What is it going to do to her? *What has it already done to her?*

It doesn’t matter. I can’t let her go. We’ve won the battle at the cost of her sanity—perhaps even at the cost of her body—but I *can’t* let her go. It isn’t fair.

“I was dragged to the shadow realm once,” I recall. “Carried through the veil by a shadow monster.”

“But there aren’t any shadows left on this plane,” Malix says, his usually charming voice dull and strained. “She took them all with her.”

I grit my teeth. “Then we’ll do it ourselves. I *know* I can get there again.”

“How?”

“I’m part shadow—we’re *all* part shadow—which means part of us belongs to that world. There has to be a way for us to get there from here.”

Frost runs his fingers over the shadows that swirl on his arms. “He’s right. There must be a way to tap back into that same magic we just used,

even without Amora here. We don't need to open a rift in the veil this time, we just need to slip through it." He glances at Malix. "Didn't the witch, Gwen, say something about that? That shadows could return to their realm more easily than they could cross over to earth? So why can't we use the shadow magic inside ourselves to do the same, and the shifter sides of ourselves to come back?"

"She used the connection of our bond to find me when I was trapped in the shadow realm," I say, the conviction in my voice building with each word. "So we'll do the same with her. The bond is fully formed again. It's stronger than it was then. If she's still alive, it *must* still connect us."

Malix's nostrils flicker as he breathes, and he drops his eyelids closed, his face going slack almost as if he's in a trance. I know what he's doing. He's searching for that feeling, the tug of our connection to Amora. I do the same, fisting my hands tightly as I hear Frost breathe deeply beside me.

For several long moments, I try to tune out the murmuring voices of the shifters around us as I concentrate. And then I no longer have to tune them out, because I can't even hear them. They might as well not exist as I reach out with every part of my heart and soul, searching for my lost mate.

Then my eyes pop open, my body jerking.

"That's it," I whisper. "Frost, Malix, let's go."

"Where?"

I spin on my heel, heading for the door. "Into the woods."

My brothers don't question me as I race out the door and through the freshly fallen snow. This cabin is higher up in the mountains than the Montana Pack lands, and it's significantly colder up here. Thick flakes sting my face as I sprint toward the tree line, breaking through the brush like it's nothing.

The rhythmic tug in my chest keeps pulling at me. I can sense Amora, not the same way I would scent her, but a gut feeling that keeps yanking me forward. It's a tiny spark of the mate bond that connects us—and it's leading us right to her.

My brothers must pick up on the feeling too, because their speed increases, their broad forms racing ahead and then drifting past me as I pick up speed. We run together as we hurtle over fallen branches, dart between thick tree trunks, and dip beneath hanging branches weighed down by wet snow. Sunlight begins to break over the horizon, the promise of a new day about to dawn.

Not without Amora. Not without my *mate*.

Finally, the insistent tug inside my chest jerks me to a stop. As if on cue, my brothers halt with me, staring into a gaping crevice between two large rocks up ahead of us. Our path led us up the mountain to an area littered with massive boulders, and I pick my way over them carefully as I take another few steps.

Then I shift and lean forward as I close my eyes, reaching out with all my senses.

Shadows.

We're here.

"What now?" Malix asks. "Do we step through it? Amora is close by. I can feel it. But can we pass through the veil here?"

"I guess there's only one way to find out," Frost murmurs.

Once again, all three of us go absolutely still, reaching out with something beyond any of the five senses. This time, I'm not searching for the bond that ties me to Amora—I'm searching for the darkness that calls to the shadows in me.

When I locate it, I let out a noise of stark relief. I can sense it, like something invisible brushing over my skin. This isn't the same darkness that resides in the absence of light. It's *thick* darkness, the kind that only exists in the shadow realm.

This is a thin patch in the veil. If we tap into it, maybe we can slip through to the other side.

Malix squares his shoulders as Frost turns to me, a questioning look in his eyes. "It's here. Ready?"

I nod, my body tensing. "On the count of three."

Our low voices join together as we all stare at the space ahead of us, counting down slowly. Then we surge forward, stepping through time and space as we force our way through the veil that separates the worlds.

Air rushes around my head, and I lose my footing as everything seems to tilt and twist around me. I no longer have any idea which way is up or down, but I keep pressing forward, moving toward the darkness that I recognize as the shadow realm.

Then, finally, everything coalesces around me, revealing a decrepit wasteland with a darkened sky and gray everywhere. Gray trees, gray ash, gray soot. The shadow realm.

We made it.

My vision blurs briefly before clearing, my body almost collapsing as I push it beyond its limits. I turn my head from side to side, freezing when I catch sight of my mate lying on her side several feet away.

Shadow monsters hover over her motionless body, sniffing at her like carrion animals.

“Amora,” I grunt. “Come on!”

Without hesitation, I shift into my shadow wolf form, my brothers following suit. We race toward her body and lunge at the dark creatures, latching on to them with our teeth.

*Kian, look out!* Malix shouts.

I dive out of the way of a lunging shadow creature, its elongated snout and exposed teeth barely missing me. As Malix darts between us, Frost runs up from the rear, taking the creature down with the help of my brother. The two of them tear it to pieces as I snatch up a few smaller creatures lingering near Amora.

Once enough of them are shredded to bits, I scoop Amora onto my back and sprint for the area where we slipped through the veil. I have no idea what kind of injuries she’s sustained from taking in so many shadows—or whether she’ll even wake up when we finally get her back to earth. But we have to try.

*I’ve got her!* I shout to my brothers. *Let’s go!*

Footsteps thunder behind me, a whole line of shadows racing after us as we hurtle toward the exit. I hope we can pass back through, hope that our shifter sides—the parts of us that belong on the earth—will allow us to return to that realm.

And I hope like hell that those shadows can’t come through after us.

Forcing my way back through the veil feels like forcing myself through a cheese grater. My body seems to shred itself to pieces as the shadow side of me resists being drawn across the barrier. But I don’t stop pressing forward, letting my need to get Amora out of this place fuel me.

When we break free to the other side, air whooshes past my ears as I surge forward. My stomach flips as I skid on some loose pebbles, nearly losing my footing, and Malix and Frost press in against my shoulders to keep me from falling over.

*Holy shit,* Malix says, his voice sounding shaky even in mind speak. *We made it.*

*Gwen was right. Our shadow sides helped us get there, and our shifter*



*sides brought us back*, Frost adds.

I'm certain our bond with Amora helped too. Whatever vision that witch saw, she was also right about it unlocking a part of our powers that we've never accessed before.

My brothers follow me as I trot a few feet away from the weak spot in the veil and gently slide Amora to the ground, then shift quickly into my human form. I drop to my knees beside her, my heart rising into my throat as my relief at having brought her back turns sour in my stomach.

She looks... dead.

Her chest doesn't rise. Her eyelids don't flutter. Nothing about the way she's sprawled in front of me indicates that she's alive.

"I'll check her," Frost whispers.

My brother leans over Amora, his hands touching her with infinite gentleness. But as his fingertips graze her skin, I jerk back at the sight of the marks that bloom over her chest.

Shadow marks. And they're not just forming on her chest. They're *everywhere*.

They look just like our tattoos, intricate patterns that arc over her flesh, rippling as if they're alive. They swirl outward from the middle of her torso, working their way over her shoulders and arms, moving like snakes down to her wrists. When they finally settle, Frost rests his hands on her chest. His brows knit together as he frowns.

"Hold on," he mutters. "I feel something."

"What? What is it?" I lean forward, gripping his shoulder.

And then I feel it too.

*Life.*

It's the faintest hint, barely a glimmer, but it's there. And it's her.

It's my mate.

Malix touches Frost's other shoulder, the three of us closing our eyes as we do what we did back in the cabin, joining our magic together. Only this time, it's different. I feel our shadows collide with hers, their union inspiring a spark to glow between us.

Between us, Amora takes a breath.

It's the softest sound in the world, barely audible, but I hear it.

"Kian..."

My eyes fly open, and my body moves without any thought, my arms wrapping around her to cradle her gently in my arms. Malix and Frost wrap

their arms around both of us, creating a cocoon around our mate as if to shield her from anything that might try to hurt her.

I'm gasping for air. I must be speaking too, but fuck if I know what I'm saying. All I know is that I have my mate back.

Blinking weakly, she looks up at me.

Green eyes so bright that they could be stars meet mine, and I stare into them for a long moment before I press my lips softly to hers.

"We found you, baby," I murmur. "We've got you."

I hold her like I'm never going to let her go.

And I *won't*.

She has my entire heart.

Forever.

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# AMORA



I'M ENCASED between my mates, half sprawled over Kian's lap while Malix holds my hand and Frost caresses my face. The three of them take turns touching me, their hands drifting reverently over my body in light caresses.

"Dammit, kitty," Malix rasps, his tone somewhere between teasing and dead serious. "Don't *ever* do something like that again."

"We thought we lost you," Frost adds quietly.

Blinking to clear my vision, I sit up a little in their embrace, smiling at the hands that immediately reach out to steady me.

I feel weak and... strange, but I'm no longer in pain like I was when the shadows were filling me up to the brim. The agony and anger are no longer pressing against every cell in my body, and although I'm sore as hell, it's the usual kind of soreness I'd expect after all the shit we've gone through in the past days.

"I'm okay," I promise my mates. My voice is hoarse, and I have a vague memory of screaming as the shadows roiled beneath my skin back in the living room. "I'm all right."

"Are you sure?" Kian murmurs, tracing his fingers over the skin between my breasts as worry darkens his eyes. "You're marked with shadows."

I glance at my body, my eyes widening at the sight of the dark lines decorating my skin. They swirl and dance all over my shoulders and arms, drifting to my wrists. Geometric shapes explode over my torso and stomach, moving down toward my thighs and drifting down my legs.

I'm covered. Just like my men. Even more than them, actually.

But I don't feel like the shadows are consuming me. I don't feel like they're in control. As I concentrate, I become aware of the feeling of them

shifting slowly inside me, but they don't hurt.

Are my mates keeping the pain at bay, just like I keep it at bay for them?

Licking my lips, I trace a few of the shadow marks, then nod, finally answering Kian's question. "Yeah. I'm sure. I feel different, but not bad."

"How did you know that would work?" Malix asks. "That when we opened the veil, you'd be able to draw the shadows in like that and then use them against Quinton?"

"I didn't know," I admit, wincing a little at the thought of how badly that plan could've gone. "But before Gwen died, she told me something strange. She said 'I lied,' and then 'you have the power to end this.' At the time, I didn't think much of it. There were so many more immediate problems to deal with, and I had no idea what she'd been talking about. But when Quinton started going on and on about the vision she showed him, and how certain he was that if you all used your connection to me and opened the veil, I would become a conduit for the power, it clicked into place."

"What do you mean?" Malix's brows furrow over his violet eyes.

"Everything she showed him in his vision was true—except for one thing. One part, she made up. Instead of becoming a vessel he could draw from, I was able to take the power into myself and keep it from him. I was able to use it to end him."

"Shit," my mate breathes, looking stunned and awed. Then his eyes narrow a little. "That's damned impressive, but I still stand by my original statement, which is, don't ever do that again."

I chuckle weakly, dragging a finger across my heart in an X. "Don't worry. I have no plans for a repeat performance. That was a one time only thing."

"Good." He leans down to kiss me, his lips somehow fierce and tender at the same time.

"We should return to the cabin," Frost says, glancing around. "It's too cold out here. And we need a first aid kit."

Kian's gaze skims my body, which I know is dotted with scrapes, cuts, and bruises alongside the shadows. "Agreed."

The men shift, and I crawl gratefully onto Kian's back before they begin to bound down the mountain, following whatever path they took to get here. It doesn't take long for us to reach the cabin, and I doze lightly on the way, holding tight to Kian's shadowy fur as I let my eyes drift closed.

When we arrive, I clamber to the ground before my mates shift back.

Leaning on Frost for support, I walk with them toward the cabin where dozens of shifters mill around by the porch.

“They’ve all been cured of the shadow magic Quinton forced into them,” Frost murmurs. “Just as I was. All that’s left in me is the magic I was born with.”

“Do you remember doing that?” Malix lets out a low whistle. “You sucked it out of them, pulling it into yourself just like you drew the creatures from the shadow realm. It was fucking incredible.”

I nod, my brows furrowing. “Yes... I think so. It’s all a bit of a blur, but I remember being able to see the darkness inside them, and thinking I should pull it out.”

“Like I said...” He presses a kiss to my temple, keeping his arm wrapped around my shoulder. “Incredible.”

As we approach the shifters, they bow their heads respectfully, stepping aside to allow us entry. I recognize several of them from both the Silver Crest Pack and the Montana Pack, and from the way they’re looking at me and my mates, it’s clear they’re not on Quinton’s side anymore. He only commanded their obedience when he controlled the dark magic inside them, and that’s gone now.

He used and betrayed them—and then he got what he deserved.

“Do you see any Blood Moon shifters?” I ask Kian in a low voice.

“No.” He shakes his head. “I know there were many of them in Quinton’s army, but I suspect they’ve already fled. Some of them supported Quinton, even toward the end when he became more brutal and ambitious, but I think many of them followed him out of fear of what would happen if they refused. My guess is that those ones will reform a smaller pack.”

That makes sense. I have a hard time not resenting the Blood Moon Pack members for ostracizing my mates and treating them like monsters, but that’s how *I* treated them when I first met them too, so I guess I have to allow that people can change. And I’m relieved that the Blood Moon shifters who were forced into Quinton’s army are no longer full of shadows. I wouldn’t wish that fate on anyone.

Sunbeams filter into the foyer as we step into the cabin, the rays of light illuminating the mess we made of the space. It looks like a fucking tornado tore through it.

One of the shifters I recognize as a young man from Silver Crest approaches with a collection of first aid materials. I gratefully accept them,

smiling when he bows his head.

“Thank you,” he whispers. “For freeing me. For freeing *us*.”

“Where will you go now?”

He lifts his head, his eyes a little haunted as he responds. “We’ll go back to our land and people. We’ll find the rest of the Silver Crest Pack and our new alpha. Then we’ll rebuild.” He pauses for a moment as he glances from me to my mates. “Will you come with us?”

Kian shakes his head. “No. But give Alpha Cormac our regards. Tell him what’s happened, and let him know that Quinton no longer poses a threat.”

“I will.” The boy looks disappointed, but he accepts Kian’s response, thanking us again as he slips past us to the porch.

As my mates and I tend to each other’s wounds, a few more shifters approach to give us their thanks. I know that some of the shifters who were turned by Quinton’s dark magic lost their lives while serving mindlessly in his army of feral shifters. But despite the somber feeling that hovers over the room, I can also sense hope and relief.

*Everyone* could have died in that shadow shifter army, and so many people will be able to return to their lives and their families, their minds free of the darkness that held them in thrall.

“We should head out,” I tell my men once we’re as cleaned up and healed as we can be. “I want to head back to Montana Pack territory and check in with Sable and the others. I want to make sure they’re all okay.”

“Of course.” Frost dips his chin in agreement.

When we step outside, the shifters have divided into two groups—Silver Crest and Montana. As we move to stand with the Montana Pack members, Malix squeezes my hand.

“You want a ride, kitty? I can shift into my shadow wolf form and carry you like Kian did earlier.”

“No. Thanks.” I smile, tilting my head up a little to let the warmth of the sun banish the chill on my face for a moment. “I feel a bit better, and I want to stretch my legs. I want to run. I want to feel how *alive* I am.”

The group of Montana Pack shifters comes with us, and we all set out, running at an easy pace over the snowy ground. I’m anxious to get back, and I can tell they are too, but the need doesn’t feel as urgent as it has in the past, so we don’t push ourselves too hard.

Several hours later, we’re greeted at the edge of the pack lands by a howl that rises up in the air. The pack’s scouts must’ve scented or spotted us.

Sable and her mates meet us at the outskirts of the village, and the moment she catches sight of me, she races toward me. I shift as I lope toward her, and we collide in our human forms, hugging each other tightly. Dare is right behind her, along with Trystan, Archer, and Ridge.

“You’re alive,” she whispers shakily. “I had no idea if any of you would come back.”

“I know. We almost didn’t.”

We squeeze each other tighter, unbothered by our nudity. I’m just grateful as hell that she’s still alive. On the run back, my men told me that most of the fighting ended after Quinton and his shadow wolves took me captive and raced off, and I’m grateful as hell for that. Felicity said something once about how his stone would run out of power eventually, and it’s a good fucking thing that she was right.

When I step back, I look between Sable and her mates, meeting the gaze of each one. A smile crosses my lips as Kian, Malix, and Frost join my side.

“Quinton is dead,” I announce. “It’s over. His shadow army is disbanded, and he won’t be a threat to you anymore.”

The relief that crosses Sable’s features mirrors what I felt in the moment I returned from the shadow realm and realized it was all over.

The war is over.

We won.

Ridge offers me a grin and opens his arms. I hug my old best friend, inhaling the familiar scent that makes me think of warm summer nights with beer and poker.

“Now that it’s done, you and your men are welcome to stay here, if you’d like,” he tells me. “I hope you know that.”

I drift back from the hug, unable to contain my grin. “I do now.”

“So, what do you say?”

I hesitate, thoughts running through my head. Kian barely even hesitated before rejecting the offer to join the Silver Crest Pack, even though I know all of my men got along fairly well with Alpha Cormac. My mates have been packless for so long. They never fit in with their old pack, and they’ve been on their own for years now. That’s how they preferred to be when I met them.

Do they still want it to be that way?

*Wherever they go, I’m going with them,* I think resolutely. If they don’t want to join a larger pack, we’ll stick with the tiny, four-person one we’ve become.

I open my mouth to speak but fall silent when Malix steps forward, slinging an arm around my shoulders.

“We accept,” he says. “Thank you.”

“We can lend our help to whatever rebuilding needs to be done as well,” Frost adds, and I see Kian nod out of the corner of my eyes.

I blink in surprise, a dozen emotions swirling in my chest as I watch my mates fall into conversation with Sable and her men.

When Kian catches me staring, he raises his eyebrows a little, the corners of his eyes crinkling as his eyes glitter. He steps closer to me, leaning his head toward mine. “You look surprised.”

I shrug. “I didn’t know if you’d ever want to join another pack. You’ve been on your own for so long.”

“We have,” he murmurs. “But maybe it’s time for a change. And besides, you want to stay, and our pack is anywhere you are.”

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# AMORA



AROUND US, the Montana Pack members who were turned into shadow wolves by Quinton greet the family and friends who came out to meet them. A buzz of conversation fills the air around us as my men and I start to follow Sable and her mates back toward the village.

Just as we reach the hard-packed dirt road that cuts through the small settlement, my knees buckle a little as I take a step, making me weave sideways as I correct my balance.

Kian glances over at me, worry instantly filling his features. Without missing a beat, he scoops me into his arms, cradling me against his body. “We should get you into bed.”

“Come on, Kian. I can *walk*,” I argue, pressing against his chest. “I ran all the way back here.”

“I know you did. Which is why you can let me carry you the last few damn steps.”

It’s useless to argue with him, and honestly, I don’t have the energy right now. Adrenaline and relief have kept me going ever since the fight with Quinton ended, but the truth is, everything that happened is finally starting to catch up with me.

Frost and Malix stick close to our sides as we say goodbye to Sable and her mates and Kian carries me to our new temporary home. Once we’re inside, the muscled shifter goes straight to the bedroom and lays me down on the bed.

Exhaustion makes me nearly melt into the covers, but my mind is still buzzing, unable to settle. I prop myself up on my elbows, looking back toward the front door we just came through.

“I’m sure Sable and the others are still doing cleanup from the fight,” I say. “Maybe we should help a bit.”

When I try to sit up fully, Malix grabs my shoulders. “Down, kitty.”

“We could help a *little*,” I insist. “Then rest.”

“No.” Kian shakes his head as he and Frost push me gently back down. “Rest now. Help later.”

“But I—”

Rather than cutting me off with words, Malix surprises me by hooking his hands under my knees and pulling me closer before settling between my legs. His breath sweeps over my pussy, making my clit throb.

“Fuck,” I whimper as his tongue slowly glides over my clit.

He chuckles, the vibrations making pleasure shoot through me. “Fucking will come later too. We’ve got plenty of time for that, and believe me, I plan on fucking you on every available surface of this cabin.”

He doesn’t give me time to respond as he stiffens his tongue and plunges it into my core, making me arch my back and flail for something to grab on to.

I’m acutely aware that Frost and Kian are here with us. The mattress squeaks and then shifts as they crawl onto the bed, eyes glued to the place where Malix is eating me out. I expect their hands or their mouths to join his, but the warmth doesn’t come, just the sound of ragged breathing as they watch him devour me.

When I glance down at Malix, he closes his lips over my clit, lashing his tongue back and forth.

“Come for him, Amora,” Frost whispers. “Give him what he needs.”

I can’t hold back. My body is so exhausted that it doesn’t have the strength to control the pleasure that’s rising relentlessly inside me. I moan as I arch again, my head digging into the pillow behind me as Malix’s name pours from my lips on a quiet cry.

“Fuck yes, kitty,” he growls. “I love it when you moan my name.”

He grips my hips to keep me in place, lapping at my pulsing clit over and over to draw out my orgasm until it feels like it will never stop. I come so hard that my toes curl, and I gasp for air as the pleasure finally crests and crashes back down.

As I slump back against the mattress, exhaustion floods my body. I nestle into the pillow as warm bodies surround me, distinctly aware of how Malix nestles behind me and wraps his arm around my waist.

*Bastard*, I think with a half-grin. *He did that on purpose.*

“You just wanted to make me too sleepy to get up and work,” I accuse, my voice already thick with languid exhaustion.

He chuckles. “Maybe. Did it work?”

I hum, not even able to respond before sleep drags me under.

MY EYELIDS FLUTTER as I rouse from sleep a while later. I’m not sure how long I’ve been out, but I feel less beat up than I did before. If it weren’t for the fact that shifters heal quickly, I’m not sure any of us would’ve made it through the past several days. I’m grateful as fuck that it’s all over, and that we can finally start to truly recover.

Being cared for by my mates, given an incredible orgasm by Malix, and then tucked in between them was exactly what I needed when we got back to the cabin. It’s like my body can somehow tell that it’s okay to relax now, that it can devote any extra energy toward healing rather than keeping reserves at the ready for an unexpected fight or flight.

A smile crosses my lips as I roll over to find Kian observing me with his gold-rimmed eyes. Everything about his expression looks peaceful for once. It’s nice to see him like this, more calm and content than he’s ever looked before.

Hands slide over my shoulders as someone stirs behind me. When I roll over onto my other side, I see Frost spooning me from behind and Malix on his other side, the two of them looking as ruffled and groggy as me.

Malix lifts his head a little, licking his lips in a way that makes me think he can still taste me on them. “Hey, kitty. I hope you slept well.”

“I did. Thanks to all of you.”

“How do you feel?”

“Loads better,” I admit. “A mind-blowing orgasm will do that to a girl.”

He smiles, a sunny radiance bursting through the room. “Good.”

I glance at Frost, who has an almost serene expression on his face. Not without emotion. Not void of feelings. *Serene*. I’ve never seen him like this.

And I could totally get used to it.

He strokes my cheek gently. “You look much better.”

“So do you.”

Behind me, Kian nuzzles his face into my dark hair, tickling the back of my neck with his breath.

“You’re lucky to be alive, you know,” he says in a low voice. “That was risky as fuck, opening the breach between realms.”

I swallow hard as I nod, feeling the weight of his words, the heaviness of the loss that he and his brothers almost experienced. “I know. But I had to take that risk.”

“You could have died.”

Frost cups my cheek. “But she didn’t.”

“I swear to fuck, I don’t want to hear about another witch having visions about us for the rest of my damn life.” Malix makes a noise in his throat, flopping back on the pillows. “I’m done with prophecies. Finished. Finito.”

Huffing a laugh, I wriggle a little between Frost and Kian, prompting them to hold me a little tighter. “Well, the good news is, I think we’ve made it past all the ones that were hovering over us. Gwen’s visions both came true, and so did the one from the witch you all met. Just not how we expected. My mates brought the shadow realm to earth, I became a conduit for the magic, and I was destroyed.”

“But we brought you back from that destruction,” Frost whispers. “We didn’t let you die.”

I tug Frost close to me and then reach over his body to pull Malix closer too, nestling back into Kian’s arms so that I’m sandwiched tightly between all three of my mates, their warmth cocooning me.

“Damn right you didn’t. And I need to thank you properly for that.”

Malix’s chuckle fills my ears, and Kian lets out a hungry sound as my lips meet Frost’s for a kiss.

# EPILOGUE



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## AMORA

### *Four Months Later*

“OH WOW, she’s sitting up now?”

I gape at Cora as I speak. She seems to have developed an independent mindset overnight, although that probably shouldn’t surprise me. Sable and her mates each have very different personalities, but one trait they all seem to share is a fierce stubbornness.

So, yeah, it makes sense that their daughter is already sitting up several months after I met her.

“She does that sometimes,” Sable teases, nudging my shoulder as she holds Ben on her lap. “Careful, little lady,” she tells her daughter, then glances at Kian. “Put your hand on her back to steady her. There, that’s it.”

I smile as I watch my mate shoot me a rather alarmed expression. Frost joins his side and gently places his hand over Kian’s, adding a little extra support to Cora’s committed sitting. Malix covers his smirk, clearly trying not to laugh at how out of their depth they seem.

Despite his initial hesitation, the line between Kian’s brows smooths out after a moment, and he shoots Frost a grateful glance. Out of all my men, I didn’t expect Frost to be the one with the most paternal instincts—but then again, my men still surprise me at every turn.

Ever since we settled onto Montana Pack lands, our lives have shifted dramatically. Long gone are the nights spent sprinting over rough terrain chasing an antidote or an evil alpha with plans of world domination—or chasing each other, for that matter. Now we spend our nights gathered around a bonfire with Sable’s mates or wrapped in each other’s arms.

And I wouldn't have it any other way.

I lean toward Sable and whisper, "Ten bucks says Kian freaks out when Cora spits up."

"Ha. I would *pay* ten bucks just to see that."

We snicker, covering our amused grins when Kian shoots me a suspicious look. As Frost scoops Cora into his arms, Ben clambers off his mother's lap and wanders toward the men, who are gathered near the fireplace. Malix kneels on the carpet and accepts the blocks that Ben brings with him, and the two of them begin playfully competing to see who can build a bigger tower.

Cora burps, drawing my attention. Frost holds her out to Kian, and my darkly handsome mate hesitates, eyeing her like she's a ticking bomb before extending his arms, his giant hands easily holding the little girl. He lifts her up and then tentatively rests her against his shoulder. When she hiccups, he pats her back.

Sable elbows me. "Tell me your ovaries didn't just explode."

I bite back a smile, watching Kian's confidence grow as he holds Cora. She grabs his ear, tugging on his dark hair, and when he shifts his grip on her to cradle her in his arms, she snatches his finger and shoves it into her mouth, making him stiffen awkwardly as if he's afraid she'll bite it off despite her lack of teeth. Frost and Malix share a grin while I try my best not to laugh.

*God, I want this, I think as I watch the unique way each of them interacts with my honorary niece and nephew. I want kids with them.*

Sable elbows me again. "How are those ovaries holding up?"

A flush rises in my cheeks as I glance over at her. "Yeah, okay. They may be a little bit exploded."

A soft smile curves her lips, her eyes taking on a faraway look. "Seeing my mates become fathers to Ben was one of the most amazing moments of my life. And it was the same thing with Cora. And your guys are doing great. You have wonderful mates."

I grin. "I really do."

Her expression turns a bit more serious as she leans toward me on the couch. "They seem to be settling in as members of the Montana Pack. Everyone is treating them well, right? People have been welcoming?"

"Yes," I promise, nodding gratefully. "Everyone's been amazing. They've told me stories about what it was like for them in their previous pack, and it's been nothing like that here. Thank you."

"Good. I'm glad to hear it."

She squeezes my arm as we both turn our attention to the men on the carpet in front of the fireplace again.

My gaze drifts from Malix to Frost to Kian and back again, and happiness settles deep into my bones. Being near them eases the pain that the shadows inside me cause, just like being near me eases their pain.

We're all a little *different*, and we always will be, but my mates fit in just fine among the Montana shifters—accepted and embraced by a pack for the first time in their lives.

And Sable wasn't wrong. Watching them play with these adorable little kids is wreaking all kinds of havoc on my lady parts. I can feel a slow flush creeping through my body, my heart beating a little harder.

"Um, I'll be right back," I tell my friend.

She nods, and I get up and head down the hall, slipping into the bathroom. I'm suddenly feeling very hot—and I don't think it's because of the flames from the fireplace.

I glance at my reflection above the mirror, noticing the pink tinge in my cheeks and rolling my eyes at myself. After taking care of my business, I bend over the sink to wash my hands, watching as the shadow marks on my skin waver slowly across my forearms and wrists.

A spicy scent makes my nostrils twitch as I dry my hands, and when I open the bathroom door, I see Frost in the hallway. I step backward, holding the door open for him, and he doesn't hesitate before coming to join me. He shuts the door quietly behind him and leans against the wood, observing me with his keen blue eyes.

"You all right?" he asks. "You disappeared."

"I'm fine," I whisper with a grin. Then I arch a brow, leaning back against the sink as I let the heat that's still burning through my body flash in my eyes. "More than fine really."

He closes the distance between us and presses his lips to mine. Although it's gentle and chaste, I can feel the way his cock stirs against my belly from just this small kiss.

He wants me.

Just like I want him.

I'm half tempted to pull him closer and deepen the kiss, to let my hands roam over his body and see what happens next—but I want to be invited to next Sunday's barbecue, and I have a feeling breaking Sable's sink by having sex on it would be a quick way to get that invitation revoked. At the very



least, Ridge would never let me hear the end of it. He would tease me for the rest of my life.

“Come on,” I whisper.

Breaking our kiss, I grab Frost’s hand and lead him from the bathroom.

He doesn’t resist, following after me as we return to the living room. I catch Malix’s and Kian’s eyes, and they stand up immediately as I make up some lame excuse to leave. I mumble something along the lines of “cleaning the house” and yank my men outside, Kian and Malix seeming more confused than Frost.

Sable’s laugh echoes behind us, and I know she saw right through my lie.

Oh well. She has four mates who clearly worship the ground she walks on, so I’m pretty sure she knows exactly what I’m feeling right now.

None of us speak on the way back to our cabin, but our steps grow quicker and quicker, as if we can barely wait to get there.

As soon as we’re inside, Frost hauls me into his arms, pressing my back against the wall in the foyer. The door is barely even closed before his lips claim mine, desperate and ravenous, so unlike the kiss he gave me back at Sable’s house.

Malix and Kian stand on either side of me, and when Frost breaks our kiss, Malix dives in to steal my lips. I’m panting by the time we separate, and he pulls me away from the door and turns me to face Kian, who growls as he crushes his lips to mine, all power and hunger and overwhelming strength.

My position shifts as Kian passes me off to Malix again. The movement is so quick that I have no time to adjust, my only reaction a small squeak that’s cut off by Malix’s lips. His fingers deftly undo my button and zipper, then slide beneath the waistband of my jeans and slip between my pussy lips.

“Fuck,” he rasps as he breaks the kiss. “What got you this wet, kitty?”

I whimper as he slides a finger into my core, my pussy clenching instinctively around the intrusion.

“You did,” I admit.

“But we’ve hardly even done anything yet.”

“I know.” I grind against his hand, my breath coming faster. “It was just... seeing you...”

Frost’s eyes flare wide as if he’s just figured it out. “Seeing us with Sable’s children?”

The heat in my cheeks triples, and I’m sure I’m blushing like mad, but I don’t stop working my hips against Malix’s hand as I nod. “Yes.”

Malix groans. “Fuck, you’re making me want to put a baby in you. Right now. Tonight.”

He withdraws his fingers, making me whine in protest. When he turns me around so fast that my head spins, I laugh dizzily. My back presses to his chest, and I reach around to cup the back of his neck so I don’t fall forward. One of his arms circles my waist as his free hand delves beneath the fabric of my jeans again, resuming his earlier torment of my clit.

“So fucking wet. Our little kitty wants us so badly, brothers,” Malix teases. “What should we do about that?”

“Take her to bed,” Kian says gruffly, his eyes hooded as he watches Malix touch me.

With two fingers buried inside me and the heel of his hand grinding against my clit, Malix steers me toward the bedroom, walking right behind me and guiding my movements as my legs get a bit wobbly.

The closer we get to the bedroom, the harder Malix works my clit, finally dragging his finger out of my core to circle it rapidly around the little bud. I hiss out a breath, sagging in his arms as my knees buckle, an orgasm lancing through me like lightning.

Malix chuckles as I pant for breath, limp in his arms.

“That was easy.” He grinds his cock against my ass. “We might have to try it again.”

“I hear women are more likely to get pregnant if they have an orgasm during sex,” Frost says as Malix deposits me on the bed and steps back. “So yes, let’s do that again. And again.”

*Holy shit.* I don’t even think Frost’s comment was supposed to be dirty talk, but it sure worked.

I scramble to rip off my clothes, and the men watch as I yank them off and toss them to floor.

Lying back on the bed, I bite my lower lip as Frost kneels on the mattress. He crawls closer to me, his body hovering over mine.

His cock is already hard, and a bead of precum smears over my inner thigh as the smooth crown of his shaft brushes my leg.

“I want to do what Malix said too,” he murmurs, peppering kisses over my chest and collarbones as he adjusts his hips to line himself up with my entrance. “I want to put a baby in you. I don’t care which one of us gives you a child, I just want to see your belly swollen and round. I want to see you hold our little one.”

“Fuck, Frost,” I whimper, hauling his face up toward mine so I can kiss him roughly.

He takes that as the urging it’s meant to be, and as his tongue plunges into my mouth, he drives his cock into my soaked pussy, filling me up so perfectly that I let out a little sob.

The same desperate need that’s been growing in me seems to have transferred to my mates as well, because Frost fucks me almost like it’s our first time, with barely controlled movements and single-minded intensity. Our lips barely separate, our kisses growing messy and wild as he fucks me hard and fast.

When he lifts one of my legs, bending it to press against my chest, we both groan—and I hear the sound echoed by my other two mates, who are kneeling on either side of us, watching Frost claim me.

I lose myself in it, alternating between staring up into Frost’s beautifully icy gaze, looking at Kian or Malix, and doing my best not to let my eyes roll back in my head from how fucking good it all feels.

I can tell when Frost gets close, because his thrusts slow suddenly, as if he’s trying to prolong this, to drag it out as much as possible. But there will always be time for a round two later. Right now, I want to feel him flood me with his cum. I want to feel the way his muscles tense as he lets the pleasure sweep through him.

“Come for me, Frost,” I whisper. “I’m right there. I want to feel you come, and I’ll let go with you.”

“Amora…”

He groans my name, picking up his thrusts as his hips slap against mine, his fingers delving into my hair as he kisses me like he’ll never come up for air.

Then he slams into me and stays there, his cock jerking as he empties himself inside me. I wrap my free leg around his back, nearly bent in half by the weight of his body as I let the feel of his cum pumping into me push me over the edge.

“So good,” I groan. “Fuck, that feels so good.”

“You always feel good. You’re perfect.”

Frost whispers the words against my lips, lingering there for a long minute as we both recover. As he pulls out, kneeling between my legs, his gaze drops down to the place where a little of his cum trickles from my pussy, and a look of possessive satisfaction fills his face.

Unable to resist, I reach down and use two fingers to scoop it up, pressing the small amount of spilled cum back inside.

Frost groans softly, his pupils expanding, and Kian reaches out to grab my wrist. As Frost moves to one side of me, Kian brings my fingers to my lips, offering them to me. I grin up at him, flicking my gaze around to take in all of my mates as I slowly lick the remnants of Frost's cum from my fingers.

"A filthy fucking angel," Kian growls, grinning hungrily. He releases my wrist, jerking his chin in a commanding gesture. "Hands and knees, baby. We're not done with you."

I don't hesitate, flipping over onto my stomach and pressing up to my hands and knees. But even though I do what he says quickly, Kian must get too impatient to wait, because his hands are on my hips before I'm even all the way up, tugging my ass toward him a bit as he positions me right where he wants me.

For a long moment, it's quiet. All I can hear is the sound of my three mates breathing around me and the quiet rumble in Kian's chest as he gropes and massages my ass, running his large palms over my skin.

When he draws one hand back and brings it down sharply on my right ass cheek, I let out a yelp as my core clenches, forcing more of Frost's cum to leak out.

"Bad girl," Kian chides, massaging away the sting of the slap. "You need to keep it all inside that gorgeous pussy of yours. Here. I'll help you stuff it back in."

The deep gravel of his voice makes goosebumps spread over my skin, and when he drags the head of his cock through the sticky mess seeping from me and then pushes his way inside, my arms wobble so hard that I go down to my elbows.

Kian doesn't seem to mind. In fact, he seems to like the way this new position makes my back arch, my ass pressing up toward him. He spans me again, just hard enough to sting and send heat blooming through my belly. Then he grips my hips and starts to fuck me, pulling me back to meet every thrust.

"Your shadows are fucking beautiful, baby," he grunts, bottoming out with every slap of his hips against my ass. "They're almost completely still right now. They like this, don't they? You like it?"

"I love it," I gasp out, my head drooping between my arms. "Harder, Kian. Please. Fuck."

He tightens his grip on me, pounding into me as his breath grows harsher. I can practically picture the way his face contorts with pleasure, his jaw set and his eyes flashing as he claims me like he fucking owns me.

My toes are curling against the blankets before long, my fingers scrabbling for something to hold on to as another orgasm starts to roll through me. My hair falls around my face like a curtain as I scream out my pleasure, tightening around him and squeezing his cock like my life depends on it.

“Fuck yes, baby.” He grunts, slamming into me again. “Take my cum. Fucking. Take. It.”

With the final word, he explodes inside me, adding his release to Frost’s as he keeps a firm grip on my hips, making sure we stay locked together until he’s emptied himself completely.

I slump to the mattress when he finally pulls out, rolling over to one side to focus on Malix. I gesture for my third mate to come closer, placing my lips close to his ear when he does. “You’re right—tonight is the night.”

“Yeah?”

“Yup. I can feel it.”

He chuckles huskily while his warm palm caresses my hip. “I feel it too.”

“Even if it’s only one of you who’ll knock me up, I still want all of you to come inside me tonight. I want it to be that any of you could be the father.”

Malix’s violet eyes darken as they focus on me, almost blending with his pupils as he whispers, “I’m going to fill you up, Amora.”

My eyelids flutter as he kisses me like he means it, and I can feel his love for me all the way down in my bones. He nudges me to lie back down as his cock finds the slick entrance to my pussy. A mixture of my own arousal and his brothers’ cum drips from my slit, but that hardly deters him.

In fact, it only seems to encourage him.

The messy wetness slicks his entry, and he groans, his lips vibrating against my mouth. I join his rhythm, unable to hold myself back. The way he thrusts inside me—the way he *claims* me like his brothers just did while they watch—heightens every tendril of pleasure licking through my veins, making me feel like I could float away.

The feelings surge higher and higher as I arch my back, surrounded on either side by Kian and Frost. Fingers dance over my body, circling my clit and pinching my nipples.

“There you go, kitty,” Malix mutters roughly. “Let them worship you. Let

us all worship you.”

When I moan, he grunts desperately, his thrusts becoming feverish pumps that make the bed shake beneath us.

“I’m close,” I whisper, my words nearly lost amid my moans. “So close. Malix, I’m gonna…”

“Yes. Yes. Come with me. Fuck, yes. Now.”

He grunts again, the sound turning into a sustained groan as his climax hits at the exact same moment mine does. I clamp down around him, and he thrusts into my tight hole, dropping his forehead to mine as he finally comes to a shuddering stop. He rotates his hips in a pattern I can’t quite identify, pulsing a few more times as he grinds against my clit.

Then he kisses me once more before pulling out and flopping to the mattress beside me.

When my vision clears, the ceiling comes into focus, and I smile breathlessly, reaching out to touch whoever I can reach as my men settle into a messy pile around me.

“Well, if that’s the kind of reward babysitting duty gets us, remind me to tell Sable we’re available to watch her kids anytime,” Malix jokes, satisfaction in his tone.

Kian chuckles. “You’ve got a point. And they’re not so bad, even though the little one did try to bite me.”

“She doesn’t even have any teeth yet,” Frost points out. “At worst, she gummed you.”

I grin as I listen to them debate the finer points of toothy versus toothless bites, sated and tired and so fucking happy.

There was a time when I hunted these men, when I thought they were evil incarnate. When I wanted them dead. But I didn’t realize then that there are a lot more shades of gray than I used to think.

Although these men—*my mates*—might not seem like “good” people to some, that doesn’t mean they aren’t good to me, and to their pack. To their family.

In fact, they’re the best men I’ve ever known.

I can’t wait to spend the rest of my life with them, all the big and little moments that are yet to come, and I run my fingers over my stomach and close my eyes as I try to imagine the future ahead.

More than anything, I can’t wait to see them become fathers. Because I meant what I said to Malix.

Tonight was the night.  
Somehow, I'm sure of it.

Thank you so much for reading the *Feral Shifters* series!

Are you wondering if Amora's prediction about that night being the night came true? Click [here](#) to read a bonus scene that will reveal the answer, or copy and paste this link into your browser:

<https://BookHip.com/CFDBXMD>

And if you haven't read Sable's series yet, you can find out how she met her mates in *Fated Magic*!



**Wolf shifters are real. And three alphas have claimed me as their mate.**

For years, I've been kept prisoner by my uncle, hidden like a piece of trash in the basement of his house. Beaten, broken, and neglected, hated by him for reasons I can't even understand.

But one night on the back roads of rural Montana, I see a chance for escape.

And I take it.

I run.

...straight into the arms of a naked man.

No. Not a man. A wolf.

Ridge, the man with dark hair and honey-colored eyes, is the alpha of the North Pack. I can hardly believe shifters are real, but how can I deny it when I've seen him transform with my own eyes?

I don't trust him. I don't trust anyone. Still, that doesn't change the overwhelming pull I feel toward him. And when the alphas of the East and West Packs step forward and claim me as their mate too, I feel that same desperate urge to claim them back.

But the part that scares me most?

There's only one reason all three of them could form a mate bond with me.

**I'm a shifter too.**

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